People Directorate
Whistleblowing Policy

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June 2023	1	New policy created and implemented
Feb 2026	2	Reviewed and updated
June 2026	3	Updated to ensure alignment with current whistleblowing legislation and best practice. The core principles of the policy remain unchanged, although wording has been updated to clarify legal rights and protections.

People Directorate

Whistleblowing Policy

THINKING personnel

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1. Why do we have this policy?

The Thinking Schools Academy Trust ("the Trust") is committed to achieving the highest standards of probity, integrity, and accountability in all aspects of its work.

The Trust recognises the importance of creating an environment in which individuals feel able to raise concerns about wrongdoing, malpractice, or risk without fear of detriment. This includes concerns relating to safeguarding, conduct, governance, and compliance.

This policy supports a culture of openness and transparency and ensures that concerns are identified and addressed at the earliest opportunity.

The Trust acknowledges its obligations under relevant whistleblowing legislation, including the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and the Employment Rights Act 1996 (as amended), and will ensure that individuals who raise concerns in the public interest are supported and protected.

The Trust is particularly committed to ensuring that all staff feel able to raise concerns about safeguarding practice in line with statutory guidance, including Keeping Children Safe in Education.

2. Who does this policy apply to?

This policy applies to all individuals and entities who engage with or are impacted by the Thinking Schools Academy Trust's operations.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- Employees, workers, agency staff, contractors, and consultants working for or on behalf of the Trust.
- Volunteers, governors, trustees, trainees, and work experience placements.
- Business partners, suppliers, and service providers.
- Any other stakeholders whose actions may directly or indirectly influence or be influenced by this policy.

3. Use of this Policy

This policy sets out the Trust's approach to raising concerns about wrongdoing, risk, or malpractice in a safe, confidential, and structured way. It aims to:

- Enable concerns to be raised at the earliest possible stage in the public interest.
- Ensure concerns are taken seriously and investigated appropriately.
- Protect individuals from detriment, victimisation, or dismissal where concerns are raised appropriately.

- Promote a culture of accountability, integrity, and transparency.

3.1 Qualifying Disclosures
A disclosure will qualify under this policy where the individual reasonably believes that one or more of the following has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur:

- Criminal offences: including fraud, theft, assault, safeguarding related offences, or any breach of criminal law.
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation: This includes breach of statutory duties, regulatory requirements, contractual obligations, or governance standards.
- Miscarriages of justice: Any situation where an individual has been or may be subject to an unfair or unjust legal outcome.
- Risks to Health and Safety: This includes safe working practices, failure to follow safeguarding procedures, or risks to the welfare of staff, pupils, or others.
- Damage to the environment: Acts or omissions causing or likely to cause environmental harm.
- Deliberate concealment of any of the above matters: Including attempts to hide wrongdoing, suppress information, or mislead investigations.
- Sexual harassment: This includes unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. Disclosures may relate to conduct by employees, workers, contractors, volunteers, trustees, governors, pupils, parents/carers, or other third parties, and may concern behaviour that has occurred, is ongoing, or is likely to occur. Other forms of sexual misconduct may also fall within this policy where they amount to a criminal offence, breach of legal obligation, safeguarding concern, health and safety risk, or other qualifying disclosure.

Disclosures must be made in the public interest to qualify for protection. Individuals may wish to seek independent advice from Protect, the whistleblowing charity. Contact details are provided in Appendix 2.

3.2 Matters not covered
This policy is distinct from other procedures and should not be used for:

- Personal grievances relating to an individual's own employment (covered by the Grievance Policy).
- Interpersonal conflicts or workplace disputes without a wider public interest element.
- Routine operational concerns that can be addressed through normal management channels.

The Trust encourages individuals to raise concerns internally in the first instance wherever possible.

However, where this is not appropriate, this policy also provides guidance on making disclosures to prescribed external bodies in accordance with legislation.

4. Adoption arrangements

This policy was adopted by the Board of Directors of The Thinking Schools Academy Trust on 1 September 2026 and supersedes any previous version of the Whistleblowing Policy.

This policy will be reviewed by the Board of Directors every 3 years or earlier if there is a need. This will involve consultation with the recognised unions.

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment, and we may amend it at any time.

The Trust will consult with recognised trade unions on proposed amendments in accordance with collective consultation arrangements.

5. Equality Statement

We are committed to being an inclusive employer enabling all staff to feel a sense of belonging.

We commit to ensuring our policies are inclusive by nature, are of benefit, accessible and understood by all staff.

As a minimum we ensure our policies and practices comply with the Equality Act 2010, but we are committed to going beyond our minimum requirement of equality legislation.

Our policies aim to reduce and remove inequalities and barriers and create opportunities to maximise positive impacts on our staff, fostering greater social cohesion and greater participation in public life.

Through our actions we recognise, appreciate and value difference, treating everyone fairly and seeking to embed a culture of equality, diversity and inclusion across our Trust which delivers the best outcomes for the diverse society in which and for whom we work.

We are committed to undertake an equality impact assessment on all relevant policies. Equality Impact Assessments for HR policies will be shared with recognised trade unions as part of the consultation process, where appropriate.

6. Responsibilities

6.1 Employees and Workers

The Trust reasonably requires its employees and workers to:

- Raise concerns where they reasonably believe wrongdoing, malpractice or unsafe practice has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur.
- Ensure disclosures are not knowingly false or deliberately misleading.
- Engage appropriately with any investigation process.
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality where required.

6.2 Employer
The Trust will be responsible for:

- Fostering a culture where individuals feel confident to raise concerns about wrongdoing.
- Promoting a culture where individuals feel safe to raise concerns.
- Ensuring concerns are taken seriously and investigated appropriately.
- Providing feedback where appropriate.
- Protecting individuals from detriment or victimisation.
- Maintaining appropriate governance oversight and monitoring.
- Keeping confidential records in line with data protection legislation.
- Ensuring clear reporting routes and escalation pathways are in place.
- Encouraging a culture of cooperation, integrity and accountability
- Ensuring that senior leaders, managers and others who may receive or manage whistleblowing concerns have appropriate awareness, guidance and training, including in relation to confidentiality, safeguarding escalation and protection from detriment.

7. Governance and Monitoring

The Board of Directors has overall responsibility for ensuring that appropriate whistleblowing arrangements are in place across the Trust.

Day-to-day operation of this policy is delegated to senior leaders within the Trust, such as the Chief Executive Officer or Head of HR.

The Board of Trustees will:

- Maintain oversight of whistleblowing arrangements.
- Maintain a confidential record of all concerns raised and their outcomes for reporting and monitoring purposes.
- Ensure appropriate governance and accountability.

Review whistleblowing activity and outcomes annually, including any equality considerations or emerging patterns, using anonymised information where appropriate.

A central confidential record of whistleblowing concerns will be maintained by the People Directorate / governance function for oversight, monitoring and reporting purposes

The Board may receive periodic anonymised reports to monitor trends and identify risks. Any reporting will not identify the parties to the complaint.

8. Raising a Concern

8.1 Who to Raise a Concern to

Concerns should normally be raised with:

- Line Manager or Headteacher/Principal

Where this is not appropriate:

- Chief Operating Officer or Head of HR
- CEO or Deputy CEO
- Chair of the Board (where concerns relate to senior leadership).

Where an individual does not feel able to raise a concern locally, or where the concern relates to a line manager, Headteacher/Principal, senior leader or other person in a position of authority, they may raise the matter directly with the Head of HR, Chief Executive Officer, Deputy Chief Executive Officer or Whistleblowing Link Trustee. Concerns will be handled as confidentially as possible, subject to safeguarding, legal, regulatory and investigatory requirements.

Please refer to **Appendix 1** for the appropriate internal contacts.

Disclosures may also be made to:

- Prescribed bodies (e.g. regulators)
- Legal advisers
- Other appropriate external parties in line with legislation.

Please refer to **Appendix 2** for the appropriate external contacts.

This route is subject to additional legal conditions and individuals are advised to seek appropriate advice before making such a disclosure. Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing.

8.2 Trade Union Representation

Individuals may wish to consult and seek guidance from their Trade Union representative before making a disclosure.

Individuals may also invite a trade union representative to support them in raising a concern, to raise the matter on their behalf, or to attend a subsequent meeting to explore the concern.

Individuals may be accompanied at a meeting by a trade union representative or workplace colleague who is not involved in the matter or area of work to which the concern relates.

Where another individual is invited to attend a formal meeting as part of the handling or investigation of a disclosure, they may also be accompanied by a trade union representative or workplace colleague, where appropriate and in line with the relevant Trust procedure.

Independent advice may also be sought from appropriate whistleblowing support organisations.

8.3 Raising a Concern in Writing

A concern raised in writing should:

- Set out the background and history of the concern including names, dates and places where possible.
- Give the reason(s) why the individual is particularly concerned about the situation.
- State that the individual wishes their concerns to be addressed under the Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure.

Concerns may also be raised anonymously; the approach to anonymous concerns is set out in Section 10.

8.4 Concerns Raised Verbally

Where a concern is raised verbally, the individual may be offered a meeting to discuss and record the concern.

A written summary may be prepared and shared with the individual, where appropriate, to ensure the concern has been accurately understood. The individual may also be asked to confirm the concern in writing.

8.5 Validity of Concerns

Individuals are not expected to prove beyond doubt the validity of their concern(s). They should explain the basis for their concern and provide any information available to them.

8.6 Concerns Raised by Pupils, Parents and Carers

Pupils, parents and carers may also raise concerns about wrongdoing, malpractice or safeguarding issues within the Trust.

Such concerns will be taken seriously and investigated appropriately and will normally be addressed through the Trust's complaints procedures, safeguarding processes or examination malpractice procedures rather than through this policy.

8.6.1 Malpractice Concerns Relating to Examinations or Assessments

Concerns about malpractice relating to examinations or assessments includes malpractice which has or will occur in an examination or assessment which includes but is not limited to the following:

- A security breach of the examination paper.
- Conduct of centre staff which undermines the integrity of the examination.
- Unfair treatment of candidates by either giving an advantage to a candidate/group of candidates (e.g. by permitting a candidate an access arrangement which is not supported by appropriate evidence), or disadvantaging candidates by not providing access to the appropriate conditions (providing a 'level playing field').
- Possible fraud and corruption (e.g. accessing the exam paper prior to the exam to aid teaching and learning).
- Abuse of authority (e.g. the head of centre/members of the senior leadership team overriding JCQ and awarding body regulations).
- Other conduct which may be interpreted as malpractice/maladministration.

Concerns should normally be raised initially with the Principal/ Headteacher of the Academy, however there may be times when it may be more appropriate to refer the issue to the contacts within this policy if the allegation is regarding the Principal / Headteacher.

8.6.2 Safeguarding Concerns

Concerns relating to safeguarding or child protection must also be raised in line with the Trust's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and statutory guidance including Keeping Children Safe in Education.

As such, it will be managed in accordance with safeguarding procedures and statutory guidance and may take precedence over this process.

Staff should never delay raising safeguarding concerns.

8.7 Confidentiality and Protections

8.7.1 Protection from Detriment

Workers who make a protected disclosure with a reasonable belief that the disclosure is in the public interest and tends to show wrongdoing will be protected from detriment because they have raised that concern.

This includes protection from:

- Victimisation.

- Harassment.
- Disciplinary action.
- Dismissal or any other unfavourable treatment.

Any individual who believes they have been subjected to detriment or retaliation as a result of raising a concern should report this immediately. Concerns will be treated seriously and may be investigated under the Trust's disciplinary or grievance procedures, as appropriate.

Reports of detriment should normally be raised with a senior leader or the Head of HR. Where this is not appropriate, concerns may be escalated to the Chief Executive Officer or the Chair of the Board of Directors.

Those receiving or managing reports of detriment will be expected to handle them sensitively, maintain confidentiality as far as practicable, and seek HR or legal advice where appropriate.

Where a concern is raised in accordance with this policy but is not upheld following investigation, no action will be taken against the individual, provided the concern was raised with a reasonable belief that it was in the public interest.

However, action may be taken under the Trust's disciplinary procedures where an individual is found to have knowingly made false, malicious, or deliberately misleading allegations.

Where an individual commits a criminal offence in the course of making a disclosure (for example, through bribery or corruption), they may lose statutory protection and may be subject to disciplinary action and/or referral to external authorities.

Individuals are not required to follow this internal procedure in order to qualify for protection under whistleblowing legislation and may make a protected disclosure internally or to an appropriate external body in accordance with the law.

8.7.2 Confidentiality

The Trust recognises that individuals may wish to raise concerns in confidence. Individuals should make this clear at the point of disclosure.

The Trust will take all reasonable steps to protect the identity of the individual raising the concern, where this is requested and practicable. This may include:

- Limiting the number of individuals aware of the disclosure.
- Arranging meetings in a confidential or neutral setting.
- Handling information sensitively throughout the process.

However, there may be circumstances where confidentiality cannot be fully maintained. This may include:

- Where disclosure is required by law.

- Where the matter is subject to external investigation (e.g. Police, Local Authority, or regulatory body).
- Where safeguarding concerns require information to be shared to protect others.

In such circumstances, the Trust will, wherever possible, discuss this with the individual before their identity is disclosed.

All disclosures will be handled in accordance with applicable data protection legislation and the Trust's data handling policies.

9. How the Trust Will Respond

9.1 Initial Consideration and Action

Preliminary enquiries may be undertaken to determine the appropriate course of action. This may include further discussion with the individual who has raised the concern in order to clarify the nature and scope of the disclosure.

In some circumstances, it may not be appropriate for the individual who initially receives the concern to progress the matter. In such cases, the concern may be referred to another appropriate person within the Trust or, where necessary, to an external body.

Where appropriate and proportionate, some concerns may be capable of being resolved

informally through agreed actions without the need for a formal investigation.

This will only apply where the concern does not involve serious wrongdoing, safeguarding risk, or matters requiring formal escalation.

Where informal resolution is not appropriate, the Trust will determine the most suitable course of action based on the nature and seriousness of the concern. This may include:

- Undertaking an internal investigation (management, safeguarding, or disciplinary).
- Referral to the Trust's internal or external auditors.
- Referral to a regulatory or prescribed body.
- Referral to the Police.
- Referral to the Local Authority, including safeguarding channels where appropriate.

9.2 Acknowledgement and Next Steps

Within 10 working days of receipt of a concern, the person responsible for progressing the matter will normally write to the individual raising the concern to:

- Acknowledge receipt of the concern.

- Outline how the Trust proposes to address the matter, including whether an investigation or external referral is required.
- Confirm whether further information will be required and how this will be obtained.

Where appropriate, the acknowledgement will confirm whether a meeting is required or offered as part of the next steps

The nature and frequency of further contact will depend on the circumstances of the case and any ongoing investigation or external involvement.

Where an investigation is prolonged or a referral to an external agency is made, reasonable efforts will be made to provide appropriate updates, insofar as this is practicable and does not compromise any process.

9.3 Notification of Outcome

The Trust recognises that individuals raising concerns will wish to be assured that the matter has been appropriately addressed.

Where possible, the Trust will provide feedback on the outcome of the concern. However, the level of detail shared may be limited due to:

- Confidentiality obligations
- Data protection requirements
- Ongoing disciplinary, legal, or regulatory proceedings

A lack of detailed feedback does not indicate that appropriate action has not been taken. The Trust is committed to providing feedback to the individual raising the concern wherever it is appropriate and lawful to do so. The Trust recognises that individuals raising concerns will wish to be assured that the matter has been considered and addressed appropriately.

Where an individual is dissatisfied with how their concern has been handled, they may request that the handling of the concern is reviewed by a more senior person not previously involved, where reasonably practicable. This does not prevent an individual from seeking advice or making a protected disclosure externally where the legal requirements are met.

9.4 Escalation and External Disclosure

This procedure is intended to provide a mechanism for raising concerns internally within the Trust.

However, individuals may raise concerns externally where appropriate and in accordance with the law and are not required to exhaust internal procedures before making a protected disclosure.

External disclosures may be made to:

- Prescribed regulatory bodies.
- Legal advisers.
- Other appropriate authorities, where legal criteria are met.

Workers are encouraged to seek advice from their trade union, Protect, a legal adviser or another independent adviser before making an external disclosure. Education-related disclosures may also be made to the Department for Education through the published GOV.UK whistleblowing route, where appropriate.

Where a concern is raised externally, individuals must take reasonable care not to disclose confidential or legally privileged information unless it is appropriate and lawful to do so. Please refer to Appendix 2 for the appropriate external contacts.

10. Anonymous Concerns

Individuals are encouraged to provide their name when raising a concern, as this can assist the Trust in investigating the matter effectively and in providing appropriate support and feedback. However, concerns raised anonymously will be considered and may be investigated at the Trust's discretion.

Individuals may seek advice and support from a recognised trade union representative where they are concerned about confidentiality or anonymity. A trade union representative may raise a concern on behalf of an individual with the individual's agreement. The Trust will handle such concerns in accordance with this policy. Statutory whistleblowing protection will depend on the legal requirements for a protected disclosure being met.

In determining whether and how to proceed with an anonymous disclosure, the Trust will take into account:

- The seriousness and potential impact of the issues raised.
- The credibility and level of detail provided.
- The likelihood of being able to substantiate the concern from available or attributable sources.

The Trust recognises that individuals may choose to raise concerns anonymously for valid reasons and will ensure that such concerns are not dismissed solely on this basis. However, it should be noted that the ability to:

- Investigate the concern fully.
- Seek further clarification.
- Provide updates or feedback.
- Offer support to the individual.

may be limited where a concern is raised anonymously.

11. Support

The Trust recognises that raising a concern can be difficult and, in some circumstances, distressing. Individuals are encouraged to seek appropriate support where needed.

This may include accessing confidential wellbeing support, such as the Trust's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). The EAP is not a specialist whistleblowing advice service, but may provide wellbeing support to individuals affected by the process. Individuals may also seek advice from a professional association, recognised trade union, Protect or a legal adviser

Where an individual is required to participate in investigation processes, including providing evidence or attending proceedings, the Trust will give appropriate consideration to their wellbeing and will take reasonable steps to ensure suitable support is in place.

This may include adjustments to the process, access to support services, and the opportunity to be accompanied in line with Trust procedures. Please refer to Appendix 3 for contact details.

12. Concurrent Process

Concerns raised under this policy may, in some circumstances, overlap with other Trust processes, including safeguarding, grievance, disciplinary, capability, absence management or complaints procedures.

The Trust will consider the nature of the concern and determine the most appropriate route for dealing with it. Where more than one process is required, each process will be managed separately but with appropriate oversight to avoid duplication, maintain procedural fairness and ensure all relevant issues are addressed.

Raising a concern under this policy will not automatically pause any other employment process involving the individual. However, the Trust will consider whether it is fair and appropriate to pause, adjust or continue any related process on a case-by-case basis. Safeguarding matters will always take precedence where there is a risk of harm.

Individuals will be kept informed, where appropriate, of how their concern is being progressed, although details that can be shared may be limited by confidentiality, safeguarding, legal or data protection considerations

13. Record Keeping

A written record will be made of any meetings held under this procedure. This will normally be in the form of a factual note or summary capturing the key points discussed, any evidence provided, and any actions agreed.

Notes will be taken by an appropriate individual and retained securely in line with data protection requirements.

A copy of the notes will be shared with individuals, where appropriate, within 5 working days of a meeting to ensure accuracy and transparency, although the level of detail provided may be limited where this is necessary to protect confidentiality or the integrity of the ongoing investigation.

14. Contacting the Media

The Trust recognises that, in limited circumstances, individuals may consider raising concerns with the media. However, this is a serious step and subject to strict legal protections and conditions.

Individuals are strongly encouraged to seek advice from their trade union, professional association, or an independent advisor before contacting the media.

Unauthorised disclosure of confidential or sensitive information, including information relating to pupils, staff, or Trust operations, may result in legal and / or disciplinary action.

Individuals should be aware that protections under whistleblowing legislation may not apply where disclosures are made to the media unless specific criteria are met.

Where possible, concerns should be raised through appropriate internal channels, such as with the Headteacher / Principal, or with prescribed external bodies.

15. Relationship to Other Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Grievance Policy
- Disciplinary Policy
- Safeguarding / Child Protection Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Safer Recruitment Policy.

This is not intended as an exhaustive list.

16. Further Guidance

16.1 Employee

Additional guidance and support materials are available on the Trust intranet under **Trust Policies**

and the HR Policy page.

16.2 Managers
Managers can access:

- Guidance on handling disclosures.
- Investigation frameworks.
- Reporting templates.

on the Trust intranet under **Trust Policies** and the HR Policy page.

17. Training and Communication

The Trust will ensure that staff are made aware of this policy and the routes available for raising concerns. Appropriate training, information and guidance will be made available to staff on whistleblowing principles, internal reporting routes and protection from detriment.

Senior leaders, managers and others who may receive, handle or investigate whistleblowing concerns will receive appropriate guidance and training on confidentiality, safeguarding escalation, record keeping, protection from detriment and the handling of concerns.

Appendix 1 – Trust Internal Contact Details

It is generally expected that employees will have sought to raise concerns internally within the Trust prior to referring the matter to an external organisation, unless it is not appropriate to do so.

Contact	Details
Chief Executive Officer	Lee.Miller@tsatrust.org.uk
Deputy Chief Executive Officer	Michelle.Smith@tsatrust.org.uk Jay.Davenport@tsatrust.org.uk
HR	0333 36 02051 human-resources@tsatrust.org.uk
Head of HR	Daniel.Matthews@tsatrust.org.uk
Trustee with Whistleblowing link	Via company secretary governance@tsatrust.org.uk

or in writing to the above named at the following address:

Thinking Schools Academy Trust
Park Crescent
Chatham
Kent
ME4 6NT

If the complaint involves the CEO or Chief Operating Officer, please write to:

Gerard Newman
Chair of The Board of Trustees (Whistle blowing link Trustee)
Thinking Schools Academy Trust
Park Crescent
Chatham
Kent
ME4 6NT

Appendix 2 – External Sources of Advice and Prescribed Bodies

Contact	Details
Protect (Whistleblowing Charity)	020 3117 2520 www.protect-advice.org.uk
National Audit Office	020 7798 7999 www.nao.org.uk/contact-us
Department for Education – GOV.UK: 'Blowing the whistle to the Department for Education'	DfE customer help portal for academy and post-16 provider disclosures.
Department for Education – fraud or financial irregularity in academies, colleges or training providers	allegations.mailbox@education.gov.uk.
Ofsted	0300 123 3155 whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk;
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman	0300 061 0614 www.lgo.org.uk;

Employees may also wish to raise a concern with:

- Director of Children's Services
- An elected member of the local authority
- Relevant trade union or professional association where the individual is a member
- A solicitor
- The police

Appendix 3 – Support for Employees

- Teachers Support Line www.teachersupport.info
- Trade union or professional association where the individual is a member
- Citizen's Advice Bureau www.citizensadvice.org.uk;

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

Confidential Counselling Service for TSAT Employees

A confidential counselling service is available for all Employees across the Trust provided by Smart Clinic.

The service offers information, advice and support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

This includes:

- A telephone support line
- Access to advice and information
- Coaching and counselling where appropriate.

To access the service please use the contact details below:

Telephone: 0845 862 2113

Access the online services via www.client.smartclinic.com and use your personal log in details.

Download the app for convenience – details are available online

Appendix 4 – Additional Support

Torbay

Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) LADO contact details:

SARS@torbay.gov.uk 01803 208564

National

NSPCC whistleblowing advice line:

Tel:08000280285 Help@NSPCC.org.uk