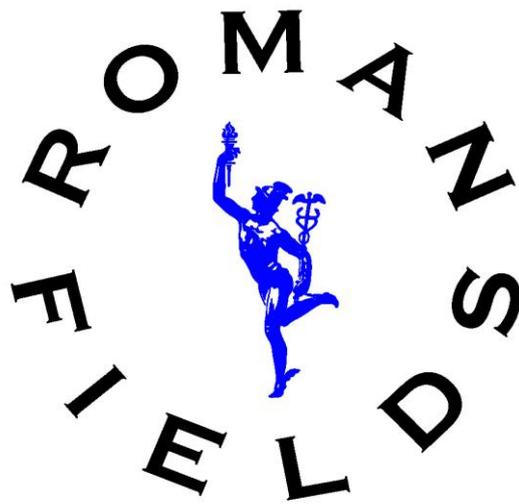


ROMAN FIELDS

WHISTLEBLOWING PROCEDURES AND POLICY



Reporting illegal or improper conduct
(Disclosures under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998)

This policy was revised in October 2016

It was ratified by the Management Committee on _____

REVIEW: This policy will be reviewed in April 2018

This policy applies to any location where staff/volunteers are representing Roman Fields Provision.

1. Introduction

This policy and procedure has been produced in consultation with the professional associations/trade unions. Roman Fields subscribes to the Provisions' HR advisory service. A HR adviser will be utilised to provide guidance in relation to the implementation of this policy.

This policy and procedure applies to all employees regardless of location (which throughout this policy and procedure include workers) and committee members. Other individuals performing functions in relation to the organisation, such as contractors, should have access to it.

It is important to the provision that any fraud, misconduct or wrongdoing by employees or committee members of the provision is reported and properly dealt with. The management committee will, therefore, respond to all individuals who raise any genuine concerns that they may have about the conduct of others in the provision, **which are in the public interest**. This policy and procedure sets out the way in which individuals may raise any concerns that they have and how those concerns will be dealt with.

- 1.1 The provision expects the highest standards of conduct from all employees and committee members and will treat seriously any concern raised about illegal or improper conduct.
- 1.2 Any individual covered by this policy will be expected, through agreed procedures and without fear of recrimination, to bring to the attention of the Headteacher (or the Chair of Management Committee if the concerns relate to the Headteacher) any serious impropriety or breach of procedure.
- 1.3 Employees who do not follow the steps identified in this procedure or other agreed internal procedures, and take their concerns to other outside sources (e.g. the press), may be subject to a formal disciplinary investigation.
- 1.4 This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time. The provision may also vary any time limits as appropriate in any case.

Generally

The legislation protecting individuals who makes a protected disclosure applies not only to employees, but also to any person who undertakes to do or perform personally (or otherwise) any work or service for the employer, regardless of the nature of the contractual relationship between them.

Section 43J of the Employment Rights Act 1996 provides that a settlement agreement made between an employee and employer cannot prevent future protected disclosures.

Any confidentiality obligations in contracts of employment that would prevent an employee making a protected disclosure will be void.

2. Background

The law provides protection for employees who raise legitimate concerns about specified matters. These are called '**qualifying disclosures**'. A qualifying disclosure is one made in the public interest by the employee who has a reasonable belief that:

- a criminal offence
- a miscarriage of justice
- an act creating risk to health and safety

- an act causing damage to the environment
- a breach of any legal obligation
- a concealment of any of the above

is being, has been, or is likely to be, committed.

It is not necessary for the employee to have proof that such an act is being, has been, or is likely to be committed, a reasonable belief is sufficient. The employee has no responsibility for investigating the matter; it is the provisions responsibility to ensure that an investigation takes place:

- 2.1** Where the concerns are about **safeguarding children or young people**, the provisions Designated Senior Person for Child Protection must be notified (see 7 below).
- 2.2** It is a procedure in which the Headteacher or Chair of Management Committee will be expected to act swiftly and constructively in the investigation of any concerns, in accordance with the provision's disciplinary procedure
- 2.3** Concerns about a colleague's professional capability should **not** be dealt with using this policy (but see section 7 below).

3. When should it be used?

This policy and procedure is for disclosures about matters other than a breach of an employee's own contract of employment. If an employee is concerned that their own contract has been, or is likely to be, breached he/she should use the provisions grievance procedure.

Where a disclosure is merely an expression of opinion that fails to show that a legal obligation has been or is likely to be breached, it **cannot** amount to a protected or qualifying disclosure for the purposes of the whistleblowing legislation.

Recent changes to the law: A qualifying disclosure means any disclosure of information that in the reasonable belief of the worker is made in the public interest. This is why an employee will generally be precluded from being able to 'blow the whistle' about breaches of his or her own employment contract.

The requirement that a whistleblower make a qualifying disclosure 'in good faith' has been removed. Therefore, while the employer can seek a declaration from the whistleblower that he or she is not knowingly making a false allegation, disciplinary action is likely to be appropriate only where there is clear evidence that the employee has misused this policy.

- 3.1** This policy and procedure is not designed to replace or be used as an alternative to the provisions grievance procedure, which should be used where an employee is only aggrieved about their own situation. This policy and procedure will also not apply where the employee simply disagrees with the way the provision is run.
- 3.2** Employees must have reasonable grounds for believing the information they have is accurate, and not just idle gossip or rumour.
- 3.3** An employee who makes such a protected disclosure has the right not to be subjected to detrimental treatment which includes, dismissal, disciplinary action, threats or other unfavourable treatment, because he/she has made a disclosure, provided it has not been made maliciously. Any employee who uses this policy and procedure will not be penalised for

doing so. The employer will not tolerate harassment and/or victimisation of any employee raising concerns.

- 3.4** An employee who is not sure whether the conduct he/she is concerned about does constitute illegal or improper conduct or is unsure about how to proceed may contact the Herts for Learning head of HR - (details in section 8) or professional association/trade union.
- 3.5** Financial regulations require that any suspicion of fraud, corruption or other financial irregularity is reported to Internal Audit for possible investigation. Normally an employee must first report any suspicion of such an irregularity to the Headteacher or Chair of Committee members (but see section 5), who will in turn report it to Internal Audit. Similar principles apply to academies where the Funding Agency must be informed.

4 Principles

- 4.1** Any matter raised under this policy and procedure will be investigated thoroughly, promptly and confidentially. Whilst the provision will aim to keep the employee informed of the progress of the investigation and likely timescales sometimes the requirement for confidentiality will prevent full information about the investigation and any consequential disciplinary action from being disclosed
- 4.2** No employee will be victimised for raising a matter under this policy. This means that the continued employment and opportunities for future promotion or training of the employee will not be prejudiced because he/she has raised a legitimate concern
- 4.3** Victimisation of a worker for raising a qualified disclosure will be a disciplinary offence.
- 4.4** If misconduct is discovered as a result of any investigation under this policy the matter will be considered under the provision's disciplinary procedure, in addition to any appropriate external measures
- 4.5** Maliciously making a false allegation is a disciplinary offence.
- 4.6** An instruction to cover up wrong doing is in itself a disciplinary offence. If told not to raise or pursue any concern, even by a person in authority, employees should **not** agree to remain silent

5 Procedure

- 5.1** In the first instance, unless the employee reasonably believes their Headteacher to be involved in the wrongdoing, any concerns should be raised with the employee's Headteacher. If he/she believes the Headteacher to be involved, then the employee should proceed straight to stage three (see below 5.3).
- 5.2** The Head teacher/Chair of management committee will arrange an investigation into the matter (either by investigating the matter himself/herself or immediately passing the issue to someone in a senior position). The investigation may involve the employee and others involved giving written statements. Any investigation will be carried out in accordance with the principles set out above.

Employees who want to use the procedure but feel uneasy about it may wish to consult their professional association/trade union initially and bring a colleague professional association/trade union representative along to any discussions. This is permitted as long as the third party is not involved in the issue.

Employees are not encouraged to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if further information cannot be obtained from the employee. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible. Employees who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should come forward to one of the contacts listed in section 8 of this policy and appropriate measures can be taken to preserve confidentiality although no guarantee can be given that this will always be possible.

- 5.3** The Head teacher (or the person who carried out the investigation) will then report to the Chair of committee members/management committee who will take the necessary action, including reporting the matter to any appropriate department or regulatory agency. If disciplinary action is required this will be taken forward by the Head teacher/Chair of the Committee/Management Committee in consultation with the Provision's HR advisory team. On conclusion of any investigation, the employee will be told the outcome of the investigation and what the next steps will be (subject to issues of confidentiality). If no action is to be taken the reason for this will be explained.

If the employee is concerned that their Headteacher is involved in the wrongdoing, has failed to make a proper investigation or has failed to report the outcome of the investigation, he/she should inform the Herts for Learning, head of HR. The aim of this policy and procedure is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the provision. In most cases employees should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally and employees are strongly advised to seek advice before reporting a concern in this way. Employees who feel unable to follow this route, for whatever reason, have the option of contacting one of the following:

- HM Revenue and Customs
- The Financial Services Authority
- The Office of Fair Trading
- The Health and Safety Executive
- The Environment Agency
- The Director of Public Prosecutions
- The Serious Fraud Office
- The Education Funding Agency
- The Department for Education
- The National College for Teaching and Leadership

6. What should be done if an issue is raised with a member of staff?

If a member of staff, other than the Headteacher, is approached by a colleague on a matter of concern as defined in this document, he/she is advised to take the matter to the Headteacher (but see 5).

7. Safeguarding children and young people

- 7.1** Separate to the obligations under this policy, all employees have a duty to report concerns about the safety and welfare of pupils/students

- 7.2** Concerns about any of the following should be reported to the provision's **Designated Senior Person for Child Protection (DSP)**: Ashley Purser

- physical abuse of a pupil
- sexual abuse of a pupil

- emotional abuse of a pupil
- neglect of a pupil
- an intimate or improper relationship between an adult and a pupil

7.3 The reason for the concern may be the actions of a colleague (including a more senior colleague), a committee member, another young person or someone outside the provision. Whatever the reason, concerns must be reported. Failure to report a Child Protection related allegation will be in itself, a disciplinary matter.

8. Contacts

Herts HR (HCC)

Sally Hopper
Assistant Director
Tel: 01992 556653

Herts for Learning

Helen Foster
Head of HR
Tel: 01438 844873

Legal, Member & Statutory Services

Kathryn Pettit
Chief Legal Officer
Tel: 01992 555527

County Internal Audit

Terry Barnett
Head of Assurance Services
Tel: 01438 845508

Or via your professional association or trade union representative.