



**ASCENSION**  
CATHOLIC ACADEMY TRUST

## **Ascension Catholic Academy Trust (ACAT) Whistleblowing Policy**

Approved by ACAT Board: December 2022

### **Commitment to Equality**

We are committed to providing a positive working environment which is free from prejudice and unlawful discrimination and any form of harassment, bullying or victimisation. We have developed a number of key policies to ensure that the principles of Catholic Social Teaching in relation to human dignity and dignity in work become embedded into every aspect of school life and these policies are regularly reviewed in this regard.

#### **1. Key Principles**

The Company is committed to ensuring respect, objectivity, belief in the dignity of the individual, consistency of treatment, and fairness, in the operation of this whistleblowing policy and procedure. This policy and procedure offers opportunities to ensure justice for all and has the potential for the expression of Christian qualities such as honesty, self-knowledge, respect for others and their gifts, recognition of the needs and achievements of others, challenge of self and others, personal growth, and openness.

#### **2. Who does this policy and procedure apply to?**

This policy and procedure applies to all employees and volunteers working for the Company.

#### **3. Purpose and aims of this policy and procedure**

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to enable employees and volunteers to blow the whistle safely, when appropriate, so that any issues are raised at an early stage and in the right way. This policy and procedure aims to:

- encourage employees and volunteers to feel confident in raising concerns that amount to whistleblowing;
- provide employees and volunteers with a confidential method of raising concerns that amount to whistleblowing;
- ensure employees and volunteers receive a response to concerns that amount to whistleblowing and if not satisfied, are aware of how to take the matter further;
- reassure those raising concerns that amount to whistleblowing that they will be protected from reprisals or victimisation for raising such concerns in good faith.

#### **4. What is whistleblowing?**

Whistleblowing is the act of expressing concern about the conduct of others in the workplace. Such concerns may relate, amongst other issues, to:

- crimes
- miscarriages of justice;
- illegality;
- health and safety;
- environmental or property damage;
- unauthorised use of public funds;
- concealing or attempting to cover up any of the above.

Although raising a concern might be difficult, it is particularly important where the welfare of any pupil might be at risk. In a school environment, whistleblowing concerns may relate to inappropriate conduct towards a child which could involve:

- bullying or humiliation
- serious ethical breaches
- professional practice falling short of normally accepted standards
- compromising pupil welfare but in a way that does not meet the threshold for child protection intervention.

A matter of concern does not however, have to relate to children. It could relate to matters such as:

- unprofessional, dishonest or unsatisfactory acts; or
- practices which may put other colleagues at risk.

#### **5. When is it not appropriate to use this policy and procedure?**

Whistleblowing is **not** usually an appropriate route where you have issues with your working relationships or where an issue with work colleagues impacts you personally. In such circumstances it would usually be more appropriate to use the Company's grievance policy and procedure.

#### **6. Reasons for raising a concern that amounts to whistleblowing**

Employees and volunteers are individually responsible for bringing matters of concern about unacceptable practice or behaviour to the attention of any member of the relevant school's leadership team, the Chief Executive Officer or a member of the Board of Directors (as appropriate).

Raising such concerns helps to protect and/or reduce risks to others and can prevent the problem from worsening or widening. Employees and volunteers may also raise concerns that amount to whistleblowing to prevent themselves from becoming implicated in wrongdoing. The reputation of the individual school or the Company as a whole may be damaged by inappropriate conduct and so it is important that such matters are exposed and appropriately dealt with.

#### **7. Factors that may prevent employees and volunteers from raising a concern that amounts to whistleblowing**

Employees and volunteers may:

- fear repercussions;
- fear getting it wrong;
- worry that they will not be believed;
- be concerned that they will start a chain of events which could spiral;
- worry that the work of their school will be disrupted;
- believe that the issue is none of their business;
- worry that they do not have enough evidence;
- be concerned about any potential damage to their own reputation/career if they raise a concern that amounts to whistleblowing;
- worry that they will suffer harassment or victimisation;
- be concerned about being disloyal to colleagues.

Although employees and volunteers may feel reluctant to report a concern about the conduct of a colleague, each individual employee and volunteer must take responsibility for making sure that children are fairly treated. If poor practice is allowed to continue unchecked, it could escalate with serious consequences. Reporting concerns that amount to whistleblowing not only protects children but it also ensures that there is no suggestion that the individual reporting the concern has colluded with poor practice that they knew was occurring, but chose to ignore.

Reporting concerns that amount to whistleblowing can lead to appropriate support being provided to an individual who may be acting out of lack of experience or lack of training, such individuals may be relieved when their conduct is questioned and may benefit from targeted support and training.

Whilst the concerns above are completely understandable, The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 protects employees from reprisals for public interest whistleblowing. Your union or professional association, a solicitor, the citizens advice bureau or the local authority legal services team can provide you with information about your legal position.

## **8. Confidentiality and anonymity**

All concerns will be treated in confidence and, as far as possible, your identity will not be revealed if that is your wish. However, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed if, as a result of an investigation, you are required to provide a witness statement or attend a court hearing.

You can, if you prefer, raise your concern anonymously to the Chair of the Board of Directors but in those circumstances, the Chair of the Board of Directors would need to decide whether the levity and credibility of the concern warrants investigation if the source of the concern, and the key evidence, is not readily available.

Those raising concerns amounting to whistleblowing will, as far as is possible, be fully supported and protected from any harassment or adverse repercussions.

Allegations that prove to be deliberately fabricated and/or malicious will be dealt with through the Company's disciplinary procedure, where appropriate. However, no action will be taken against any employee or volunteer who raises a genuine concern that proves to be unfounded.

## **9. How to raise a concern that amounts to whistleblowing**

Employees and volunteers should voice their concerns, suspicions or uneasiness at the earliest opportunity. The earlier a concern is raised, the sooner action can be taken and the issue resolved. Concerns can be raised in writing or verbally but it may help those raising concerns to write them down.

In most cases it will be appropriate to raise concerns with a member of an individual school's leadership team. However, there will be certain scenarios where this is not appropriate and in these cases concerns should be raised as follows:

- If the concern involves a headteacher it should be raised with the Chief Executive Officer;
- If the concern involves a member of a local governing body, (or a local governing body as a whole), or a director, it should be raised with the Chair of the Board of Directors;
- If the concern relates to the Chair of the Board of Directors it should be raised with the Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors;
- If the concern relates to the Board of Directors as a whole it should be raised with one of the members of the Company.

Concerns will always be taken seriously, and support will be provided if it is felt to be necessary.

Appendix 1 contains the procedure that will be followed in the event that a concern amounting to whistleblowing is raised.

## **10. Self-Reporting**

There may be occasions where an employee or a volunteer has a personal difficulty which they know to be impinging on their competence. Employees and volunteers have a responsibility to discuss such difficulties with their line manager so that professional and personal support can be offered.

## Appendix 1 – Whistleblowing Procedure

1. The concern is raised in writing or verbally.
2. You will be invited to a meeting to discuss your concern at the earliest possible opportunity. You may bring a companion to any such meeting.
3. Within 5 school days of the meeting above you will be provided with details of the proposed action to be taken to investigate the matter and a date will be set for a second meeting. The timetable for that meeting will be agreed with you and will depend on the complexity of the matter.
4. Enquiries will then be made to establish the facts of the matter and whether poor practice or inappropriate conduct has occurred. Other employees or volunteers, members of the local governing body or directors may be asked to provide information or advice. External advice, for example, from legal or human resources or children’s services may also be sought.
5. A written record of the conduct, established facts and outcome of the inquiry will be kept and you will be invited to a second meeting to provide you with information as to the outcome of the inquiry, where this is appropriate, and does not breach the confidentiality of any other person. Possible outcomes are as follows:
  - a. no poor practice or wrongdoing is established, and the case is closed;
  - b. the concern has some substance, and the subject of the concern will receive advice and support to improve practice;
  - c. poor practice or wrongdoing is established, and disciplinary proceedings are initiated;
  - d. the concern is more serious, and an investigation is initiated.

**If, at any stage in the process, there is reason to believe that a child is at risk of significant harm, children’s social care will be immediately involved.**

**If you raise a concern and you are dissatisfied with the way it is managed, or the outcome, you may contact the Chair of the Board of Directors for advice. Alternatively, you can seek advice from your union or professional association, a solicitor, the police, children’s social care or Public Concern at Work (PCaW), and/or a registered charity that offers free and confidential legal advice on workplace malpractice.**

**Public Concern at Work**

**3rd Floor, Bank Chambers, 6-10 Borough High Street, London SE1 9QQ**

**020 7404 6609 [whistle@pcaw.co.uk](mailto:whistle@pcaw.co.uk) [www.pcaw.co.uk](http://www.pcaw.co.uk)**