**St Dominic’s Grammar School**



**WHISTLEBLOWING AT WORK POLICY**

**1. Rationale**

St Dominic’s is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity, and accountability. All Governors and members of staff in the school are therefore expected to conduct themselves with integrity, impartiality and honesty at all time. This policy is intended to assist individuals who believe they have discovered malpractice or impropriety. It is not intended to replace existing procedures and it cannot be used to question financial or business decisions of the Board of Governors. Likewise, it may not be used to revisit any matters which have already been addressed under harassment, complaint or disciplinary procedures.

The Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 provides legal protection to all employees against being dismissed or victimised by their employers should they reasonably and in good faith report matters of concern. It is expected that employees will faithfully serve their employer and not disclose confidential information about the employer’s affairs. This policy applies where an individual discovers information which he or she believes shows malpractice or wrongdoing within an organisation. When this occurs the information should be disclosed without fear of reprisal and may be made independent of line management.

This policy takes account of the provisions of this Order.

**2. Definition**

2.1 The term ‘whistleblowing’ in this policy refers to the disclosure by members of the \*school community, or by ex-employees of malpractice, including illegal acts or negligence within St Dominic’s .

2.2 This policy has been developed in recognition of the fact that individual members of the school community have a right and a duty to raise with the school any matter of concern that they might have.

2.3 The policy seeks to encourage staff to use internal mechanisms to report such concerns in the first instance.

2.4 This policy does not replace or alter existing complaints procedures but complements any existing professional and ethical rules, guidelines and codes of conduct used by the school relating to complaints and freedom of speech.

2.5 St Dominic’s recognises that existing policies and procedures which deal with conduct and behaviour at work eg those relating to disciplinary, grievance and harassment matters or complaints procedures may not always be appropriate and that extremely sensitive issues may need to be handled by a different procedure. This may also be necessary in other circumstances such as where there is a fear of retribution or because of certain loyalties or relationships.

 Examples of the above may be:

* malpractice or ill treatment relating to pupils, parents/guardians or members of staff by any other member of the school community;
* repeated ill treatment of pupils, parents/guardians or members of staff where a complaint has already been made;
* when a criminal offence has been committed, is being committed or is likely to be committed;
* where there is reason to suspect fraud or there is evidence of such fraud;
* failure to comply with legal obligations eg in respect of health and safety or equality and fair treatment;
* the environment has been, or is likely to be damaged;
* a miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur;
* there is a breach of standing financial instructions;
* undue favour has been shown over a job applicant;
* information on any of the above has been, is being, or is likely to be concealed.

The above list is not intended to be exhaustive or restrictive.

\* We understand members of the school community to mean a Governor or member of staff.

**3. Aims and Objectives**

3.1 The aim of the policy is to promote a culture of openness, transparency and dialogue within St Dominic’s, which at the same time:

* upholds children’s and parents’ rights to confidentiality;
* meets the obligations of members of the school community to their employer;
* does not undermine confidence in the work of the school unreasonably
* reassures members of the school community that they will not be penalised for raising a concern and gives them a process to follow;
* contributes towards improving the work carried out by the whole school community.

3.2 Where it is at all possible St Dominic’s would encourage the use of the internal procedure as set out in this policy. However, the school recognises that in some circumstances members of the school community may wish to contact outside bodies/agencies immediately.

3.3 St Dominic’s encourages all members of the school community to identify themselves when raising a concern. Whilst it is possible to raise a concern anonymously, this policy is not ideally suited to concerns raised in this way and members of the school community should not feel inhibited in identifying themselves. Concerns raised anonymously will only be considered at the discretion of the appropriate person within the school, taking into account factors such as the seriousness of the issue raised, the credibility of the concern, and the likelihood of confirming the concern from other sources.

3.4 This policy should not be used by members of the school community who are aggrieved about a personal issue.

3.5 This policy applies to all members of the school community including those employed in a temporary capacity.

**4. Responsibilities**

4.1 St Dominic’s has a responsibility to:

* ensure that this policy enables issues raised under it to be dealt with effectively;
* promote a culture of openness and trust in which when issues are raised they are taken seriously and dealt with responsibly.
* ensure that members of the school community who raise any issues in good faith, believing them to be of sufficient importance to justify disclosure, but which are not subsequently upheld are not penalised for doing so.

4.2 Managers have a responsibility to:

* take any concerns reported to them seriously and consider them fully, fairly and sympathetically;
* recognise that raising a concern can be a difficult experience and offer appropriate support;
* seek advice, where appropriate, from other senior colleague;
* if it appears appropriate to do so, invoke the formal procedure as set out in 5.2 of this policy.

4.3 All members of the school community have a responsibility to:

* recognise that it is their duty to draw to the school’s attention to any matter of serious concern;
* adhere to the procedures set out in this policy;
* maintain their duty of confidentiality to pupils, parents and the school.

If the disclosure of confidential information to the Designated Person or an outside agency appears justified, the member of the school community should first, where appropriate, seek specialist advice from their line manager or trade union/professional body representative or the Designated Person (as defined in paragraph 5.2.2).

Where, an individual makes a malicious or vexatious allegation and particularly if he or she persists in making them, disciplinary action may be taken against the individual concerned.

**5. Procedure**

5.1 Informal Procedure

If a member of the school community is concerned about what they believe might be malpractice and have an honest and reasonable suspicion that the malpractice has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur, then the matter should be raised in the first instance with their line manager, or if there are specific reasons for not doing so the matter should be reported to the appropriate senior manager.

Anyone wishing to proceed in this way is entitled to involve a trade union/professional body representative or work colleague in assisting them raise such a matter of concern.

The manager alerted should endeavour to obtain information as to the veracity of the allegations.

If this procedure does not allay concerns, then the formal procedure as outlined below may be invoked.

5.2 Formal Procedure

5.2.1 In the event that the matter raised cannot be dealt with informally or under any of the school’s other policies or procedures for dealing with conduct and behaviour at work then the following formal procedure should be followed:

5.2.2 The Designated Person for Formal procedures will be the Principal where members of staff are concerned or the Chairman of the Board of Governors if the allegations concern the Principal. If the allegations concern a member of the Board of Governors then the Designated Person will be the Chairman of the Board. In circumstances where the Chairman of the Board is the subject of concern then the Vice-Chairman of the Board will act as the Designated Person.

5.2.3 The appropriate Designated Person will arrange an initial interview with the complainant, which will be strictly confidential and will ascertain the area of concern. The complainant may be accompanied by a member of their trade union/professional body or work colleague. The Designated Person will reassure the complainant about protection from possible reprisals or victimisation and provide them with a copy of the College’s policy on Whistleblowing at Work. The Designated Person will write a summary report of the interview, which will be agreed by both parties.

5.2.4 If the complaint concerns the improper use of public funds then the Designated Person should also alert the Finance Committee unless he/she is the subject of the allegations in which case it is sufficient for the Chairman of the Board to be aware of the allegations.

5.2.5 The Designated Person, as appropriate, will be responsible for commissioning an investigation. An Investigating Officer will be appointed, drawn appropriately from senior members of staff or Board of Governors to conduct an investigation under terms of strict confidentiality.

5.2.6 In serious cases, for example, allegations of mistreatment of pupils or fraud an Investigating Panel may be appointed comprising either senior members of staff or members of the Board or in the most serious circumstance from both groups to conduct the investigation. This panel should seek external advice from specialists or experts if this is deemed appropriate.

In such a circumstance consideration may have to be given by the Principal or the Board of Governors, to immediate precautionary suspension from work of the person under investigation.

5.2.7 Following the investigation the Investigating Officer/Panel will produce a report and inform the Chairman of the Board of Governors or Principal, as appropriate, who will implement the recommendations and ensure that appropriate action is taken, which may include changes in practice or disciplinary action.

5.2.8 The Designated Person may conclude in circumstances where false or malicious allegations have been made, that it is appropriate to invoke the Disciplinary Procedure against the person or persons who made them.

5.2.9 The Designated Person will provide the individual who raises concerns with as much feedback on the outcome of the investigation as is proper in the circumstances. However, the school may not be in a position to disclose the precise action taken where it would infringe a duty of confidentiality owed to someone else. In particular, precise details of any disciplinary action will not be provided.

**6. Role of Trade Unions and Other Organisations**

All members of the school community involved in any of the above proceedings have the right to consult and seek guidance and support from their professional organisations or trade union.

**7. External Contacts**

St Dominic’s School hopes that this policy reassures members of the school community of its commitment to have concerns raised under it taken seriously and fully investigated, and to provide protection to any individual who brings such concerns to light in good faith. Whilst there may be few occasions where individuals will wish to report their concerns to external agencies or the PSNI, the school would hope that the robust implementation of this policy will mean that where concerns exist they can be raised in a spirit of openness and trust and investigated internally in the first instance.

**8. Recording and Monitoring**

The Principal and the Chairman of the Board of Governors will maintain a register of all concerns brought to their attention

**9. Review and Evaluation**

This policy will be reviewed at least once every four years by the Board of Governors. The policy will be kept under review by senior members of staff who will keep Governors informed should any changes become necessary.