

Whistleblowing Policy

19 October 2026

About This Document

Annual Policy Period	2026 - 2027
Policy Adopted by Governors	7 September 2018
Last Policy Review	19 October 2026
Next Policy Review	September 2027

History

Version	Date	Name	Description
0.1	Aug - 2018	René Esterhuizen, Clerk to Trustees	First release. DRAFT
1.0	7 Sept - 2018	School Governors	Approved and adopted.
1.1	30 Mar - 2021	School Governors	Reviewed and approved.
1.2	1 Sep - 2021	School Governors	Reviewed and approved.
1.3	6 Sep - 2022	School Governors	Reviewed and approved.
1.4	21 Aug - 2023	School Governors	Reviewed and approved.
1.5	8 May - 2024	School Governors	Reviewed and approved.
1.6	10 June - 2025	René Esterhuizen, Headteacher	Reviewed, no changes.
1.7	19 Oct - 2026	René Esterhuizen, Headteacher	Reviewed, changes made to come in-line with the new KCSIE guidelines.

© The Vine Christian School 2026

Contents

1. Introduction 4
2. Background 4
3. .When Should It Be Used? 5
4. Principles 6
5. Process 6
6. Procedure 6
7. What Should Be Done If an Issue Is Raised with A Member of Staff? 7
8. Safeguarding Children and Young People 7
9. Relevant Legislation and Guidance 8
10. Staff Awareness 9

1. Introduction

1.1. This policy has been written with regard to Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (KCSIE 2026) and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026. Working Together 2026 expects organisations working with children to have clear whistleblowing procedures, reflecting the principles of Sir Robert Francis' Freedom to Speak Up Review, referenced in staff training and codes of conduct, and supported by a culture in which safeguarding concerns can be raised and addressed.

1.2. This policy applies to employees and other workers engaged by the school. It is also made available to volunteers, Governors/Trustees, agency workers and contractors so that anyone working in or on behalf of the school knows how to raise concerns. Statutory whistleblowing protection under the Employment Rights Act 1996 applies to workers who make a protected disclosure and meet the relevant legal conditions. Whether or not an individual falls within that statutory definition, the school will not tolerate retaliation or victimisation against anyone who raises a genuine concern under this policy.

1.3. It is important to The Vine Christian School that suspected wrongdoing, malpractice, safeguarding failures, including failures to address racism, faith-targeted abuse or other discriminatory safeguarding concerns, fraud or other serious impropriety is reported and properly considered. The Governors/Trustees will take genuine concerns raised in the public interest seriously and will ensure that concerns are handled fairly, promptly and appropriately.

1.4. The Vine Christian School expects high standards of conduct from all employees, workers, volunteers and Governors/Trustees and will treat seriously any concern about illegal, unsafe or improper practice.

1.5. Concerns should normally be raised with the Headteacher/Principal. If the concern relates to the Headteacher/Principal, it should be raised with the Chair of Governors/Trustees. The school should identify an alternative senior contact where the Chair is implicated or there is another conflict of interest.

1.6. Nothing in this policy prevents a worker from making a protected disclosure to an appropriate prescribed person or body where the legal conditions are met. Individuals are encouraged to use internal routes where appropriate, but they will not be disciplined merely for making a lawful protected disclosure externally. Staff should take care not to disclose confidential information more widely than is necessary and may wish to obtain independent advice before making a wider disclosure.

2. Background

2.1. The Employment Rights Act 1996, as amended by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, protects workers who make certain disclosures of information in the public interest. These are commonly referred to as qualifying disclosures and, when the statutory conditions are met, protected disclosures. A worker must reasonably believe that the disclosure tends to show one or more of the following:

i. a criminal offence has been, is being, or is likely to be committed

ii. a person has failed, is failing, or is likely to fail to comply with a legal obligation

iii. a miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur

iv. the health or safety of any individual has been, is being, or is likely to be endangered

v. the environment has been, is being, or is likely to be damaged

vi. information tending to show any of the above has been, is being, or is likely to be deliberately concealed.

2.2. The worker does not need to prove the wrongdoing. A reasonable belief, and a disclosure made in the public interest, may be sufficient if the other statutory conditions are met. The person raising the concern is not expected to investigate the matter themselves; the school is responsible for deciding what investigation or referral is required.

2.3. Safeguarding concerns must be handled through the correct safeguarding route as well as, where appropriate, this whistleblowing procedure. Concerns about a child's safety or welfare must be reported to the DSL or Deputy DSL without delay. Concerns or allegations about the conduct of an adult working in or on behalf of the school, including supply staff, trainee teachers, volunteers and contractors, must be reported in accordance with the school's Procedures for Managing Allegations Against Adults and Low-Level Concerns Policy.

2.4. The Headteacher, Chair of Governors/Trustees or other person appointed to handle the concern will act promptly, take safeguarding advice where necessary, and ensure that any investigation is fair and appropriately independent. A whistleblowing concern may lead to action under safeguarding, disciplinary, grievance, fraud, health and safety or other procedures as appropriate.

2.5. Whistleblowing may concern the conduct of an individual, a wider system or organisational practice where the concern is about wrongdoing in the public interest. Ordinary concerns about an individual's performance or capability should normally be dealt with under the appropriate management or capability procedure unless the matter also raises a qualifying whistleblowing or safeguarding concern

3. .When Should It Be Used?

3.1. This procedure is intended for concerns about wrongdoing in the public interest. It is not normally the route for a worker's personal contractual complaint or individual employment grievance, unless the matter also raises wider public-interest wrongdoing.

3.2. A disclosure must contain information, and the worker must reasonably believe that it tends to show relevant wrongdoing. It does not need to be proved at the time it is raised.

3.3. This procedure does not replace the school's grievance procedure, safeguarding procedures, complaints procedure or procedures for managing allegations about adults. The school will direct a concern to the most appropriate procedure where necessary.

3.4. The person raising a concern should provide information they reasonably believe to be accurate. Concerns may still be raised where the facts are uncertain, provided the concern is not knowingly false.

3.5. A worker who makes a protected disclosure has legal protection from dismissal or detriment for making that disclosure. The school will not tolerate harassment, victimisation or retaliation against

anyone who raises a genuine concern under this policy. Statutory protection depends on the circumstances and whether the legal requirements for a protected disclosure are met.

3.6. Suspected fraud, corruption, bribery or serious financial irregularity should normally be reported to the Headteacher or, where appropriate, the Chair of Governors/Trustees. The school will consider whether referral to an external regulator, auditor, police or other relevant authority is required.

4. Principles

4.1. Concerns raised under this procedure will be considered promptly, fairly and, so far as possible, confidentially. The person raising the concern will be told how the matter will be handled and, where appropriate, given feedback on the outcome, subject to legal duties, safeguarding considerations and the confidentiality rights of others.

4.2. No worker will be subjected to detriment for making a protected disclosure. The school will also take reasonable steps to protect volunteers and others who raise genuine concerns under this policy from retaliation or victimisation.

4.3. Victimisation or retaliation against a person because they have raised a genuine whistleblowing concern may itself be a disciplinary matter.

4.4. If misconduct or another serious issue is identified, the school will take appropriate action under the relevant procedure and will make any external referral required by law or safeguarding guidance.

4.5. Knowingly making a false allegation, or deliberately misusing the whistleblowing procedure, may be a disciplinary matter. A concern will not be treated as malicious merely because it is mistaken or is not substantiated after investigation.

4.6. An instruction to conceal wrongdoing or to prevent a lawful protected disclosure is unacceptable. A person who is told not to raise or pursue a genuine concern should not agree to remain silent and should use another appropriate internal or external route.

5. Process

5.1. Identifying something might be wrong.

5.2. Raising a concern

5.3. Examining the facts

5.4. Outcomes and feedback

5.5. Reflecting and moving forward

6. Procedure

6.1. In the first instance, concerns should normally be raised with the Headteacher. If the person raising the concern reasonably believes the Headteacher is involved, or there is a conflict of interest, the concern should be raised with the Chair of Governors and Trustees. If that route is also inappropriate, the school should provide an alternative senior contact, or the individual may consider an appropriate external route.

6.2. The person receiving the concern will decide how it should be examined and may appoint an appropriately independent person to investigate. The person who raised the concern may be asked to provide a written account or further information. Any investigation will be proportionate and will respect safeguarding, confidentiality, data protection and natural justice.

6.3. A person using the procedure may ask to be accompanied at a meeting by a workplace colleague or trade union representative where applicable, provided that person is not involved in the matter. The school may also agree another appropriate companion where this would assist a volunteer or other non-worker.

6.4. A person may ask for their identity to be kept confidential. The school will respect that request so far as reasonably possible, but absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed if disclosure is necessary to investigate the concern, protect a child or another person, comply with the law or ensure fairness. Anonymous concerns will be considered, although anonymity may limit the school's ability to investigate or provide feedback.

6.5. The person handling the concern will determine any action required and, where appropriate, report to the Governors and Trustees. The person who raised the concern will be told, so far as the school is able, whether the concern has been considered and whether action has been taken. Detailed information about disciplinary, safeguarding or personal matters concerning another individual may need to remain confidential.

6.6. Internal reporting is usually the most direct route, but it is not an absolute prerequisite to statutory whistleblowing protection. A worker may make a disclosure to a prescribed person or body where the legal conditions are met. The current GOV.UK list of prescribed people and bodies should be checked before an external disclosure is made. For independent schools in England, the Secretary of State for Education is a prescribed person for relevant education matters. Other prescribed bodies may be appropriate depending on the subject of the concern, for example HMRC, the Health and Safety Executive, the Environment Agency, the Information Commissioner, the Charity Commission (where applicable), Ofqual or the Serious Fraud Office. Safeguarding concerns about failures in child protection practice may also be raised through the NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line where staff feel unable to raise them internally or believe they are not being addressed.

7. What Should Be Done If an Issue Is Raised with A Member of Staff?

7.1. If a member of staff is approached by a colleague with a whistleblowing concern, they should listen, avoid promising absolute confidentiality, make an appropriate record and help the person raise the concern with the Headteacher or other appropriate recipient under this policy. They should not investigate the matter themselves unless formally appointed to do so.

8. Safeguarding Children and Young People

8.1. All staff and volunteers have a responsibility to act on concerns about the safety and welfare of children. Safeguarding concerns must be reported through the school's safeguarding procedures without delay.

8.2. The correct reporting route depends on the nature of the concern:

i. concerns about a child's safety or welfare must be reported to the DSL or Deputy DSL without delay

ii. safeguarding concerns or allegations about an adult working in or on behalf of the school must be reported under the Procedures for Managing Allegations Against Adults and the Low-Level Concerns Policy, normally to the Headteacher

iii. where the concern or allegation is about the Headteacher, it must be reported to the Chair of Governors/Trustees, or to the LADO directly where the school's procedure requires this because of sole proprietorship or a conflict of interest

iv. concerns about poor or unsafe safeguarding practice, or failures in the school's safeguarding arrangements, may be raised under this Whistleblowing Policy

v. where a member of staff feels unable to raise a safeguarding-practice concern internally, or believes a genuine concern is not being addressed, they may use the NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line or another appropriate external route

8.3. The school's DSL is Mrs. René Esterhuizen

8.4. The school will not require a person to choose between safeguarding and whistleblowing routes where both are relevant. Immediate child protection action takes priority, and concerns about organisational or systemic failures may be pursued under this policy alongside the safeguarding response. Failure to report a safeguarding concern in accordance with the school's procedures may itself be a disciplinary matter. Where a concern relates to an adult and there is a conflict of interest or the Headteacher is the sole proprietor, staff may report directly to the LADO in accordance with the school's safeguarding procedures.

9. Relevant Legislation and Guidance

9.1. Employment Rights Act 1996, Part IVA (protected disclosures)

9.2. Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998

9.3. The Employment Rights Act 1996 protects workers who make protected disclosures and meet the statutory conditions. The definition of 'worker' is broader than employee but does not automatically include every volunteer, Governor/Trustee or officeholder. The school nevertheless expects all such persons to raise genuine concerns and will not tolerate retaliation against them for doing so.

9.4. The policy should be read alongside the current GOV.UK guidance on whistleblowing and the current list of prescribed people and bodies, together with KCSIE 2026, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Code of Conduct, Low-Level Concerns Policy and Procedures for Managing Allegations Against Adults.

9.5. For statutory protection, a worker must satisfy the relevant conditions in the Employment Rights Act 1996. The former requirement that a qualifying disclosure be made 'in good faith' has been removed; however, the disclosure must still meet the statutory tests, including the worker's reasonable belief and, for a qualifying disclosure, the public-interest requirement. Deliberate misuse of the procedure may be addressed separately.

9.6. Section 43J of the Employment Rights Act 1996 provides that an agreement cannot validly prevent a worker from making a protected disclosure. Settlement agreements and confidentiality clauses must not be used to prevent lawful whistleblowing.

9.7. Any contractual term that purports to prevent a worker from making a protected disclosure is void to that extent.

10. Staff Awareness

All staff will be made aware of this policy, the internal reporting routes and the distinction between safeguarding concerns about a child, allegations or low-level concerns about adults, and whistleblowing about poor or unsafe safeguarding practice. The policy will be referenced in staff induction, safeguarding training and the Staff Code of Conduct and will be reviewed regularly to reflect current KCSIE, Working Together and whistleblowing law and guidance.