



Lincolnshire Maintained Nursery School Federation (LMNSF)

Whistleblowing Policy

1. Introduction

The Lincolnshire Maintained Nursery School Federation (LMNSF) is committed to the highest standards of honesty, openness, accountability and integrity. We expect all staff and others working with or on behalf of the Federation to share this commitment.

This Whistleblowing Policy is based closely on the Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) Whistleblowing Policy and has been adapted to reflect the governance and operational arrangements of LMNSF. It meets statutory requirements set out in the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) and Department for Education guidance for maintained schools.

The Governing Body has a statutory responsibility to agree, establish and publish the Federation's whistleblowing procedure.

2. Scope

You can use this whistleblowing policy if you are:

- an employee of LMNSF
- a school governor
- agency staff, contractor staff or suppliers providing goods or services to the Federation
- a partner organisation
- a member of the public

This policy applies across all schools within the Federation.

This whistleblowing policy does not replace the following procedures, which should normally be used where appropriate:

- safeguarding reporting procedures for children and adults

- disciplinary policy
- grievance policy
- complaints procedure

If your concern relates to:

Safeguarding a child or young person

You must make immediate contact with the safeguarding team:

- Email: lscp@lincolnshire.gov.uk
- Telephone: 01522 782333

Safeguarding an adult at risk

You must contact the safeguarding adults team:

- Email: lsab@lincolnshire.gov.uk
- Telephone: 01522 782155
- Out of hours: 01522 782333

3. When to Use Whistleblowing Arrangements

You should only consider raising concerns through whistleblowing arrangements if:

- you have genuine reasons why you cannot use the relevant employment or complaints procedures, or
- you reasonably believe those procedures are failing or are not being properly applied, and
- there is an identifiable public interest aspect to the concern

Whistleblowing arrangements are not intended to provide an alternative route for pursuing personal grievances (such as bullying, harassment or discrimination), unless there is a wider public interest.

4. What is Whistleblowing?

A whistleblower is someone who raises an honest and reasonable concern about possible wrongdoing or malpractice that is in the public interest.

Concerns may relate to:

- fraud, theft, bribery or corruption
- misuse of public funds or resources

- criminal offences
- failure to comply with legal obligations or statutory requirements
- health and safety risks or violations
- safeguarding failures
- discrimination or harassment where there is a public interest
- environmental damage
- abuse of authority
- concealment of information about any of the above

This list is not exhaustive.

5. Protected Disclosures and Confidentiality

Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, individuals who make a disclosure in the public interest and in accordance with this policy are legally protected from dismissal, harassment or victimisation. This is known as a protected disclosure.

Members of the public are not legally protected under PIDA. However, LMNSF allows concerns to be raised confidentially or anonymously.

Confidentiality

We will respect confidentiality as far as possible. However, there may be circumstances where we cannot guarantee confidentiality, for example:

- where a criminal offence may have been committed
- where child protection or adult safeguarding issues arise
- where disclosure is required by law or court order

Where disclosure of information could identify the whistleblower, we will seek consent wherever possible before releasing information.

LMNSF will not tolerate harassment or victimisation of anyone raising a concern in good faith. Any such behaviour will be treated as a serious disciplinary matter.

6. Anonymous or Malicious Allegations

Anonymous disclosures will be considered at the discretion of those handling the concern. This will depend on:

- the seriousness of the issue
- the credibility of the concern

- the likelihood of confirming the allegation
- the evidence provided

If a concern is raised in good faith but not substantiated, no action will be taken against the whistleblower. Malicious or knowingly false allegations may result in disciplinary action and will not be protected under PIDA.

7. How to Raise a Concern

We encourage concerns to be raised internally wherever possible. This allows the Federation to address issues promptly.

Concerns may be raised with:

- your line manager
- the Head of School
- the Executive Headteacher
- the Chair of Governors (where the concern relates to the Executive Headteacher)

Concerns should be raised as whistleblowing disclosures and preferably in writing, including:

- background and history
- relevant names, dates and locations
- copies of any relevant documents
- why you believe the matter is of concern

You are not expected to prove the allegation but must have reasonable grounds for concern.

8. Raising Concerns Externally

If you feel unable to raise concerns internally, or believe they have not been handled appropriately, concerns may be raised externally.

Lincolnshire County Council – Audit and Counter Fraud
Email: CounterFraud@lincolnshire.gov.uk

LCC Confidential Whistleblowing Reporting
Email: whistleblowing@lincolnshire.gov.uk
Freephone: 0800 085 3716 (9am–5pm, answerphone out of hours)

Independent advice can be obtained from:

- Protect (Whistleblowing charity)
Advice line: 020 3117 2520

You may also refer concerns to appropriate regulators such as Ofsted, the Department for Education or the Local Government Ombudsman.

9. How the Federation Will Respond

All whistleblowing disclosures will be taken seriously.

We will:

- acknowledge receipt within five working days
- explain within ten working days how we propose to deal with the matter
- carry out proportionate enquiries or investigations
- keep the whistleblower informed, where appropriate

Concerns may be:

- resolved through agreed action
- investigated internally
- referred to LCC, auditors, safeguarding teams or the Police
- subject to independent inquiry

Where investigations proceed, whistleblowers may be asked to provide further information or statements. Meetings can be held off-site if preferred and employees may be accompanied by a trade union representative or colleague.

10. Record Keeping

All records relating to whistleblowing concerns will be held securely and confidentially in line with data protection and records retention requirements.

11. Taking the Matter Further

If you are dissatisfied with how your concern has been handled, you may raise this with the investigating officer or Chair of Governors.

Employees must not raise Federation-related matters directly with the media. Doing so may constitute a breach of the Code of Conduct.