

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Effective 1 September 2026 | Next review: September 2027

Organisation	The Community Schools CIC
Company number	14658587
Registered office	Office 211, Epicentre, Enterprise Way, Haverhill, England CB9 7LR
Policy owner	Claire Meadows-Smith - Principal
Safeguarding leads	DSL: Hayley Coull Deputy DSL: Claire Meadows-Smith
Alternative internal contact	Wendy Meadows-Smith - Director
Tutors' Association	Corporate Member CO 306

The Community Schools CIC encourages people working on its behalf to speak up about wrongdoing, unsafe practice and safeguarding failures. No person should suffer retaliation for making a protected disclosure or for raising a genuine safeguarding concern. This policy is separate from the Complaints Procedure and from an individual's personal grievance, although the same facts may sometimes engage more than one procedure.

1. Scope and concerns covered

This policy applies to employed tutors, self-employed tutors who provide services personally, administrative staff, directors, volunteers, trainees and other workers where whistleblowing protection applies. It is also available as an internal speaking-up route to anyone working with or on behalf of The Community Schools CIC.

A protected disclosure must meet the statutory conditions, including the worker reasonably believing that the information is in the public interest and tends to show a relevant type of wrongdoing. Concerns may include:

- a criminal offence, fraud, dishonesty or miscarriage of justice;
- a breach of a legal obligation;
- danger to health and safety or damage to the environment;
- sexual harassment that has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur;
- safeguarding failures, unsafe practice or a failure to protect a child;
- serious financial malpractice, corruption or other wrongdoing in the public interest;
- deliberate concealment of information tending to show any of the above.

A complaint about an individual's own employment or engagement will normally be handled under the Disciplinary, Capability and Grievance Procedures or the relevant contractual process unless it also raises a wider public-interest concern. A tutor experiencing harassment, including harassment by a parent, student or other third party, may also use the grievance route; where the disclosure meets the whistleblowing conditions, the protections in this policy apply as well.

2. How to raise a concern

A concern may be raised verbally or in writing with Claire Meadows-Smith, Principal, or Hayley Coull, DSL. If the concern is about either of them, or it would otherwise be inappropriate to report to them, it should be raised with Wendy Meadows-Smith, Director, or another director. Where a genuine conflict remains, an appropriate external adviser or body may be used.

The person raising the concern should provide, so far as they reasonably can, the nature of the concern, relevant dates, people involved, available evidence and why they believe there is wrongdoing. They do not need to prove the allegation before raising a concern.

A verbal concern will be written up by the person receiving it, dated and checked back with the person raising it where their identity is known, so that there is an accurate record. An urgent child-protection concern must never wait for this whistleblowing process.

3. Safeguarding concerns

Poor or unsafe safeguarding practice must be raised promptly. Allegations about an adult working with children will be managed under the Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures, including LADO advice where the relevant threshold may be met. Nothing in this policy prevents a tutor or other worker from making a direct referral to children's social care, the police or another appropriate safeguarding authority where necessary to protect a child.

A whistleblowing concern may also lead to statutory or professional referrals, including to the Disclosure and Barring Service where the statutory referral conditions are met and to the Teaching Regulation Agency where serious misconduct by a teacher may warrant regulatory consideration. Resignation or termination of engagement does not remove a statutory safeguarding referral duty.

4. Confidential and anonymous reporting

A confidential report means The Community Schools CIC knows who raised the concern but will protect that person's identity so far as reasonably possible. Absolute confidentiality cannot be promised where disclosure is necessary for safeguarding, a fair investigation, legal proceedings or a statutory/regulatory referral.

An anonymous report means the organisation does not know the identity of the person raising it. Anonymous concerns will be considered according to seriousness, credibility and available evidence, but anonymity may restrict the investigation and the feedback that can be provided.

5. Protection from detriment and dismissal

The Community Schools CIC will not tolerate harassment, victimisation, loss of work, disadvantage or other detriment because a worker has made a protected disclosure or raised a genuine safeguarding concern. An employee dismissed because they made a protected disclosure may have a claim for automatically unfair dismissal; the usual qualifying period for ordinary unfair dismissal does not apply to that protection.

A concern raised genuinely but not substantiated will not, by itself, result in action against the person who raised it. Knowingly false or malicious allegations may be considered under the appropriate disciplinary, contractual or other procedure, but a mistaken concern raised on reasonable grounds is not misconduct.

6. How we will respond and timescales

We will normally acknowledge an identifiable whistleblowing concern within 5 working days. An initial assessment will normally begin promptly and, where practicable, within 5 working days of acknowledgement. The assessment will identify any immediate safeguarding or protective action, the appropriate investigator or route, conflicts of interest and whether external advice or referral is required.

The person raising the concern will be given an appropriate progress update normally within 20 working days and thereafter at reasonable intervals if the matter remains open. Investigations vary in complexity, so no fixed completion date is promised. Subject to confidentiality, safeguarding and legal restrictions, the person raising the concern will be told when the matter has concluded and given appropriate information about the outcome.

7. External advice and disclosure routes

Workers are not required to raise every concern internally first. The legal conditions for protection differ depending on whom a disclosure is made to, so independent advice may be helpful. Current external routes include:

- NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line: 0800 028 0285. This is a dedicated route for concerns about how an organisation is working with children or handling child-protection issues. Current published hours are 8am-8pm Monday-Friday and 9am-6pm Saturday-Sunday.
- Protect: an independent whistleblowing charity providing free confidential advice about raising concerns and legal protection. Current contact details should be obtained from www.protect-advice.org.uk.
- Relevant local authority children's social care and LADO: for child safeguarding concerns. Because The Community Schools CIC may teach children from different areas, the route should be identified from the child's home local authority. In an emergency call 999; non-emergency police matters may be reported via 101.

- A prescribed person or body whose statutory remit covers the subject of the disclosure. The current government list is published at GOV.UK under 'Whistleblowing: list of prescribed people and bodies'. Workers should choose the body whose remit actually covers the concern.
- Department for Education / Secretary of State for Education: only where the matter falls within the Secretary of State's prescribed education remit. The current prescribed-person list does not make the DfE a universal external whistleblowing route for every private tutoring-provider concern.
- Office of the Regulator of Community Interest Companies: concerns about a CIC that fall within the Regulator's remit, including potentially serious mismanagement, governance concerns or significant risk to community assets/asset-lock compliance, may be raised through the CIC Regulator's complaints process. Current email: cicconcerns@companieshouse.gov.uk.

External contact details can change. The organisation will verify the contact information in this section at each annual review and sooner if it becomes aware of a change.

8. Whistleblowing records

The organisation will maintain a confidential whistleblowing log recording, as appropriate, the date received, broad nature of the concern, whether it was anonymous or confidential, immediate risk action, investigation/referral route, key decisions, progress updates and outcome. Access will be restricted. Whistleblowing records will be kept separately from routine personnel records unless a lawful and necessary employment record also needs to be created, and retained in accordance with the Data Retention and Destruction Policy, safeguarding requirements and any legal hold.

9. Governance and oversight

Directors will receive at least an annual anonymised overview of whistleblowing concerns, themes, handling, outcomes and any learning or policy changes, without unnecessary disclosure of identities or safeguarding details. Serious concerns will be escalated to directors sooner where appropriate. The purpose is assurance, accountability and identification of recurring risks, not interference with individual safeguarding or employment decisions.

10. Training and awareness

This policy will be brought to the attention of tutors and relevant staff at induction and through periodic safeguarding/employment updates. Tutors will be reminded of the speaking-up route when the Tutor Code of Conduct is re-signed annually. Managers and directors receiving concerns must understand how to recognise a whistleblowing disclosure, preserve confidentiality, make an accurate record and escalate safeguarding concerns without delay.

11. Confidentiality clauses and protected disclosures

Nothing in a contract, subcontractor agreement, settlement agreement, confidentiality clause or non-disclosure agreement will be interpreted or used to prevent a protected disclosure or another disclosure that cannot lawfully be restricted. Section 43J of the Employment Rights Act 1996 makes contractual terms void to the extent that they purport to prevent a worker from making a protected disclosure. The organisation will also comply with the Employment Rights Act 2025 provisions concerning confidentiality clauses relating to harassment and discrimination as and when applicable.

12. Related policies

Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Procedures; Tutor Code of Conduct; Tutor Disciplinary, Capability and Grievance Procedures; Complaints Procedure; Privacy Policy; Data Retention and Destruction Policy; Equality Policy; Safer Recruitment and Selection Policy; Online Safety Policy and Guide.

13. Review

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner following a material change in whistleblowing, safeguarding or employment law, official guidance, organisational structure or an incident identifying a procedural weakness. External contact details will be checked as part of that review.