

Hillcrest Schools

Whistleblowing and Complaints Procedure

1. Whistleblowing Policy

1.1 Introduction

Hillcrest Schools Group is committed to the highest standards of transparency, integrity, and accountability. This policy provides a framework for employees to raise concerns about unethical or unlawful conduct safely and confidentially.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to all employees, contractors, and volunteers who suspect or witness misconduct, including but not limited to:

- Fraud, financial irregularities, or corruption
- Health and safety violations
- Bullying, harassment, or discrimination
- Breach of school policies or professional conduct
- Any unlawful activity

1.3 Reporting Procedure

1. Employees should report concerns promptly to their immediate supervisor unless the concern involves them.
2. The report should be made to the **Business Manager** or the **Principal** or **Head of Prep School if the issue involves a direct supervisor**.
3. If the concern involves senior leadership, employees may escalate the matter to the Chairperson of the **Board of Governors**.
4. Reports should be in writing, providing detailed information and any supporting evidence.
5. Whistleblowers may submit reports anonymously if they feel uncomfortable identifying themselves.

1.4 Protection of Whistleblowers

- The school ensures whistleblowers are protected from retaliation, victimization, or discrimination.
- All reports will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Any form of retaliation against whistleblowers will be treated as a disciplinary offense.

1.5 Investigation Process

1. The school will acknowledge receipt of a whistleblowing report within **five working days**.
 2. A preliminary assessment will be conducted to determine the credibility of the concern.
 3. An internal or external investigation will be carried out depending on the severity of the case.
 4. Where necessary, remedial action will be taken, and appropriate sanctions applied.
 5. The whistleblower (if known) will be informed of the outcome within **30 working days**, subject to confidentiality limitations.
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2. Complaints Process for Staff

2.1 Introduction

Hillcrest Schools Group encourages a professional and respectful working environment. This protocol provides a structured process for staff to raise concerns against colleagues, leaders, or other school members fairly and constructively.

2.2 Informal Resolution

1. Staff members should first address concerns directly with the individual involved through a **respectful conversation**.
2. If direct communication is ineffective or inappropriate, staff may seek mediation facilitated by a **line manager or HR representative**.

2.3 Formal Complaints Procedure

If the issue remains unresolved, the following steps should be followed:

1. **Submission of a Formal Complaint:**
 - Complaints should be made in writing and submitted to the **HR Department** or a designated senior staff member.
 - The complaint should detail the nature of the concern, relevant incidents, and any supporting evidence.
2. **Acknowledgment & Preliminary Review:**
 - The complaint will be acknowledged within **five working days**.
 - A preliminary review will determine whether further investigation is necessary.
3. **Investigation Process:**
 - A designated investigator (HR personnel or an impartial senior staff member) will conduct interviews and gather evidence.
 - Both the complainant and the respondent will be given an opportunity to present their perspectives.
4. **Resolution & Decision:**
 - The investigation should be concluded within **20 working days**.
 - The outcome will be communicated in writing to all involved parties.

- If the complaint is upheld, appropriate action (disciplinary measures, policy changes, mediation, etc.) will be taken.

2.4 Appeal Process

If either party is dissatisfied with the outcome, they may appeal by submitting a written request to the **Head of School or Board of Governors** within **five working days** of the decision.

2.5 Confidentiality & Non-Retaliation

- All complaints will be handled with **strict confidentiality**.
- Retaliation against complainants will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action.

Conclusion: These policies aim to foster an open, ethical, and professional working environment at Hillcrest Schools Group. All employees are encouraged to raise concerns responsibly, knowing they will be treated fairly and with respect.