Date: July 2025
Next review due: July 2027
Responsibility: SMT (Principal/Head of HR)

DAME ALLAN'S SCHOOLS POLICY ON WHISTLEBLOWING

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Disciplinary Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

Dame Allan's Schools (the Schools) have a culture of valuing and encouraging staff to engage in reflective practice. We have adopted this policy and the accompanying procedure on whistleblowing to enable members of staff to raise any concerns regarding suspected wrongdoing or dangers including safeguarding, fraud, malpractice, health and safety, criminal offences, miscarriages of justice, and failure to comply with legal obligations, inappropriate behaviour or unethical conduct. The policy also provides, if necessary, for such concerns to be raised outside the Schools.

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and we may amend it at any time.

2. AIMS OF THE POLICY

The Schools will:

- not tolerate malpractice;
- respect the confidentiality of staff raising concerns and will, where possible, maintain confidentiality so far as is consistent with progressing the issues effectively;
- not tolerate the victimisation or harassment of any member of staff raising a concern;

- provide the opportunity to raise concerns outside of the normal line management structure where this is appropriate;
- invoke the Schools' disciplinary policy and procedure in the case of false, malicious, vexatious or frivolous allegations, though no member of the staff will suffer a detriment or be disciplined for raising a genuine and legitimate concern, providing that they do so in good faith and following the Schools' policies;
- provide a clear and simple procedure for raising concerns, which is accessible to all members of staff.

This procedure is separate from the Schools' adopted procedures regarding grievances. Staff should not use the whistleblowing procedure to raise grievances about their personal employment issues.

The purpose of this procedure is to enable members of staff to express any concerns they may have regarding suspected malpractice within the Schools.

Malpractice is not easily defined; however, it includes allegations of fraud, financial irregularities, corruption, bribery, dishonesty, criminal activities, or failing to comply with a legal or regulatory obligation, a miscarriage of justice, conduct likely to damage our reputation or financial wellbeing, negligence, creating or ignoring a serious risk to health, safety or the environment, violations of public interest and the concealment of information relating to any of the above.

The whistleblowing procedure should be used in conjunction with the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection policy (see page 34) in relation to reporting low-level concerns around employees conduct with children.

The term 'low-level' concern does not mean that it is insignificant, it means that an adult working in or on behalf of the schools may have acted in a way that does not meet the expectations of the staff code of conduct, including conduct outside of school, but this conduct does not meet the allegations criteria or is not considered serious enough to refer to the LADO. Such behaviour can exist on a wide spectrum; examples could include, but are not limited to:

- Being overfriendly with children

- Having favourites

- Taking photographs of children on their mobile phone

- Using inappropriate language.

3. HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN

All whistleblowing claims or low-level concerns should be raised with the Principal. Should the concern relate to the safeguarding of children, this should be reported to both the Principal and DSL.

This includes allegations made against agency and supply staff, volunteers and contractors. Should an allegation be made against the Principal, this will be reported to the Chair of the Governing Board.

In the event that neither the Principal nor Chair of the Governing Board is contactable on that day, the information must be passed to and dealt with by either the member of staff acting as Principal/ the DSL or the Vice Chair of the Governing Board.

The member of staff should provide as much detail as possible and any supporting evidence they have. If there is evidence of criminal activity, then the Police will in all cases be informed.

Members of staff are encouraged to put their names to any disclosures of information. If a concern is raised anonymously, it will be much more difficult for the Schools to look into the matter, to protect the whistleblower's position or to give them feedback on the outcome of the investigation. If a situation arises where the Schools are not able to resolve a concern without revealing the whistleblower's identity, the investigator will discuss whether and how to proceed with the whistleblower. We will make every effort to withhold your identity.

The School's reserve the right to commission third-parties at any time during this process.

Where there is a concern about the DSL's handling of a specific safeguarding case, it may be appropriate for a member of staff to report the concern to the Principal. Where there is a concern about the Schools' overall approach to safeguarding it may be appropriate to refer the concern to an external agency **(see Section 6 External Disclosure).**

4. WHAT THE SCHOOLS WILL DO

Upon receipt of a disclosure of information, the investigator will normally write to the member of staff who reported the concern within five working days, to acknowledge receipt of the disclosure and to arrange a meeting to discuss it (or to explain the reasons for any delay in arranging a meeting to discuss the disclosure). The meeting will take place within a reasonable timescale, and reasonable notice will be given. At the meeting, the whistleblower may be accompanied by a colleague or trade union official. The member of staff may request postponement of the meeting if his/her chosen companion is not available. In such cases the meeting will be postponed by up to five working days.

The investigator will arrange for another member of staff to accompany him/her to the meeting to take minutes. The investigator will conduct any relevant investigations prior to, or subsequent to, the meeting as appropriate. At the discretion of the investigator, other

members of staff may be interviewed or required to attend a meeting to answer questions regarding the disclosure.

Any investigations will be completed in a timely manner , consistent with the need for it to be full and thorough. There may be cases that involve wider investigation, thus lengthening the time of the process. Should this be the case, the whistleblower will be made aware of this.

The investigator will prepare a report detailing the findings and confirming whether or not any wrongdoing has occurred. The report will include recommendations and details of how the matter can be rectified and whether or not a referral is required to an external organisation, such as the local authority or the police.

We will aim to keep the member of staff informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent the Schools giving them specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. The staff member should treat any information about the investigation as confidential. If the Schools conclude that a whistleblower has made false allegations maliciously, the whistleblower will be subject to disciplinary action.

Whilst the Schools cannot guarantee the outcome a whistleblower is seeking, we will deal with the concern fairly and in an appropriate way. By using this policy staff can help us to achieve this.

5. PROTECTION AND SUPPORT FOR WHISTLEBLOWERS

It is understandable that whistleblowers are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. We aim to encourage openness and will support staff who raise genuine concerns under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

The Schools' operate a no-tolerance policy to any form of bullying and/or harassment of any employees who raise concerns. Whistleblowers must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern. Detrimental treatment includes dismissal, disciplinary action, threats or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern.

If a member of staff believes they have suffered any such treatment, they should inform the Human Resources Department immediately. If the matter is not remedied they should raise it formally using the Schools' grievance procedure.

Staff must not threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. If an employee is involved in such conduct they may be subject to disciplinary action.

6. EXTERNAL DISCLOSURE

Where all internal procedures have been exhausted, a member of staff shall have a right to access to the Schools' external auditor, UNW LLP, Citygate, St James Boulevard, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4JE, on a confidential basis. Their Managing Partner, Andrew Wilson, can be contacted by emailing: andrewwilson@unw.co.uk

The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for staff to report their concerns to an external body such as a regulator. We strongly encourage staff to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. The independent whistleblowing charity, Public Concern at Work, operates a confidential helpline. Their details are provided below.

Where a member of staff's concerns are related to safeguarding issues not being appropriately addressed by the Schools, the member of staff has a duty to report their concerns either to the Schools' local Safeguarding partners as detailed in the safeguarding policy or to the NSPCC Whistleblowing helpline on 0800 0 280 285. These numbers are posted in staff rooms on both of the Schools' sites.

It will very rarely, if ever, be appropriate to alert the media.

Deterring any employee from reporting a legitimate concern is viewed as a serious offence. Any employee found to be deterring another employee will be subject to disciplinary action.

Protect - Speak up, stop harm:	Helpline: 020 3117 2520
(previously Public Concern at Work)	Website: www.protect-advice.org.uk