

Introduction

Arvalee School & Resource Centre is committed to the delivery of a high-quality education for all its pupils and therefore adopts high standards in public administration and will treat malpractice as a serious matter. The Policy applies to all staff working in Arvalee School & Resource Centre, both full-time and part-time, temporary, and casual, teaching staff, classroom assistant staff, secretarial staff and technician. References to 'employees' within the Policy covers all these categories. The Policy aims to provide an avenue for employees to raise concerns and receive feedback on any action taken.

Employees may take matters further if they are dissatisfied with responses received. This policy is intended to cover concerns which fall outside the scope of other procedures which already are included in or covered by other Policies e.g. Harassment, Bullying, Discrimination etc. Employees are often the first to suspect or realise that there may be something wrong in their place of work but may not express concerns because of feelings of disloyalty to colleagues or fears of harassment and victimisation.

In line with Arvalee's commitment to openness and accountability employees and others with serious concerns about any aspect of the school's work are encouraged to report them and, if necessary, in certain instances, on a confidential basis.

The Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998

The Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, (see www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/si/si1998/19981763.htm) also known as the 'Whistleblowers Act' provides protection for employees who disclose information which, in the reasonable belief of the worker making the disclosure, tends to show one or more of the following –

- that a criminal offence has been committed, is being committed, or is likely to be committed;
- that a person has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligations to which (s)he is subject;
- that a miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur;
- that the health or safety of any individual has been, is being or is likely to be endangered;
- that the environment has been, is being, or is likely to be damaged;
- that information tending to show any matter falling within any one of the preceding subparagraphs has been, is being or is likely to be deliberately concealed.

Protection of Staff Arvalee School & Resource Centre is committed to this Policy.

If an employee raises a concern in good faith the School will protect them against harassment or victimisation and will if necessary apply the relevant procedures. In accordance with the Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 an employee cannot be dismissed or selected for redundancy as a result of making a disclosure in good faith.

Employees who already are the subject of disciplinary, grievance or redundancy procedures will not have those procedures stopped or suspended as a result of their whistleblowing. An employee must

have a reasonable belief that a crime or risk as described in above bullet points has occurred or may occur in the future.

In deciding whether or not an employee has acted reasonably, all circumstances will be taken into consideration but in particular;

- the identity of the person to whom the disclosure is made;
- the seriousness of the relevant 'offence';
- whether the 'offence' is continuing or is likely to occur in the future;
- whether the disclosure is made in breach of a duty of confidentiality owed by the employer to any other person;
- any action the employer or prescribed person might reasonably be expected to take as a result of a previous disclosure;
- and whether in making the disclosure to the employer the employee complied with procedures approved by the employer.

Protection applies where 'external' disclosures are made to such bodies as the police. In such instances Arvalee School would expect to be satisfied that internal sources had been advised first or that the employees believed they would have been victimised or evidence would have been concealed or destroyed. External disclosures must be made in good faith, in the belief that allegations are substantially true and there should be no motive for personal gain.

Anonymous Reports

Arvalee School & Resource Centre encourages employees to put their names to allegations because concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful. Although Arvalee School & Resource Centre will consider anonymous reports this policy is not appropriate for concerns raised anonymously.

The school leadership cannot respond directly to anonymous reports.

The Procedure for Expressing Concerns

As a first step employees should raise concerns with their line manager. This may be done either orally or in writing. If an employee feels unable to raise a concern with the line manager then the matter should be reported to another member of Arvalee's Senior Management or the Principal who will investigate the matter or have the matter investigated. The employee will have the opportunity to decide whether or not he/she wishes to remain anonymous.

If an employee still has concerns, then the matter should be reported to Siobhan Rogan Chairperson of The Board of Governors of Arvalee.

Independent Advice

If an employee is unsure which procedure to use or wants independent advice at any stage he/she may wish to contact: A Trade Union/Professional organisation or The independent charity 'Public Concern at Work' www.pcaw.co.uk - Telephone 0171 404 6609

External Contacts

This Policy is intended to provide an avenue to raise concerns within Arvalee School. If an employee is not satisfied, and feels it is right to take the matter outside Arvalee School, the list below shows possible contact points: NI Education and Library Boards Whistle blowing Policy

- Any Member of the Board
- Relevant Trade Unions
- Department of Education
- Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
- Department of Employment and Learning
- Your Solicitor
- The Police Service of Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Ombudsman
- Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO)

The Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO, has been prescribed as a person to whom protected disclosures can be made under the Order. He is prescribed as having a role in relation to the proper conduct of public business, value for money, fraud and corruption in relation to the provision of centrally funded public services. Prescribed persons are responsible for investigating allegations that fall under their prescribed role and for protecting the whistleblower and their interests whilst conducting an investigation.

The NIAO Whistleblower's telephone number is 028 9025 1023 or employees can write to: The Comptroller and Auditor General Northern Ireland Audit Office 106 University Street Belfast BT1 1EU www.niauditoffice.gov.uk

Vexatious claims

In certain circumstances the Board will take appropriate action if, it is found through investigation, that an employee has made a claim which is vexatious.

Reviewed with reconstitution of the Board May 2025