Little Acorns Montessori

Ascot | Bracknell | Crowthorne

Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure

1. Document Control

Version	Date	Review Date	Author / Role
1.0	June 2026	June 2027	Jonathan Duffy / Director

This policy is reviewed annually or sooner following changes to legislation, EYFS requirements, or Ofsted guidance. All staff must be informed of updates at the earliest opportunity.

Compliance Note: The previous version of this policy did not reference the EYFS Statutory Framework (2025), the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, the Children Act 2004, or the Employment Rights Act 2025. It lacked a document control table, defined roles and responsibilities, step-by-step reporting procedures, confidentiality provisions, a recording protocol, and signposting to external agencies. This revised policy rectifies all gaps and is fully compliant with the EYFS (September 2025) safeguarding and welfare requirements.

2. Policy Statement

Little Acorns Montessori (hereinafter 'the nursery') is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, honesty, and accountability. The nursery operates across three sites in Ascot, Bracknell, and Crowthorne and provides early years education and childcare for children aged 0–5.

All staff, students, and volunteers are in a unique position to observe and identify concerns about poor or unsafe practice. The nursery recognises that speaking up can be difficult, particularly in a small setting. This policy ensures that anyone who raises a genuine concern in good faith is protected from reprisal, harassment, or victimisation.

The nursery's commitment is clear:

- All concerns raised in good faith will be taken seriously.
- No member of staff will suffer any detriment as a result of raising a concern.
- Concerns will be investigated promptly, fairly, and with appropriate confidentiality.
- Staff will receive feedback on action taken where it is safe and appropriate to do so.

This policy is distinct from the nursery's Complaints Procedure and Grievance Policy. It specifically addresses concerns about safeguarding, poor or unsafe practice, or other matters of public interest.

3. Statutory and Legislative Framework

This policy has been developed to comply with the following legislation and guidance:

- EYFS Statutory Framework for Group and School-Based Providers (September 2025) – Section 3, safeguarding and welfare requirements. Providers must put appropriate whistleblowing procedures in place for all staff (including students and volunteers) to raise concerns about poor or unsafe practice in the setting's safeguarding provision. Procedures must include when and how to report concerns and the process that will be followed after concerns are reported.
- Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) – provides legal protection for workers who make a protected disclosure. Whistleblowing rights under PIDA are day-one rights: no qualifying period of service is required.
- Employment Rights Act 1996 (as amended by PIDA 1998 and the Employment Rights Act 2025) – it is automatically unfair dismissal to dismiss an employee for making a protected disclosure. From 6 April 2026, disclosures about sexual harassment explicitly qualify as protected disclosures.
- Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004 – place a duty on all those working with children to safeguard and promote their welfare.
- Working Together to Safeguard Children — Statutory Guidance on Multi-Agency Working to Help, Support and Protect Children (March 2026).
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 – governs the barring of individuals from working with children.
- Equality Act 2010 – prohibits detriment on grounds of a protected characteristic.
- UK GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018, and Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 — govern the handling of personal data in any investigation.

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4. Scope

This policy applies to all individuals working at, or on behalf of, Little Acorns Montessori, including:

- All permanent, part-time, and temporary employees
- Students on placement
- Volunteers
- Agency workers
- Contractors and visiting professionals

This policy covers concerns that are in the public interest, including concerns that:

- Relate to the safeguarding, welfare, or safety of a child
- Relate to sexual harassment
- Are unlawful or constitute a criminal offence
- Indicate a miscarriage of justice
- Fall below established regulatory or professional standards
- Amount to impropriety or serious misconduct
- Place the health or safety of any person at risk
- Relate to a failure to comply with any legal obligation
- Involve the deliberate concealment of information relating to any of the above

This policy does not replace the nursery's Complaints Procedure (for concerns raised by parents/carers) or the Grievance Procedure (for personal employment disputes). If you are unsure which procedure applies, speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

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5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 The Whistleblower

Any person covered by the scope of this policy who raises a concern in good faith. Staff are not expected to prove the truth of an allegation; they must only have reasonable grounds to believe the concern is true and that it is in the public interest to raise it. The nursery will not tolerate malicious or knowingly false allegations.

5.2 Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

Role	Name	Campus
Designated Officer / Nominated Individual	Jonathan Duffy	All Campuses
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Elaine Eastham	Ascot Campus
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Agata Payne	Bracknell Campus
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Emma Gray	Crowthorne Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguiading Lead (DDSL)	Jessica McGrath/Katy Cooley	Ascot Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguiading Lead (DDSL)	Joanne Broughton	Bracknell Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguiading Lead (DDSL)	Martine Loveridge	Crowthorne Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguiading Lead (DDSL)	Kira King	Crowthorne Campus (in the absence of Emma and Martine)
Manager on Duty	As rostered	All Campuses

The DSL must:

- Receive all whistleblowing concerns in the first instance
- Acknowledge receipt of a concern within 2 working days
- Decide upon the appropriate course of action, in consultation with the nursery owner/manager
- Liaise with external agencies (Ofsted, LADO, Children's Services, Police) where required
- Maintain a confidential record of all concerns and actions taken
- Provide feedback to the whistleblower on the outcome where it is safe to do so
- Ensure the whistleblower is protected from detriment

5.3 Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (Deputy DSL)

The Deputy DSL acts in the absence of the DSL and holds the same responsibilities during this period.

5.4 Nursery Manager / Owner

The nursery manager/owner must:

- Ensure this policy is implemented, reviewed annually, and communicated to all staff

- Support the DSL in managing concerns and investigations
- Ensure no member of staff suffers detriment for raising a concern in good faith
- Act where a concern is raised about the DSL (in which case the concern must be escalated directly to the owner or to Ofsted)
- Make a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and/or the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) where required

5.5 All Staff

All staff must:

- Familiarise themselves with this policy upon induction and following each review
- Raise any genuine concern as soon as possible
- Not victimise, harass, or treat detrimentally any colleague who has raised a concern
- Maintain confidentiality regarding any concern raised and any investigation underway

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6. How to Raise a Concern

6.1 Internal Reporting Procedure

Staff should follow this procedure in order:

1. Raise the concern with the DSL as soon as reasonably practicable.
2. Concerns should be raised in writing wherever possible. Complete the nursery's Whistleblowing Concern Form (see Appendix A) and submit it to the DSL directly.
3. If the concern relates to the DSL, raise it directly with the Designated Officer.
4. If the concern relates to the Designated Officer, or anyone connected to the Designated Officer, or if you are not satisfied with the response received, escalate the concern externally (see Section 6.2).

When raising a concern, staff should set out:

- The background and history of the concern
- Names, dates, and location(s) of any incident(s)
- The reason(s) they are particularly concerned about the situation
- Any witnesses or supporting evidence available

Staff may invite a third party (such as a trade union representative or a trusted colleague not involved in the concern) to accompany them when raising or discussing a concern.

6.2 External Reporting Procedure

Where a member of staff feels unable to raise a concern internally, or feels that their genuine concern has not been addressed, they must use the external channels below. Raising a concern with an external body is a protected disclosure under PIDA 1998.

Organisation / Service	Contact Number	Email / Website	Operating Hours

Police (Emergency)	999	N/A	24/7, 365 days a year
Police (Non-Emergency)	101	N/A	24/7, 365 days a year
Bracknell Forest MASH	01344 352005	mash@bracknell-forest.gov.uk	Mon–Fri: 8:30am – 5:00pm
Bracknell Forest EDS	01344 351999	edt@bracknell-forest.gov.uk	Weeknights: 5:00pm – 8:30am
NSPCC Whistleblowing Line	0800 028 0285	help@nspcc.org.uk	Mon–Fri: 8:00am – 8:00pm
Ofsted Whistleblowing Hotline	0300 123 3155	whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk	Mon–Fri: 8:00am – 6:00pm
Protect (Whistleblowing Charity)	020 3117 2520	whistle@protect-advice.org.uk	Mon–Tue, Wed: 1:00pm – 5:30pm, Thu–Fri: 9:30am – 1:00pm, 2:00pm – 5:30pm

Staff may also contact the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) for Bracknell Forest where the concern relates to a person in a position of trust who may have harmed, or poses a risk of harm to, a child.

- Bracknell Forest LADO: 01344 351500

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7. How Little Acorns Montessori Will Respond

Upon receipt of a concern, the DSL will:

5. Acknowledge receipt of the concern in writing within 2 working days.
6. Assess the concern and determine whether immediate action is required to protect a child or prevent further harm.
7. Decide upon the appropriate course of action. This may include: internal investigation; referral to Bracknell Forest Children's Services; referral to Ofsted; referral to the Police; referral to the LADO; or referral to another independent body.
8. Inform the whistleblower, within 10 working days, of who will handle the matter and the expected timescale.
9. Provide feedback on the outcome of the concern, where it is lawful and appropriate to do so.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for a formal investigation. The nursery will inform the whistleblower if this is the case.

Where an investigation is required, the nursery will carry it out in a timely and thorough manner, with appropriate confidentiality maintained throughout.

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8. Recording and Confidentiality

8.1 Recording

All concerns raised under this policy must be recorded. The DSL must complete and retain:

- The completed Whistleblowing Concern Form (Appendix A)
- A written record of any meetings held to discuss the concern, including date, attendees, and decisions made
- Copies of any correspondence with external agencies
- A record of the outcome and any action taken

All records must be stored securely in the nursery's confidential safeguarding file, accessible only to the DSL, Deputy DSL, and Nursery Manager/Owner. Records must be retained in accordance with the nursery's Data Retention Policy and the requirements of UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

8.2 Confidentiality

The nursery will treat all concerns with strict confidentiality. The identity of the whistleblower will not be disclosed without their consent, unless the nursery is legally required to do so.

Staff must not disclose details of any concern or investigation to any unauthorised person. Breaches of confidentiality will be treated as a serious disciplinary matter.

The nursery acknowledges that in a small setting, complete anonymity may not always be achievable. Where anonymity cannot be guaranteed, the DSL will discuss this with the whistleblower before proceeding.

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9. Protection from Detriment

The nursery will not tolerate the victimisation, harassment, or detrimental treatment of any member of staff, student, or volunteer who raises a concern in good faith under this policy.

Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and the Employment Rights Act 1996, workers are legally protected from dismissal or detriment for making a protected disclosure. This is a day-one employment right: no qualifying period of service is required.

From 6 April 2026, the Employment Rights Act 2025 explicitly extends protection to disclosures about sexual harassment.

Any member of staff who victimises a whistleblower will be subject to disciplinary action, which may result in dismissal.

If a member of staff believes they have suffered a detriment as a result of raising a concern, they should report this immediately to the Nursery Manager/Owner. They may also seek independent legal advice or contact Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work): tel: 020 3117 2520.

10. Malicious or Vexatious Disclosures

This policy protects concerns raised in good faith. Staff are not required to prove that their concern is true; however, they must have a reasonable belief that the information they are disclosing is true.

Where an allegation is made maliciously or in bad faith, the nursery reserves the right to take disciplinary action against the individual making the allegation. Such action will not, however, be taken where the concern was raised genuinely but proved unfounded.

11. Anonymous Concerns

The nursery encourages staff to identify themselves when raising a concern, as this helps to facilitate a thorough investigation and enables the nursery to provide feedback on outcomes.

Anonymous concerns will be considered and acted upon where possible. However, the nursery may be limited in its ability to investigate fully where the concern cannot be substantiated without identifying the source. Anonymous concerns will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

12. Training and Awareness

The nursery will ensure that:

- All staff receive training on whistleblowing procedures as part of their induction.
- All staff are informed of updates to this policy at the earliest opportunity.
- Safeguarding training (which must include whistleblowing content) is renewed at least every two years, in line with the EYFS Statutory Framework (2025).
- This policy is readily accessible to all staff at all times, including at all three nursery sites.

13. Linked Policies

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

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Staff Induction Policy / Handbook
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure
- Complaints Procedure
- Confidentiality and Data Protection Policy
- Records Management / Data Retention Policy
- Safer Recruitment Policy

14. Policy Sign-Off

Role	Name	Date
Owner/Director	Jonathan Duffy	June 2026

Appendix A: Whistleblowing Concern Form

This form should be completed by the person raising the concern and submitted to the DSL. A copy should be retained by both the DSL and the person raising the concern.

Date of Concern	
Name of Person Raising Concern	*(may be left blank if raising anonymously)*
Job Role / Position	
Contact Details	
Name(s) of Person(s) Concerned	
Nature of the Concern	*(Describe what you have seen, heard, or been told. Include dates, times, locations, and names of any witnesses.)*
Why Are You Concerned?	
Have You Raised This Concern Before?	*Yes / No. If yes, with whom and when?*
Is There Any Supporting Evidence?	
Signature	
Date	

For DSL Use Only:

Date Received	
Acknowledged (date & method)	
Action Taken	
External Agency Contacted	
Outcome / Feedback to Whistleblower	
Date File Updated	

— End of Policy —