



Ecclesfield
SCHOOL

This policy is for the purpose of outlining the school's obligation to management the risks against fraud in the organisation. The policy sets out the key principles for early intervention and the management of the procedures in the event of fraud occurring.

Date approved:

Signed:

(Headteacher)

Signed:

(Chair of committee)

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Changes in this edition

No changes

Introduction

For the purposes of this policy, fraud is defined as dishonest, irregular or illegal acts, characterised by a deliberate intent at concealment or false representation, resulting in the diversion of resources, whether or not for personal gain, for the benefit of an individual or group of individuals at a consequent loss to the school.

The objective of this policy is to safeguard the proper use of the school's finances and resources. The school derives the majority of its income from public funds, however it may also receive charitable donations and income from parents and so has a particular responsibility to ensure that income and resources are used solely for the purposes intended.

Fraud is a serious matter and the governing body is committed to investigating all cases of suspected fraud. Any member of staff, regardless of their position or seniority, against whom prima facie evidences of fraud is found, will be subject to disciplinary procedures that may result in dismissal. The school will normally involve the local authority EFA and the police and may seek redress via civil proceedings.

(Note: The reader should note that the responsibility for Internal Audit requirements is within the schools Finance Committee remit however, for the purpose of this policy the Finance Committee and Internal Audit Committee have been identified independently).

Prevention

As the aftermath of fraud is costly, time-consuming, disruptive and unpleasant and may lead to unwelcome adverse publicity, a major thrust of this fraud policy is prevention.

Leadership

Governors and senior leaders should ensure that their behaviour is demonstrably selfless and open and should champion the school's policies on conflicts of interest, hospitality and gifts.

Management procedures

Fraud can be minimised through carefully designed and consistently operated management procedures, which deny opportunities for fraud. Staff must comply with and should receive training in the school's policies on segregation of duties, data security and conflict of interest and the school's financial regulations. A continuous review of systems by internal audit may deter attempted fraud and should result in continuous improvements. The risk of fraud should be a factor in internal audit plans.

Staff appointments

Potential new members of staff must be screened before appointment, particularly for posts with financial responsibility. For example:

- References should cover a reasonable, continuous period of at least three working years and any gaps should be explained.
- References should cover character, in addition to academic or other achievement.
- An official employer's reference should be obtained.
- Doubts about the contents of the reference should be resolved before confirming the appointment. If this done by telephone, a written record of the discussion should be kept.
- Essential qualifications should be checked before making an offer of employment, for example by requiring original certificates at the interview.
- Where a post carries significant financial responsibility, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks should be considered.

Cash

Management of cash should include the following:

- Segregation of duties – systems should prevent one person from receiving, recording and banking cash. Where there are many outlets, the system should incorporate additional supervisory management and unannounced spot checks. Segregation of duties should continue during periods of leave or sickness absence.
- Reconciliation procedures – an independent record of cash received and banked may deter and detect fraud. Documents used in reconciliation processes, such as paying-in-slips, should not be available to the officer responsible for banking.
- Receipts should normally be issued in return for cash received, to provide an audit trail.

- Physical security, such as access to keys and access codes should be kept secure.
- Frequent banking.

Cheques

Cheques are often completed in ways which facilitate opportunist fraud. Cheques are sometimes intercepted by organised criminals who falsify payee and value details using sophisticated techniques. Debtors may also be told to make cheques payable to a private account, possibly using an account name which is similar to that of the school.

The following preventative measures should be taken:

- Use of electronic funds transfer (EFT) as an alternative to cheques.
- Physical security – unused, completed and cancelled cheques should never be left unsecured. If cheques are destroyed, more than one officer should be present and a record of the serial numbers should be maintained.
- Frequent bank reconciliations – some frauds have gone undetected for long periods because accounts have not been reconciled promptly, or because discrepancies have not been fully investigated.
- Segregation of duties.
- Use of bank account names which it is difficult to represent as personal names, to prevent the simple theft of cheques in the post and their conversion into cash.
- Clear instructions to debtors about correct payee details and the address to which cheques should be sent. The address should normally be the accounts department, not the department which has provided the goods or services.
- Central opening of all post by more than one person and recording of all cash and cheques received.
- Rotation of staff responsibilities, including the regular rotation of counter-signatories in accounts departments, to reduce the risk of collusion.
- Training in secure completion of cheques.

Purchasing

Preventative measures should be taken as follows:

- Minimising little used or unusual account codes.
- Ensuring that all account codes are effectively monitored and approved by line management.
- Segregation of duties.
- Secure management of the creditors' standing data file, including segregating the origination and approval of new or amended data.

- Requiring purchase orders for the procurement of all services, as well as goods.
- Matching the invoice amounts to the purchase order commitment in all cases. Where service order variations occur, these should be supported by an authorised variation order.
- A certified delivery note should be matched to the invoice for payment.

All suppliers should be vetted to establish that they are genuine and reputable companies before being added to lists of authorised suppliers.

Detection

Checks and balances

Detective checks and balances will be designed into all relevant systems and applied consistently, including segregation of duties, reconciliation procedures, random checking of transactions, and review of management accounting information, including exception reports. Systems should identify transactions which have not followed normal procedures.

Behaviour patterns

Suspect patterns of behaviour among staff dealing with financial transactions should be investigated, for example, living beyond apparent means, taking a few holidays, regularly working alone out of normal hours and resistance to delegation. Any indication of addiction to drugs, alcohol or gambling should be addressed promptly, for the welfare of the individual and to minimise the risks to the school.

Whistle blowing policy

Anyone suspecting fraud may use the school's whistle blowing policy, which provides protection against reprisal for any such disclosure.

Fraud response procedure

Purpose

The purpose of this fraud response procedure is to define authority levels, responsibilities for action and reporting lines in the event of suspected fraud irregularity. Those investigating a suspected fraud should:

- Aim to prevent further loss.
- Liaise with the school's insurer.
- Establish and secure evidence necessary for criminal and disciplinary action.
- Inform the police.
- Notify the relevant authorities i.e. Education Funding Agency (EFA).
- Endeavour to recover losses.
- Take appropriate action against those responsible.

- Keep internal personnel and outside organisations with a need to know suitable informed, on a confidential basis, about the incident and the school's response.
- Deal with requests for references for employees disciplined or prosecuted for fraud.
- Review the reasons for the incident, the measures taken to prevent a recurrence, and any action needed to strengthen future responses to fraud.

Initiating action

Members of staff, students or members of the Local Governing Body (LGB) may suspect fraud or irregularity in the school. If so, they should report it as soon as possible to the Headteacher. The person to whom the suspected incident is reported should then ensure that it is made known without delay to the Business Manager, and the chair of the Finance Committee (also responsible for internal audit).

The Business Manager should, as soon as possible (and with the aim of acting within 24 hours), chair a meeting of the following group to decide on the initial response, using properly appointed nominees where necessary:

- Headteacher.
- Business Manager.
- Chair of finance committee.
- Internal audit committee (lead person or other nominated representative from the committee).

If a member of this group is implicated in the incident the Chair of LGB or vice chair must appoint a substitute.

Responsibility for investigation

The chair of the Finance Committee will lead the group who will decide on the action to be taken. This will normally be an investigation led by the Internal Audit Committee (lead person or other nominated representative from the committee).

Prevention of further loss

Where initial investigation provides reasonable grounds for suspecting an employee or employees, governors or others of fraud, the group will decide how to prevent further loss. This may require the suspension from employment until the full investigation process has been completed, under the school's disciplinary procedure. The timing of the suspension should be planned to prevent the possibility of the employee destroying or removing evidence that may be needed to support disciplinary or criminal action.

In these circumstances, the suspects should be approached unannounced and should be supervised at all times before leaving the school's premises. They should be allowed to collect personal property under supervision, but should not be able to remove any property belonging to the school. Any security passes and keys to the premises, offices and furniture should be returned. The Business Manager should be required to advise on the best means of denying access to the school while the employee(s) remain suspended, for example by changing locks and informing premises staff not to admit the individual(s) to any part of the premises. Similarly, all access and permissions to access the school network should be suspended under instruction to the ICT Support Service from the time of the suspension of the employee.

The group will consider whether it is necessary to investigate systems other than the system which is alleged to have been breached. In reaching a decision, the group should consider whether the suspected employee may have had opportunities to misappropriate the school's assets.

Establishing and securing evidence

The school will follow disciplinary procedures against any member of staff or governor who has committed fraud and will normally pursue the prosecution of any such individual through the criminal courts. The Business Manager will:

- Ensure that evidence requirements are met during any fraud investigation.
- Establish and maintain contact with the police.
- Ensure that staff involved in fraud investigations are familiar with and follow rules on the admissibility of documentary and other evidence in criminal proceedings.

Reporting lines

The group will provide regular, confidential reports to the chair of governors, which will include:

- Quantification of losses.
- Progress with the recovery action.
- Progress with disciplinary action.
- Progress with criminal action.
- Estimate of resources required to conclude the investigation.
- Remedial actions taken to prevent and detect similar incidents.

Notifying the EFA

The school **must** notify the EFA if losses are incurred through fraud or theft in excess of £5,000, individually and cumulatively, in any academy financial year or irregularity.

Any unusual or systematic fraud, regardless of value, **must** also be reported (*Academies Financial Handbook 2014, Section 4.8.2*).

Recovery of losses

The Internal Audit Committee will endeavour to ensure that the amount of any loss is quantified. Repayment of losses will be sought in all cases. Where the loss is substantial, legal advice should be obtained about the need to freeze the suspect's assets through court, pending conclusion of the investigation. Legal advice may be obtained about prospects for recovering losses through the civil court, where the perpetrator refuses repayment. The school will normally expect to recover costs in addition to losses.

Final report

On completion of an investigation, a written report from the Internal Audit Committee (lead person or nominated person) will be drafted and submitted to the chair of governors containing:

- A description of the incident, including the value of any loss, the people involved, and the means of perpetrating the fraud.
- The measures taken to prevent a recurrence.
- Any action needed to strengthen future responses to fraud, with a follow-up report on whether the actions have been taken.

The final outcome will be reported to the complainant.

Reference for persons disciplined or prosecuted for fraud

Any request for a reference for persons disciplined or prosecuted for fraud must be referred to the Headteacher who will take advice from the schools HR specialist in advance of responding to such a request.

Review of fraud response plan

This plan will be annually reviewed for fitness of purpose. Any recommended change will be reported to the finance committee for consideration and the Board of Directors for approval.