

Updated October 2026 | New or amended wording is shown in blue.

Smartkidz Play and Learn are committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability.

We recognise that our staff are often the first to realise that there may be something wrong within the setting. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or they may fear harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances, it may be easier to ignore the concern rather than report what may just be suspicion of malpractice. If a member of staff discovers evidence of malpractice or wrongdoing within Smartkidz Play and Learn, they can disclose this information internally without fear of reprisal.

This policy applies to employees, agency staff, volunteers and other adults working within Smartkidz Play and Learn Ltd., including Smartkidz Forest School Alternative Provision. It should be read alongside the Safeguarding Policy (September 2026), allegations/low-level concerns procedures and relevant school safeguarding arrangements.

Our Whistleblowing policy is intended to cover concerns such as

- Financial malpractice or fraud.
- Failure to comply with legal obligation.
- Dangers to health and safety or the environment.
- Criminal activity.
- Improper conduct, poor practice or unethical behaviour.
- Safeguarding failures, unsafe practice, concealment of concerns, inappropriate conduct towards children or a failure to act on allegations about adults.

The policy should not be used to challenge ordinary business decisions by Smartkidz or as a substitute for the Staff Grievance Policy for individual employment matters. Concerns involving discrimination, harassment or safeguarding may also constitute whistleblowing where the legal public-interest requirements are met; they must not be excluded from reporting merely because another policy also applies.

Any allegations relating to child protection will follow the procedures set out in the safeguarding policy. Staff must act immediately where a child may be at risk; whistleblowing arrangements do not delay safeguarding referrals.

Principles

The policy is based on the following fundamental principles:

- The staff have a right to raise concerns about perceived unacceptable practice or behaviour.
- The responsibility for expressing concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour rests with all staff.
- The setting will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect workers who raise concerns.
- The setting will do its best to protect a whistleblower's identity where confidentiality is requested, subject to safeguarding, legal and investigation requirements.
- Appropriate advice and support will be made available to staff.
- Those who raise concerns will be kept informed of the progress and outcome of any investigation, subject to confidentiality and data protection.
- Knowingly false or malicious allegations may lead to disciplinary action; an honest concern that is not substantiated will not.

Workers who make a qualifying protected disclosure are protected by whistleblowing law from dismissal or detriment. Staff do not need proof before raising a genuine concern, and may raise concerns anonymously, although this can make investigation and feedback more difficult.

Procedures

Procedures for reporting and investigating whistleblowing concerns have been developed to ensure that:

- Staff can raise a concern, no matter how small it may appear, and receive appropriate feedback.
- Concerns are taken seriously and dealt with quickly and appropriately.
- Staff are protected from reprisals or victimisation when raising protected concerns.
- Staff can take the matter further if dissatisfied with the setting response and seek external advice and guidance.
- Issues raised are addressed via other procedures and policies as appropriate, e.g. safeguarding, allegations against an adult working in a setting, grievance, disciplinary, health and safety.
- Appropriate records are maintained for monitoring purposes.

Raising a concern

Staff should raise concerns promptly with the Smartkidz Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), Adam Smart, or Deputy DSLs Nikki Henrywood or Sharon Howlett. If the concern involves the DSL, it should be raised with a Deputy DSL or directly with the relevant external safeguarding authority. Staff must not be required to report to a person implicated in the concern.

Concerns should preferably be raised in writing and include:

- Reference to the fact that it is a whistleblowing disclosure.
- The background and history of the concerns.
- Names, dates and places (where possible).
- The reason why the individual is concerned about the situation.

Staff who feel unable to put their concern in writing can telephone or meet with a DSL or appropriate senior manager. An urgent concern must be reported immediately; written reporting must never delay action to protect a child.

If the person receiving the concern is unwilling or unable to act, or the staff member reasonably believes internal reporting is unsafe or inappropriate, the concern may be raised directly with the relevant external body. There is no requirement to exhaust internal routes before making an appropriate safeguarding referral.

Safeguarding concerns, allegations and low-level concerns

Concerns about a child's immediate safety must be reported in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy. Where a child is at immediate risk, call 999. Staff must not investigate allegations themselves or promise absolute confidentiality.

An allegation about an adult who may have harmed a child, may pose a risk of harm, may have committed an offence against or related to a child, or may be unsuitable to work with children must be escalated without delay through the allegations procedure, with LADO advice where appropriate. Ofsted must be notified of allegations of harm and action taken where the EYFS notification requirements apply, as soon as reasonably practicable and within the statutory 14-day limit.

Low-level concerns about an adult, even where the harm threshold is not met, must be shared promptly with the appropriate senior lead, recorded securely and reviewed for patterns. Staff must not dismiss concerns as too minor to report. Whistleblowing may also be used where staff believe such concerns are being ignored or concealed.

Alternative Provision – Smartkidz Forest School

Smartkidz Forest School operates on the Girton Glebe Primary School site. Concerns relating to safeguarding practice, suitability of adults, unsafe working arrangements or failures to share information must be escalated through Smartkidz safeguarding arrangements and, where relevant, shared promptly with the host school and commissioning school's DSL. This does not replace direct referral to the LADO, Children's Social Care or police where necessary.

Staff may raise concerns about Smartkidz employees, visiting professionals, transport providers, school personnel or any other adult whose actions or omissions may place a child at risk. The commissioning school retains its safeguarding responsibilities for pupils it places in alternative provision.

Responding to a concern

Initial enquiries will usually involve a meeting with the individual raising a concern, and will decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. If a concern relates to issues which fall within the scope of other policies, it will be addressed under those policies.

If the initial meeting does not resolve the concern, further investigation is required. The appropriate person will investigate the concerns thoroughly, ensuring that a written response can be provided within ten working days where feasible, or if this is not possible, giving a date by which the final response can be expected. The response should include details of how the matter was investigated, conclusions drawn from the investigation, and who to contact if the member of staff is unhappy with the response and wishes to take the matter further.

Safeguarding referrals and statutory notifications must be made within their required timescales and must not wait for the ten-working-day response. Records will be factual, securely stored and shared only where lawful and necessary. The person raising the concern will be told as much as possible without compromising confidentiality or an investigation.

Rights and responsibilities of the whistleblower

All concerns will be treated in confidence and the club will make every effort not to reveal the identity of anyone raising a concern. At an appropriate time, however, the member of staff may need to come forward as a witness.

If a member of staff raises a concern honestly which is then not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against that person. If the investigation concludes that the member of staff knowingly and maliciously fabricated the allegations, disciplinary action may be taken.

External reporting and further advice

- NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line: 0800 028 0285 | help@nspcc.org.uk (for safeguarding failures where staff cannot raise concerns internally).
- Cambridgeshire LADO: 01223 727 967 | LADO@cambridgeshire.gov.uk (allegations concerning adults working with children).
- Cambridgeshire Children's Social Care: 0345 045 5203 | out of hours 01733 234 724.
- Ofsted: 0300 123 1231 (registered early years provision concerns and relevant notifications).
- Police: 999 for emergencies; 101 for non-emergencies.

Staff may seek independent advice from the NSPCC, Acas, Protect or their trade union. Where a disclosure is made externally for whistleblowing-law protection, the relevant legal requirements (including those for disclosures to prescribed persons) apply.

It is recognised that whistleblowing can be difficult and stressful. Advice and support is available from your line manager and your HR provider (Redwing Solutions).

Policy review and references

Reference guidance: Smartkidz Safeguarding Policy (September 2026); EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers (effective 1 September 2026); Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (where relevant); Employment Rights Act 1996; Cambridgeshire and Peterborough safeguarding procedures.

This policy was adopted by:	Smartkidz Play and Learn Ltd.
Date:	
Reviewed/updated:	12 October 2026
Next review:	12 October 2027 (or sooner if guidance changes).

Signed: _____