

## **NSPCC Whistleblowing Helpline Annual Report 2023/2024**

### **Section A:**

#### **1: Summary of Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA)**

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 gives legal protection to employees against being dismissed or penalised by their employers because of disclosing information which is considered to be in the public interest. NSPCC is a 'prescribed person' as defined under the Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order 2014.

The NSPCC has been a prescribed whistleblowing body for child welfare and protection since 2001 ([Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016](#)). This means any worker who has child protection or welfare concerns can make a disclosure to us and we can seek to protect them against unfair treatment at work.

#### **2: The NSPCC Reporting Duty**

The NSPCC Whistleblowing Helpline is required to report on the disclosures received. Whistleblowing is the term used when someone provides information concerning perceived wrongdoing relating to how a child welfare concern was handled by their own organisation. This is known as a whistleblowing disclosure.

The NSPCC are required to report the following each year:

- The number of disclosures received.
- The number of these disclosures where further action was taken.
- A summary in relation to all disclosures.

#### **3: NSPCC Reason for Reporting**

The Whistleblowing Advice Line was commissioned by the Home Office. It is a direct response to the recommendation for 'a new whistleblowing national portal for child abuse related reports' set out in the Government's Tracking child sexual exploitation report ([HM Government, 2015](#)).

The Whistleblowing Advice Line is not intended to replace any current practices or responsibilities of organisations working with children. We encourage professionals to raise concerns about a child to their own employer in the first instance.

### **Section B:**

#### **Part 1: NSPCC functions, objectives, and powers**

The NSPCC are the leading children's charity in the UK, specialising in child protection and dedicated to protecting children today to prevent abuse tomorrow. The NSPCC are the only UK children's charity with statutory powers, which means they can take action to safeguard children at risk of abuse.

#### **Part 2: Importance of Whistleblowing**

The NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line should be contacted if:

- The organisation the professional works for does not have clear safeguarding procedures to follow
- The professional thinks the concern will not be dealt with properly or may be covered-up
- The professional has raised a concern, but it has not been acted upon
- The professional is worried about being treated unfairly

A professional can contact the Whistleblowing Advice Line about an incident that happened in the past, is happening now or is believed may happen in the future.

The Advice Line can be contacted by calling 0800 028 8025 or by email to [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

## **Section C:**

### **Part 1: Dates of the Reporting Period**

The reporting period for this report is 01 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 inclusive.

### **Part 2: Statement on Confidentiality**

If a professional contacts the NSPCC Whistleblowing Helpline, they will be connected to a child protection specialist. They will discuss the concerns and:

- Talk through the whistleblowing process
- Take details of the concern raised
- Explain the protection available if needed
- Get relevant agencies and authorities to take action on the concern raised

The caller does not have to tell us who they are – they can remain anonymous. If a name is given and contact details, the professional can ask the NSPCC not to share these with other agencies.

### **Part 3: Summary of the contacts to and action taken by NSPCC Whistleblowing Helpline in response to disclosures**

In 2023/24 the Whistleblowing Helpline responded to 372 contacts, a 10% increase in the levels seen in the previous year. 267 of the total contacts handled were classed as child welfare contacts and went on to receive a response from a child protection specialist. 105 contacts were handled by the Helpline Adviser team and classified as enquiries.

<b>Outcome of Contact</b>	<b>Total</b>
Advice	<b>191</b>
Referral	<b>69</b>
Referral Update	<b>7</b>
Enquiry	<b>105</b>
<b>Total Enquiry and Child Welfare Contacts</b>	<b>372</b>

Of the 267 (72%) contacts handled directly by the Helpline service, 76 (28%) resulted in a referral being made to an external agency (or an update to an existing referral), these ranged from national agencies such as OFSTED, local authority Children's Services teams, LADO or the police. The biggest proportion of contacts (51%) received advice from the service.

## Child Welfare Contacts Main Concerns

The table below shows the main child welfare concerns discussed by contacts to the Whistleblowing Helpline during 2023/24 and the outcome of these.

Main Concern	Advice	Referral / Referral Update	Total	%
School/Education problems	69	27	96	36%
Crime/Legal/Services	30	14	44	16%
Neglect	18	8	26	10%
Physical Abuse	14	12	26	10%
Sexual Abuse & Exploitation (Contact)	12	7	19	7%
Emotional Abuse	15	1	16	6%
Safeguarding Concern (No details provided)	11	4	15	6%
Child Mental/Emotional Health	4	2	6	2%
Disability/SEN/Health	4	0	4	1%
Parent/Adult Health/Behaviour	4	0	4	1%
Bullying NOT ONLINE	3	0	3	1%
Domestic Abuse	3	0	3	1%
Online Sexual Abuse/Exploitation	3	0	3	1%
Other forms of Child Exploitation	1	1	2	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>100%</b>

The highest proportion of overall contacts related to School / Education problems at 36% of the total, followed by Crime/Legal/Services at 16%. Physical Abuse and Neglect were both the third most prevalent, accounting for 10% of contacts each. Where a referral (or referral update) was made, School / Education problems was the highest recorded concern with 39%, followed by Crime/Legal/Services with 20%.

School/Education problems saw an increase in the reporting year, up from 81 to 96 this year. There was also a significant increase in concerns about Crime/Legal/Services, increasing from 30 in 2022/23 to 44 in 2023/24. Another increase of note was in Safeguarding Concern (No details provided), where this increased from 4 to 15 contacts this year. This is a new concern code added in 2022/23. It captures contacts where the referrer mentioned abuse but did not specify the type of abuse.

### Referrals by the region of the agency referred to

Where a referral is made, we can identify the location of the referred to agency as follows:

*Please note that one contact can result in multiple referrals to different agencies based in different areas. Therefore, the total number of referrals by area is higher than the total number of contacts that resulted in a referral being made.*

Agency Region	Total Agency Referrals	%
Nationwide	46	28%
East Midlands	24	15%
South East	21	13%
London	17	10%
West Midlands	17	10%
East of England	9	6%
North West	7	4%
Yorkshire & the Humber	7	4%
South West	6	4%
North East	4	2%
Wales	4	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>100%</b>

28% of cases were referred to a nationwide agency such as OFSTED or the Department for Education for the regulation of independent schools.

### Referrals by the type of agency referred to

*Please note that one contact can result in multiple referrals to different agencies based in different areas. Therefore, the total number of referrals by agency is higher than the total number of contacts that resulted in a referral being made.*

Agency Type	Total Agency Referrals	%
Children's Services	104	64%
Education	44	27%
Police	12	7%
Other	2	1%
Adult Services	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>100%</b>

There were 162 referrals sent to external agencies in 2023/24. The greatest proportion of referrals were sent to Children's Services at 64%, accounting for more than 100 individual referrals.

### Themes

Where information about the relationship of the referrer to the child is provided, relationship role by contact type is provided below. Information was available for 121 of the 267 child welfare contacts. With many contacts, the role status and relationship to child data is blank, these are largely contacts that received advice with a more complete dataset where a referral has been made.

Relationship of Referrer to Child	Advice	Referral / Referral Update	Total CW Concerns	%
Professional	23	45	68	56%
Adult Member of the public	19	23	42	35%

Unknown/Not disclosed	2	2	4	3%
Parent/Carer	4	0	4	3%
Adult - Other Family Member	2	1	3	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>100%</b>

Overall, 56% of concerns were raised by professionals, with education professionals accounting for 37% of the total. 35% of contacts were recorded as 'Adult Member of the public'. While the Whistleblowing Helpline is intended for professionals, members of the public contact the service as well. This is often when a member of the public wants to 'whistleblow' on perceived poor practices within an organisation, such as a school.

Below is a breakdown of the ages of young people included (where data provided<sup>1</sup>) in referrals:

Age of Child	Total Children in Referrals	%
0	1	2%
1	3	5%
3	4	7%
4	5	9%
5	2	4%
6	3	5%
7	2	4%
8	4	7%
9	2	4%
10	6	11%
11	3	5%
13	4	7%
14	5	9%
15	9	16%
17	1	2%
18	2	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100%</b>

Where we know the age of the child, 43% of children in referrals are high school and sixth form age (11-18) 43% primary school age (4-10) and 14% under 4 years old.

Alongside the 'Main Concern', 'Sub-concerns' are selected by the Helpline professional as part of the recording process to further detail the nature of the concern. Each contact can have several 'sub-concerns' selected under one main concern. The top five 'Sub -concerns' for child welfare contacts made to the Whistleblowing helpline are found below (excluding "No relevant sub concerns"):

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<sup>1</sup> The age of the young people is based on the assumptions of the referrers

Sub concern	Main Concern	Advice	Referral/Referral Update	Total CW Contacts	%
Safeguarding concerns	School/Education problems	45	21	66	
	Physical Abuse	1	3	4	
	Total	46	24	70	20%
Unhappy with school procedures / responses	School/Education problems	34	19	53	
	Physical Abuse	1	3	4	
	Total	35	22	57	16%
Problems with teacher / school staff	School/Education problems	31	13	44	
	Physical Abuse	1	3	4	
	Total	32	16	48	13%
Whistleblowing (Reporting Employers Only)	Crime/Legal/Services	26	0	26	7%
Contact with a person who poses a physical abuse risk	Physical Abuse	5	7	12	3%
Criticised/humiliated/called names/teased	Emotional Abuse	12	0	12	3%

#### Part 4: Summary of findings

Below are some of the issues discussed in contacts to the Whistleblowing Helpline:

- Concerns raised about how a children protection agency was processing concerns raised with them, including audits and quality assurance processes.
- Member of staff at a children's home contacted the service due to concerns about some staff not being properly vetted.
- Concerns raised about teachers in a secondary school who were alleged to be physically and emotionally abusing multiple children.
- Professional in a foster agency raised concerns that daily work was not being done by social workers, resulting in a backlog. Concerns raised that issues could build up as a result and management were not prioritising these issues.
- A tutor at a private tuition company was worried about the process for raising safeguarding concerns within the company.
- Concerns were raised about a potential risk of harm being caused by the conduct and professional actions of an alternative education provider.
- A professional at an infant's school raised about an alleged lack of safeguarding action within the school.
- Allegations made that senior managers at a social care agency have behaved inappropriately towards children in their care.
- A support worker in a children's home raised concerns for a manager failing to follow appropriate safeguarding practices.
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**Section D:****Impact on Disclosures on Ability to Perform Duties**

This is a summary of the contacts to the NSPCC Whistleblowing Helpline and those contacts where concerns have been raised about how child protection concerns have been handled in other agencies. As a result, this is information shared with other organisations and does not impact on the NSPCC's ability to perform its duty as a direct result of the disclosures made to the Helpline.