




Complaints Policy

Approved By:	Wessex MAT Board of Directors
Date:	13.1.21
Review Date:	12.1.24
Signed:	Chair of Directors – G.Batt 
Adopted By:	LGB:
Date:	
Signed:	

POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR HEARING AND DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

Aims

The schools in Wessex Multi-Academy Trust are committed to working in close partnership with all members of their community. The Trust places great value on the role which parents and carers can play in supporting children's learning. Directors, Governors and Staff actively encourage a positive relationship between Trust schools and the families of children who attend a Trust school.

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the schools within the Trust. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Wessex Multi-Academy Trust or any of its schools about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

Definitions - The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.'*

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Wessex Multi-Academy Trust and its schools take concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Concerns about an aspect of life at a Trust school will be dealt with by the relevant school as quickly, sympathetically and effectively as possible. It is hoped that most concerns will be settled amicably at this stage. If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases the headteacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern the headteacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand, however, that there are occasions when people like to raise their concerns formally or, if there is a continuing concern, the Trust will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Wessex Multi-Academy Trust or its schools, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions to schools Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs School re-organisation proposals 	<p>Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the Local Authority.</p> <p>Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Dorset Council</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding (01305 221122) or the Children’s Advice and Duty Service (01305 228866).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the complaints procedure.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our Trust or Trust schools should complain through the complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the Trust’s internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the Trust’s internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that</p>

	the matter is being addressed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Curriculum - content 	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Wessex Multi-Academy Trust or any of its schools in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or their line manager. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complaints against school staff (except the headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to Governors via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a trustee of the Trust, should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees, Wessex MAT, c/o The Thomas Hardy School, Queens Avenue, Dorchester, DT1 2ET. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints, However, the headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Wessex Multi-Academy Trust wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- An assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- An explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- An undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- An apology

Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to do this in writing.

Stage 1 – Informal complaint

It is hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, head of year/college or headteacher. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at a later stage.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the informal complaint will provide an informal written response within 5 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Stage 2 – Formal complaint

Formal complaints must be made to the headteacher (unless they are about the headteacher) via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form) or by telephone.

The headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days. The headteacher will send a copy of the complaint and their response to the MAT Company Secretary/Complaints Coordinator.

Within this response, the headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, as to what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: the headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the headteacher (or investigator) will:

- If necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint . The headteacher will provide a copy of their response to the MAT Company Secretary/Complaints Coordinator.

If the headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the relevant Trust school will take to resolve the complaint.

The headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome for Stage 2.

If the complaint is about the headteacher or a member of the governing body, the Chair of Governors will complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about the headteacher or a member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk to Governors, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the Chair and Vice-Chair or
- The entire governing body or
- The majority of the governing body

Stage 2 will be escalated to the CEO of the Trust. In this instance complaints must be made to the Company Secretary, Wessex MAT, c/o The Thomas Hardy School, Queens Avenue, Dorchester, DT1 2ET. At the conclusion of the CEO's investigation, they will provide a formal written response.

Stage 3

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to the Chair of the Local Governing Body. The complaint should be made in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form) and sent to the Clerk to Governors c/o the school office. The Chair of Governors will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days. The Chair will send a copy of the complaint and their response to the MAT Company Secretary/Complaints Coordinator via the Clerk to Governors.

Within this response the Chair of Governors will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Chair of Governors can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

During the investigation, the Chair of Governors will:

- If necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Chair of Governors will provide a formal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. The Chair will provide a copy of their response to the MAT Company Secretary/Complaints Coordinator. If they are unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the relevant Trust school will take to resolve the complaint.

The Chair of Governors will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome for Stage 3.

Note: the Chair of Governors may delegate the investigation to another suitably skilled member of the Local Governing Body but not the decision to be taken.

If the complaint is about the Chair of Governors, the CEO of the Trust will complete all the actions at Stage 3. If the Stage 2 complaint was investigated by the Chair of Governors, the CEO of the Trust will complete all actions at Stage 3. If the Stage 2 complaint was investigated by the CEO of the Trust, a Director will complete all actions at Stage 3.

Stage 4

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 3 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to the CEO of the Trust. The complaint should be made in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form) and sent to the Company Secretary, Wessex MAT c/o The Thomas Hardy School, Queens Avenue, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 2ET. The Company Secretary will record the

date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Within this response the Company Secretary will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The CEO can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

During the investigation, the CEO will:

- If necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the CEO will provide a formal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. The CEO will provide a copy of their response to the MAT Company Secretary/Complaints Coordinator. If they are unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the relevant Trust school will take to resolve the complaint.

The CEO will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome for Stage 4.

Note: the CEO may delegate the investigation to another member of the MAT's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

If the complaint is about the CEO, a suitably skilled Director will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 4. If the Stage 3 complaint was investigated by the CEO, a Director of the Trust will complete all actions at Stage 4. If the Stage 3 complaint was investigated by a Director of the Trust, the Chair of Directors will complete all actions at Stage 4.

Stage 5

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 4 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 5 – a panel hearing consisting of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 5 must be made to the Clerk to the Trust Board, via the MAT office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 4 response.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days. The MAT Clerk will provide a copy of the complaint and their response to the MAT Company Secretary/Complaints Coordinator.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 5 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the Chair and Vice-Chair or
- The entire governing body or
- The majority of the governing body

Stage 5 will be heard by the Directors and an independent panel member.

If the complainant chooses to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 schools days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- Confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
- Request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 7 schools days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic records of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant, the MAT Company Secretary/Complaints Coordinator and the trust school involved with a full explanation of their decision and reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will also include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Wessex MAT.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Wessex MAT will take to resolve the complaint.

The Panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the headteacher.

A written record will be kept by the MAT Company Secretary/Complaints Coordinator of all complaints and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing.

Complaints escalated to / about the Trust, CEO or Trustee

If a complaint is escalated to Wessex MAT "the trust" or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the trust, then the complaint should be sent to the Company Secretary for the CEO to investigate.

The Company Secretary will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 5 school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 4 of this Complaints Policy and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

Following the investigation, the CEO will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 10 school days of the date that the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the CEO will write to the Complainant within 5 school days of the date that the letter was received, explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a Director, the complaint should be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board. If a formal complaint is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation

NB. Where the Chair of the Trust Board has investigated the complaint, they will write the letter of outcome to the Complainant and provide a copy to the CEO.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Clerk to the Trust Board asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel, within 10 school days.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 4 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire trust board or
- the majority of the trust board

Stage 5 will be heard by a completely independent committee panel.

The Complaint Panel will consist of three members. None of the three members of the Complaint Panel will have been involved in the incidents or events which led to the complaint, or have been involved in dealing with the complaint in the previous stages, or have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint. One of the Complaint Panel members will be independent of the management and running of the Academy Trust. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will not be a Director or an employee of the Trust.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a trust employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 7 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure. The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Wessex MAT with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Wessex MAT. The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Wessex MAT will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher. A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing.

Next steps

If the complainant believes the school / trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the ESFA after they have completed Stage 5.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Wessex MAT. They will consider whether Wessex MAT has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

Early Years Foundation Stage

In respect of children within the Early Years Foundation Stage of the Trust's Academies:

- We will investigate all written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint;
- records of complaints will be kept for at least three years and made available to Ofsted on request; and
- parents or carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the school is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by calling the general helpline on 0300 123 1231 or 0300 123 4666; textphone number 0161 618 8524, by emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or writing to Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD and/or ISI (on 020 7600 0100) if they wish. An online contact form is also available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>

We will notify parents and carers if we become aware that the school is to be inspected by Ofsted. We will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

Unreasonably Persistent Complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by the following the school's complaints procedure
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- Knowingly provides false information
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refusing to co-operate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames it sets out
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation goes on
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal, wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put a communications strategy in place. We may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as Citizens Advice
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

Stopping responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from our school site.

Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and the local process is complete
- Direct them to the ESFA if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again

Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

Roles and responsibilities

The Complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality

The Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- Providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - Sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - Interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - Consideration of records and other relevant information
 - Analysing information
- Liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- Conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- Keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note take to record minutes of the meeting
- Ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- Be mindful of the timescales to respond
- Prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

The Complaints Co-ordinator

The Complaints Co-ordinator should:

- Ensure the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- Liaise with staff members, headteacher, CEO, Chair of Governors, Chair of Trust or the Clerk to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- Be aware of issues regarding:
 - Sharing third party information

- Additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support of where the complainant is a child or young person
- Keep records

Clerk to the Governing Board

The clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- Ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- Set the time, date and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- Collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- Record the proceedings
- Circulate the minutes of the meeting
- Notify all parties of the committee's decision

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complainant meeting, should ensure that:

- Both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- The meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- Complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- The remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- Written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- Both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- The issues are addressed
- Key findings of fact are made
- The committee is open-minded and acts independently
- No member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- The meeting is minuted

- They liaise with the Clerk (and Complaints Coordinator, if the school has one)

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- The meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so. No governor / trustee may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- Many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated. The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend. However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

General and Monitoring

The Trust will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by the Clerk, the Company Secretary and those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or through a subject access request under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and record retention schedule.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board to preserve impartiality in case they are needed for a complaints committee.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

The local governing body will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. They will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues. The complaints records are logged and managed by the Clerk to Governors/Company Secretary.

Legislation and Guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school. It is based on the Model Complaints Procedure from the Department for Education (DfE).

This policy will be reviewed by Board of Directors every 3 years. At each review, the policy will be approved by the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors will monitor complaints across the Trust.

INVESTIGATION STAGES

<p>Stage 2 Response to complainant within 10 school days</p>	Subject of Complaint:	Investigator:
	Member of staff	Headteacher
	Headteacher	Chair of Governors
	Governor	
	Governing Body	CEO of Trust
	Chair of Governors	

<p>Stage 3 Response to complainant within 10 school days</p>	Previous Investigator	Investigator:
	Headteacher	Chair of Governors
	Chair of Governors	CEO of Trust
	CEO of Trust	Director of Trust

<p>Stage 4 Response to complainant within 10 school days</p>	Previous Investigator	Investigator:
	Chair of Governors	CEO of Trust
	CEO of Trust	Director of Trust
	Director of Trust	Chair of Directors

<p>Stage 4 complaint Response to complainant within 10 school days</p>	Subject of Complaint:	Investigator:
	The Trust	CEO of Trust
	CEO of Trust	Chair of Directors
	Chair of Directors	Vice-Chair of Directors

If complaints are not resolved in Stages 1-4 the complaint will be referred to an independent panel hearing.

COMPLAINT FORM

School Name:	
Complainant's Name:	
Student's Name:	
Complainant's Relationship to student:	
Address of Complainant:	
Postcode:	Daytime Tel:
Mobile:	E-mail:
Please give details of your complaint:	
What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve you complaint (who did you speak to, when and what was the response?):	

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details:

Signed:

Date:

Official Use:

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Amendments