



Ratified April 2019

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Scope

This Complaints Policy is based on the principle that concerns expressed by a pupil, parent or any other individual or organisation should be resolved as quickly as possible without the need to escalate to the formal stages of the procedure. However, where resolution has not been achieved and the person raising the concern is unhappy and wishes to take the matter further, the formal procedure for dealing with complaints will be followed. The three stages are:

- ❖ Stage 1 - Informal investigation of a concern.
- ❖ Stage 2 - Formal complaint investigated by the Headteacher or the Chair of Governors.
- ❖ Stage 3 - Complaint heard before a Complaint Panel.

Complaints made by members of staff should be dealt with under separate grievance procedures applicable to employees. Complaints made by employees will not be dealt with under this Complaints Policy.

Complaints made by Governors should be referred to the Chair of Governors to be dealt with informally as an item for consideration initially and, if necessary, through the formal procedure set out in this Policy.

Complaints made by contractors should be dealt with informally, but may be escalated where dispute resolution or a formal complaints process is included in the contractual agreement. Complaints made by contractors will not be dealt with under this Complaints Policy.

Complaints about or relating to a pupil should be directed to the Headteacher. If the Complainant is not happy with the manner in which the complaint was handled, then they may put their complaint in writing and ask for it to be dealt with formally.

Complaints made by those who are not parents of pupils at the school will only be dealt with up to Stage 2 of this policy. After which, if the Complainant believes that this Complaints Policy does not comply with the Regulations, or if the Complainant believes that the school has not followed the procedure in this Complaints Policy, the Complainant can refer the complaint to the Education Funding Agency for consideration.

All correspondence and requests from third parties in relation to a complaint, i.e. solicitors, must be sent via post. Third parties must provide written permission from the complainant.

This Complaints Policy is intended to be compliant with Schedule 1, Part 7 of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2014. In the event of any variance between this Complaints Policy and the Regulations, the Regulations will apply.

Policy and Procedure

Concerns or complaints should be raised within three months of the incident or event to which the complaint relates (or, where the complaint relates to a series of incidents or events, within three months of the latest incident or event).

The Academy has three stages to its complaints procedure. The aim is to try to deal with the complaint, to the satisfaction of the Complainant, at the earliest possible stage.

Only if the complaint cannot be resolved at the informal stage would it be escalated to the formal stages. Only if the complaint cannot be subsequently resolved at the formal stages would it be escalated to a Complaint Panel Hearing.

Principles of Investigating a Concern or Complaint

The principles that will form the basis for all investigations of concerns and complaints will be that the person investigating the complaint:

- ❖ Has read this Complaints Policy to familiarise his or her self with the procedure;
- ❖ Is aware of the time limits that apply to the relevant stage and ensures that he or she complies with them;
- ❖ Establishes the nature of the complaint and what issues remain unresolved;
- ❖ Establishes what the Complainant says has happened, who has been involved, and what the Complainant feels would put things right;
- ❖ If necessary, interviews those involved in the matter, for example the Complainant, pupils and members of staff, including those complained about;
- ❖ Allows pupils and those complained about to be accompanied during interviews, if they wish;
- ❖ Keeps a written record of the interview, and asks the interviewee to sign and date it;
- ❖ Establishes relevant facts, on a balance of probabilities, based on evidence not speculation, and keeps a written record of these;
- ❖ Provides an effective response to the complaint, addressing all issues raised (including, where relevant, complaints about the way in which the complaint has been dealt with in the earlier stages);
- ❖ Ensures that the response to the complaint includes the appropriate redress, where necessary;
- ❖ Reports the complaint and the outcome of the complaint to the Senior Management Team so that services can be improved;

- ❖ Deals with investigation in an impartial, objective, fair and timely manner, keeping in mind the privacy of the parties involved.

Principles of Resolving a Concern or Complaint

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The way in which the concern or complaint is dealt with after the Complainant first raises the matter can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate.

At each stage of the complaints procedure, the investigator will consider how the complaint may be resolved. In considering how a complaint may be resolved, the investigator will give due regard to the seriousness of the complaint. It may be appropriate in order to bring the complaint to a resolution for the investigator to offer:

- ❖ An explanation;
- ❖ An apology;
- ❖ Reassurance that steps have been taken to prevent a recurrence of events which led to the complaint;
- ❖ Reassurance that the school will undertake a review of its policies and procedures in light of the complaint.

None of the above will constitute an admission of negligence or an acceptance of liability on behalf of the school.

Principles of Notifying the Outcome of a Concern or Complaint

Once all of the facts have been established, the investigator will contact the Complainant setting out all of the issues in dispute, the results of the investigation, the decision made, the reasons for the decision, and details of any action to be taken to resolve matters or prevent a reoccurrence. Alternatively, the investigator may wish to meet with the Complainant to discuss the outcome of the investigation, the decision made, the reasons for the decision and any action to be taken directly, in which case a full written record will be made of the meeting, which the Complainant will be asked to sign and date. Strictly confidential procedures such as staff disciplinary investigations or sanctions must not be referred to.

The outcome of all concerns and complaints, whether dealt with formally or informally, will be recorded centrally by the school. Examples of outcomes include:

- ❖ There was insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld;
- ❖ The evidence did not substantiate the concern, so the complaint cannot be upheld;
- ❖ The complaint was substantiated in part or full. A brief description should be given of the remedial action being taken by the school as a consequence of the complaint. Details of the investigation of or any disciplinary sanctions to be taken against a member of staff cannot be disclosed.

- ❖ The matter has been fully investigated and, as a consequence, further confidential procedures are being pursued. Strictly confidential procedures such as staff disciplinary investigations and sanctions must not be referred to.

Time Limits

This Complaints Policy sets out the time limits for each stage of the complaints procedure. Those dealing with complaints will keep to these time limits. However, where a complaint is of a particularly complex nature, or further investigations are required to ascertain the facts, new time limits can be set. The Complainant will, within the time limit specified in this Complaints Policy, be sent the details of any changes to the time limits with an explanation for the delay and confirmation of the revised date.

Late Complaints

Where a concern or complaint is raised more than three months after the incident or event (or where the complaint relates to a series of incidents or events, more than three months from the date of the latest incident or event), the school reserves the right to refuse to investigate the concern or complaint under the procedure in this Complaints Policy **if it appears reasonable and fair to do so, having regard to the circumstances surrounding the complaint.**

Where the school decides that a concern or complaint which was raised late will not be investigated, the school will write to the Complainant notifying them of the decision within **5 school days** of the concern or complaint being raised.

If the Complainant is unhappy with the decision not to investigate a concern or complaint that was raised late, the Complainant may write to the Chair of Governors asking for the decision to be reviewed. The Chair of Governors will be provided with all documentation relating to the concern or complaint, together with the letter from the school to the Complainant, and will review the decision made. The Chair of Governors will write to the Complainant with the outcome of the review within **10 school days** of the date that the letter from the Complainant seeking the review was received, and provide the school with a copy of the letter.

If the Chair of Governors quashes the decision not to investigate the concern or complaint, it will be referred to the school to be dealt with under the procedure in this Complaints Policy in the usual way.

If the Chair of Governors upholds the decision not to investigate the concern or complaint, the Complainant may refer the concern or complaint to the Education Funding Agency using the procedure stated towards the end of this Complaints Policy.

In exceptional circumstances, the Chair of Governors can delegate the responsibility for the review to the Vice-Chair of Governors.

Vexatious and/or Repeated Complaints

There may be occasions when, despite exhausting the procedure in this Complaints Policy, the Complainant persists in making the same complaint to the school. There may also be occasions when a Complainant raises unreasonable persistent complaints or raises complaints about matters which do not affect them. In addition, there may be occasions when a complaint is made about a matter which is clearly so trivial that it would be a waste of the school's resources to deal with it under the formal stages of the procedure. In all of these cases, the school reserves the right to regard the complaint as vexatious and/or repeated and to refuse to investigate it under the procedure in this Complaints Policy **if it appears reasonable and fair to do so, having regard to the circumstances surrounding the complaint.**

Where the school decides that a complaint is vexatious and/or repeated and will not be investigated, the school will write to the Complainant within **5 school days** of the complaint being raised to notify them of the decision.

If the Complainant is unhappy with the decision not to investigate a vexatious and/or repeated complaint, they may write to the Chair of the Governing Body to ask for the decision to be reviewed. The Chair of the Governing Body will be provided with all documentation relating to the current complaint and any previous complaints which were relevant to the decision, together with the letter from the school to the Complainant, and will review the decision made. The Chair of Governors will write to the Complainant with the outcome of the review within **10 school days** of the date that the letter from the Complainant seeking the review was received.

If the Chair of Governors quashes the decision not to investigate the concern or complaint, it will be referred to the school to be dealt with under the procedure in this Complaints Policy in the usual way.

If the Chair of Governors upholds the decision not to investigate the concern or complaint, the Complainant may refer the concern or complaint to the Education Funding Agency using the procedure stated towards the end of this Complaints Policy.

In exceptional circumstances, the Chair of Governors can delegate the responsibility for the review to the Vice-Chair of Governors.

Anonymous Complaints

The school will not investigate anonymous complaints under the procedure in this Complaints Policy. Anonymous complaints will be referred to the Headteacher who will decide what, if any, action should be taken.

Stage 1 - Informal Procedure

The Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher can deal with many concerns to the satisfaction of the Complainant, without needing to deal with it formally. The school values informal meetings and telephone discussions as a way of improving its procedures and relations with parents.

There is no rigid time-scale for resolving concerns and complaints at this stage, given the importance of dialogue through informal discussions, however it is expected that most concerns will be resolved within **10 school days**. Should the nature or complexity of the concern mean that more time is required, the school will contact the Complainant within **10 school days** informing them of the reason for the delay and confirming a revised date for resolution.

Should informal meetings and telephone discussions appear unlikely to resolve the concern, either party may initiate a move to the Stage 2 for the complaint to be investigated formally. A copy of the formal complaint form in Annex 3 will be forwarded to the Complainant for completion and return, together with a copy of this Complaints Policy.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint Investigated by the Headteacher or the Chair of Governors

If the Complainant is unhappy with the way in which the concern was dealt with informally, the Complainant should complete the formal complaint form found in Annex 3 and return it to the Headteacher.

Upon receipt of a completed formal complaint form, the Headteacher will investigate the complaint under Stage 2. Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher or a Governor, the complaint will be referred to the Chair of Governors. Where the complaint concerns the Chair of Governors, the Vice Chair of Governors will investigate the complaint.

Where the first approach is made to a Governor, the Governor must refer the complaint to the Headteacher, who will investigate it under Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy. Governors should not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or be involved at the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a Complaint Panel at a later stage of the procedure.

The Headteacher will write to the Complainant acknowledging the complaint within **5 school days** of receiving the formal complaint form. The acknowledgement will confirm which stage of the Complaints Policy the complaint is being investigated under, and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complaint. Following investigation of the complaint, the Headteacher will write to the Complainant confirming the outcome within **10 school days** of the formal complaint form being received. If this time limit cannot be met, the Headteacher will write to the Complainant within **10 school days** of the formal complaint form being received, explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

The letter to the Complainant should notify them that if he or she is unhappy with the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation of the complaint, they should write to the the Clerk to the Governors within **10 school days** of receiving the letter asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel under Stage 3 of this Complaints Policy. If no further communication is received from the Complainant within 10 school days, the complaint will be deemed to have been resolved.

Stage 3 – Complaint heard at a Complaint Panel Hearing

If the Complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the complaint under Stage 2, the Complainant should write to the Clerk to the Governors at the school asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel.

The Clerk to the Governors will write to the Complainant acknowledging the request for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel within **5 school days**. The letter will inform the Complainant that the Complaint Panel Hearing will take place within **25 working days** of the date that the letter was received from the Complainant and that arrangements to appoint the Complaint Panel and convene the Complaint Panel Hearing will be made by the Clerk to the Governors, who will be the Complainant's point of contact.

Appointment of the Complaint Panel

The Clerk to the Governors will liaise with the Governing Body in making arrangements for the Complaint Panel to be appointed. 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 school. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will not be a Director of the Academy, a Governor of the Academy, or an employee of the Academy. When appointing the independent Complaint Panel member, the school will bear in mind the non-statutory advice of the Department for Education, which states:

“Whilst we do not wish to be prescriptive about who schools should appoint as an independent person our general view is that people who have held a position of responsibility and who are used to analysing evidence and putting forward balanced arguments would be suitable. Examples of persons likely to be suitable are serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background and retired members of the police force might be considered by schools. Schools will of course have their own views.”

One or both of the other two Complaint Panel members can be a Director of the Academy and/or a Governor of the Academy, as long as they fulfil the requirements above and are not an employee of the Academy.

The Academy's Representative

The school will be represented at the Complaint Panel Hearing by the person who investigated the complaint under the most recent stage of the procedure. This will usually be the Headteacher, however it may on occasions be the Chair of Governors or the Vice-Chair of Governors. If the Complainant has complained about the way in which the complaint was investigated by that person (rather than simply disagreeing with the outcome of the complaint)

then the school will not be represented by that person at the Complaint Panel Hearing, and the school will nominate another person to represent the Academy.

Convening the Complaint Panel Hearing

The Clerk to the Governors will liaise with the Governing Body and convene the Complaint Panel Hearing on a date and at a time which is convenient to the Complainant, the Academy's representative and the three Complaint Panel members. The Clerk to the Governors will write to the Complainant, the Academy's representative and the Complaint Panel members **at least 5 school days** before the Complaint Panel Hearing is due to take place confirming the date and time.

Witnesses

The Complainant may seek to rely on the accounts of witnesses, which are relevant to the complaint. The Complainant should ask each witness to write down their account in a signed and dated statement and send it to the school **at least three school days** before the Complaint Panel Hearing is due to take place.

The school may seek to rely on the accounts of witnesses, which are relevant to the complaint. Such witnesses may also include those persons who dealt with the complaint in the previous stages, if the Complainant has complained about the way in which the complaint was investigated (rather than simply disagreeing with the outcome of the complaint). Such witnesses should, if they have not already done so, provide a signed and dated statement of their account and provide it to the Clerk to the Governors **at least three school days** before the Complaint Panel Hearing is due to take place.

The Complaint Panel will have the absolute discretion to decide whether a witness account is relevant to the complaint or whether a witness account is undisputed by the Complainant or the school respectively. Where a witness account is irrelevant or undisputed, their attendance at the Complaint Panel will not be required.

All witnesses, whether they are for the Complainant or the school, will not be allowed to sit in on any part of the Complaint Panel Hearing except when they are giving their own verbal account or answering questions, upon conclusion of which they will be required to leave the room.

Documents

The Clerk to the Governors will provide a copy of all correspondence, statements (including witness statements) and records relating to the complaint (including records made by those persons who investigated the complaint in the previous stages) to the Complainant, the Academy's representative and each Complaint Panel member **at least two school days** before the Complaint Panel Hearing is due to take place.

Attendance at the Hearing

The Complainant may be accompanied by an interpreter or signer, as well as friend or relative, at the Complaint Panel Hearing. The friend or relative will attend for moral support only and will not play any part in the Complaint Panel Hearing, unless invited to do so by the Complaint Panel if it appears to them that it will improve the quality of the Complainant's representations. The Complaint Panel Hearing is not a legal hearing and it is therefore not appropriate for either the Complainant or the school to be legally represented.

The Clerk to the Complaint Panel

A Clerk to the Complaint Panel will attend the Complaint Panel Hearing and keep a written record of the proceedings. The Clerk to the Complaint Panel will usually be the Clerk to the Governors, however another suitable person may be appointed to this role if the Clerk to the Governors is not available.

Procedure at the Complaint Panel Hearing

The Complaint Panel Hearing will proceed as follows:

- ❖ The Clerk to the Complaint Panel will greet the Complainant, the Complainant's supporter and welcome them into the room where the Complaint Panel has convened (witnesses will remain outside of the room until they are called in to give their account);
- ❖ The Complainant will be invited by the Complaint Panel to give an account of their complaint;
- ❖ The Complaint Panel will ask the Complainant questions, if any;
- ❖ The Complainant's relevant first witness will be invited into the room to give an account of what they saw or know;
- ❖ The Complaint Panel will ask the Complainant's witness questions, if any;
- ❖ The Complainant's witness will be asked to leave the room;
- ❖ If the Complainant has any further relevant witnesses, they will be invited into the room individually to provide their accounts and be questioned as outlined above;
- ❖ The Complainant will be invited by the Complaint Panel to summarise their complaint and how they hope the matter would be resolved;
- ❖ The Complainant will be asked to leave;
- ❖ The Academy's representative will be invited into the room by the Complaint Panel to make representations on behalf of the school;
- ❖ The Complaint Panel will ask the Academy's representative questions, if any;
- ❖ The Academy's relevant first witness will be invited into the room to give an account or what they saw or know;
- ❖ The Complaint Panel will ask the Academy's witness questions, if any;
- ❖ The Academy's witness will be asked to leave the room;
- ❖ If the Academy has any further relevant witnesses, they will be invited into the room individually to provide their accounts and be questioned, as outlined above;
- ❖ The Academy's representative will be invited by the Complaint Panel to summarise their response to the complaint and the Academy's stance;

- ❖ The Academy's representative will be asked to leave;
- ❖ The Complaint Panel Hearing will discuss the findings and conclude.

The Complaint Panel's Decision

The Complaint Panel will meet in private, either immediately after the Complaint Panel Hearing or on a subsequent date, and will consider all of the documentation and everything that they have heard at the Complainant Panel Hearing and make:

❖ **Findings of Fact**

The Complaint Panel will decide which facts are established to be true, on a balance of probabilities (i.e. more likely than not). If a fact is not deemed relevant, the Complaint Panel will not consider it further. The Complaint Panel will make a written record of the facts that have been established, those which have not been established and those which are not relevant, with reasons.

❖ **Recommendations**

The Complaint Panel will consider the facts, which they have established and will make recommendations based upon them. These recommendations may be aimed at achieving reconciliation between the parties (for example, a written apology), improving procedures or preventing a recurrence in the future. The Complaint Panel will keep a written record of their recommendations, with reasons.

Notification of the Complaint Panel's Decision

The Clerk to the Complaint Panel will write within **10 school days** of the Complaint Panel Hearing to the:

- ❖ **Complainant;**
- ❖ **the Academy's representative;**
- ❖ **Any person complained about;**

The letter will identify the issues complained about, and will confirm the Complaint Panel's findings of fact and recommendations, if any, with reasons. The letter will also confirm that, if the Complainant believes that this Complaints Policy does not comply with the Regulations, or that the school has not followed the procedure outlined in this Complaints Policy, the Complainant may refer their complaint to the Education Funding Agency for consideration.

The Clerk to the Complaint Panel will also ensure that a copy of the Complaint Panel's findings and recommendations are made available on the schools premises.

Complaint Referred to Education Funding Agency

Once a complaint has been through all the stages of the this Complaints Policy, if the Complainant believes that this Complaints Policy does not comply with the Regulations, or if the Complainant believes that the school has not followed the procedure in this Complaints Policy, the Complainant can refer the complaint to the Education Funding Agency for consideration.

The Complainant can find further information about referring a complaint to the Education Funding Agency by pasting this page into an Internet browser:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/schoolperformance/b00212240/making-complaint-school/complaints-free-schools-academies>

The Complainant can refer your complaint to the Education Funding Agency by completing an online form by pasting this page into an Internet browser:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/schoolperformance/school-complaints-form>

The Complainant should be aware that the Education Funding Agency will not usually investigate the complaint itself, or interfere with the findings of the Complaint Panel, unless the decision made was manifestly unreasonable.

Administrative Matters

Records

The school will keep a central record of all concerns and complaints received, whether they were dealt with informally or formally.

Confidentiality

The school will keep all correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body authorised to conduct a school inspection requests access to them.

Publication

This Complaints Policy will be reviewed annually and published on the school's website, as well as being made available to pupils, parents and other individuals or organisations on request.

Annex 1 – Glossary

The definitions used in this Complaints Policy are:

Academy	The school, which has academy status
Clerk to the Complaint Panel	The person who will attend the Complaint Panel Hearing and keep a written record of the proceedings, and will write to the Complainant notifying them of the decision of the Complaint Panel.
Clerk to the Governors	The person responsible for making the arrangements to appoint the Complaint Panel and convene the Complaint Panel Hearing. The Clerk to the Governors will also usually act as the Clerk to the Complaint Panel at the Complaint Panel Hearing.
Chair of Governors	The person elected by the Governing Body to be their chairperson.
Complainant	The person or organisation making the complaint.
Education Funding Agency	The government department (a sub-department of the Department for Education) responsible for funding and monitoring standards in academies.
Governing Body	The Directors of the Academy.
Parent	The natural or adoptive mother or father of a pupil, prospective pupil or former pupil, irrespective of whether they are or ever have been married, together with persons with parental responsibility for the pupil, and persons with care of the pupil.

Headteacher

The head of the Academy.

School Day

Term-time weekdays excluding weekends, inset days, bank holidays and school holidays.

Annex 2 – Complaint Panel Hearing Principles

Guiding Principles

It is essential that the Complaint Panel Hearing is independent and impartial. No person may sit on the Complaint Panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it, or any previous knowledge of the complaint's progress through the previous stages, or any previous knowledge of the Complainant.

The aim of the Complaint Panel Hearing, which must be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the Complainant. However, it has to be recognised the Complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the Complaint Panel does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations, which may satisfy the Complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

An effective Complaint Panel will acknowledge that many Complainants and witnesses, especially children, will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The Complaint Panel will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming and informal as possible, while keeping in mind that the proceedings must be fair and follow the rules of natural justice.

Annex 3 – Formal Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the school who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Pupil's name (if applicable):

Your relationship to the pupil:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint:

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint (for example, who have you spoken to 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.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date: