



## COMPLAINTS POLICY

<b>SCOPE:</b>	Trust Policy
<b>AUTHOR/ORIGINATOR:</b>	Governance Lead
<b>NAME OF RESPONSIBLE DIRECTOR/PRINCIPAL:</b>	CEO & Trust Directors Academy Principals
<b>APPROVING COMMITTEE:</b>	Trust Board
<b>STATUTORY BASIS:</b>	Statutory Policy
<b>REQUIREMENT TO PUBLISH ON WEBSITE:</b>	Yes – Trust and Academies
<b>DATE CONSULTED ON BY JCNC:</b>	n/a
<b>DATE RATIFIED:</b>	July 2021
<b>REFERENCE NUMBER:</b>	AAT-002
<b>DATE DISTRIBUTED:</b>	July 2021

**Please note:** We have updated this policy to include information on how the Trust should deal with concerns during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic within Appendix A.

The Trust and its Academies are **not** expected to address new or existing complaints during this time.

For more information regarding school complaints, schools and complainants should [contact the DfE](#).

Contact your local council or call the police if you believe a child is at risk.

## **Contents:**

Statement of Intent

1. Legal framework
2. Definitions
3. Roles and Responsibilities
4. Making a Complaint
5. Complaints Procedure
6. Interviewing Witnesses
7. Recording a Complaint
8. Complaints not covered by this Procedure
9. Exceptional Circumstances
10. Managing Unreasonable Requests
11. Complaints Campaigns
12. Barring from the Premises
13. Standard of Fluency Complaints
14. Role of the DfE School Complaints unit (SCU)
15. Transferring Data
16. Availability
17. Reviewing the Procedure

## **Appendices**

- a) Complaints Procedure During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic
- b) Complaints Procedure Form

## Statement of Intent

Ambitions Academies Trust aims to resolve all complaints at the earliest possible stage and is dedicated to continuing to provide the highest quality of education possible throughout the procedure.

This policy has been created to deal with any complaint against a member of staff, an Academy or the Trust as a whole, relating to any aspects of the Trust or the provision of facilities or services.

Any person, including a member of the public, is able to make a complaint about the provision of facilities or services that the Trust and its academies provide. This policy outlines the procedure that the complainant and the academy must follow.

Once a complaint has been made, it can be resolved or withdrawn at any stage.

The Academy Principal will be the first point of contact when following the complaints procedure for each Academy.

The CEO will be the point of contact for complaints relating to the Trust.

## 1. Legal Framework

1.1. This policy has due regard to statutory legislation, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Education Act 2002
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Immigration Act 2016
- Equality Act 2010
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- The Data Protection Act 2018
- The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2005
- The School Information (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2016
- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014

1.2. This policy also has due regard to guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- DfE (2019) 'Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures 2019'
- ESFA (2015) 'Creating an academy complaints procedure'
- HM Government (2016) 'Code of Practice on the English language requirement for public sector workers'

1.3. This policy will be implemented in accordance with the following school policies:

- Records Management Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Exclusion Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy

## 2. Definitions

- 2.1. For the purpose of this policy, a “**complaint**” can be defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction’ towards the actions taken or a perceived lack of action taken.
- 2.2. Complaints can be resolved formally, through this procedure, or informally dependent on the complainant’s choice.
- 2.3. A “**concern**” can be defined as ‘an expression of worry or doubt’ where reassurance is required.
- 2.4. Any complaint or concern will be taken seriously, whether formally or informally, and the appropriate procedures will be implemented.
- 2.5. A “**grievance**” is an issue raised by a member of staff where they feel the Trust has not implemented a policy or process fairly or properly. Grievances will be dealt with in line with the Trust’s Grievance Policy.
- 2.6. For the purpose of this policy, concerns will be classed and addressed as complaints.
- 2.7. For the purpose of this policy, “**unreasonable complaints**” include:
- Vexatious complaints:
    - Are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious.
    - Insist upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.
    - Insist upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.
      - Are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
      - Demand for redress which lacks any serious purpose or value.
  - Serial or persistent complaints:
    - Are duplicated, sent by the same complainant once the initial complaint has been closed.
- 2.8. Serial or persistent complaints will only be marked as ‘serial’ once the complainant has completed the complaints procedure. The complaint will be marked as ‘serial’ meaning the complainant can complain about a separate issue if necessary.
- 2.9. For the purpose of this policy, “**duplicate complaints**” are identical complaints received from a complainant’s spouse, partner, grandparent or child. These complaints will not be addressed again, the individual making the second complaint will be informed that the complaint has been dealt with on a local level and if they are dissatisfied with the result, they can appeal to the DfE.
- 2.10. Any new details provided by a complainant’s spouse, partner, grandparent or child, will be investigated and dealt with in line with the complaints procedure.

## 3. Roles and Responsibilities

- 3.1. The complainant will:
- Cooperate with the Trust or Academy in seeking a solution to the complaint.
  - Describe the complaint and their concerns in full at the earliest possible opportunity.
  - Promptly respond to any requests for information or meetings.
  - Ask for assistance as needed.

- Treat any person(s) involved in the complaint with respect.

### 3.2. The Complaints Co-ordinator will:

- Ensure that all parties involved in the complaint are fully updated throughout each stage of the procedure.
- Guarantee that all parties involved in the procedure are aware of any relevant legislation, including the Equality Act 2010, GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018 and Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- Keep up-to-date records throughout the procedure – these records will be kept securely on the Trust’s ICT system and retained in line with the Trust’s Records Management Policy.
- Liaise with all parties involved to ensure the complaints procedure runs smoothly, including the Principal, the Academy Clerk and the Academy Committee Chair for complaints received by the Academy or the CEO, Clerk to the Trustees and the Chair of Trustees for complaints received by the Trust Office.
- Be aware of issues with regard to sharing third party information.
- Understand the complainant’s need for additional support, including interpretation support, and will be aware of any issues concerning this.

### 3.3. The Investigator is involved in stages one and two of the procedure. Their role includes:

- Providing a sensitive and thorough interviewing process to establish what has happened and who is involved.
- Considering all records, evidence and relevant information provided.
- Interviewing all parties that are involved in the complaint, including staff and pupils.
- Analysing all information in a comprehensive and fair manner.
- Liaising with the complainant and the Complaints Co-ordinator to determine an appropriate resolution to the problem.
- Identifying and recommending solutions and courses of actions to take.
- Being mindful of timescales and ensuring all parties involved are aware of these timescales.
- Responding to the complainant in a clear and understandable manner.

### 3.4. The Panel Chair, at stage three of the procedures, will:

- Ensure that minutes of the hearings are taken on every occasion.
- Explain the remit of the panel to the complainant.
- Ensure that all issues are addressed and that outcomes are reached based on facts and evidence.
- Help to put at ease and console individuals involved who are not used to speaking at such hearings, particularly any pupils involved.
- Conduct the hearing in an informal manner, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect and courtesy.
- Ensure that the room’s layout and setting is informal and non-adversarial, yet still sets the appropriate tone.
- Confirm that no member of the panel has previously been involved in the earlier stages of the procedure or has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings.
- Give both the complainant and the Trust or Academy the opportunity to state their case and seek clarity without undue interruption.

- Ensure that the copies of any written material or evidence is provided to everyone in attendance at the meeting and ensure that everyone has seen the necessary material.
- Organise a short adjournment of the hearing if required.
- Continuously liaise with the Clerk and Complaints Co-ordinator to ensure the procedure runs smoothly.
- Help to provide the support necessary where the complainant is a child.

3.5. All Panel Members, at stage three, will be aware that:

- The review panel hearing is independent and impartial.
- No individual with prior involvement in the complaint, or the circumstances surrounding it, is permitted to sit on the panel.
- The aim of the panel is to achieve a reasonable resolution and, ultimately, attain reconciliation between the parties involved.
- Reconciliation between the Academy or the Trust and complainant is not always achievable, and that it may only be possible to establish facts and make recommendations to reassure the complainant that their case has been taken seriously.
- The Panel can:
  - Dismiss or uphold the complaint, in whole or in part.
  - Decide on appropriate action to be taken.
  - Recommend changes that the Academy or Trust can make to prevent a recurrence of the problem.
- Complainants may feel nervous or inhibited in a formal setting and, therefore, the proceedings should be as welcoming as possible.
- When a child is present at the hearing, extra care needs to be taken to ensure that the child does not feel intimidated, as well as ensuring the child's view is represented equally.

3.6. The Panel Clerk, at stage three, will:

- Continuously liaise with the Complaints Co-ordinator.
- Record the proceedings.
- Set the date, time and venue of all hearings, ensuring that this is appropriate, convenient and accessible to all parties involved.
- Collate all written material or evidence involved and send it to the parties involved in timely advance of the hearing.
- Greet all parties as they arrive at the hearing.
- Ensure that the minutes of the panel hearing are circulated.
- Notify the relevant parties of the panel's decision and any actions to be taken.

## 4. Making a Complaint

4.1. Complaints are not restricted to parents of attending pupils. The Trust will consider all complaints.

4.2. The Trust and its academies will ensure the complaints procedure is:

- Easily accessible and publicised on the Trust and academies websites.
- Simple to understand and put into practice.
- Impartial and fair to all parties involved.

- Respectful of confidentiality duties.
- Continuously under improvement, using information gathered during the procedure to inform the Trust's SLT.
- Fairly investigated, by an independent person when necessary.
- Used to address all issues to provide appropriate and effective responses where necessary.

- 4.3. Complaints are expected to be made as soon as possible after an incident arises to resolve the issue in an appropriate timescale.
- 4.4. The Trust upholds a three-month time limit in which a complaint can be lodged regarding an incident.
- 4.5. Complaints made outside this time limit will not be automatically refused and exceptions will be considered.
- 4.6. In the case of any timescales changing, all parties involved will be informed of the changes in a timely manner.
- 4.7. Complaints should be made using the appropriate channels of communication, including the use of the Complaints Procedure Form.
- 4.8. All complaints shall be considered, whether they are made in person, by telephone, in writing, electronically via email, or via a third party (such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau).
- 4.9. A complaint can progress to the next stage of the procedure even if it is not viewed as "justified". All complainants are given the opportunity to fully complete the complaints procedure.
- 4.10. Any complaint made against a member of staff will be initially dealt with by the Principal, Director or CEO and then by a committee of panel members from the Academies Committees or the Trust Board.
- 4.11. Any complaint made against the Principal shall be initially dealt with by the Sector Director or the CEO and then by a committee of panel members from the Academies Committees or the Trust Board.
- 4.12. Any complaint made against the Chair of Trustees, the Academy Committee Chair or any other member of the Academy Committee or Trust Board should be made in writing to the Clerk to the Trustees.
- 4.13. Any complaint made against the Trust Board, or complaints involving the Chair and the Vice Chair, should be made in writing to the Clerk to the Trustees. The Clerk will then determine the most appropriate course of action, depending on the nature of the complaint. This action may involve sourcing an independent investigator to initially deal with the complaint and then getting the complaint to be heard by a co-opted panel of governors from another Academy or Trust.
- 4.14. Under some circumstances, it may be necessary to deviate from the complaints procedure. Any deviation will be documented.
- 4.15. Information about a complaint will not be disclosed to a third party without written consent from the complainant.

## 5. Complaints Procedure

Academies' complaints procedures must consist of at least three stages:

- Informal (meeting with the complainant)
- Formal (the complaint is put in writing)
- A panel hearing that is heard by members of the Academies Committee or Trust Board

### Stage One – Informal concern made to a member of staff

- 5.1. A complaint may be made in person, by telephone or in writing.
- 5.2. The member of staff the complaint has been made against can discuss the concern with the Principal, Director or CEO or Complaints Co-ordinator to seek support.
- 5.3. To prevent any later challenge or disagreement over what was said, brief notes of meetings and telephone calls are kept and a copy of any written response is added to the record. These notes are kept securely on the Trust's ICT system and, where appropriate, encrypted.
- 5.4. If the concern is about the Principal, the Complaints Co-ordinator should be informed and will need to determine how to handle the complaint. The complainant can then be referred to the Sector Director or the CEO.
- 5.5. If a complaint is made initially to an Academy Committee Member or Trustee, the complainant should be referred to the appropriate person. The Academy Member or Trustee in question should not act alone on a complaint outside the procedure; if they do, they cannot be involved if the complaint is subject to a hearing at a later stage of the procedure.
- 5.6. Within 10 academy working days, the complainant and the relevant member of staff should discuss the issue in a respectful and informal manner to seek a mutual resolution.
- 5.7. At this stage, the complainant will be asked what they think might resolve the issue – any acknowledgement that the Trust or Academy could have handled the situation better is not an admission of unlawful or negligent action.
- 5.8. If an appropriate resolution cannot be sought at this informal level, or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome following the initial discussions, the complainant may wish to proceed to the next level of the procedure.

### Stage Two – Formal complaint made to the Principal, Director or CEO

- 5.9. Stage two of the process will be completed within 10 academy working days. Where the situation is recognised as complex, and it is deemed to be unable to be resolved within this timescale, the Principal will contact the complainant to inform them of the revised target date via a written notification.
- 5.10. An appointment with the Principal, Director or CEO should be made, as soon as reasonably practical, to avoid any possible worsening of the situation.
- 5.11. If the complaint is against the Principal, the complainant will initially need to write, in confidence, to the Sector Director. The Sector Director will seek to resolve the issue informally before moving directly to stage three of the procedure.
- 5.12. Where the Principal or Sector Director has made reasonable attempts to accommodate the complainant with dates for a complaint meeting and they refuse or are unable to attend, the meeting will be convened in their absence and a conclusion will be reached in the interests of drawing the complaint to a close.



- 5.13. Where there are communication difficulties, the complaint may be made in person or via telephone.
- 5.14. To prevent any later challenge or disagreement over what was said, brief notes of meetings and telephone calls are kept, and a copy of any written response is added to the record. These notes are kept securely on the Trust's ICT system and, where appropriate, encrypted.
- 5.15. In terms of a complaint being made against a member of staff, the Principal, Director or CEO will discuss the issue with the staff member in question. Where necessary, the Principal, Director or CEO will conduct interviews with any relevant parties, including witnesses and pupils, and take statements from those involved.
- 5.16. All discussions shall be recorded and findings and resolutions will be communicated to the complainant either verbally or in writing.
- 5.17. Once all facts are established, the Principal, Director or CEO shall contact the complainant in writing with an explanation of the decision. The complainant will be advised of any escalation options (for example, escalation to stage three) and will be provided with details of this process.
- 5.18. The complainant will also be provided with copies of minutes, subject to any necessary redactions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the GDPR.
- 5.19. Any further action the Trust or Academy plans to take to resolve the issue will be explained to the complainant in writing.
- 5.20. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome suggested, the procedure will progress to stage three.

### **Stage Three – Complaints Appeal Panel**

- 5.21. Following receipt of a stage two outcome, the complaint should be made in writing to the Chair of the Academy Committee or the Chair of Trustees within 10 academy working days.
- 5.22. Where there are communication difficulties, the complaint may be made in person or via telephone.
- 5.23. To prevent any later challenge or disagreement over what was said, brief notes of meetings and telephone calls are kept, and a copy of any written response is added to the record. These notes are kept securely on the Trust's ICT system and, where appropriate, encrypted.
- 5.24. Written acknowledgement of the complaint will be made within 3 academy working days. This will inform the complainant that a Complaints Appeal Panel will hear the complaint within 20 academy working days.
- 5.25. Neither the Trust nor the complainant should bring legal representation to the Complaints Appeal Panel proceedings; however, there are occasions where legal representation will be necessary, for example where an employee is a witness in a complaint, they may be entitled to bring union or legal representation.
- 5.26. The Academy Committee Chair or the Chair of Trustees will request that the Clerk convenes a Complaints Appeal Panel comprising three people not involved in the complaint, at least one of whom is independent of the management and running of the Academy. Academy Committee Members are not eligible to be independent panel members.
- 5.27. If the whole Academy Committee is aware of the substance of a complaint before the Complaints Appeal Panel has been completed, an independent panel should be arranged to hear the complaint.

- 5.28. If the complainant believes there is likely to be bias in the proceedings, they may reserve the right to request an independent panel – complainants should provide evidence to support their request. Where the appearance of bias is sufficient to taint the decision reached, the request will likely be granted by the Academy Committee.
- 5.29. Where an independent panel is arranged on an ad-hoc, informal basis, Academy Committee Members or Trustees who are suitably skilled and who can demonstrate their independence will be sourced.
- 5.30. Academy Committee Members or Trustees from any category of governor or associate members of another governing board can be approached to take part in an independent panel.
- 5.31. Five working academy days' notice will be given to all parties attending the Complaints Appeal Panel, including the complainant.
- 5.32. Prior to the hearing, the Chair of the Academy Committee or Chair of Trustees, supported by their Clerk, will write to the complainant informing them of how the review will be conducted. The Principal, Director or CEO will also have a copy of this letter.
- 5.33. At the hearing, all participants will be given the opportunity to put their case across and discuss any issues.
- 5.34. The Complaints Appeal Panel will consider issues raised in the original complaint and any issues which have been highlighted during the complaints procedure.
- 5.35. The meeting should allow for:
- The complainant to be present and accompanied at the hearing if they wish.
  - The complainant to explain their complaint and the Principal, Director or CEO to explain the reasons for their decision.
  - The complainant to question the Principal, Director or CEO and vice versa, about the complaint.
  - Any evidence, including witnesses who have been prior approved by the Panel Chair, to be questioned.
  - Members of the Complaints Appeal Panel to question both the complainant and the Principal, Director or CEO.
  - Final statements to be made by both parties involved.
- 5.36. The complainant will receive a written response explaining the Complaint Appeals Panel's findings and recommendations within 10 academy working days. This letter will

also explain whether there are any further rights of appeal and to whom they need to be addressed.

5.37. Where relevant, the person complained about will receive a summary of the Complaint Appeals Panel's findings and recommendations. They will also receive a copy of the minutes, subject to any necessary redactions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the GDPR.

### **Final stage – Appeal**

5.38. If a complainant has exhausted the Trust's complaints procedure, they will be advised that they can submit a complaint to the ESFA using the [online form](#) or in writing to:

Ministerial and Public Communications Division  
Department for Education  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

5.39. If there are exceptional circumstances to the provisions outlined in 5.35. These are outlined in [Section 9](#) of this policy.

## **6. Interviewing Witnesses**

- 6.1. When interviewing pupils to gather information regarding a complaint, the interview should be conducted in the presence of another member of staff or, in the case of serious complaints, e.g. where the possibility of criminal investigation exists, in the presence of their parents.
- 6.2. The Trust will ensure that the conduction of interviews does not prejudice an LA Designated Officer's (LADO), or police, investigation.
- 6.3. The Trust understands the importance of ensuring a friendly and relaxed area which is free from intimidation.
- 6.4. All pupils interviewed will be made fully aware of what the interview concerns and their right to have someone with them.
- 6.5. Staff are allowed a colleague to support them at their interview. The colleague must not be anyone likely to be interviewed themselves, including their line manager.
- 6.6. The interviewer will not express opinions in words or attitude, so as to not influence the interviewee.
- 6.7. The interviewee will sign a copy of the transcription of the interview.

## **7. Recording a Complaint**

7.1. A written record shall be kept of any complaint made, whether made via phone, in person or in writing, detailing:

- The main issues raised, the findings and any recommendations.
- Whether the complaint was resolved following an informal route, formal route or panel hearing.

- Actions taken by the Trust as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint was upheld).
- 7.2. All records are made available for inspection on the Trust's premises by the Principal, Director or CEO.
- 7.3. The Trust reserves the right to use recording devices, where appropriate, to ensure all parties involved are able to review the discussions at a later date.
- 7.4. Where there are communication difficulties or disabilities, the Trust may provide recording devices to ensure the complainant is able to access and review the discussions at a later point.
- 7.5. Recording devices will not be used without the prior consent of all parties.
- 7.6. Where the Trust allows complainants to record meetings, the following will be considered:
- How any decision to allow recordings may affect any third parties called to act as witnesses
  - The impact and consequences on the individuals involved in the complaint in the event that recordings are lost or leaked
- 7.7. The Trust will not accept, as evidence, any recordings that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.
- 7.8. Details of any complaint made shall not be shared with the entire Academy Committee or Trust Board. The exception to this is when a complaint is made against the whole Academy Committee or Trust Board and they need to be aware of the allegations made against them, to respond to any independent investigation.
- 7.9. Complainants have a right to access copies of these records under the GDPR and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- 7.10. The Trust or Academy will hold all records of complaints centrally. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection requests to access them.

## **8. Types of Complaints and how they are covered**

- 8.1. Complaints regarding the following topics should be directed to the LA:
- Statutory assessments of SEND
  - School re-organisation proposals
  - Admissions to schools
- 8.2. Complaints about child protection matters will be handled in line with the Trust's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.
- 8.3. Any child protection complaints should be directed to the LADO or the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH).
- 8.4. Complaints concerning admissions will be directed to the appropriate admissions authority.
- 8.5. Complaints regarding exclusions will be dealt with in accordance with procedure outlined in the Exclusion Policy.

- 8.6. The Trust has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all employees, including contractors and temporary staff outlined in the Whistleblowing Policy.
- 8.7. Any whistleblowers not wishing to raise the issue with their employer will direct their complaint to the DfE.
- 8.8. Volunteers who have concerns about the Trust or a member of staff should make their complaint in line with this policy. Volunteers may also be able to complain to the LA or DfE, depending on what the complaint is about.
- 8.9. Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures will be dealt with in line with the Grievance Policy and the Disciplinary Policy. In these cases, complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any investigations; however, they will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
- 8.10. This complaints procedure is not to be used when addressing any complaints made about services provided by a third party who may use the Trust's premises or facilities. All complaints concerning this should be directed to the service provider.
- 8.11. Complaints about the content of national curriculum should be made to the DfE.
- 8.12. Complaints about how the Trust and its academies deliver the curriculum, including RE and RSE, will be dealt with using this complaints procedure.
- 8.13. Any complaints about the content of the daily act of collective worship are dealt with by either:
- the LA
  - the local Standard Advisory Council on Religious Education • another relevant body, e.g. the diocese.
- 8.14. Complaints from parents who are dissatisfied with the handling of a request to withdraw their child from RE or collective worship will be handled in line with this complaints procedure.
- 8.15. Requests for information and issues with the Trust's process for dealing with FOI requests, will be dealt with in accordance with the Freedom of Information Policy.

## 9. Exceptional Circumstances

- 9.1. The DfE expects complainants to have completed the Trust's Complaints Procedure before directing a complaint to them. The exceptions to this include when:
- Pupils are at risk of harm.
  - Pupils are missing education.
  - A complainant is being prevented from having their complaint progress through the Trust's complaints procedure.
  - The DfE has evidence that the Trust is proposing to act or is acting unlawfully or unreasonably.
- 9.2. If a social services authority decides to investigate a situation, the Principal, Director, CEO or Academy Committee or Trust Board may postpone the complaints procedure.
- 9.3. Where a matter can be resolved through a legal appeal, it will not be considered as a formal complaint. The key areas are: Admissions decisions, certain decisions relating to formal assessment of SEND, and decisions to permanently exclude a child.

9.4. If a complainant commences legal action against the Trust in relation to their complaint, the Trust will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure, until those legal proceedings have concluded.

## 10. Managing Unreasonable Requests

10.1. The Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the Trust; however, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

10.2. A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced.
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed).
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the Trust's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the DfE.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on the Trust's time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

10.3. A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:

- Maliciously
- Aggressively
- Using threats, intimidation or violence
- Using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language
- Knowing it to be false
- Using falsified information
- By publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers

- 10.4. Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with an Academy or the Trust while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.
- 10.5. Whenever possible, the Principal, Director, CEO or Academy Committee Chair or Chair of Trustees will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.
- 10.6. If the behaviour continues, the Principal, Director or CEO will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the Academy or Trust causing a significant level of disruption, the Trust may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after six months.
- 10.7. In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from the premises.

## 11. Complaints Campaigns

- 11.1. For the purposes of this policy, "**complaints campaigns**" are where an Academy or the Trust receives large volumes of complaints that are all based on the same subject.
- 11.2. Where an Academy or the Trust becomes the subject of a complaints campaign from complainants who are **not** connected with an Academy or the Trust, a standard, single response will be published on the Academy or Trust's website.
- 11.3. If the Trust receives a large number of complaints about the same subject from complainants who **are** connected to an Academy or the Trust, e.g. parents, each complainant will receive an individual response.
- 11.4. If complainants remain dissatisfied with the Trust's response, they will be directed to the DfE.

## 12. Barring from the Premises

- 12.1. The Trust's premises are private property and therefore any individual may be barred from entering the premises.
- 12.2. If an individual's behaviour is cause for concern, the Principal, Director or CEO will ask the individual to leave the premises.
- 12.3. The Principal, Director or CEO will notify the parties involved in writing, explaining that their implied licence for access to the premises has been temporarily revoked and why, subject to any representations that the individual may wish to make.
- 12.4. The individual involved will be given the opportunity to formally express their views regarding the decision to bar them.
- 12.5. This decision to bar will be reviewed by the Chair of the Academy Committee, the Chair of Trustees or a committee of Academy Members and/or Trustees, taking into account any discussions following the incident.

- 12.6. If the decision is made to continue the bar, the individual will be contacted in writing, informing them of how long the bar will be in place, they will also be informed of when the decision will be reviewed.
- 12.7. Anyone wishing to make a complaint regarding a barring order can do so in writing, including email, to the Principal, Director, CEO or the Academy Committee Chair or Chair of Trustees.
- 12.8. Once the Trust's complaints procedure is completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts.

### 13. Standard of Fluency Complaints

- 13.1. As members of a public authority, all staff are subject to the fluency duty imposed by the Immigration Act 2016, which requires staff members to have an appropriate level of fluency in English in order to teach pupils.
- 13.2. The Trust is free to determine the level of spoken communication necessary in order for staff members to develop effective performance, but it will be matched to the demands of the role in question.
- 13.3. The Trust will be satisfied that an individual has the necessary level of fluency appropriate for the role they will be undertaking, whether this is an existing or potential new member of staff.
- 13.4. If a member of the Academy or Trust community feels that a staff member has insufficient proficiency in spoken English for the performance of their role, they are required to follow the complaints procedure outlined in [Section 5](#) of this policy.
- 13.5. For the purpose of this policy, a **"legitimate complaint"** is one which is about the standard of spoken English of a member of staff; complaints regarding an individual's accent, dialect, manner or tone of communication are not considered legitimate complaints.
- 13.6. All legitimate complaints regarding the fluency duty will be handled in line with the processes outlined in this policy.
- 13.7. In addition to the processes outlined in this policy, the Trust will assess the merits of a legitimate complaint against the necessary standard of spoken English fluency required for the role in question.
- 13.8. To assess the merits, the Trust will undertake an objective assessment against clear criteria set out in the role specification or, against the level of fluency descriptors relevant to the role in question.
- 13.9. If the complaint is upheld, the Trust will consider what action is necessary to meet the fluency duty; this may include:
  - Specific training
  - Specific re-training
  - Assessment
  - Re-deployment
  - Dismissal
- 13.10. Appropriate support will be provided to staff to ensure that they are protected from vexatious complaints and are not subjected to unnecessary fluency testing.



13.11. Records of complaints regarding fluency will be kept in accordance with the processes outlined in Section 7 of this policy.

## **14. Role of the School Complaints Unit (SCU)**

- 14.1. If a complainant remains dissatisfied once the complaint procedure has been completed, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State.
- 14.2. If a complainant wishes to escalate a complaint of bias, the DfE will require evidence to be submitted with the complaint.
- 14.3. The Secretary of State will only intervene when they believe that the Trust Board has acted unlawfully or unreasonably.
- 14.4. The SCU will not overturn a Trust's decision about a complaint except in exceptional circumstances, such as the Trust acting unlawfully.
- 14.5. When making a final decision about a complaint, the Trust reserves the right to seek advice from the SCU on whether they are acting reasonably and lawfully; however, they will not be able to advise on how to resolve the complaint.

## **15. Transferring Data**

- 15.1. When a pupil changes school, the pupil's educational record will be transferred to the new school and no copies will be kept.
- 15.2. The Academy will hold records of complaints separate to pupil records while a complaint is ongoing, so that access to these records can be maintained.
- 15.3. Information that the Academy retains relating to a complaint will be stored securely and in line with the Trust's Records Management Policy to ensure GDPR Compliance.

## **16. Availability**

- 16.1. A copy of this policy will be made available on request. It will also be published on the academies and Trust website, as recommended by the ESFA.

## **17. Reviewing the Procedure**

- 17.1. The Complaints Policy will be reviewed annually, taking into account the latest guidance issued by the DfE.
- 17.2. Responsibility for reviewing the procedure belongs to the Trust Board.
- 17.3. All projected review dates will be adhered to.
- 17.4. Information gathered through reviewing the Complaints Policy and Procedures will be used to continuously improve and develop the process.
- 17.5. The monitoring and reviewing of complaints will be used to help evaluate the Trust's performance.

# Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic – Complaints Procedure

## Statement of Intent

In line with current government guidance, the Trust is not expected to handle new or existing complaints while it is open to a limited number of pupils due to the coronavirus pandemic; however, the Trust remains committed to maintaining open communication channels with parents and all stakeholders during this time. It may be a requirement for any meetings to be conducted remotely using video-conferencing facilities.

We understand the necessity to adapt our procedures during the academies partial closure and to ensure members of our school community can continue to voice any concerns they may have.

This appendix outlines how the Trust will manage concerns and complaints during the coronavirus pandemic, in line with the government’s guidance and this policy. The information in this section is under constant review and updated to reflect any changes to national or local guidance.

### 1. Making a Complaint

- 1.1 For the purpose of this policy, a “**complaint**” can be defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction’ towards the actions taken or a perceived lack of action taken.
- 1.2 The normal complaints procedure set out within the main body of this policy will resume once the academies reopen fully to all pupils and when directed by the DfE; until this point, formal complaints will not be dealt with by the academies or the Trust.
- 1.3 Any updates that influence this policy will be communicated to all parties involved via email in a timely manner.
- 1.4 Complainants are encouraged to call the DfE for more information regarding the expectations on schools regarding complaints at this time.

### 2. Concerns with regards to School Closures

- 2.1. A “concern” can be defined as ‘an expression of worry or doubt’ where reassurance is required.
- 2.2. Parents can share concerns about aspects of an Academy’s current provision, by contacting the Principal via telephone or email. Concerns will be responded to as soon as it is deemed possible.
- 2.3. Parents who wish to share a concern about their child’s learning should, in the first instance, raise their concerns with their child’s class teacher via telephone or email.
- 2.4. If a concern relates to the safeguarding of a child, the person concerned should contact the LA or, where appropriate, the police without delay.

### 3. Recording a Concern

- 3.1. A written record will be kept of any concern made in the Academy’s Concerns Log where deemed necessary, and will include:
- 3.2. The main issues raised and any recommendations.
- 3.3. Whether the concern was resolved and how this was achieved.

- 3.4. Actions taken by the Academy as a result of the concern raised.
- 3.5. The Academy will keep the Academy Committee up-to-date with any concerns raised and actions that are taken to resolve them, where necessary.
- 3.6. Any record of concerns made will be held in line with the Records Management Policy.

#### **4. Monitoring and Review**

- 4.1. The Trust's Executive Team is responsible for continually monitoring government updates and updating this appendix in line with any changes and guidance on both national and local levels.
- 4.2. Any changes to this appendix will be communicated to all staff, parents and relevant stakeholders.
- 4.3. This appendix will be considered redundant once the academies reopen fully to all pupils and when directed by the DfE – at which point, the school will resume its regular complaints procedures.

## Complaints Procedure Form

If you have tried unsuccessfully to resolve your complaint and wish to take the matter further, please complete this form and send it to the Principal.

If your complaint is against the Principal, you will need to send the form to the Sector Director.

If your complaint is against the Sector Director, you will need to send the form to the CEO.

If your complaint is against the CEO, you will need to send the form to the Chair of Trustees

Name:	Address:
Daytime telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
Email:	Postcode:
What is your complaint concerning, and what action would you like to be taken?	
When did you discuss your concern/complaint with the appropriate member of staff?	
What was the result of the discussion?	
Signed:	Date: