



Transform Trust Complaints Procedure

Policy Number	Author	Publication Date	Review Cycle
003	Chief Operating Officer	V5 March 2022	Annually

Introduction

This procedure applies to all schools within Transform Trust. The Trustees may approve a transitional procedure for recently converted schools in exceptional circumstances. The Scheme of Delegation for each Academy within the Trust outlines the delegated responsibility for staffing matters and the pay and conditions of all staff.

It is a legal requirement for all academies to have a complaints procedure. This must meet the standards set out in the Education (Independent School Standards (England) Regulations 2014 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/schedule/made>) Schedule 1, Part 7, which sets out how complaints procedures should be drawn up and used effectively to handle complaints from parents of pupils.

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to our 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.

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. Our schools take concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

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 would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, the school will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

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.

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 Governance Professional (formerly known as Clerk), 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 Trust Board Governance Professional, Chair of Trustees, via the Trust office. 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 the 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.

Timescales

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 timeframe if exceptional circumstances apply. The complainant will need to stipulate what they believe are exceptional circumstances which will then be considered by the school in liaison with a member of the Trust's Executive Team. The complainant will be notified accordingly.

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.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by our school, 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 	<p>Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the Local Authority.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) 	<p>If you are concerned about a school's SEND support you should do make your concerns known while your child is still registered at the school. This includes complaints that the school has not provided the support required by your child's SEN statement or education, health and care plan (EHCP). Follow the steps below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Talk to the school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENDCO). Follow the school's complaints procedure. Complain to your Local Authority: For Nottingham: special.needs@nottinghamcity.gov.uk (telephone: 0115 876 4300) For Derby: https://tinyurl.com/y4prt6mo Complain to the Education & Skills Funding Agency - https://tinyurl.com/y272935d <p>There is a different process if you disagree with a decision your Local Authority has made about an SEN statement or EHCP https://tinyurl.com/y7yd82n9</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: lado@nottinghamcity.gov.uk (tel: 0115 876 2303) cypsafeguarding@derby.gov.uk (tel: 01332 642376)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suspension (exclusion) of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about suspensions 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 school's complaints procedure. A copy of our Behaviour Policy is on our school's website.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) 	<p>We have a Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) policy for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors – a copy can be found on our school's website.</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 school should complain through the school's 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 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 the matter is being addressed.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.</p>

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority, 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 this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against any of our 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.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure, our school 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 confirm this in writing.

Stage 1 – Informal Complaints

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

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, phase leader 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 Stage 3 of the procedure.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the 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

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

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.

Within this response, the headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask 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. Anyone undertaking an investigation will be experienced or have received the appropriate training.

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. All correspondence, statements and records relating to the complaint are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within 20 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

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 our schools 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 of Stage 2.

If the complaint is about the headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about the headteacher or member of the governing body must be made to the School Governance Professional (for the headteacher), via the school office and Trust Governance Professional (for the governing body), via the Trust.

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.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing (Committee Meeting)

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a panel hearing consisting of at least three 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.

Prior to the meeting, the Panel will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Panel Hearing. If there are fewer than two governors from the school, the Governance Professional will source any additional, independent governors through another school from within the Trust, in order to make up the Panel.

Alternatively, the Chief Executive Officer will appoint a Panel of at least three people who are not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint – at least one of which will be entirely independent of the management and running of the school.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Governance Professional, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The Governance Professional will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.

Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Governance Professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Governance Professional 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 3 will be heard by the Trustees and an independent Panel member.

The Panel will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

The 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 Panel Hearing. 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 5 school days before the Panel meeting, the Governance Professional 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 3 school days before the meeting. All correspondence, statements and records relating to the complaint are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

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 notes 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 the school 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 & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school.

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 school 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 of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

Complaints escalated to/about the Trust, CEO or Trustee

If a complaint is escalated to Transform Trust "the Trust" or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the Trust, then the complaint should be sent to the CEO to be investigated.

The CEO 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 2 of this complaints procedures 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 20 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 10 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 Trustee, the complaint should be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board. If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation.

Note: 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.

All correspondence, statements and records relating to the complaint are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

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

The Governance Professional 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 timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Governance Professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Governance Professional 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 3 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 will be independent of the management and running of the Academy Trust. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will not be a Trustee 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 5 school days before the Panel meeting, the Governance Professional 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 3 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 notes 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 Trust's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Transform Trust 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 & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Transform Trust.

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 Trust 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 CEO.

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, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All correspondence, statements and records relating to the complaint are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Vexatious Complaints and Unacceptable Behaviour by the Complainant

Those identified will be treated consistently, honestly and proportionately while ensuring that the School and/or Trust as a whole suffer no detriment.

It is considered that all complainants have the right to have their concerns examined in line with the relevant complaints procedure. In most cases, dealing with complaints will be a straightforward process; however, in a minority of cases, the complainant may act in a manner that is deemed unacceptable.

They may act in a way that is considered abusive, unreasonably persistent or vexatious and by doing so it may hinder the School or Trust's ability to investigate their complaint or the complaints of others. This behaviour may occur at any time before, during or after a complaint has been investigated.

The time spent on dealing with all complaints should be proportionate to the nature of the complaint and consistent with the outcome that is being sought being realistic and achievable.

How is unreasonable complaint behaviour defined?

It should be noted that raising a complaint about a School or the Trust does not in itself constitute unreasonably persistent behaviour and neither do complainants who escalate through all stages of the relevant complaints procedure or those who express criticism about the complaints process itself.

The Trust has adopted the Local Government Ombudsman's definition and the identified characteristics for unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complainants "*For us, unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants are those complainants who, because of the nature or frequency of their contacts with an organisation, hinder the organisation's consideration of their, or other people's, complaints*". Appendix A outlines both examples of unreasonably persistent behaviour as well as abusive and/or vexatious complainants.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school or 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 Education & Skills Funding Agency (<https://tinyurl.com/y272935d>) after they have completed Stage 3.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the Trust. They will consider whether the school/Trust 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) Regulation 2014.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: www.education.gov/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

Monitoring and Review of the Policy

This Policy may be amended at any time to take account of changes in legislation. The normal cycle of review for this policy will be annually.

Form

Please complete and return to: Headteacher / Governance Professional (*delete as appropriate*) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your Name:
Pupil's Name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the Pupil (if relevant):
Address:
Postcode:
Daytime telephone number:
Evening telephone number:
Email address:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.
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:
Action taken:
Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible;
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint;
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint;
- ask for assistance as needed;
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect;
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

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 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:

- a. conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- b. keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record notes of the meeting;
- c. ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal;
- d. be mindful of the timescales to respond;
- e. 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.

Complaints Case Worker

(This could be the headteacher/designated complaints governor, CEO, COO, Operational Safeguarding Lead, Trustee or other staff member providing administrative support).

The complaints case worker should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure;
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, Chair of Governors, CEO, Governance Professional and Trust (if appropriate) 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 or where the complainant is a child or young person.
- keep records.

Governance Professional to the Governing Body/Trust Board

The Governance Professional 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 date, time 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 contemporaneous notes of the meeting;
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Complaints Committee Chair

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

- both parties are asked (via the Governance Professional) 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;
- 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;
- notes of the meeting are taken;
- they liaise with the Governance Professional (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Complaints Committee (Panel) 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 and present during all or part of the meeting.

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child 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 is the complainant, the Committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child's parent is the complainant, the Committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child to attend a part of the meeting that the Committee considers is not in the child's best interests. The welfare of the child is paramount.

Complaints Procedure Flowchart

Stage One Informal Stage

- Informal concerns raised with the class teacher or other appropriate member of staff.
- Member of staff responds to the complainant.
- Where the complainant requests a meeting, a meeting will be held within 10 working days.
- A record of the complaint and the outcome recorded by the school and copy sent to the complainant where appropriate.



Stage Two - Formal

- Complaint form completed and sent to the school if they remain unhappy.
- Within 5 working days the school will acknowledge the complaint.
- Initial investigation conducted within 20 working days.
- Outcome provided in writing within 5 working days thereafter.



Stage Three - Panel

- Complainant writes to the Governing Body if they remain unhappy (or writes to the Trust). Within 5 working days the complaint will be acknowledged.
- Within 10 working days the date and time of a panel hearing will be notified to the complainant.
- Within 5 working days the Panel outcome will be communicated to the complainant in writing stating that there is no further right to complain under this or other academy procedure.



ESFA

The complainant may refer their complaint the Education & Skills Funding Agency if they remain unhappy.

Appendix A - Examples of unreasonably persistent behaviour:

(Note: this list is not exhaustive, nor does one single characteristic on its own imply that the person will be considered as being in this category).

- Refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint, despite offers of help.
- Refusing to cooperate with the complaints investigation process.
- Refusing to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the school or Trust’s jurisdiction or within the scope of a complaints procedure.
- Insisting on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeking to have them replaced.
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Denying or changing statements he or she made at an earlier stage.
- Introducing trivial or irrelevant new information at a later stage.
- Raising many detailed but unimportant questions, and insisting they are all answered.
- Submitting falsified documents from themselves or others.
- Adopting a 'scatter gun' approach: pursuing parallel complaints on the same issue with various members of staff and/or organisations.
- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy phone calls, emails to numerous staff, or detailed letters every few days, and expecting immediate responses.
- Submitting repeat complaints with minor additions/variations, which the complainant insists make these 'new' complaints.
- Refusing to accept the decision; repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence.

Examples of abusive and/or vexatious complainants:

The School and/or Trust will take steps to protect its staff and other adults from those who are behaving in a way which is considered abusive and/or vexatious. This may include physical or verbal abuse and could include the following (however this list is not exhaustive):

- Speaking to the member of staff/adult in a derogatory manner which causes offence.
- Swearing, either verbally or in writing despite being asked to refrain from using such language.
- Using threatening language towards any member of staff/adult which provokes fear.
- Repeatedly contacting a member of staff/adult regarding the same matter which has already been addressed.