SOLENT
Academies Trust

Together we inspire lifelong learning, perseverance, kindness, and growth, transforming the lives of our children and families.

Complaints Policy

Scope:	Solent Academies Trust
Author:	Company Secretary
Name of Responsible Officer:	Chief Executive Officer
Approving Committee:	Trust Board
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Requirement to publish on website:	Yes – Trust and all Academies
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1. Policy Statement

Our Trust recognises the importance of consistency, openness, and equality in responding to concerns and complaints.

This policy has been adopted by the Trustees and is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at schools in the Trust. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint 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 use this procedure when parents/carers of current registered pupils at schools in Solent Academies Trust have concerns or complaints about the school or Trust.

2. Adoption Arrangements and Date

This policy was adopted by Solent Academies Trust in March 2026 and supersedes any previous complaints policy.

This policy will be reviewed by the Chief Executive Officer every two years.

3. Equal Opportunities Statement

Our Trust is committed to reviewing the complaints policy regularly to ensure that it takes account of the Equality Act 2010 and does not discriminate against any complainant, or concerned party, on the grounds of race, religion or belief, disability, age, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, sex, or sexual orientation.

Solent Academies Trust 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.

Our complaints policy allows for recordings of meetings if the complainant's own disability or special needs require it, with prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending having been sought before meetings or conversations take place

4. 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*, and 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 complaint's procedure. Solent Academies Trust takes 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 Principal of the school, will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Principal 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 that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, the schools in the Trust will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaint's procedure.

5. 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 on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complainants should, from the earliest stage of their complaint, identify the outcome they would like and what they think may resolve the issue.

	School		Trust	
Concern / complaint about:	**School**	**Principal or Academy Committee**	**Trust or Trust Staff**	**CEO or Trustee(s)**
Stage 1 - Concern	Teacher, staff member	Trust Complaints Team	Trust Complaints Team	Trust Complaints Team
Stage 2 – Formal Complaint	Principal*	Trust Complaints Team	Trust Complaints Team	Trust Complaints Team
Stage 3 – Panel	Trust Complaints Team	Trust Complaints Team	Trust Complaints Team	Trust Complaints Team

*Complaints against school staff should be made to the Principal via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

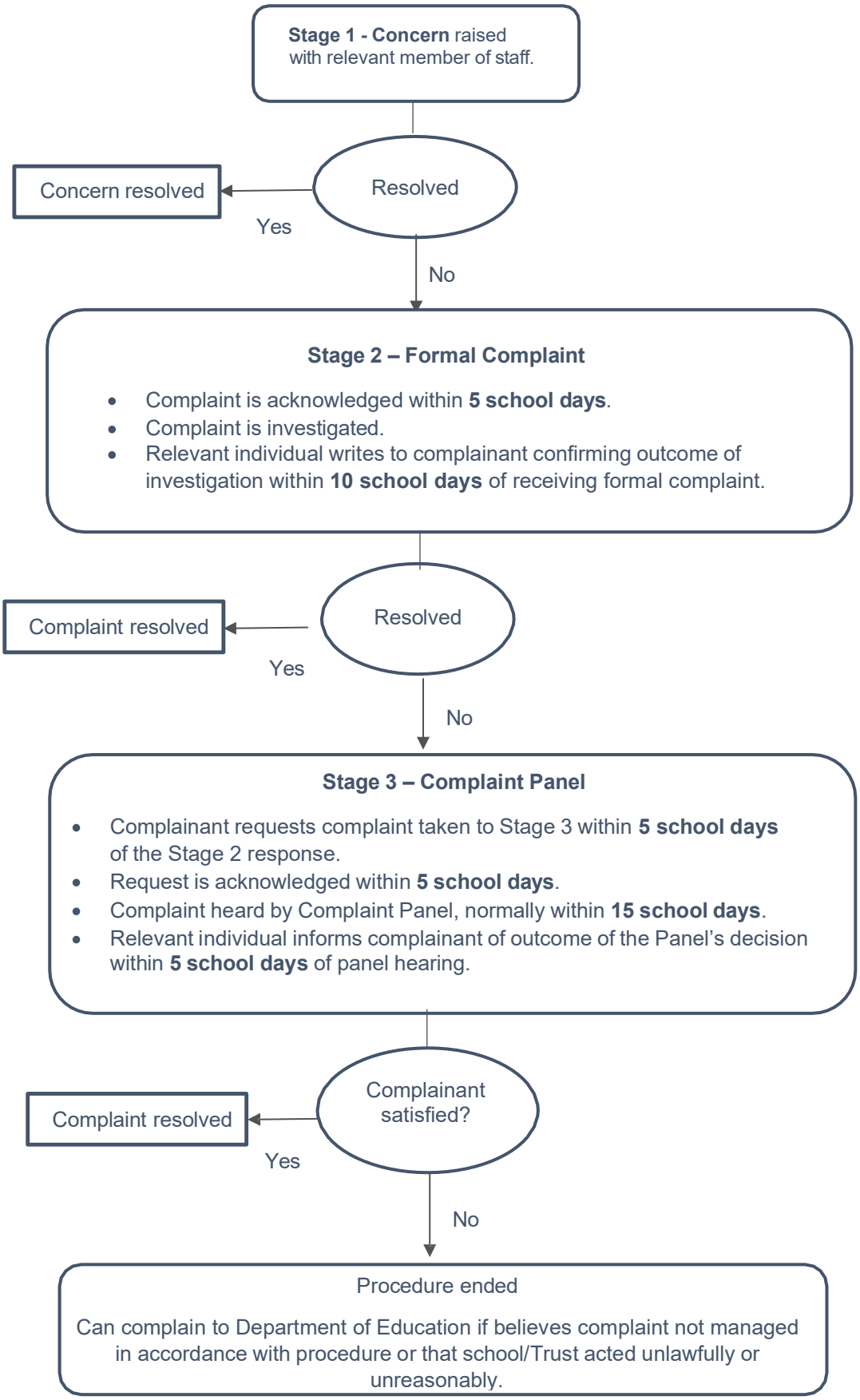
Trust Complaints Team:

complaints@solentacademiestrust.info

Solent Academies Trust, Unit 4 Acorn Business Centre, Northarbour Road, Portsmouth, PO6 3TH

T: 02394310805

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 a third-party organisation, for example Citizens Advice, to help you.


Stage 1 - Concern raised with relevant member of staff.
Resolved
Concern resolved
Yes
No
Stage 2 – Formal Complaint
Complaint is acknowledged within 5 school days.
Complaint is investigated.
Relevant individual writes to complainant confirming outcome of investigation within 10 school days of receiving formal complaint.
Resolved
Complaint resolved
Yes
No
Stage 3 – Complaint Panel
Complainant requests complaint taken to Stage 3 within 5 school days of the Stage 2 response.
Request is acknowledged within 5 school days.
Complaint heard by Complaint Panel, normally within 15 school days.
Relevant individual informs complainant of outcome of the Panel's decision within 5 school days of panel hearing.
Complainant satisfied?
Complaint resolved
Yes
No
Procedure ended
Can complain to Department of Education if believes complaint not managed in accordance with procedure or that school/Trust acted unlawfully or unreasonably.

6. Anonymous Complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, a member of the complaints team will determine whether the complaint or concern warrants an investigation.

7. Time Scales

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

Every effort will be made to adhere to the timescales set out for each stage of the procedure. There may be some circumstances where it takes longer to arrange a meeting of all relevant parties, if this is the case, the complainant will be kept informed.

8. 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.

9. Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by the any of the schools in Solent Academies Trust, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
Exclusion of children from school*	The process for challenging exclusions decisions is set out in the DfE's statutory guidance and information can be found at: Suspensions and permanent exclusions guidance.pdf **Complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.*

Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. 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: Whistleblowing - Department for Education - GOV.UK 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.
Staff Grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the Trust's internal grievance procedures.
Staff Conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the Trust's internal disciplinary and conduct procedures, if appropriate. 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.
Freedom of Information	Complaints about our compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 are handled under our freedom of information policy and in accordance with relevant guidance from the ICO. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the ICO directly, but the ICO will usually expect you to have raised your concerns with us in the first instance.
Data Protection	Complaints about data protection matters are handled under our data protection policy and in accordance with relevant guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the ICO directly, but the ICO will usually expect you to have raised your concerns with our Data Protection Officer in the first instance.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams, or Tribunals, it may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or may 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 one of the schools in the Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

10. Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Solent Academies Trust intends 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 or Trust policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

11. Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

12. Record Keeping and Monitoring of Complaints

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.

Members of the Complaints Team monitor the response to, and outcomes of complaints.

13. Confidentiality

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

14. Use of AI in Minuting Meetings

In line with SAT “Using AI to Minute Meetings Procedure,” AI tools may be utilised to assist with minute taking under specific conditions to ensure data security and confidentiality. For full details on when and how AI can be used, please refer to the “Using AI to Minute Meetings Procedure”

15. Stage 1 – Informal Concern

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

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, Head of School or Executive Principal. Concerns relating to central team staff should be made in writing to the Trust Complaints Team using complaints@solentacademiestrust.info

Complainants should not approach individual Governors or Trustees as they have no power to act on an individual basis, and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at a later stage of the process.

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

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is Stage 2, a formal complaint.

16. Stage 2 – Formal Complaints

Following the completion of stage 1, Formal complaints (preferably using the Complaint Form Annex B).

Contact details for the Complaints Team can be found in item 5.

A member of the Complaints Team will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days.

A member of the Complaints Team will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. A face-to-face meeting may be the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Complaint Lead may *delegate the investigation to another member of staff, however the decision remains the responsibility of the Complaint.*

During the investigation, the investigator will:

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

At the conclusion of the investigation a formal written response will be provided within ten school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If more time is required to meet this deadline, the complainant will receive an update and revised response date.

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

17. Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

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 by writing to a member of the Complaints Team within ten school days of receiving the Stage 2 response, requesting the complaint be heard before a complaint panel.

Contact details or the Complaints Team can be found in item 5

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply

A member of the Trusts Complaints Team will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within five school days. If not already provided the Trust Complaints Team will ask the complainant to provide details of the reason for the appeal and any relevant supporting evidence.

The Trusts Complaints Team will convene a panel meeting to take place within fifteen school days following acknowledgement of the complaint escalation, if this timeframe is not possible the complainant will be informed and an anticipated date will be provided. The panel hearing will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. Panel members can include Governors from schools within the Trust, Trustees, and one panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school. This is the final stage of the complaint's procedure.

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

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 panel meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

The panel will be professionally clerked.

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

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least seven school days before the meeting, a member of the Complaints Team 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 panel at least five school days before the meeting.

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

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

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

The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel 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 panel 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 panel will provide the complainant and the school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within five school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department of Education (DfE) 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, the response 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 email, or otherwise given to the complainant, and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection by the Trust and the Principal.

18. Next Steps

If the complainant believes that the school/Trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure, or that they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the DfE after they have completed Stage 3.

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

For more information on the DfE's remit in relation to academy complaints, visit: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complain-about-an-academy/complain-about-an-academy

Contact the Department for Education - Contact type - GOV.UK

Department for Education (DfE)
School Complaints Unit,
Piccadilly Gate,
Store Street,
Manchester,
M1 2WD

0370 000 2288 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Annex A

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Principal or Complaints team 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:** **Day time 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 whom:
Complaint referred to:
Action taken:
Date:

Annex B

Serial, Persistent, and Unreasonable Complaints

Solent Academies 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 our school. 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.

The Solent Academies Trust Parental Code of Conduct is published on the Trust and school websites, setting out expected behaviour and conduct, which is not tolerated and dealing with incidents.

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 complaint's investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaint's procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint's procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on
- 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 school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, and 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
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the 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.

Whenever possible, a member of the complaints panel handling the complaint will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before deciding that the behaviour is “unreasonable”

If the behaviour continues, the individual/ complaints panel will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact either the Trust, or a school within the Trust, causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

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

Complaint groups and campaigns

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint campaign is defined as a complaint from three of more separate individuals (whether or not connected with the school) which are all based on the same subject

Depending on the subject in question, we may deviate from the procedure set out in the policy and instead

- Send a template response to all complainants: and or
- Publish a single response on the school website as applicable

Group Complaints will not be addressed. Parents/carers right to complain rests on their position as the parent/carer of an individual pupil. Complainants cannot raise a complaint on behalf of other pupils of a group of pupils.

Annex C

Roles and Responsibilities

a. 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

b. Complaint Investigator

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

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

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the head teacher or complaints panel that sets out the facts, identifies solutions, and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The Principal or Complaints Team will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

c. Complaints Team

The Complaints Team consists of Leaders, Governors, and Trustees.

d) Complaints Investigator

The complaints Investigator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with the Complaints Team to ensure the smooth running of the complaint's 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

e) Complaints Team

A member of the Central Team will act as contact for the complaints team and will

- 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 minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the panel's decision

f) Panel Chair

The Panel Chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the contact member of staff) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the panel 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 panel is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the panel has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Complaints Team as required.

g) Panel Member

Panel 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 panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

  We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting

  Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.

- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

  Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

  The panel should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

  If the child/young person is the complainant, the panel should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the panel should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

  However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the panel considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

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