

# Concerns and Complaints Policy

<b>Author/Owner</b>	Head of Governance and Policy
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## Summary of Changes from Previous Version

Version	Date	Author	Summary of Updates
V1	March 2026	HOGP	Academy Complaints Policy and Trust Complaints Policy merged into one new policy. Latest Browne Jacobson Complaint Policy template used to ensure latest legislation is included.



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## 1. Aims and application

The aims of the policy and procedure are to deal with complaints and concerns:

- about an Academy, the Academy Trust (“Trust”), or any individual connected with it by following the correct procedure.
- thoroughly; and
- in an open, honest and fair manner.

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children who are registered at one of the academies within the Trust. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to an individual Academy within the Trust, or the Trust itself, about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. This policy outlines how parents/carers of registered pupils/students currently attending academies within the Trust can raise a concern or complaint. Concerns or complaints from other persons will be dealt with in accordance with this policy. Complaints from registered pupils/students should be raised by their parents/carers.

This procedure does not apply to concerns and complaints relating to the matters listed in Annex 1.

Anonymous concerns or complaints will not normally be investigated under this procedure. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Deputy Chief Executive Officer (DCEO) will determine whether there are exceptional circumstances to justify conducting an investigation into the issues raised.

All staff will be made aware of this policy and procedure and are expected to review this policy regularly in order that they are familiar with our process of dealing with complaints and can be of assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

In this procedure:

- ‘complaint’ means an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.
- ‘concern’ means an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important, for which reassurances are sought.
- ‘meeting’ and ‘hearing’ means an in person or virtual meeting or hearing (i.e. telephone or video conference where all parties can participate verbally), virtual meetings/hearings will only be held if all parties have access to appropriate equipment to attend and are happy to do so.
- ‘parent’ means a biological parent, carer, or anyone who has parental responsibility or care for a child.
- ‘Academy days’ excludes weekends and Academy holidays and periods of partial or total Academy closure.
- ‘Trust’ means the Academy Trust.

The timeframes referred to in this policy are our usual timeframes, and the Trust/Academy will seek to adhere to these timeframes where possible.

Reasonable adjustments will be made to this procedure where required to ensure that all complainants can access and complete this complaints procedure. For example, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.



## 2. Key principles

The Trust acknowledges that raising concerns or complaints can be a difficult, emotional, and stressful time, particularly for parents and carers. We expect our staff to always be respectful and courteous when dealing with concerns and complaints. We also expect all persons raising concerns and complaints to treat our staff with the same respect and courtesy.

We will not accept abusive and threatening behaviour towards our staff from anybody at any time. In circumstances where this happens the Trust will take the action outlined in Part 3 of this policy.

The Trust expects all complainants to make reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution. This will usually be the most effective way to swiftly resolve any concerns.

The Trust encourages parents/carers and others to approach the Academy with any concerns and refrain from airing concerns about the Academy and its staff on social media sites. Posting negative comments on social media can cause damage and upset and is often counterproductive to pupil/student education.

To investigate your complaint properly and fairly, we have implemented a Staged approach. We anticipate that almost all complaints that arise will be resolved at informal concern Stage 1 or Stage 2, as outlined below.

We expect our members of staff to be addressed in a respectful manner, and for communication to remain calm at all times. The procedure under Part 3 will only be used on very rare occasions to deal with repetitious and/or vexatious complaints, or complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner.

Concerns or complaints should be brought to our attention as soon as possible. Any matter raised more than 3 months after the incident being complained of (or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 3 calendar months of the last of these incidents) will not be considered unless the Chief Executive Officer or Deputy Chief Executive Officer or Principal/Executive Principal (as appropriate) accepts that there are exceptional circumstances to justify accepting the complaint out of time.

Where a complaint is received outside of term time, we will consider it to have been received on the first Academy Day following the holiday period. An Academy Day does not include Training Days.

On rare occasions an Academy or the Trust may receive complaints from a number of individuals relating to the same issue. In order to deal with these complaints efficiently, the Academy/Trust will follow the procedure set out in Part 4.

If it becomes necessary to alter the time limits and deadlines set out within this procedure, you will be advised accordingly and given an explanation as to why this has been the case and provided with revised timescales. If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority safeguarding teams, or tribunals/courts, 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. Where a complaint is raised but we do not have clarity from the complainant on the issues and/or desired outcomes, we will inform the complainant what information we need to progress the complaint and pause this procedure until reasonable clarity is achieved.

Complainants should not approach individual Governors or Directors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may prevent them from considering complaints at later Stages.

If a complainant commences legal action against the Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether it would be appropriate to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded. If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.



### 3. Records of Complaints

A record will be kept of all written formal complaints, including at what Stage they were resolved, and action taken by us as a result of those complaints regardless of whether they were upheld. All concerns raised will be recorded on CPOMS. Correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where:

- Access is requested by the Secretary of State.
- Disclosure is required in the course of an Academy inspection.
- An individual has a legal right to access their own personal data contained within such documentation; or
- Under other legal authority.

We will make the findings and recommendations of the Complaints Committee(s) available for inspection on the Academy premises by the Trust and the Principal/Executive Principal.



## 4. Stages of Concern and Complaints Procedure

Stage 1	
<b>Stage 1: Informal concern</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concern(s) brought to the attention of the Academy/Trust via the completion of the Raising a Concern Form.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concern will be reviewed by the Academy/Trust and an outcome provided within 15 Academy days.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution of the concern then the complainant can escalate to Stage 2 Formal Written Complaint within 10 Academy days of receiving the outcome from the concern raised.</li> </ul>
Stage 2	
<b>Stage 2: Formal Written Complaint</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complainant to raise a formal written complaint by completing and submitting the Complaints Form within 10 Academy days of receiving the outcome from the concern raised.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trust/Academy will acknowledge the complaint within 5 Academy days of receipt of the Complaints Form.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trust/Academy to appoint an Investigating Officer to investigate the complaint. A meeting with the complainant where appropriate may be required as part of this process.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An outcome to the investigation and written response will be sent to the complainant sent within 20 Academy days.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution of the complaint at Stage 2 then the complainant can escalate to Stage 3 Complaints Committee within 10 Academy days of receiving the outcome from Stage 2.</li> </ul>
Stage 3	
<b>Stage 3: Referral to Complaints Committee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complainant to raise a formal written request to escalate the complaint to Stage 3 within 10 Academy days of receiving the outcome from Stage 2</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trust/Academy will acknowledge the complaint within 5 Academy days of receipt the request to escalate to Stage 3.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stage 3 Complaints Hearing to take place within 20 Academy days of receipt of request.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Notification of date, time, and place of the hearing and details of the committee members present sent at least 5 Academy days before the hearing.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academy/Trust representative and complainant to submit evidence in support of their case to Head of Governance and Policy at least 3 Academy days before the hearing.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complaints Committee decision will be sent to the complainant no more than 5 Academy days after the hearing.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution of the complaint at Stage 3 then the complainant can escalate to Stage 4 Trust Executive and Directors Complaints Committee within 10 Academy days of receiving the outcome from Stage 3.</li> </ul>



Stage 4	
<b>Stage 4: Referral to Trust Executive and Directors' Complaints Committee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complainant to raise a formal written request to escalate the complaint to Stage 4 within 10 Academy days of receiving the outcome from Stage 3</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trust will acknowledge the complaint within 5 Academy days of receipt the request to escalate to Stage 4</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stage 4 Hearing to take place within 20 Academy days of receipt of request.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Notification of date, time, and place of the hearing and details of the committee members present sent at least 5 Academy days before the hearing.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academy/Trust representative and complainant to submit evidence in support of their case to Head of Governance and Policy at least 3 Academy days before the hearing.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complaints Committee decision will be sent to the complainant no more than 5 Academy days after the hearing.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution of the complaint at Stage 4 then the complainant can escalate to Stage 5.</li> </ul>
Stage 5	
<b>Stage 5: Referral to Complaint to the Department for Education (DfE)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the complainant is dissatisfied with the decision of the Stage 4 Complaints Committee, they are entitled to refer their complaint to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will only investigate the complaint in limited circumstances.</li> <li>For more information on the DfE's remit in relation to Academy complaints, visit: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complain-about-an-Academy/complain-about-an-Academy">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complain-about-an-Academy/complain-about-an-Academy</a></li> </ul>

# Stage 1 – Informal Concern



## 4.1 Stage 1: Informal Concern

An Informal Concern can be raised in person, by email, or by telephone but must be accompanied with the Concern Form in Annex 2.

This concern form must be addressed to the Principal or Executive Principal of the Academy and sent via email, to [concernsandcomplaints@elp.org.uk](mailto:concernsandcomplaints@elp.org.uk)

If the concern is regarding the Trust, or a Principal/Executive Principal in an Academy then this form must be addressed to the Head of Governance and Policy and sent via email to [concernsandcomplaints@elp.org.uk](mailto:concernsandcomplaints@elp.org.uk)

Concerns may also be raised by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant if they have appropriate authority to do so.

The completion of the concern form will provide the appropriate detail and the outcome that is being sought.

Concerns will be acknowledged within 5 Academy days of receipt and responded to within 15 Academy days. All concerns raised and their outcomes will be logged on CPOMS.

For all concerns relating to academies, the Principal/Executive Principal will allocate the most appropriate member of staff to review and lead on the concern.

For all concerns relating to the Trust, the CEO/Deputy CEO will allocate the most appropriate member of staff to review and lead on the concern.

We value informal meetings and discussions and encourage parents/carers to approach staff with any concerns they may have and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding.

Where appropriate, the person raising the concern may be invited to an informal meeting with the member of staff most appropriate for dealing with that concern. The member of staff dealing with the concern will make sure that you are clear on what action (if any) has been agreed. This will be put in writing where appropriate.

The Academy and the Trust will respect the views of the person raising the concern who indicates that they would have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff. In this case, the Principal/Executive Principal will refer the parent to another designated member of staff. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved in the circumstances leading to the concern feels the same, the Principal/Executive Principal may consider referring the parent to another member of staff.

If the concern is regarding the Trust, the CEO or Deputy CEO will designate to an appropriate leader to deal with the concern.

There is no suggested timescale for resolution at this Stage, given the importance of informal discussion, although it would be expected that most issues will be resolved within 15 Academy days. Where no satisfactory solution has been found, the person raising the concern will be advised that they can escalate to a formal complaint within 10 Academy days of the outcome of the concern.

# Stage 2 – Formal Written Complaint

## **4.2 Stage 2: Formal Written Complaints**

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage one, then they are able to escalate their concerns to a Stage 2 Written Complaint.

This must be escalated within 10 Academy days of receiving the Outcome of Stage one and the complaint must be put in writing using the Complaints Form provided in the Annex of this Policy.

This form must be addressed to the Principal or Executive Principal of the Academy and sent via email to [concernsandcomplaints@elp.org.uk](mailto:concernsandcomplaints@elp.org.uk)

If the complaint is regarding the Trust, then this form must be addressed to the Head of Governance and Policy and sent via email to [concernsandcomplaints@elp.org.uk](mailto:concernsandcomplaints@elp.org.uk)

It is very important that the complainant provides the detail requested in the form and the actions that they would like to be undertaken in order to resolve the complaint.

If the complainant requires support in completing the form, they can contact the Academy or Trust Office.

The complainant can also ask third party organisations like the [Citizens Advice](#) to help them. In all cases your written complaint must include:

- The nature of the complaint.
- Details of how the matter has been dealt with so far.
- The names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events and copies of all relevant documents; and
- A clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint.

The complaint will normally be acknowledged in writing within 5 Academy days of receipt. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the Academy/Trust's complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This will normally be within 20 Academy days of receipt.

For Academy Complaints the Principal/Executive Principal will appoint an Investigating Officer, this could be themselves or another Senior Leader within the Academy or Trust.

For Trust Complaints, the CEO/Deputy CEO will appoint an Investigating Officer, this could be themselves or another Senior Leader from within the Trust.

The Trust/Academy may engage an independent, external person to carry out the investigation into the Stage 2 complaint, or to review the investigation and response at Stage 2. This may be appropriate where the complaint is particularly complex or involves legal issues.

If appropriate, the Principal/Executive Principal/CEO/Deputy CEO (or someone appointed by them) may invite the complainant to a meeting to clarify the complaint and to explore possible resolutions. If the complainant accepts the invitation, they may be accompanied by one other person, such as a friend, relative or interpreter, to assist you. Where possible, this meeting will take place within 10 Academy days of receipt of the written complaint.

If necessary, witnesses will be interviewed, and statements taken from those involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil/student, the pupil/student will usually be interviewed with their parent present, but if this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint or if the pupil/student has specifically said that they would prefer that their parents were not involved, another member of staff with whom the pupil/student feels comfortable will be present.

If other pupil(s)/student(s) require interviewing as part of the investigation then the Principal/Executive Principal will make the decision on whether the pupil(s)/student(s) will be interviewed with their parent present or with another member of staff that the parent/student feels comfortable with.



If the matter includes a complaint relating to a member of staff, the member of staff will have the opportunity to respond to the complaint.

Once the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, the complainant will be provided with a written response to the complaint, including an explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. This will include what action will be taken to resolve the complaint (if any). The complainant will be advised that if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, they may request that the complaint be escalated to Stage 3 within 10 Academy days or receiving the outcome of the complaint.

All records will be kept on CPOMS.

## **Key Questions**

### **Q. What if the complaint is about the Principal/Executive Principal or the Principal/Executive Principal has already considered your complaint as a Concern under Stage 1?**

In these cases, your complaint should be sent to the Head of Governance and Policy and can be contacted via the Exceed Learning Partnership Trust office. (Address can be found on <https://exceedlp.org.uk/contact-us/>). They will arrange for a suitably skilled member of the Trust's Strategic Leadership Team to carry out the Stage 2 procedure or suitably skilled independent external person.

### **Q. What if the complaint is about a Governor on the Local Governing Body?**

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, or any individual Governor should be addressed to the Head of Governance and Policy via the Exceed Learning Partnership Trust office. (Address can be found on <https://exceedlp.org.uk/contact-us/>).

Please mark them as private and confidential. The Head of Governance and Policy will arrange for another Governor from another Governing Board within the Trust or Director (as applicable) with no connection to the complaint to investigate the concerns in accordance with Stage 2.

### **Q. What if the complaint is about the Local Governing Body or the Head of Governance and Policy?**

If the complaint is about the Head of Governance and Policy or the Local Governing Body as a whole, you should send your complaint to the Deputy CEO via the Exceed Learning Partnership Trust office. (address can be found on <https://exceedlp.org.uk/contact-us/>). who will then determine the most appropriate action with regards to Stage 2.

### **Q. What if the complaint is about the Deputy Chief Executive Officer?**

If the complaint is about the Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the Trust, or if they have been closely involved with a concern, your complaint should be sent to the Head of Governance and Policy via the Exceed Learning Partnership Trust office (address can be found on <https://exceedlp.org.uk/contact-us/>) who will arrange for the CEO to carry out all the Stage 2 procedures.

### **Q. What if the complaint is about the Chief Executive Officer?**

If the complaint is about the Chief Executive Officer of the Trust, or if they have been closely involved with a Stage 1 concern, your complaint should be sent to the Head of Governance and Policy via the Exceed Learning Partnership Trust office (address can be found on <https://exceedlp.org.uk/contact-us/>) who will arrange for a Director to carry out all the Stage 2 procedures.

### **Q. What if the complaint is about a Director or a Member of the Trust?**

If the complaint is about a Director or Member of the Trust, you should contact the Head of Governance and Policy via the Exceed Learning Partnership Trust office (address can be found on

<https://exceedlp.org.uk/contact-us/>) who will arrange for another Director or suitably skilled independent external person to investigate the concerns in accordance with Stage 2.

If your complaint is about the Trust board as a whole, you should send your complaint to the Head of Governance and Policy via the Exceed Learning Partnership Trust office (address can be found on <https://exceedlp.org.uk/contact-us/>) who will arrange for the matter to be independently investigated.

Please be aware that where the complaint relates to an employee, a copy of the complaint may be shared with the employee in order to investigate the issues raised.

# Stage 3 – Complaints Committee





### 4.3 Stage 3: Referral to the Complaints Committee

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint under Stage 2, within 10 Academy days of receiving the outcome of Stage 2, the complainant may escalate this to Stage 3 in which a Complaints Committee will be convened to consider the complaint.

The complainant should write to the Head of Governance and Policy via email [concernsandcomplaints@elp.org.uk](mailto:concernsandcomplaints@elp.org.uk) within 10 Academy days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 2. Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The complainant should provide copies of all relevant documents and state all the grounds for escalation to Stage 3 and the outcome that is being sought.

This written request will be acknowledged within five Academy days of receipt.

The Complaints Committee will principally consider how the complaint was handled at Stage 2 but has discretion to review other aspects of the complaint as it sees fit. The Complaints Committee will not review any new concerns or complaints at this Stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint.

The Head of Governance and Policy will arrange for a Complaints Committee to be convened.

For Stage 3 complaints relating to an Academy the Committee will be made up of at least 3 Committee members, including:

- Governors of any Local Governing Body within the Trust with no prior involvement in the matter; and,
- One member of the panel must be independent of the management and running of the Academy (for example, this might be a Governor from another Academy within the Trust, a Governor from another local Academy/college or an educational professional who has no link to the Academy).

The Head of Governance and Policy shall appoint one of these committee members to be the chair of the Complaints Committee.

For Stage 3 complaints relating to members of the Central Team the Committee will be made up of at least 3 Committee members, including:

- 3 individuals from the Trust Executive Leadership Team and or/Senior Leadership Team with no prior involvement in this matter.

The Head of Governance and Policy shall appoint one of these committee members to be the chair of the Complaints Committee.

Every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within 15 Academy days of the receipt of the Stage 3 complaint.

As soon as reasonably practicable and in any event at least 5 Academy days before the hearing, the complainant will be sent written notification of the date, time, and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the committee members who will be present. Fair consideration will be given to any bona fide objection to a particular member of the Complaints Committee. You will also be informed of the name of the person who will be presenting the case on behalf of the Academy/Trust (referred to in this policy as the 'Academy/ Trust representative'). This may be the person who is the subject of the complaint, the person who undertook the investigation at Stage 2 and/or another person with sufficient knowledge of the matter.



If, despite best efforts, it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date and time for a hearing within a reasonable timeframe, the Head of Governance and Policy may determine that the hearing proceeds on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complainant has the right to be accompanied to the hearing by a friend, relative or interpreter. They should notify the Head of Governance and Policy in advance if they intend to bring anyone to the hearing. We do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the Complaints Committee hearing. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend. The Complaints Committee itself may take legal advice and/or be supported by a legal advisor at the hearing on matters of law and procedure.

A copy of the complaint and any other documents provided by you in support of the complaint, or by the Academy/Trust representative in defence of the complaint, will be provided to the Complaints Committee as soon as practicable upon receipt.

Copies of these documents shall also be provided to the complainant or Academy/Trust representatives (as applicable) at least 3 Academy days before the hearing. The Complaints Committee reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented by either party less than 3 Academy days prior to the hearing. The Complaints Committee is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from those other than the parties (e.g., witnesses) but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. The Complaints Committee will not normally accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The hearing will be conducted to ensure that each party has the opportunity to address the Complaints Committee. The procedure to be followed during the hearing will be explained to the parties by letter in advance of the hearing. The Head of Governance and Policy will ensure that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken, or actions agreed. Electronic recordings of the hearing will not normally be permitted and, in any event, would require the consent of all those present.

Unless otherwise stated, the procedure for the Stage 3 hearing is as follows:

- The complainant and Academy/Trust representative will enter the hearing together.
- The Chair of the Complaints Committee will introduce the committee members and outline the process.
- The complainant will explain the complaint.
- The Academy/Trust representative and committee members will question the parent.
- The Academy representative will explain the Academy/Trust's actions.
- The complainant and the committee members will question the Academy representative.
- The complainant will summarise up their complaint and define what outcome they are seeking.
- The Academy representative will sum up the Academy/Trust's actions.
- The Chair of the Complaints Committee will explain that both parties will hear from the committee within five Academy days.
- Both parties will leave together while the Complaints Committee decides.
- The Head of Governance and Policy, and any legal advisor assisting the Complaints Committee (if applicable), will stay to assist the Complaints Committee with its decision making.

The Head of Governance and Policy and/or Complaints Committee reserves the right to modify the above procedure at their sole discretion, for example requiring the complainant and the Academy representative to present their complaint/actions separately to the Complaints Committee in the absence of the other party.

If the complainant has not arrived by the start of the Complaints Committee, the Head of Governance and Policy will attempt to contact the complainant via telephone to ascertain if they are delayed, have chosen not to attend, or wish to withdraw their complaint. If the Head of Governance and Policy is unable to speak with the complainant, or if the complainant confirms that they have chosen not to attend, the hearing will proceed in

the complainant's absence 30 minutes after the scheduled start time. Findings and recommendations will be based on the written submissions previously provided by both parties.

The Complaints Committee may be adjourned if the Complaints Committee require further evidence, or in exceptional circumstances (for example, if clarification sought by the Complaints Committee is essential to the proceedings). The adjourned date must be as soon as possible.

After the hearing, the Complaints Committee will consider their decision and inform the complainant and, where relevant, the Academy/Trust about of their decision in writing within five Academy days. The letter will set out the decision of the Complaints Committee together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The Complaints Committee can (by a majority if necessary):

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- Recommend changes to the Academy or Trust systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

Where the complainant is not satisfied about the outcome of Stage 3 they have 10 Academy days after receipt of the outcome in which they can escalate to Stage 4, Executive and Directors Complaints Committee.

# Stage 4 – Trust Executive and Directors Complaints Committee





## 4.4 Stage 4: Referral to the Trust Executive and Director's Complaint Committee

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the decision under Stage 3, they have 10 Academy days upon receipt of the outcome of Stage 3 to formally request an escalation to Stage 4.

Stage 4 is the Trust Executive and Directors Complaint Committee. This committee will principally consider how the complaint was handled at the previous Stages but has discretion to review other aspects of the complaint as it sees fit. The Directors' Complaints Committee will not review any new complaints at this Stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint.

To escalate to Stage 4, the complainant must write to the Head of Governance and Policy via email [concernsandcomplaints@elp.org.uk](mailto:concernsandcomplaints@elp.org.uk) within 10 Academy days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 3. Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. You should ensure that you provide copies of all relevant documents and state all the grounds for your complaint and the outcome that you are looking for.

Your written request will be acknowledged within five Academy days of receipt.

The Head of Governance and Policy will arrange for a Directors' Complaints Committee to be convened.

For Stage 4 the Committee will be made up of at least 3 Committee members, including:

- Directors of the Trust with no prior involvement in the matter; and,
- CEO and/or Deputy CEO whomever has not been previously involved in Stages 1, 2 or 3.

The makeup of this committee will be the same whether the complaint is regarding an Academy or the Trust.

The Head of Governance and Policy shall appoint one of these committee members to be the chair of the Complaints Committee.

Every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within 15 Academy days of the receipt of the request.

As soon as reasonably practicable and in any event at least 5 Academy days before the hearing, the complainant will be sent written notification of the date, time, and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the committee members who will be present. Fair consideration will be given to any bona fide objection to a particular member of the Complaints Committee. You will also be informed of the name of the person who will be presenting the case on behalf of the Academy/Trust (referred to in this policy as the 'Academy/ Trust representative'). This may be the person who is the subject of the complaint, the person who undertook the investigation at Stage 2, members of the committee at Stage 3 and/or another person with sufficient knowledge of the matter.

If, despite best efforts, it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date and time for a hearing within a reasonable timeframe, the Head of Governance and Policy may determine that the hearing proceeds on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complainant has the right to be accompanied to the hearing by a friend, relative or interpreter. They should notify the Head of Governance and Policy in advance if they intend to bring anyone to the hearing. We do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the Complaints Committee hearing. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend. The Complaints Committee itself may take legal advice and/or be supported by a legal advisor at the hearing on matters of law and procedure.



A copy of the complaint and any other documents provided by you in support of the complaint, or by the Academy/Trust representative in defence of the complaint, will be provided to the Complaints Committee as soon as practicable upon receipt.

Copies of these documents shall also be provided to the complainant or Academy/Trust representatives (as applicable) at least 3 Academy days before the hearing. The Complaints Committee reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented by either party less than 3 Academy days prior to the hearing. The Complaints Committee is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from those other than the parties (e.g., witnesses) but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. The Complaints Committee will not normally accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The hearing will be conducted to ensure that each party has the opportunity to address the Complaints Committee. The procedure to be followed during the hearing will be explained to the parties by letter in advance of the hearing. The Head of Governance and Policy will ensure that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken, or actions agreed. Electronic recordings of the hearing will not normally be permitted and, in any event, would require the consent of all those present.

Unless otherwise stated, the procedure for the Stage 3 hearing is as follows:

- The complainant and Academy/Trust representative will enter the hearing together.
- The Chair of the Complaints Committee will introduce the committee members and outline the process.
- The complainant will explain the complaint.
- The Academy/Trust representative and committee members will question the parent.
- The Academy representative will explain the Academy/Trust's actions.
- The complainant and the committee members will question the Academy representative.
- The complainant will summarise up their complaint and define what outcome they are seeking.
- The Academy representative will sum up the Academy/Trust's actions.
- The Chair of the Complaints Committee will explain that both parties will hear from the committee within five Academy days.
- Both parties will leave together while the Complaints Committee decides.
- The Head of Governance and Policy, and any legal advisor assisting the Complaints Committee (if applicable), will stay to assist the Complaints Committee with its decision making.

The Head of Governance and Policy and/or Complaints Committee reserves the right to modify the above procedure at their sole discretion, for example requiring the complainant and the Academy representative to present their complaint/actions separately to the Complaints Committee in the absence of the other party.

If the complainant has not arrived by the start of the Complaints Committee, the Head of Governance and Policy will attempt to contact the complainant via telephone to ascertain if they are delayed, have chosen not to attend, or wish to withdraw their complaint. If the Head of Governance and Policy is unable to speak with the complainant, or if the complainant confirms that they have chosen not to attend, the hearing will proceed in the complainant's absence 30 minutes after the scheduled start time. Findings and recommendations will be based on the written submissions previously provided by both parties.

The Complaints Committee may be adjourned if the Complaints Committee require further evidence, or in exceptional circumstances (for example, if clarification sought by the Complaints Committee is essential to the proceedings). The adjourned date must be as soon as possible.

After the hearing, the Complaints Committee will consider their decision and inform the complainant and, where relevant, the Academy/Trust about of their decision in writing within five Academy days. The letter will

set out the decision of the Complaints Committee together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The Complaints Committee can (by a majority if necessary):

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- Recommend changes to the Academy or Trust systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

If, despite best efforts, it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date and time for a hearing within a reasonable timeframe, the Head of Governance and Policy may determine that the hearing proceeds on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

You have the right to be accompanied to the hearing by a friend, relative or interpreter. You should notify the Head of Governance and Policy in advance if you intend to bring anyone to the hearing. We do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the Directors' Complaints Committee hearing. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend. The Directors' Complaints Committee itself may take legal advice and/or be supported by a legal advisor at the hearing on matters of law and procedure.

A copy of the complaint and any other documents provided by you in support of your complaint, or by the Academy representative in defence of the complaint, will be provided to the Complaints Committee as soon as practicable upon receipt. Copies of these documents shall also be provided to you or Academy representatives (as applicable) at least 3 Academy days before the hearing. The Directors' Complaints Committee reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented by either party less than 3 Academy days prior to the hearing. The Directors' Complaints Committee is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from those other than the parties (e.g. witnesses) but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. The Directors' Complaints Committee will not normally accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The hearing will be conducted to ensure that each party has the opportunity to address the Directors' Complaints Committee. The procedure to be followed during the hearing will be explained to the parties by letter in advance of the hearing. The Head of Governance and Policy will ensure that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken, or actions agreed. Electronic recordings of the hearing will not normally be permitted and, in any event, would require the consent of all those present.

Unless otherwise stated, the procedure for the Stage 4 hearing is as follows:

- The parent and Academy representative will enter the hearing together.
- The Chair of the Directors' Complaints Committee will introduce the committee members and outline the process.
- The parent will explain the complaint.
- The Academy representative and Directors' committee members will question the parent.
- The Academy representative will explain the Academy/Trust's actions.
- The parent and the Directors' committee members will question the Academy representative.
- The parent will sum up their complaint.
- The Academy representative will sum up the Academy/Trust's actions.
- The Chair of the Complaints Committee will explain that both parties will hear from the committee within five Academy days.
- Both parties will leave together while the Complaints Committee decides.
- The Head of Governance and Policy, and any legal advisor assisting the Complaints Committee (if applicable), will stay to assist the Complaints Committee with its decision making.

The Head of Governance and Policy and/or Complaints Committee reserves the right to modify the above procedure at their sole discretion, for example requiring the parent and the Academy representative to present their complaint/actions separately to the Complaints Committee in the absence of the other party.

If the complainant has not arrived by the start of the Complaints Committee, the Head of Governance and Policy will attempt to contact the complainant via telephone to ascertain if they are delayed, have chosen not to attend, or wish to withdraw their complaint. If the Head of Governance and Policy is unable to speak with the complainant, or if the complainant confirms that they have chosen not to attend, the hearing will proceed in the complainant's absence 30 minutes after the scheduled start time. Findings and recommendations will be based on the written submissions previously provided by both parties.

A Directors' Complaints Committee may be adjourned if the Complaints Committee require further evidence, or in exceptional circumstances (for example, if clarification sought by the Complaints Committee is essential to the proceedings). The adjourned date must be as soon as possible.

After the hearing, the Directors' Complaints Committee will consider their decision and inform you and, where relevant, the person complained about of their decision in writing within five Academy days. The letter will set out the decision of the Complaints Committee together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The Directors' Complaints Committee can (by a majority if necessary):

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- Recommend changes to the Academy or Trust systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

# Stage 5 - Complaint to the Department for Education (DfE)





## **4.5 Stage 5: Referral of Complaint to the Department for Education (DfE)**

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the decision of the Complaints Committee at Stage 4, they are entitled to refer the complaint to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will only investigate the complaint in limited circumstances.

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>



## 5. Roles and responsibilities

### 5.1 The role of the Head of Governance and Policy

The Head of Governance and Policy is the contact point for the complainant and the Complaints Committee, and should:

- Ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each Stage of the procedure.
- Liaise with staff, /principal/executive principal, the deputy chief executive officer, chief executive officer, chair of Governors of an Academy and chair of the Directors board (as applicable) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure.
- Be mindful of the timescales for responding to complaints.
- Ensure that all people involved in the complaints process are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to Academy 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).
- Ensure that the Complaints Committee has access to legal advice, where appropriate.
- Set the date, time, and venue of the hearing, taking reasonable steps to find a date that is convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
- Collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: Stage 2 paperwork, Academy and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing within an agreed timescale.
- Ensure the hearing is formally minuted.
- Notify all parties of the Complaints Committee's decision.
- Assist the Academy/Trust in issuing a summary letter to the complainant.

### 5.2 The role of the Investigating Officer (the appointed person investigating the complaint) in accordance with the procedure at Stage 2

- To ensure that the complainant is fully updated throughout the Stage 2 procedure.
- To ensure that the correct procedure has been followed.
- To ensure that an investigation is carried out, and a report compiled.
- To meet the complainant, if appropriate.
- If the complaint is being referred to Stage 3, notify the Head of Governance and Policy of to arrange the Complaints Committee.

### 5.3 The role of the Chair of the Complaints Committee at Stage 3

The Chair of the Complaints Committee has a key role, ensuring that:

- The hearing 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 hearing are put at ease.
- The remit of the Complaints Committee is explained to the complainant;
- The 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).
- Key findings of fact are made, and that any issues not previously mentioned in writing should not be raised at the hearing and, if they are mentioned at the hearing, these should not be noted or considered by the Complaints Committee.
- Both the complainant and the Academy/Trust are given the opportunity to make their case, and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the hearing, or verbally in the hearing itself.
- The Complaints Committee is open-minded, acts independently, and no committee member has an external interest in the outcome, or any involvement in an earlier Stage of the procedure.
- The hearing is minuted.

## 5.4 The role of the Chair of the Complaints Committee at Stage 4

The Chair of the Complaints Committee has a key role, ensuring that:

- The hearing 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 hearing are put at ease.
- The remit of the Complaints Committee is explained to the complainant;
- The 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).
- Key findings of fact are made, and that any issues not previously mentioned in writing should not be raised at the hearing and, if they are mentioned at the hearing, these should not be noted or considered by the Complaints Committee.
- Both the complainant and the Academy/Trust are given the opportunity to make their case, and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the hearing, or verbally in the hearing itself.
- The Complaints Committee is open-minded, acts independently, and no committee member has an external interest in the outcome, or any involvement in an earlier Stage of the procedure.
- The hearing is minuted.

## 6. Part 2: Repetitious and vexatious complaints and complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

There are rare circumstances where we will deviate from the Complaints Procedure set out within this Policy. These include, but are not necessarily limited to:

### 6.1 Repetitious, including serial and/or persistent, complaints

Where the complainant's complaint is the same, similar to, or based on the same facts of a complaint which has already been considered in full and we have:

- Taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns; and
- Given the complainant a clear statement of our position and their options.

The Trust will write to the complainant to advise that the complaints procedure has been exhausted, and that we will not be responding to any further correspondence in relation to these matters. The complainant will be referred to Stage 5.

### 6.2 Vexatious complaints

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator defines the characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint as:

- Complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitious.
- Insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.
- Insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.
- Complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
- Demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value.
- Examples include but are not limited to:
- Refusal to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refusal to co-operate with the complainant's investigation process.
- Refusal to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure.
- Insistence on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complainant's procedure or with good practice.
- Introducing trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on.
- Raising large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insist they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced.
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Seeking an unrealistic outcome, such as the inappropriate dismissal of staff.
- Making excessive demands on Academy time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
- Knowingly providing falsified information.
- Publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

The Trust and/or its Legal Representatives will write to the complainant to advise that the Trust has determined the complaint to be vexatious and that we will not be responding to any further correspondence in relation to these matters. The complainant will be referred to Stage 5.



### 6.3 Complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

In the circumstances where the complainant's behaviour or language towards Staff, Governors, Directors or Members is aggressive, abusive, offensive, discriminatory or threatening or insulting personal comments are made about, or threats are made towards, staff the Trust or its Legal Representatives may:

- Inform the complainant that we consider their complaint to be vexatious or the manner in which they are pursuing their complaint to be unreasonable and why and ask them to desist.
- Conduct the Complaints Committee on the papers only, i.e. not hold a hearing.
- Refuse to consider the complaint any further and refer the complainant directly to Stage 5.

The Trust may also restrict the complainant's access to the Academy, e.g. requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only), requiring contact to take place with a named person only, restricting telephone calls to specified days and times or number of contacts, or banning the complainant from the Academy's premises in line with our Parent Code of Conduct.

Where the complainant's behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of Staff, Governors, Directors, or Members, we will consider other options, for example, reporting the matter to the police, or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

## 7. Part 3: Complaint campaigns

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint campaign is defined as a complaint from 3 or more separate individuals (whether or not connected with the Trust or any of its Academies), which are all based on the same subject.

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

- Send a template response to all complainants; and/or
- Publish a single response on the Academy's website (as applicable).

Policy Agreed: March 2026

Signed CEO:

Signed Chair of Directors:

Policy to be reviewed: September 2027



## Annex 1: Matters excluded from the scope of this policy

Excluded Matters	Signposting
Admissions	The process for challenging admissions decisions is set out in our admissions policy in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.
Child protection matters	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).
Data protection matters	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.
Exclusions	The process for challenging exclusions decisions is set out in the DfE’s statutory guidance, and information can be found at: Academy suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK ( <a href="http://www.gov.uk">www.gov.uk</a> )
Freedom of information matters	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.
Governor/Director grievances	Complaints from Directors and Governors will be dealt with by the Chair of Directors under the Trust’s internal governance procedures. This does not preclude Governors or Directors from raising complaints in their capacity as a parent.
National Curriculum content	Please contact the Department for Education at <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>
Academy re-organisation proposals	Where concerns are not adequately addressed by the Academy, complaints can be raised directly with the Department for Education.
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use Academy premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the Academy’s internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Certain complaints about staff may need to be dealt with under the Academy’s internal disciplinary 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.



Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)	Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with the local authority.
Whistleblowing	<p>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 whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters directly with their employer. Referrals can be made at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a></p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns should complain through the Academy's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain directly to the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of the complaint</p>



**Annex 2: Stage 1: Concern form**

<b>Concern Form</b>
<b>Your name:</b>
<b>Pupil/student's name:</b>
<b>Your relationship to pupils/students:</b>
<b>Your address and postcode:</b>
<b>Your daytime telephone number:</b>
<b>Your evening telephone number:</b>
<b>Your email address:</b>
<b>Your concern is:</b> (if you have more than one concern, please number these)
<b>What action have you already taken to try and resolve your concern(s)</b> (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)
<b>What would you like as an outcome from your concern(s)?</b>
<b>Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, give details here:</b>

Your signature..... Date .....

All functions of the concern and complaints procedure must adhere to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Please complete and return as outlined in the ELP Concern and Complaints Policy

Office Use Only:

Date received .....

Date acknowledgement sent .....

Responsible member of staff .....



## Annex 3: Stage 2 Complaints form

Complaints Form	
<b>Your name:</b>	
<b>Pupil/Student's name:</b>	
<b>Your relationship to Pupil/Student's:</b>	
<b>Your address and postcode:</b>	
<b>Your daytime telephone number:</b>	
<b>Your evening telephone number:</b>	
<b>Your email address:</b>	
<b>Your complaint is:</b> (if you have more than one complaint, please number these)	
<b>What action have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint(s) in accordance with the concern Stage of the Academy's complaints procedure?</b> (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)	
<b>What would you like as an outcome from your complaint(s)?</b>	
<b>Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, give details here:</b>	

Your signature..... Date .....

All functions of the concern and complaints procedure must adhere to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Please complete and return as outlined in the ELP Concern and Complaints Policy

Office Use Only:

Date received .....

Date acknowledgement sent .....

Responsible member of staff .....