

Complaints Procedure

February 2024 – February 2025



LDLT
LEEDS DIOCESAN
LEARNING TRUST



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Responsible Officer: CFO/CEO

Vision Statement

Serving and celebrating our unique schools and communities, we will love, live and learn together. Valuing our pupils, staff, governors and team as people of God, we will deliver transformational learning and the flourishing of all.

1. Statement of Intent

Leeds Diocesan Learning Trust is committed to transparency and a complete openness to receiving and hearing the concerns and complaints of parents, carers, employees, local academy councillors and directors. In the working life of a Trust, with all its different academies, there will be regular and constant exchanges between parents and staff, staff and staff, staff and local governors, governors and directors where clarity is being sought on a given issue. The language of 'concern' can often be used: 'I'm a bit concerned about my child's reading'; 'I've been concerned about my workload'; 'I asked you about my son's progress and haven't heard back from you yet and am concerned' and so on. These concerns are usually dealt with by conversation and clarifying matters in the moment and don't have to be recorded. If matters of this sort become an on-going concern then they should be resolved through what is termed an informal process but one that is covered by a policy. On occasion those concerns have to be raised to a more formal level and sometimes the formal route is deemed not to address the matter and has to be heard by a panel.

Leeds Diocesan Learning Trust ('LDLT') aims to resolve complaints at the earliest possible stage and, where possible, informally, and is dedicated to continuing to provide the highest quality of education possible in the academy throughout the procedure.

This policy has been created to handle complaints relating to any aspects of the provision of facilities or services against:

- An individual i.e. any member of staff (school or central Trust staff)
- The Trust
- A School within the Trust
- Local academy council members (individually or the whole LAC)
- Individual directors or the Board of Directors

This policy is to be used by parents or carers of children at an academy in the Trust who need to complain about the academy or employee of the academy. It is also to be used by staff at an academy or of the Trust who need to make a complaint about a fellow colleague or LAC or Trust Board member. It can also be used by a member of the public who seeks to make a complaint in relation to any of the categories in the bullet points above. It is designed to ensure that the Trust's complaints procedure is straightforward, impartial, non-adversarial, allows a full and fair investigation, respects confidentiality, and delivers an effective response and where appropriate, redress.

This policy outlines the procedure that the complainant and the Trust will follow. Once a complaint has been made, it can be resolved or withdrawn at any stage.

The CEO / Headteacher / LAC Chair / Chair of Board of Directors will delegate an appropriate person to be the first point of contact during the complaints procedure.

2. Legal Framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Education Act 2002
- Equality Act 2010
- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014
- Immigration Act 2016
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- HM Government (2016) 'Code of Practice on the English language requirement for public sector workers'
- ESFA (2021) 'Best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures'
- ESFA (2023) 'Academy trust handbook 2023'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- School's Admissions Policies
- LDLT Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- School's Behavioural Policies
- School's Exclusion Policies
- LDLT Whistleblowing Policy
- LDLT Grievance Policy
- LDLT Data Protection Policy

3. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, a “**complaint**” is defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction’ towards actions taken or a perceived lack of action. Complaints can be resolved formally or informally.

A “**concern**” is defined as ‘an expression of worry or doubt’ where reassurance is required. For the purpose of this policy, concerns will be classed and addressed as complaints.

Any complaint or concern will be taken seriously, whether raised formally or informally, and the appropriate procedures will be implemented.

The definition of “**unreasonable complaints**” is outlined in the [Managing unreasonable complaints](#) section of this policy.

For the purpose of this policy, “**duplicate complaints**” are identical complaints received from a complainant’s spouse, partner or child. These complaints will not be addressed again and the individual making the second complaint will be informed that the complaint has been dealt with on a local level. If the individual is dissatisfied with the result, they can appeal to the ESFA, as outlined in [The role of the ESFA](#) section of this policy. Any new details provided by a complainant’s spouse, partner or child, however, will be investigated and managed in line with the complaints procedure.

For the purpose of this policy, “**complaints campaigns**” are where the Trust, or an academy within the Trust, receives large volumes of complaints that are all based on the same subject.

For the purposes of this policy, having “**independence**” from the Trust and its academies is defined as having no association with the Trust, including through being a member, director or employee, and having no clear connection with any of the Trust’s academies, including through being an employee or solicitor. Independent panel members will meet the Trust’s and ESFA’s definition of independence.

“**Clerk to the Trust Board**” is the externally appointed Governance Professional who acts in this capacity.

4. Making a Complaint

Any person, including a member of the public, is able to make a complaint about the provision of facilities or services that the Trust provides. Complaints may also be made by a third party on behalf of a complainant, contingent on appropriate consent having been obtained to do so. All complaints made will be handled via the procedures outlined in this policy.

The Trust will not normally investigate anonymous complaints.

Individuals making complaints about issues relating to separate statutory procedures will be referred as follows:

- **Admissions** – referred to the appeals process outlined in the Admissions Policy.
- **Child protection** – referred to safeguarding procedures outlined in the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policies.
- **Exclusion** – referred to the procedures outlined in the Behavioural Policy and Exclusion Policy.
- **Whistleblowing** – referred to the internal whistleblowing procedures outlined in the Whistleblowing Policy.
- **Staff grievances** – referred to the internal grievance procedures outlined in the Grievance Policy.
- **Staff conduct** – referred to the internal disciplinary procedures.
- **Third-party suppliers using school premises or facilities** – referred to separate complaints procedures. The school will ensure any third-party supplier using school premises or facilities to offer community facilities or services has its own complaints procedures in place and such complaints do not fall within the scope of this policy.

All other complaints will be directed towards the procedures laid out in this policy.

Complainants may make informal complaints verbally in person or by telephone. It would be appropriate for those receiving the complaint or concern to clarify that the complainant is raising a complaint. Where the complainant wishes to make a formal complaint, it would be appropriate for the person receiving the complaint to ask the complainant to complete a Complaints Procedure Form, or to ask if one can be completed on their behalf.

Complaints are expected to be made as soon as possible after an incident arises to attend to the issue in an appropriate timescale. The Trust upholds a two school term

time limit from the date of the incident, or becoming aware of the incident which has lead to the complaint, in which a complaint can be lodged regarding an incident. Complaints made outside this time limit may be considered in exceptional circumstances. In the case of any timescales changing, all parties involved will be informed of the changes in a timely manner. Complaints received outside of term time will be treated as being received on the first school day after the holiday period.

A complaint can progress to the next stage of the procedure even if it is not viewed as “justified”. All complainants are given the opportunity to fully complete the complaints procedure.

5. Complaints about academy / Trust staff or directors / local academy councillors

Complaints against staff of an academy in the Trust will:

- Be dealt with by the headteacher of the academy.
- Follow the complaints procedure, including a panel hearing where applicable.

Complaints against a headteacher of an academy in the Trust will:

- Be dealt with by the chair of the Local Academy Council of the academy
- Follow the complaints procedure, including a panel hearing where applicable.

Complaints against Academy Councillors or Trust Directors will:

- Be made in writing to the clerk, who will arrange for them to be heard.
- Be dealt with by the chair of the academy council or the chair of directors, respectively.
- Potentially involve escalation to the Trust board to conduct an investigation – this will be managed by the CEO.
- Involve a panel hearing where applicable.

Complaints against the Chair of Directors or an entire local academy council will:

- Be made in writing to the clerk, who will determine the most appropriate course of action dependent on the nature of the complaint.

Complaints against the Board of Directors will:

- Be managed by the CEO.
- Follow the complaints procedure, including a panel (independent where necessary) hearing where applicable.

Complaints against the CEO will:

- Be dealt with by the Chair of Directors, with a panel hearing where applicable.

Complaints against the Trust will:

- Be managed by the CEO.
- Begin with stage two of the [complaints procedure](#) outlined in this policy, i.e. via a formal, written complaint.

6. Complaints escalated to the Trust

Where a complainant wishes to escalate their complaint to the Trust, the complaint will be managed by the CEO.

The clerk to the Board of Directors will write to the complainant to acknowledge their complaint within 15 days of receiving it. If appropriate, the CEO will investigate or assign someone to investigate the complaint and provide an initial response.

Where the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the initial response, they may write to the clerk to the Board of Directors to ask for the complaint to be held before a panel within 10 school working days. The clerk will record the date this complaint is received and will respond within 10 school working days. The panel hearing will be organised in accordance with stage three of the [complaints procedure](#).

If a complaint is escalated beyond the panel, its resolution may involve sourcing an independent investigator to deal with the complaint, agreed by Trust Audit and Risk Subcommittee. In exceptional circumstances, where it is necessary to deviate from the complaints procedure, this deviation will be appropriately documented.

Information about a complaint will not be disclosed to a third party without written consent from the complainant.

7. Roles and responsibilities

The complainant is responsible for:

- Cooperating with the Trust, or an academy within the Trust, in seeking a solution to the complaint.
- Expressing the complaint and their concerns in full at the earliest opportunity.
- Promptly responding to any requests for information and meetings.
- Treating any person (s) involved in the complaint with respect.

The role of the investigator will differ depending on the nature of the complaint and who it is directed at.

- For complaints against staff of academies in the Trust, the investigator will be the head teacher.
- For complaints against head teachers of academies in the Trust, the investigator will be the chair of the local academy council.
- For complaints against academy councillors, the investigator will be the Chair of the Local Academy Council.
- For complaints against directors, the investigator will be the Chair of Directors.
- For complaints against the chair of directors or an entire Academy Council, the CEO will appoint an appropriate person (who may be external to the Trust) to be the investigator.
- For complaints against the CEO, the investigator will be the Chair of Directors.

The investigator of the complaint is responsible for:

- Providing a sensitive and thorough interviewing process of the complainant to establish what has happened and who is involved.
- Asking the complainant if assistance is required.
- Considering all records, evidence and relevant information provided.

- Interviewing and making notes of the interviews with all parties that are involved in the complaint, including staff and pupils (a note taker may be used).
- Analysing all information in a comprehensive and fair manner.
- Liaising with the complainant and clarifying an appropriate resolution to the problem.
- Identifying and recommending solutions and courses of actions to take.
- Being mindful of timescales and ensuring all parties involved are aware of these timescales.
- Responding to the complainant in a clear and understandable manner.

Where complaints are escalated to a panel hearing, all complaints panel members will be aware that:

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

The panel chair will:

- Ensure that minutes of the hearings are taken on every occasion.
- Explain the remit of the panel to the complainant.
- Ensure that all matters raised by the complainant are referenced and addressed and that outcomes are reached based on facts and evidence. Where a matter is outside of the scope of the panel hearing to investigate that it is identified as such by the Chair.
- Help to put at ease and console individuals involved who are not used to speaking at such hearings, particularly any pupils involved. This may include giving prior permission for the complainant to bring along a friend (as support) or an interpreter if requested.
- Conduct the hearing in a manner that ensures everyone is treated with respect and courtesy.
- Ensure that the room's layout and setting is non-adversarial, yet still sets the appropriate tone.
- Confirm that no member of the panel has previously been involved in the earlier stages of the procedure or has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings.
- Give both the complainant and the academy / Trust the opportunity to state their case and seek clarity without undue interruption.

- Provide copies of any written material or evidence to everyone in attendance of the meeting, ensuring that everyone has seen the necessary material.
- Organise a short adjournment of the hearing if required.
- Continuously liaise with the clerk to ensure the procedure runs smoothly.
- Help to provide the support necessary where the complainant is a child.

8. Complaints procedure

This policy is implemented on a Trust-wide level. The Trust will ensure that the complaints procedure is:

- Easily accessible and publicised on its website.
- Simple to understand and put into practice.
- Impartial and fair to all parties involved.
- Respectful of confidentiality duties.
- Continuously under improvement, using input from the SLTs of all individual academies within the Trust.
- Fairly investigated, by an independent person where necessary.
- Used to address all issues to provide appropriate and effective responses where necessary.

The procedure will consist of three stages:

- **Informal** – Stage 1
- **Formal** – Stage 2
- **Panel hearing** – Stage 3

The majority of concerns and complaints are addressed through a Stage 1 procedure. At each stage, complainants will be informed of their options for escalation if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint. The appropriate person will communicate the details of the next stage of the process when delivering the outcome of the current stage, where applicable.

To prevent later challenge or disagreement over what was said in any in-person meetings or telephone conversations at any stage of the procedure, brief notes will be kept, and a copy of any written response will be added to the record of the complaint. Notes and paper copies of any complaints and/or responses are kept securely on each academy's ICT system, or on the central Trust ICT system where the complaint is against the Trust as a whole or a member of the Board of Directors.

8.1 Stage one – raising an informal concern/complaint

An informal complaint can be made in person, by telephone or in writing. It is preferred that initial, informal complaints are heard via an in-person meeting.

Where a complaint has been made about a member of staff in an academy, the complainant should discuss the concern with the headteacher, or a person delegated by the head teacher to hear the complaint on their behalf. If the concern is about the headteacher, then the chair of the academy council should be informed and will need to handle the complaint. The complainant could then be referred to the chair of directors.

Where a complaint is made initially to the CEO, or a member of the Trust central team or a Trust Board director, the complainant will be referred to the appropriate person to manage the complaint. No member of staff or director must act alone on a complaint outside of the procedure; if they do, they cannot be involved if the complaint is subject to a hearing at a later stage of the procedure.

Within **10** school working days of notification of the complaint, the complainant and the relevant member of staff should discuss the issue in a respectful and informal manner to seek a mutual resolution.

At this initial communication stage of the complaint, the complainant will be asked for their input as to what they believe may resolve the issue about which the complaint has been made to avoid further escalation where possible.

If an appropriate resolution cannot be sought at this informal level, or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome following the initial discussions, the person managing the response to the complaint will inform the complainant about the next level of the procedure.

8.2 Stage two – formal complaint

Formal complaints must be made in writing via the Complaints Procedure Form.

Stage two of the process will be completed within 15 school working days. Where the situation is recognised as complex, and it is deemed to be unable to be resolved within this timescale, the person managing the complaint will contact the complainant via a written notification to inform them of the revised target date.

An appointment with the appropriate person for managing the complaint should be made, as soon as reasonably practical, to avoid any possible worsening of the situation.

If the complaint is against the headteacher, the complainant will initially need to write, in confidence, to the chair of the academy council. The chair will seek to resolve the issue by arranging a meeting with the complainant within 15 days.

Where the appropriate person has made reasonable attempts to accommodate the complainant with dates for a complaint meeting and they refuse or are unable to attend, the meeting will be convened in their absence and a conclusion will be reached in the interests of drawing the complaint to a close.

In terms of a complaint being made against a member of staff, the headteacher will discuss the issue with the staff member in question. Where necessary, the headteacher will conduct interviews with any relevant parties, including witnesses and pupils, and take statements from those involved. All discussions shall be recorded by the headteacher. The complainant will be provided with copies of minutes, subject to any necessary redactions to comply with the proper use of “personal data”. Once all facts are established the findings and resolutions will be communicated to the complainant in writing. Any further action the Trust plans to take to resolve the issue will also be explained to the complainant in writing. The complainant will be advised of any escalation options (e.g., escalation to stage three) and will be provided with details of this process.

A request to escalate to stage three will be made to the clerk to the Board of Directors within 10 school working days of the end of stage two, i.e. the date of the communication of an outcome.

8.3 Stage three – panel hearing

Where the complaint progresses to stage three, a panel will be constituted by the clerk to the Trust Board to hear the complaint, consisting of at least three individuals who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, where at least one is an independent panel member. Where the complaint concerns an individual academy, the independent panel member will have no clear connection with that academy, such as having conducted work for the academy. Where possible, the independent panel member will also have no association with the Trust. Where this is not possible, however, and the complaint concerns an individual academy, in line with the ESFA's guidance, an academy councillor serving on the Academy Council of a different academy within the Trust may occupy this role, as they will be sufficiently separate from the academy being complained about.

The clerk will record the date the escalation request was received, acknowledge receipt of the complaint, and inform the complainant of the scheduled time and date of the panel hearing in writing. The meeting will be convened within 15 days of the receipt of the escalation request where possible. Where this is not possible, the clerk will provide an anticipated date and ensure the complainant is kept up-to-date.

5 days' notice will be given to all parties attending the panel hearing, including the complainant.

Prior to the hearing, the clerk will write to the complainant informing them of how the review will be conducted. It would be usual for the headteacher of the academy in question, the chair of the Academy Council and the chair of directors will also have a copy of this letter. It is acknowledged that the stage three process could be between: a parent/carer and a head teacher / academy / academy council; member of academy staff and a head teacher; members of academy staff; head teacher and the Trust; or other permutations. The clerk therefore has to determine the most appropriate way of managing the stage three process.

At the hearing, all participants will be given the opportunity to put their case across and discuss any issues. It may be that individual meetings are held between the panel and the different sides in the complaint as part of the process. It is envisaged that the hearing would, wherever possible, include the complainant being able to discuss the case with the object of their complaint. If the hearing is unable to be conducted in person due to exceptional circumstances it may be held virtually by video call. The meeting will allow for:

- The complainant to be present and accompanied at the hearing if they wish. The identity of the companion must be agreed by the Chair in advance and they will be able to act in a supportive role but not speak on the complainant's behalf (unless agreed in exceptional circumstances before the hearing).
- The complainant to explain their complaint and the individual handling the complaint to determine how the complaint will be heard and explain the reasons for their decision.

- The complainant to question the individual handling the complaint, and vice versa, about the complaint.
- Any evidence, including witnesses who have been prior approved by the chair of the panel, to be questioned.
- Members of the panel to question both the complainant and the individual about whom the complaint was made.
- Final statements to be made by both parties involved.

Neither the complainant nor the Trust will bring legal representation to this hearing, unless in exceptional circumstances, where this will be agreed beforehand. A member of staff who may be a witness to the complaint can bring a union representative or legal representative if desired; this will be agreed before the hearing.

The purpose of the hearing will be to hear the complaint, report on the findings and make recommendations for improvements where things have gone wrong.

The complainant will receive a written response explaining the panel's findings and recommendations within 15 school days. This decision will be the final stage in the complaint's procedure subject to any submission to the ESFA below.

The panel will make findings and recommendations, and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be made available for inspection on the academy premises by the Board of Directors and the headteacher. Where recommendations are made of the Trust then these will be shared with the CEO or Chair of Trust Board.

Where relevant, the person complained about will receive a summary of the panel's findings and recommendations. They will also receive a copy of the minutes, subject to any necessary redactions to comply with the proper use of "personal data".

9. The role of the ESFA

If a complainant remains dissatisfied once the complaint procedure has been completed, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State. If a complainant wishes to escalate a complaint, the Trust will refer them to the relevant contact form, and prompt them to follow the instructions on this form to submit a complaint to the Secretary of State.

Please note, the ESFA will not overturn the Trust or panel's decision about a complaint or re-investigate the original complaint. The ESFA will only intervene following a complaint if it believes the Trust has:

- Breached a clause in its funding agreement.
- Failed to comply with education law or acted unreasonably when exercising related education functions.

When making a final decision about a complaint, the Trust reserves the right to seek advice from the ESFA on whether they are acting reasonably and lawfully; however, the ESFA will not be able to advise on how to resolve the complaint.

In line with ESFA guidance, complainants should note that any acknowledgement by the Trust that it could have handled the situation better is not an admission of unlawful or negligent action.

10. Complaints to the ESFA

If a complainant has exhausted the Trust's complaints procedure, they will be advised that they can submit a complaint to the ESFA via www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure or by writing to:

Complaints Team
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
Coventry
Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

Please note that the ESFA will only consider complaints that fall into the following areas; where an academy (extract from ESFA website [How ESFA handles complaints about academies - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure)):

- “does not have a complaints procedure
- did not provide a copy of its complaints procedure when requested
- does not have a procedure that complies with statutory regulations
- has not followed its published complaints procedure
- has not allowed its complaints procedure to be completed

The ESFA are not able to:

- overturn the governing body's decision
- re-investigate your original complaint
- review the accuracy of minutes taken or documents provided
- order the academy to pay you compensation
- direct the academy to discipline / exclude pupils
- force the academy to discipline / dismiss staff
- instruct the academy to apologise to you”

11. Resolving complaints

At each stage of the complaints procedure, the Trust is committed to resolving the complaint. Where appropriate, the Trust will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, and may in those circumstances offer one of the following:

- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been handled better
- An assurance that the Trust will try and ensure the incident will not occur again
- An outline 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 changes will be made
- An undertaking to review Trust policies in light of the complaint
- An apology

12. Withdrawal of a complaint

Where a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, the Trust will ask them to confirm this in writing. Despite the complaint having been withdrawn, the Trust and academy will still take the complainant's voice seriously and attempt to avoid causing similar distress to others in the future. The Trust and academy will not under any circumstances ask, or pressure an individual, to withdraw a complaint.

13. Record keeping

A written record will be kept of all complaints that are made, whether made via phone, in person or in writing, regardless of the stage at which they are resolved, including any action taken by the Trust as a result of those complaints whether they are upheld or not, detailing:

- The main issues raised, the findings and any recommendations.
- Whether the complaint was resolved following an informal route, formal route or panel hearing.
- Actions taken by the Trust as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint was upheld).

All records are made available for inspection on the academy premises by the Trust. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or an inspectorate requests access to them.

Trust schools will retain records of complaints and related documents in line with the Data Protection Policy and Data Retention Schedule. Personal data will only be kept for as long as necessary.

Details of any complaint made shall not be shared with the entire board of directors. The exception to this is when a complaint is made against the whole board and they need to be aware of the allegations made against them to respond to any independent investigation.

Complainants have a right to access copies of these records under the UK GDPR and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection requests to access them.

Where a school (head, LAC) receives a complaint then they are to notify the CEO / CFO that a process has been undertaken, but no details are to be shared.

14. Interviewing Witnesses

When interviewing pupils to gather information regarding a complaint, the interview should be conducted in the presence of another member of staff or, in the case of serious complaints, e.g. where the possibility of criminal investigation exists, in the presence of

their parents. All pupils interviewed will be made fully aware of what the interview concerns and their right to have someone with them.

The Trust will ensure that the conducting of interviews does not prejudice an LA designated officer's (LADO) or police investigation.

The Trust understands the importance of ensuring a friendly and relaxed area which is free from intimidation. Staff are allowed a colleague to support them at their interview. The colleague must not be anyone likely to be interviewed themselves, including their line manager. The interviewer will not express opinions in words or attitude, so as to not influence the interviewee. The interviewee will sign a copy of the transcription of the interview.

15. Recording a complaint

The Trust holds the right to use recording devices, where appropriate, to ensure all parties involved are able to review the discussions at a later date. Where there are communication difficulties or disabilities, the Trust may provide recording devices to ensure the complainant is able to access and review the discussions at a later point.

Recording devices will not be used without the prior consent of all parties.

The Trust will not accept as evidence any recordings that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

16. Exceptional circumstances

The ESFA expects complainants to have completed the Trust's complaints procedure before directing a complaint to them. The exceptions to this include when:

- Pupils are at risk of harm.
- Pupils are missing education.
- A complainant is being prevented from having their complaint progressed through the Trust's complaints procedure.
- The ESFA has evidence that the Trust is proposing to act or is acting unlawfully or unreasonably.

If a social services authority decides to investigate a situation, the Board of Directors may postpone the complaints procedure.

17. Managing unreasonable complaints

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

For the purposes of this policy, "**unreasonable complaints**" include:

- Vexatious complaints, which:
 - Are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, or repetitious.
 - Insist upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.

- Insist upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.
- Are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
- Demand for redress which lacks any serious purpose or value.
- Serial or persistent complaints, which:
 - Are duplicated, sent by the same complainant once the initial complaint has been closed.
 - Are new complaints that are submitted additionally, as part of an existing open complaint, by the same complainant.
- A complaint may also be regarded as unreasonable when the complainant:
 - 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 cooperate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
 - Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure.
 - Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
 - Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
 - Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced.
 - Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
 - Repeatedly makes the same complaint despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed.
 - Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the Trust's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the ESFA.
 - Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
 - Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
 - Raises complaints about school or Trust personnel who have left the employment of the Trust beyond the permitted timescale for reviewing a complaint.
- A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the complainant:
 - Acts maliciously or aggressively.
 - Uses threats, intimidation or violence.
 - Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language.
 - Knows the complaint to be false.
 - Uses falsified information.

- Publishes unacceptable information in media such as social media websites and newspapers.

The above applies regardless of the method the complaint is made, e.g. face-to-face, by telephone, in writing or electronically.

Complainants should limit the number of communications with the Trust while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent, either by letter, phone, email or text, as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the member of staff, local governor or director leading the response to a complaint will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

Serial or persistent complaints will only be marked as 'serial' once the complainant has completed the complaints procedure. It is the complaint that will be marked as 'serial', meaning the complainant can complain about a separate issue if necessary.

If the behaviour continues, the individual handling the complaint will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the Trust or any of its academies causing a significant level of disruption, the Trust may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after six months.

A decision to stop responding will only be considered in circumstances where the following statements are true:

- Every reasonable step has been taken to address the complainant's concerns
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the Trust's position and their options
- The complainant contacts the Trust or any of its academies repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

If the above criteria are met, in making a decision to stop responding, the Trust will also consider if the complainant is often abusive or aggressive in their communication, makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff, or if the Trust believes their intent is to disrupt or inconvenience the Trust or its academies.

The Trust will not stop responding to a complainant on the basis that they are difficult to deal with or they ask complex questions.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from the premises.

18. Complaints campaigns

Where the Trust or one of its schools becomes the subject of a complaints campaign from complainants who are not connected with the Trust, a standard, single response will be published on the Trust (or school's) website.

If the Trust/school receives a large number of complaints about the same subject from complainants who are connected to the Trust, e.g. parents, each complainant will receive an individual response.

If complainants remain dissatisfied with the Trust or school's response, they will be directed to the ESFA.

19. Barring from the premises

School premises are private property and therefore any individual may be barred from entering the premises.

If an individual's behaviour is cause for concern, the headteacher of the relevant academy will ask the individual to leave the premises.

The headteacher will notify the parties involved in writing, explaining that their implied licence for access to the premises has been temporarily revoked and why, subject to any representations that the individual may wish to make. The individual involved will be given the opportunity to formally express their views regarding the decision to bar them.

This decision to bar will be reviewed by the chair of the Academy Council, or the chair of directors where escalated, taking into account any discussions following the incident. If the decision is made to continue the bar, the individual will be contacted in writing, informing them of how long the bar will be in place, and when the decision will be reviewed.

Anyone wishing to make a complaint regarding a barring order can do so in writing, including via email, to the headteacher or chair of the Academy Council.

20. Standard of fluency complaints

As members of a public authority, all staff are subject to the fluency duty imposed by the Immigration Act 2016, which requires staff members to have an appropriate level of fluency in English in order to teach pupils.

The Trust is free to determine the level of spoken communication necessary in order for staff members to develop effective performance, but it will be matched to the demands of the role in question.

The Trust will be satisfied that an individual has the necessary level of fluency appropriate for the role they will be undertaking, whether this is an existing or potential new member of staff.

If a member of the school community feels that a staff member has insufficient proficiency in spoken English for the performance of their role, they are required to follow the [complaints procedure](#) outlined in this policy.

For the purpose of this policy, a "**legitimate complaint**" is one which is about the standard of spoken English of a member of staff; complaints regarding an individual's accent, dialect, manner or tone of communication are not considered legitimate complaints. All legitimate complaints regarding the fluency duty will be handled in line with the processes detailed in this policy.

In addition to the processes outlined in this policy, the Trust will assess the merits of a legitimate complaint against the necessary standard of spoken English fluency required for the role in question.

To assess the merits, the academy at which the staff member works will undertake an objective assessment against clear criteria set out in the role specification or, against the level of fluency descriptors relevant to the role in question.

If the complaint is upheld, the Trust will consider what action is necessary to meet the fluency duty; this may include:

- Specific training
- Specific re-training
- Assessment
- Re-deployment
- Dismissal

Appropriate support will be provided to staff to ensure that they are protected from vexatious complaints and are not subjected to unnecessary fluency testing.

Records of complaints regarding fluency will be kept in accordance with the processes outlined in the [Recording a complaint](#) section of this policy.

21. Transferring data

When a pupil changes school, the pupil's educational record will be transferred to the new school and no copies will be kept.

The Trust will hold records of complaints separate to pupil records while a complaint is ongoing, so that access to these records can be maintained.

Information that the Trust retains relating to a complaint will be stored securely and in line with its Records Management Policy.

22. Availability

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

23. Monitoring and review

The complaints procedure will be reviewed **annually**, taking into account any legislative changes and the latest guidance issued by the DfE or ESFA.

Responsibility for reviewing the procedure belongs to the board of directors.

Information gathered through reviewing the complaints procedure will be used to continuously improve and develop the process.

The monitoring and reviewing of complaints will be used to help evaluate each academy's performance, and the performance of the Trust as a whole.

Headteachers of each school will inform Academy Councillors of the number of complaints received in their termly report, this report will include numbers but no identifying details.

Appendix 1 Complaints Procedure Form

If you have completed stage 1 of the policy and need to take the matter further, i.e. request a stage 2 process, please complete this form and send it to the headteacher. If your complaint is against the headteacher, you will need to send the form to the chair of the Local Academy Council.

Your Name:	Address:
Daytime telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
Email:	Postcode:
When did you first discuss your concern or complaint with a member of staff, what was the concern about and at what date did your stage 1 process complete?	
What was the result of the stage 1 discussion?	
What is your stage 2 complaint concerning, and what action would you like the headteacher (or where appropriate the Chair of the Local Academy Council) to take?	
Signed:	Date:

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