Complaints Policy

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Author	Lisa Taylor, Governance Professional
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1. Aims

Kingfisher Schools Trust values and respects the voice of our community. We take complaints seriously and welcome feedback as part of our ongoing commitment to continuous improvement, ensuring we provide the best for our pupils. It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. We aim to address complaints and concerns informally whenever possible, fostering strong and positive relationships between all parties throughout this process. If this is not possible, a formal procedure can be initiated. This policy outlines how we meet our statutory requirements in managing complaints and ensures the process is supportive for all parties involved.

This policy will address both concerns and complaints raised. A concern is defined as: an expression of worry or doubt regarding an issue deemed important, for which reassurance is sought. A complaint is defined as: an expression of dissatisfaction, made in any form, regarding actions taken or a lack of action.

When responding to complaints or concerns, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Make sure any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school and trust improvement evaluation processes
- Give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full

We ask that all parties involved in this process support the procedure and act in a way that contributes to achieving a satisfactory outcome.

We will ensure the policy is widely publicised and available on our website, as well as on the websites of our schools. A paper copy can also be provided upon request through the school office.

Throughout the process, we will remain sensitive to the needs of all parties involved and will make any reasonable adjustments necessary to accommodate individuals. Examples of reasonable adjustments may include providing materials in accessible formats, offering additional support for those with language barriers, arranging meetings at accessible locations, or allowing for extra time in meetings for those who require it.

This policy is designed to cover the treatment of complaints raised by **parents and carers** with confirmed parental responsibility **for current pupils** within Kingfisher Schools Trust.

<u>Third Party Complaints:</u>

We take all complaints seriously, including those submitted by third parties and members of the public, and are committed to handling them fairly. Please note that such complaints may be reviewed outside of the formal complaint's procedure. Depending on the nature of the concerns raised, it may be determined that the formal complaints procedure outlined in Section 6 will not be applied. However, we will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within **5 school days**, assess how to proceed, and decide whether an investigation is necessary. You will be informed of the **outcome within 30 school days** of the complaint being received. All other sections of the policy remain in place. While we don't typically investigate anonymous complaints, following a review of the concerns raised we will decide whether the nature of the complaint justifies further investigation.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale. If a complainant commences legal action against the school or trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

If we decide that we are unable to consider your complaint, we will write to you within three academy weeks following the receipt of your complaint and explain why. In some circumstances, we may decide that your concern(s) should be considered using another policy or procedure (see section 3).

2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents/carers of pupils in our trust.

It is also based on best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures published by the Department for Education.

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework with regards to dealing with complaints about the trust's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements.

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

3. Scope

This policy does **not** cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline
- Withdrawal from the curriculum (parents and carers can withdraw their child from any aspect of religious education, including the daily act of collective worship. They do not have to explain why)

Please refer to our separate policies for procedures related to these types of complaints and consult Appendix 1 for further guidance on the appropriate process to follow in each case.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use trust premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school or trust throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Be as specific as possible about the nature of their concern or complaint, including what the issue is and what outcome or resolution they are seeking.
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not approach individual Academy Council Members about the complaint. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at stage 3 of the procedure.
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media
- Please respect the confidentiality of this process and any outcomes. Additionally, be aware that there may be circumstances where we are bound by a duty of confidentiality to others and, as a result, may be unable to share specific details about any actions taken.

4.2 The investigator

Where an investigation is deemed appropriate, an individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report, which includes the facts and potential solutions

4.3 The complaints co-ordinator (School Support Manager / Trust Complaints Co-ordinator)

The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the headteacher, chair of the Academy Council/trustees, clerk and CEO and chair of trustees
- Be aware of issues relating to sharing third-party information
- Arrange for any additional support needed by complainants; for example, interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- Keep records

4.4 Clerk to Complaints Panel

Where a panel is deemed necessary the clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

4.5 Committee chair

Where a panel is deemed necessary the committee chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

5. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

5.1 Timescales

The complainant must raise the complaint **within 3 months of the incident**. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident. We will consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

5.2 Managing unreasonable behaviour

Kingfisher Schools Trust and its schools are committed to handling all complaints fairly, impartially, and in a timely manner. We aim to provide a high standard of service to all individuals who raise concerns with us. In most cases, we will not place restrictions on communication between complainants and our schools. However, we have a duty to ensure the wellbeing of our staff and will not tolerate behaviour that is abusive, offensive, or threatening. Where such behaviour occurs, appropriate action will be taken to protect staff.

Section 9 of this policy outlines what constitutes serial and unreasonable complaints, as well as the steps that may be taken in response. These measures will be applied only in exceptional circumstances and where the specific criteria are met. Expectations regarding the conduct of parents and carers are detailed in the Kingfisher Schools Parent Code of Conduct.

5.3 Meetings

Complaint meetings will normally take place in person, but may be held virtually at the Trust's discretion (via the Trust's Complaints Co-Ordinator) in exceptional circumstances, to support attendance by the complainant. When deciding whether to hold a complaint meeting virtually, the Trust will consider whether:

- All participants agree to the use of remote access;
- All participants have access to the necessary technology to hear and speak throughout the meeting, and to see and be seen, if a live video link is used;
- All participants are able to express their views and fulfil their roles; and
- The meeting can be conducted fairly and transparently via remote access.

If there are concerns regarding any of the above, the Trust will aim to hold the meeting in person and/or facilitate access to appropriate technology.

Recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted, unless required due to a complainant's disability or specific needs. In such cases, all parties must agree in advance to the meeting or conversation being recorded. This policy applies to all meetings held with school staff. Recordings made covertly and without the informed consent of all parties will not be accepted as evidence.

5.4 Withdrawing a complaint

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

5.5 Complaints about our fulfilment of early years requirements

We will investigate all written complaints relating to the trust's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements, and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. Schools will keep a record of the complaint (see section 10) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that a school is not meeting Early Year Foundation Stage requirements, by:

- Calling 0300 123 4666
- Emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
- Using the online contact form available at https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts

Schools will notify parents and carers if they become aware that they are to be inspected by Ofsted. Schools will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

6. Stages of complaint

(not complaints against the trust, CEO or trustees)

We have adopted a 3-stage process for dealing with complaints:

- Stage 1 – informal resolution
- Stage 2 – formal investigation
- Stage 3 – panel hearing

Wherever possible, we aim to resolve complaints at Stage 1 through early and informal resolution, before moving to the formal stages of the process.

At each stage in the procedure, If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Once the complaint process has started, no new complaints may be added to the existing case. If a new issue arises, a separate complaint must be initiated. However, at any stage, the person responsible for managing the case may, at their discretion, decide to consider additional issues as part of the ongoing complaint if deemed

appropriate.

6.1 Stage 1: informal resolution

We make every effort to address any concerns or complaints early through informal measures. The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible within the timescales set out in section 5.1. When raising a complaint or concern, we ask that complainants provide as much detail as possible, including a clear description of the issue and what they believe would be a suitable resolution. The complaint should be addressed to the relevant member of school staff or the headteacher, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact their school office (details can be found on the school website)

We encourage parents to raise concerns with the member of staff they feel is best placed to help, which may not always be the headteacher. Wherever possible, please speak with a staff member you have a trusted relationship with. Alternatively, please use the guidance below to help direct your concern appropriately:

- **Complaint regarding another child** - Direct to the form tutor, class teacher, or head of year.
- **Complaint regarding a school policy or procedure** - Direct to the head of year or subject leader.
- **Complaint regarding a member of staff** - Direct to the Headteacher (who may delegate to a member of the Senior Leadership Team).

If your complaint concerns the Headteacher or a member of the Academy Council, please contact the Trust's Complaints Co-Ordinator, Lisa Taylor at **l.taylor@kingfisherschools.co.uk**. The Complaints Co-Ordinator will review the concern and either handle the Stage 1 process directly or delegate to an appropriate individual. This may include a member of the Academy Council, a member of the Trust's Senior Leadership Team, or a Trustee.

We will acknowledge all informal complaints within **three school days**, confirming how the Trust intends to proceed. This acknowledgment will include an indication of the anticipated timescale for resolution. As part of the informal process, a meeting may be arranged between the complainant and a relevant member of school staff to discuss and support resolution of the concern.

Within **ten school days** of either the informal meeting or receipt of the complaint—whichever occurs later—a **verbal or written response will be provided** to summarise the complaint and confirm any agreed steps and outcome.

In all cases, a record of the complaint will be logged within internal systems.

A complaint can only be escalated to the formal stage of the complaints procedure **once the informal stage has been fully exhausted** and the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome.

Our schools are committed to continuous improvement and to ensuring concerns are addressed appropriately. Where deemed necessary, staff may escalate a concern to the formal stage of the procedure, even if the parent or carer has not requested this action at that time.

6.2 Stage 2: formal investigation

The formal stage requires the complainant to submit their complaint in writing using the **Kingfisher School Trust Complaint Form**. This should include details such as:

- Details of the complaint, including what has happened from the complainant's perspective at Stage 1
- Relevant dates and times
- What the complainant believes would resolve the complaint

The completed form should be submitted along with any supporting documentation.
Please see Appendix 2 for the complaint form (copies are available from the school office).

Addressing the complaint

Complaints not involving the headteacher or a member of the Academy Council should be directed to School Support Manager. This can be done by:

- Email: via the school office
- Letter addressed delivered to the school office

Complaints involving the headteacher or any member of the Academy Council should be directed the Trust's Complaints Co-Ordinator. This can be done by:

- Email: l.taylor@kingfisherschools.co.uk
- Letter addressed to, Lisa Taylor – Prospect House, Loddon Business Park, Little Money Road, Loddon, Norfolk NR146JD

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office for support.

Investigation

The complainant will receive written acknowledgement of their complaint within **three school days**.

The School Support Manager or Trust Complaints Co-ordinator will consider the written submission from the complainant and, based on the views of all parties, assess whether the Stage 1 process has been exhausted or if escalation is appropriate. In the rare instance that escalation is not deemed appropriate, this will be fully communicated to the complainant—either outlining why the complaint will not be considered further, or setting out a plan to explore the complaint through Stage 1 in line with policy

The Headteacher will conduct their own investigation, either personally or by delegating the task to an appropriate individual with suitable experience and expertise. If the complaint concerns the Headteacher or a member of the Academy Council, the Trust Complaints Coordinator will either carry out the investigation themselves or delegate it to a suitably qualified person. This may include a member of the senior leadership team (including from another school within the Trust), a trustee, or the CEO.

An independent investigator, with no prior knowledge of the case and able to act without bias, will be appointed to lead the investigation. This independent person may be a member of school or Trust staff, provided they have had no prior involvement in the matter and can act impartially. The investigator may arrange meetings or interviews with the complainant and any relevant staff or witnesses to gather evidence and will review any relevant correspondence, documentation and policies.

An investigation report is then prepared, setting out the findings, conclusions, and any recommended actions. While the outcome is usually communicated **within 20 school days**, this timeline may be extended if meetings cannot be scheduled in time to complete the investigation. In such cases, the outcome will be provided within **five school days of the final meeting**. The complainant will be kept informed of progress throughout the process.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the School Support Manager or the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator — depending on who oversaw the Stage 2 process — in writing **within 20 school days** of receiving the outcome letter from the Stage 2 investigation. The complainant must submit a written request indicating that they are dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 (formal investigation) and wish to escalate the complaint to the next stage.

6.3 Stage 3: review panel

Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal stage.

The request to escalate to stage 3 should include a clear explanation of the reasons for their dissatisfaction, which may include, but are not limited to:

- A belief that the complaint was not handled in accordance with the school's complaints procedure
- Concerns that relevant evidence was not properly considered
- Disagreement with the conclusions reached or the actions taken

If the complainant has new and relevant evidence that was not considered during Stage 2, they are encouraged to include it in their submission. However, this is not mandatory and escalation may proceed based solely on dissatisfaction with the Stage 2 outcome.

The complaints panel will review how the complaint was handled in the earlier stages to determine whether the process was followed correctly and fairly. The panel will not re-investigate the original complaint but will consider whether the procedures were properly applied, whether the decisions made were reasonable based on the evidence, and whether the grounds for the appeal are valid. This stage provides an opportunity to assess the handling of the complaint rather than revisit its substance.

Convening the panel

The panel will be appointed by, or on behalf of, the Trust and must consist of at least three individuals who have not been directly involved in the matters raised in the complaint and hold a position within school governance. Panel members must also have no prior knowledge of the pupil, their family, or the specific incident, where applicable, to ensure impartiality. At least one member of the panel must be independent of the management and day-to-day running of the school. This individual may be a member of an Academy Council from another school within the Trust, or someone holding a governance post within another school or at a different Trust. The panel cannot be made up solely of Academy Council members from their own school or Trustees, as they are not independent of the management and running of the school. If the complaint concerns the Academy Council, School Improvement Board (SIB), or any of their members, the panel will be composed of trustees and at least one independent member.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 10).
The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The clerk will aim to find a date within **20 school days** of the request, where possible. If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties. Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least **5 school days** before the date of the meeting.

At the meeting

The panel will ensure that the hearing is properly minuted. The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless required as part of reasonable adjustments. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The Trust may, at its discretion, arrange for the panel to meet with the complainant and school representatives separately. A decision to conduct the panel in this way will be taken if it is felt necessary to protect the welfare of either party, or if it is otherwise deemed appropriate to do so.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish, this could include a friend or family member, colleague or advocate, in cases where the individual needs additional support. As this process does not form part of any legal proceedings, neither party should bring legal representation. Exceptions may be made, but only with the authorisation of the Trust's Complaints Co-ordinator, in circumstances where, for

example, a staff member called as a witness wishes to be supported by their union. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide on request copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the trust and headteacher.

A written response will be provided to the complainant, outlining the panel's decision, the reasons for that decision, and, where appropriate, any recommended next steps. The letter will also provide details of the options available if the complainant remains dissatisfied upon completion of the Trust's internal complaints procedure. The school will notify all relevant parties of the panel's decision in writing within five school days of the hearing.

The outcome

The committee can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld, the committee will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes that the school should review and consider for implementation to help prevent similar issues in the future.

7. Complaints about the trust, CEO or trustees

The process for handling and investigating complaints relating to the Trust itself, Trustees or members of central staff including the CEO follows the same procedure outlined in Section 6. Any differences are outlined below:

7.1 Stage 1: informal

The complaint should be addressed to the relevant member of the trust's central team, or the chief executive officer (CEO).If the concern regards the CEO, the complainant should contact the chair of the board of trustees. If the complainant is unsure who to contact, or needs to contact the chair of the board of trustees, they should contact the Trust complaints Co-ordinator, Lisa Taylor l.taylor@kingfisherschools.co.uk

7.3 Stage 3: panel hearing

A panel will be appointed by the Trust and will comprise members of the Trust Board who have not been involved in handling the complaint during the formal stage, along with at least one independent person from outside the Trust. In cases where the complaint concerns any member or the entire Trust Board, the panel will consist entirely of independent individuals with no direct connection to the Trust. These individuals could include Members or Trustees from another Trust, or external professionals who are suitably experienced.

8. Referring complaints on completion of the school and trust procedures

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school or trust complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the DfE. The DfE expects all local procedures to have been completed before getting involved.

The DfE will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly. The DfE will not overturn the school or trust's decision about a complaint but will intervene if a school or trust has:

- Breached a clause in its funding agreement
- Failed to act in line with its duties under education law
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions

If the complaints procedure is found not to meet regulations, the trust will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.
For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:
www.gov.uk/complain-about-school
We will include this information in the outcome letter to complainants.

9. Unreasonable and persistent complaints

9.1 Unreasonable complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the DfE
- Requests an outcome that is not unrealistic or is dissatisfied with the timeframe needed to implement changes and review evidence of agreed actions or outcomes.
- Makes excessive demands on school 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
- Uses threats to intimidate
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- Makes personal comments or attacks
- Raises complaints based solely on opinion without any supporting evidence or facts
- Knowingly provides falsified information
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

Please note: the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It is at the discretion of the trust what is deemed to be unreasonable.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school/trust while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's comments, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

Whenever possible, the school/trust will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before deeming the complaint as unreasonable. If the behaviour continues, the school/trust will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as Citizens Advice
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from school premises and ensuring appropriate measures of support are provided to staff where they are the subject of aggression and/or violence.

9.2 Serial/persistent complaints

If the complainant contacts the school/trust again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. We may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:

- We have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts the school/trust repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

The case to stop responding is stronger if:

- The complainant's communications are often or always abusive or aggressive
- The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff
- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school/trust with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

Where we decide to stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will consider any new complaints they make provided the concerns raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern

9.3 Duplicate complaints

If the school/trust has resolved a complaint under this procedure and received a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, the school/trust will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information that needs to be taken into account.

If the school/trust is satisfied that there are no new aspects, it will:

- Tell the new complainant that the issue has already been investigated and responded to, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the original handling of the complaint

If a duplicate complaint is raised which in the view of the school warrants further consideration, the procedure outlined in section 6 or 7 (as appropriate) will be repeated.

9.4 Complaint campaigns

Where the school/trust receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school/trust may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school/trust website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's/trust's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

10. Record-keeping and confidentiality

The school/trust will record the progress of all complaints, including information about:

- Actions taken at all stages
- The stage at which the complaint was resolved
- The final outcome

The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes related to meetings and phone calls. This material will be treated as confidential and stored securely, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel. Additionally, complainants should be aware that there may be circumstances where we are bound by a duty of confidentiality to others and, as a result, may be unable to share specific details about any actions taken.

In the case of complaints about the trust or central staff, these records will be managed by the Trust's Complaints Co-Ordinator, and will be stored securely in the trust's offices under restricted access.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection. Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and record retention schedule.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole Academy Council (or the entire trust board) in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the Academy Council is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel of the school to hear the complaint. Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the Academy Council, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

11. Learning lessons

The Academy Council may review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school/trust can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

The Trust Board and Trust Senior Leadership Team will receive regular reports on the types of complaints received in each school to support the development of appropriate support structures and to inform improvements to procedures or practice. Additionally, the Trust Senior Leadership Team will review the outcomes of all Stage 2 and Stage 3 cases and may discuss any recommendations and required actions with the headteacher.

12. Monitoring arrangements

The complaints records are logged and managed by the School Support Manager at each School and by the Trust's Complaints Co-Ordinator for complaints relating to the Trust, CEO or Trutsees. The CEO will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure trust-wide. Trustees receive information through committees to monitor the number and nature of complaints and to review any underlying issues, as outlined in the section titled 'Learning Lessons'.

This policy will be reviewed by Trust Complaint Co-Ordinator every 2 years. At each review, the policy will be approved by Trust Board.

13. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Suspension and permanent exclusion policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- Special educational needs policy and information report
- Privacy notices

Appendix 1 – Complaints outside scope of this policy

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
• Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)	Concerns should be raised with the LA SEN team. Refer to the LA's website for detail of their complaints procedure.
• Safeguarding	Complaints about safeguarding should be dealt with through statutory safeguarding procedures. 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). <insert LADO/MASH details>.
• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. **complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure. <link to school behaviour policy>.*

• Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school'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.