



Cheviot

Learning Trust

Name of Policy	Complaints Policy and Procedure
Policy Type	Statutory
Responsible Body	Trust
Responsible Person	CEO
Review Committee	Board
Last review date	Autumn 2026
Next review date	Summer 2027
Revisions at last review	Autumn 2026: All changes are recorded within this document Spring 2026: Duration of Stage 2 investigation changed from 20 working days to 25 working days July 2025: All changes are recorded within this document Sept 2023: Updated to reflect Cheviot Learning Trust Contact information, i.e. email contacts and central office address changed

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PART 1: Using this Policy and Procedure

This section provides a quick overview of what we need from you and what you can expect from us when raising feedback, concerns or complaints. Please refer to the sections referenced below for full details.

What we need from you

- Raise concerns as soon as possible – we will not usually consider matters that happened more than three months ago (see Section 10);
- Try to resolve matters informally first – this is usually the quickest way to sort things out (see Section 13);
- Explain your concern or complaint clearly and concisely, including what happened, what has already been done and what you would like us to do to put things right (see Section 8);
- Use the complaint forms provided at Annex 4 and Annex 5 when raising or escalating a formal complaint (see Sections 14 and 15);
- Treat our staff and governors/trustees with respect and courtesy – we will not accept inappropriate, abusive or threatening behaviour (see Section 21, Annexes 3 and 7);
- Avoid discussing the details of your complaint publicly, including on social media, while we are investigating – you are of course welcome to discuss the matter privately with a companion, advisor or support organisation (see Section 8)

What you can expect from us

- We will treat you with respect and courtesy at all times (see Sections 1 and 21);
- We will acknowledge your formal complaint within 5 school days, normally arrange an investigation and provide a written outcome within 25 school days (see Section 14 and Annex 8);
- If you ask for a complaints committee hearing, we will try to hold this within 20 school days of your request and write to you with the decision within 10 school days of the hearing (see Section 15 and Annex 8);
- We will provide help if you need adjustments to use this procedure or assistance with writing your complaint (see Section 8)

Before using this procedure, we encourage parents to read the 'Parent guide to school complaints' published by Parentkind, the Department for Education, Ofsted and the Improving Education Together board, which provides helpful guidance on how to provide feedback, resolve concerns and raise complaints. A copy of this guide is available on the Trust website –

<https://site-cheviot.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/Policies/Organisation-Policies/Parent-Guide-to-School-Complaints.pdf>

1. Statement of Intent

Cheviot Learning Trust is committed to ensuring that all our schools work in a productive and positive way with all parents, carers and other members of the public.

However if a parent feels that a situation has arisen that they are dissatisfied with, then they have the right to make a complaint. The Trust aims to resolve complaints at the earliest possible stage, and informally where possible. Every complaint will be taken seriously and dealt with in a professional and in a timely manner.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- 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
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school and Trust improvement evaluation processes

The Trust will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full. To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on our website, and on the websites of our schools.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

2. Relationship with Cheviot Values

The policy must always be applied in a way that reflects the values of Cheviot Learning Trust, and the Christian ethos of our faith schools:

- **Respect** – we take the time to understand and make decisions and have due regard for the feelings, wishes and rights of others
- **Cooperation** – We nurture the relationships that we've built over many years and we know by working together we can achieve more than we can alone
- **Excellence** – we will always strive for continuous improvement and will produce the best solutions and deliver the best services possible
- **Innovation** – we're here to shape the future, which is why we all have a responsibility to be thinking about the big issues of tomorrow

3. 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 the [best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures](#) published by the Department for Education (DfE).

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.

4. Scope

This procedure is for use for complaints against an individual school of the Trust, a member of staff or the Board of Trustees. There are separate arrangements, laid down by law to cover the following:

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

For further guidance on any of the above please refer to Annex 1.

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

5. What do we mean by certain words in this procedure?

Meeting or hearing: Can be in person, by telephone or by video call, as long as everyone can take part and is happy to do so. In exceptional circumstances, including where there are concerns about the safety or wellbeing of any participant, we reserve the right to determine the format of the meeting or hearing without the agreement of all parties, and will notify those involved of the reasons for doing so.

Concern: An 'expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

Complaint: An 'expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'. The aim of this policy is to prevent a concern becoming a complaint.

Parent: Includes biological parents, carers, and anyone with parental responsibility or care for a child.

Complainant: Applies to an individual stakeholder. It may also be interpreted to encompass stakeholders whose communications and/behaviour falls under categories defined as unreasonable.

School day: A weekday during term time, when the relevant school is open, excluding weekends and Bank Holidays.

Trust: Means the academy trust.

6. Policy Implementation

The CEO is responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented in our schools. Complainants should be aware that Headteachers may refer complaints to the central team of the Trust if they consider that the complaint is of such a nature that it should be investigated independently of the school. Likewise, complaints may be retrieved and dealt with by the central team of the Trust for the same reason. Where a complaint is made directly to the central offices of the Trust, it will be logged and sent to the school.

7. Record Keeping

School staff members are required to log all informal concerns on Bromcom and inform the Headteacher of any serious concerns. The School will monitor the level and the subject matter of concerns and review the outcomes on a regular basis with their School Governing Boards. The Headteacher is responsible for ensuring that monitoring of concerns takes place.

A record of all complaints that reach the formal complaint or complaints committee/review stages is held centrally by the Trust Governance Professional. This includes how and when the complaint was resolved, and any action we took as a result.

We keep records in line with our Records Management and Retention Policy and data protection law. We keep all complaint details confidential, except where:

- The Secretary of State asks to see them;
- They are needed for an academy inspection;

- An individual has a legal right to see their own personal information in the records; or
- The law requires us to share them

The findings and recommendations from any complaints committee decision will be shared with the Trust Executive Team and the Headteacher of the school.

Electronic recordings of any meetings or the complaints committee hearing will not be permitted unless there are very good reasons to do so and all parties to the meeting or hearing give their written consent. In the event that a decision is made to record a meeting, the Trust shall assume sole responsibility for conducting the recording and maintaining its custody.

8. Raising Matters Effectively

When raising concerns or complaints, it is very important that you explain clearly:

- What your concern/complaint is;
- What has already been done to try and resolve it;
- Names of any witnesses, dates and times of what happened and copies of any relevant documents; and
- What you would like us to do about it to put things right

We encourage you to:

- Focus on the relevant facts – what happened, when and who was involved;
- Remain objective and direct your concern towards processes or decisions rather than target individuals; and
- Suggest clear and realistic outcomes so that we can see what is possible and we can try to resolve the matter constructively

For the avoidance of doubt, certain outcomes are not available under this procedure. These include but are not limited to:

- outcomes relating to staff disciplinary action – any disciplinary matters will be handled confidentially under our internal staff procedures and you will not be informed of any action taken; and
- financial compensation or payments of any kind

We ask that you keep your complaint and any supporting documents short and focused on the issues that matter. If what you send us is too long, repeats the same points or includes information that is not relevant, it may take us longer to look into and respond to your concerns. As a guide, we would not expect a letter or email to be longer than two sides of A4 (about 1,000 words). If you send us more than we need, we may ask you to tell us which issues and documents are most important and put the timescales in this procedure on hold until you do. If we think a concern or complaint is

being pursued in a way that is unreasonable, we may deal with it under Annex 7 / Section 19 of this procedure.

If you choose to use artificial intelligence (AI) tools (such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini or similar) to help you draft or structure your concern or complaint, please read the guidance set out in Annex 2 of this procedure before doing so. AI tools can be helpful in organising your thoughts and presenting your concern or complaint clearly, but they must be used carefully. You are responsible for the accuracy and content of anything you submit to us, regardless of whether AI was used to help prepare it.

For formal complaints, please complete all sections of the complaint form at Annex 4. It is a precondition of this complaints procedure that reasonable attempts should be made to resolve issues on an informal basis (at stage one). The relevant senior member of staff shall have the discretion, to be exercised reasonably, not to allow a formal complaint to be pursued where this precondition has not been met.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff these views will be respected. In these cases you will be referred to another staff member. Similarly if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

All complaints should be marked as **Private and Confidential**.

When asking for our response to your formal complaint to be reviewed, please complete all sections of the complaints committee hearing and review request form at Annex 5. Put 'complaint' in the subject line of your email or clearly on any correspondence so we can deal with it quickly.

If you need help with writing or escalating your complaint, please contact the Trust Central Office and we will arrange for a member of staff to help you. You can also ask organisations like [Citizens Advice](#) to help you.

To assist us in investigating your complaint fairly and thoroughly, we ask that you refrain from discussing the details of your complaint publicly, including on social media, while the matter is being considered under this procedure. This helps to protect the privacy of all individuals involved and supports the integrity of the investigation. Nothing in this paragraph prevents you from discussing the matter privately with a companion, advisor or support organisation from whom you are seeking advice or support.

Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher)	Should be made, in the first instance, to the Headteacher via the school office/ school's email address
Complaints about the Headteacher	Should be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer, and sent to: info@cheviotlt.co.uk
Complaints about the Chair of the School Governing Board, any individual governor, or the whole School Governing Board	Should be addressed to the Governance Professional of the Trust: f.ewart@cheviotlt.co.uk
Complaints about the Chair of the Board of Trustees	Should be addressed to the Governance Professional of the Trust: f.ewart@cheviotlt.co.uk a suitably skilled Trustee will investigate the complaint
Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Finance and Operations Officer (CFOO), or a Trustee	Should be marked for the attention of the Board of Trustees and sent to the Co-Chairs of the Board via the Trust Governance Professional: f.ewart@cheviotlt.co.uk
Complaints about the Central Team apart from CEO and CFOO	Should be addressed to the Executive Team, and sent to: info@cheviotlt.co.uk

The template formal complaint form can be found at Annex 4. If the complainant does not have access to email please call 0191 232 2777 or send a hard copy, marked for the attention of the appropriate individual, to:

Cheviot Learning Trust Central Offices
Sir Bobby Robson House
Esh Plaza
Sir Bobby Robson Way
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE13 9BA

In accordance with equality law, reasonable adjustments will be considered, if required, to enable complainants to access and complete the complaints policy.

9. Anonymous Complaints

We will not investigate matters raised anonymously under this procedure. A complaint will be regarded as 'anonymous' if the complainant cannot be identified or their identity cannot be verified from the information provided. This includes complaints submitted

using unidentifiable contact details, such as an email address that does not reveal who has made the complaint. However, we may decide to look into issues raised anonymously under other procedures (e.g. our safeguarding procedures) where we think it is right to do so.

10. Timescales

We aim to resolve any complaint in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage of the Complaints Procedure are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. For the purposes of this policy, a “school day” is defined as a weekday during term time, when the relevant school is open. The definition of a “school day” excludes weekends and Bank Holidays. Complaints made outside of term time will be considered to have been received on the first day of school after the holiday period.

The complaint must be raised within **three months** of the incident, or where a series of associated incidents have occurred within three months of the last of these incidents. Complaints made outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority safeguarding teams or tribunals, this may impact on the Trust’s ability to adhere to the timescales within this policy resulting in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigation. If this happens, you will be informed of a proposed new timescale.

In exceptional circumstances, such as the full or partial closure of schools or other disruption, time scales related to responses to formal complaints in this policy may be extended. In such circumstances, new timescales will be communicated to the complainant.

We have a duty to use our staff time and resources proportionately and in the best interests of all pupils, and we will take this into account when deciding how to manage multiple concerns or complaints raised at the same time. Where you raise more than one concern or complaint at the same time or raise a new concern or complaint while an existing matter is still being considered under this procedure, we may combine these and deal with them together. Where you raise a new concern or complaint while a complaints committee hearing or review in respect of an earlier complaint is pending, we may at our discretion pause the complaints committee hearing or review until the new matter has been investigated and responded to under this procedure.

11. Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the policy, the aim is always to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, it will be acknowledged that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition one or more of the following may be offered:

- An explanation
- An admission the the situation could have been handled differently or better
- An assurance that the Trust will try to ensure the event complained about 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 processes in light of the complaint
- An apology

In line with DfE 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.

12. Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, this should be confirmed in writing.

13. PART 2: PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS

Your child's experience is important to everyone within the Trust and our schools. We want to work together with you to ensure that your child is happy at school, and that they achieve their best. If you feel something has gone wrong, we want to hear from you.

Stage One: Informal "Listen and Respond"

At this stage, you may want to share:

- A. Feedback – where you want to share your voice with us without needing us to respond, but you want us to listen and take it on board;
- B. Concerns – where you have a worry or doubt over an important issue and you are looking for reassurance; or
- C. Complaints – where you are dissatisfied with our actions or lack of action

Before raising matters informally, please refer to Section 8 of this procedure: 'Raising matters effectively'. You can raise matters in person, by email or by telephone.

We encourage you to raise matters first with the member of staff closest to your child, such as their class teacher or form tutor, as they will usually be best placed to help you. Most matters at this stage will be dealt with by them or by your child's head of year or another senior member of staff. Matters raised informally will not normally be considered by the Headteacher or by a governor/trustee as getting them involved too early may stop them from helping you at later stages.

Most matters can be sorted out quickly by informal meetings (in-person or online) or telephone discussions with the right member of staff, rather than by exchange of

emails. These meetings or telephone discussions may need to be arranged in advance to make sure the right member of staff is available to discuss the matter with you and has the time to listen and put things right.

There is no set timeframe for consideration of informal concerns, but we would expect most matters to be resolved within 15 school days. If we cannot find a solution, we will let you know that you can move to making a formal complaint in writing.

Complainants should not approach individual governors or Trustees to raise concerns/complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis.

At the conclusion of their investigation the appropriate person investigating the concern will provide an informal response. This may be in writing, by email or through a telephone call or face to face interview. A record of the response must be kept. The response will be provided to the complainant **within 10 school days** of the concern being raised.

It is hoped the majority of concerns can be resolved at this stage. If the issue remains unresolved the next step is to make a formal complaint, **within 10 days of an informal response.**

14. Stage Two: Consideration of Formal Complaint by the Trust

If the complainant feels their concern has not been resolved at the informal stage, they need to follow the formal complaint process as detailed below.

In most cases all complaints will be dealt with via the informal stage initially before progressing to the formal stage. It is acknowledged however, that on occasion, depending on the nature of the complaint, it may be appropriate to proceed straight to the formal stage, in agreement with the school and the complainant.

Formal complaints must be to the CEO via the info@cheviotlt.co.uk email box or in writing to the Cheviot Learning Trust Central Offices, marked Private and Confidential, **within 10 school days** of the outcome of Stage 1. The complainant should use the formal complaint form (see Annex 4) to provide their written complaint, and include a copy of correspondence concluding Stage 1 and give details in writing of why they are not satisfied with the outcome.

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

The CEO will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. They may do this by phone or in

person or they may decide that a telephone conversation will be sufficient. The CEO may delegate the investigation to another member of the senior staff or appropriate independent body, but not the decision, nor the action to be taken.

The person(s) carrying out the investigation will review the way in which the complaint has been handled and ensure that the issues have been dealt with properly and fairly. They may seek further information from the complainant or the school and will investigate the matter.

The CEO will provide a formal, written response at the conclusion of the investigation **within 25 school days** of receipt of the complaint.

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

The complaint can move to Stage 3 if the complainant remains dissatisfied by the outcome.

15. Stage Three: Consideration by a Panel

If the complainant is not satisfied with the result from Stage 2, they may choose to refer their complaint to Stage 3 of the procedure. This must be done in writing to the Chair of the Board at Cheviot Learning Trust Central Offices, Sir Bobby Robson House, Esh Plaza, Sir Bobby Robson Way, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE13 9BA **within 10 school days of the completion of Stage 2.**

At this Stage, the complaint will be considered by a panel comprising Trustees and/or members of the School Governing Board.

The panel will consider the manner in which the complaint was addressed and decide whether it has been properly dealt with.

They will make a final decision about the case and will determine whether the complaint has received fair and proper consideration within the Trust's procedure. If they have any concerns, they may direct that further investigation takes place. The complainant will be kept informed of any delay.

Where the complaint is considered by a panel of Trustees/School Governing Board members of this will comprise of persons who have no detailed prior knowledge of the complaint, and will have no connection with the complainant. There will also be one independent person who is independent of the management or governance of the Trust.

The meeting will normally take place **within 20 school days** of the request. If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the meeting will be held in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

Complainants will have the opportunity to submit written evidence on the complaint prior to the meeting of the panel and also to attend, accompanied by a friend/partner if they wish, to present their case. The Headteacher or CEO will be given the same opportunities.

The complainant will be informed of the date, time and place of the meeting. The letter will also explain what will happen at the meeting. No new evidence or witnesses previously undisclosed should be introduced into the meetings by the complainant at this stage.

The decision of the panel will normally be communicated to the complainant **within 10 school days of the meeting**.

The decision taken at Stage 3 is final. For most complaints this decision will be the last step in the process.

Note: Where appropriate, complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints policy. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under the disciplinary procedures of the Trust, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least ten school days prior to the meeting the date, time and venue will be confirmed. Any written materials will be circulated to all parties **at least five school days before the date of the meeting**. The panel will not normally accept as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

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

The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel can:

- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- Not uphold the complaining in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part the panel will:

- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to Trust or school processes or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The chair of the panel will provide the complainant and the Trust/School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, **in writing within ten school days**.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education (DfE) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled.

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

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by email or otherwise delivered to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about.

A written record will be kept of all complaints and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing.

16. Next Steps

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

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

The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE as below:

Online at –

https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact_the_Department_for_Education

In writing to –

School Complaints Compliance Unit
Department for Education

2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

By telephone to –
0370 000 2288

Further advice is available at <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

17. Help with Special Educational Needs (SEND)

We work together with the local authority to provide support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). We will always try to help, but for some things that are outside of our control we will refer you to the local authority.

- **What we are responsible for:** We provide teaching, with reasonable adjustments to help your child, and support from our own resources (known as SEN support). We monitor your child's progress, put support plans in place, and review these with you.
- **What the local authority is responsible for:** The local authority decides whether to assess a child for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), issues and maintains the EHCP, and provides the funding and services specified within it.
- **What an EHCP sets out:** An EHCP describes your child's needs, the provision required to meet those needs, and who must deliver it. Schools must implement the parts of the plan that fall within their control, and the local authority must provide the provision it is responsible for.

Some support depends on national or local funding decisions that are outside our control. We will always do our best within the resources available to us. If you are unsure about who is responsible for a particular aspect of SEND support, please ask.

18. Complaints about the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

To comply with the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage ("EYFS"), written concerns or complaints about whether a school is meeting the EYFS requirements will be dealt with as follows:

- We will acknowledge the written concern or complaint within **5 school days**.
- The Headteacher or another member of the Senior Leadership Team will investigate the concern or complaint, which may include meeting with you and the Early Years Lead. We will send you a written response with the outcome of the investigation **within 28 school days of receiving the complaint**.
- If you are not happy with the outcome, you can ask for your complaint to be reviewed by a complaints committee at a hearing, as set out in Section 7.17 onwards of this procedure.

We will keep a record of all written complaints about EYFS requirements and their outcomes and will make this available to Ofsted on request. If you have concerns about whether a school is meeting EYFS requirements, you can also contact Ofsted at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or 0300 123 4666.

19. Managing Unreasonable Complaints

If properly followed, a good complaints procedure will limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. **Please see Annex 7** for further details of how such complaints will be dealt with and examples of behaviour which will not be tolerated.

20. Complaint Campaigns

Where the Trust becomes the focus of a campaign and receives a large volume of complaints all based on the same subject, particularly if these complaints come from complainants unconnected with the Trust, the Trust may respond by:

- Sending a consistent response to all complainants
- Publishing a single response on the Trust website.

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

21. Expectations

What can you expect from us?

Anyone who raises informal or formal concerns, issues or complaints can expect us to:

- follow the Trust's complaints procedure;
- be available for consultation within a reasonable time limit, bearing in mind the needs of pupils at the school and the nature of the complaint;
- respond with courtesy and respect;
- attempt to resolve concerns using reasonable means in line with the Trust's complaints procedure, other policies and practice and in line with guidance from the Trust in accordance with the Secretary of State's legislation and guidance for academies; and
- keep those involved informed of progress towards a resolution

What we expect of you

We expect anyone who wishes to raise concerns to:

- try to resolve the concern informally with a member of school staff, or Trust central office
- treat all staff with courtesy and respect;
- respect the needs of pupils and staff;

- never to use violence (including threats of violence) towards people or property;
- recognise the time constraints under which members of staff work and allow a reasonable time to respond to a complaint;
- recognise that some problems may not be resolved in a short time;
- follow the Trust's complaints procedure;
- speak politely and respectfully using appropriate language and avoid any aggression or verbal abuse, including name-calling;
- raise concerns/complaints in an appropriate place and at an appropriate time (for example not in front of other parents or pupils and not in an open public space);
- be prepared to work towards a resolution and in partnership

22. Learning Lessons

The Executive Team will 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 Board of Trustees will receive regular reports on the types of complaints received in each school in order to support the development of appropriate support structures, and to inform any improvements to procedures or practice.

23. 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 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.

24. Monitoring and Review

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

Responsibility for reviewing the procedure belongs to the board of trustees. All projected review dates will be adhered to.

Information gathered through reviewing the complaints procedure will be used to continuously improve and develop the process. Any changes to this policy will be communicated to all relevant stakeholders.

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

Annex 1: Matters not covered by this procedure

Excluded Matters	Signposting
Admissions	The process for challenging admissions decisions is set out in our admissions policy and the DfE's school admissions codes at: School admissions code - GOV.UK and School admission appeals code - GOV.UK .
Collective Worship	Complaints about the content of the daily act of collective worship should be directed to the local authority or the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). Complaints about the handling of a request to withdraw your child from religious education or the daily act of collective worship can be raised under this procedure. The right of withdrawal does not apply to other areas of the curriculum where religious matters may be spontaneously raised by pupils or arise in other subjects such as history or citizenship.
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities (including the PTA of a school)	Providers, including the PTA of a school, will have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about them or their service. Please contact them directly.
Complaints regarding requests for term time absence	These requests are entirely at the Headteacher's discretion. Therefore, they do not come under the remit of the Complaints Policy. https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/holidays-during-school-term-time-england/ DfE Working together to improve school attendance https://childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/school-attendance-and-absence/
Complaints about the fact that a Section 547 ban has been applied	Complaints about how the ban was applied, i.e. the process, can be made, but not about the fact that a ban itself has been implemented. This is dealt with through the legal process

Curriculum	Complaints about the content of the national curriculum should be directed to the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk/contactus. However, complaints about the delivery of the curriculum, including the delivery of religious education (RE) and sex and relationships education, can be raised under this procedure.
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.
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.
School re-organisation proposals	Where concerns are not adequately addressed by the School or Trust, complaints can be raised directly with the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk/contactus
Safeguarding and child protection matters	Some complaints that relate to safeguarding or child protection matters will be handled under our Child Protection and Safeguarding policy rather than under this procedure. Where that policy applies, a separate investigative process will be followed. This complaints procedure does not limit or replace any action that may be taken under our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, and in some cases both processes may run concurrently or one may take precedence over the other depending on the nature of the concern raised. If you have a serious concern about a child's safety or welfare, you may also wish to contact: the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), who has local responsibility for managing allegations against people who work with children; or

	the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), which coordinates safeguarding referrals across local agencies.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the Trust's grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Where appropriate, complaints about staff conduct will be dealt with under the Trust disciplinary procedures. 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	Complaints regarding the statutory assessment of a child's special educational needs should be directed to the relevant local authority. For example, the local authority has refused to carry out an assessment; has delayed the assessment; has not yet issued the assessment findings; or you disagree with the decisions in the assessment.
Suspension/ Permanent exclusion of children from school	The process for challenging suspension or exclusions decisions, or matters relating to those decisions, is set out in our Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions Policy and the DfE's statutory guidance at: School suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Whistleblowing	The Trust has a whistleblowing procedure for all 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: www.education.gov.uk/contactus ~~Volunteer staff who have concerns about the schools should complain through the complaints policy.~~

Annex 2: Guidance on using AI tools to raise concerns or complaints

Introduction

AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini and similar large language model applications) can help you organise your thoughts, structure your concern or complaint clearly, and express yourself effectively. However, these tools have significant limitations and must be used with care. This Annex provides practical guidance on how to use AI tools effectively when raising a concern or complaint under this procedure, and what to avoid.

How AI tools can help you

AI tools can be useful for:

- Organising your thoughts and structuring your concern or complaint in a clear and logical way;
- Helping you express what happened in plain, clear language if you find writing difficult;
- Summarising a timeline of events based on information you provide;
- Suggesting what outcome you might want to ask for; and
- Checking your draft for clarity, tone and spelling before you submit it.

Important limitations and risks

You should be aware of the following limitations and risks when using AI tools:

1. AI tools do not know what happened – they can only work with the information you give them, and they may fill gaps with invented details that sound convincing but are untrue (this is sometimes called 'hallucination');
2. AI tools may generate references to laws, regulations, policies or legal rights that do not exist, are out of date, or do not apply to your situation;
3. AI tools may produce language that is overly formal, legalistic or aggressive, which may not reflect your genuine concern and may make it harder for us to resolve the matter constructively;
4. any personal data (including names, dates of birth, or other identifying information about your child, other children, staff or other individuals) that you enter into an AI tool may be stored, processed or used by the AI provider in ways that are outside your control and may breach data protection law;
5. AI-generated complaints that do not accurately reflect your experience may cause delays in resolving your concern, as we may need to spend time clarifying what actually happened; and
6. AI tools work by predicting the most likely answer based on the information they have been trained on. They do not check whether their output is accurate or relevant to your particular situation, and the most likely-sounding answer is not always the correct one. AI tools are also designed to make you feel helped and understood, which means they may agree with your point of view, use an overly sympathetic tone, or present your complaint in a one-sided way rather than

giving a balanced account of what happened. This can wrongly reinforce your point of view and make you more fixed in your position, which may make it harder for us to work together to resolve the matter.

What to do and what to avoid

Do	Don't
Write down the key facts yourself first (what happened, when, who was involved, and what you would like us to do) before using an AI tool.	Copy and paste AI-generated text without reading and checking it thoroughly.
Use AI to help you structure and clarify what you have already written, rather than to generate the complaint from scratch.	Submit a complaint that contains facts, events or details that you have not personally verified as accurate.
Read everything the AI produces carefully and remove or correct anything that is inaccurate, exaggerated or that you did not experience.	Rely on any legal advice, references to legislation or statements about your rights generated by an AI tool without checking them independently.
Use your own words where possible – your complaint should sound like you.	Enter the names or personal data of your child, other children, staff members or any other individuals into an AI tool.
Remove all personal data (names, dates of birth and other identifying information about individuals) before entering any information into an AI tool – you can use placeholders such as 'my child', 'the class teacher' or 'Teacher A' instead.	Use AI to generate multiple or repetitive complaints about the same issue.

Example prompts for using AI tools effectively

The following example prompts illustrate how AI tools can be used effectively to help you prepare a concern or complaint. In each case, you should replace the descriptions in square brackets with your own details, taking care not to include any personal data or names.

Example 1 Organising your thoughts:

"I want to raise a concern with my child's school about [describe the issue in general terms, e.g. 'how a bullying incident was handled']. The key things that happened are: [list the main events in the order they happened, using descriptions such as 'my child', 'the class teacher' etc. instead of names]. Can you help me organise these into a clear, chronological summary that I can use when speaking to the school?"

Why this helps: Before writing a formal complaint, it can be difficult to know where to start, particularly if a number of things have happened over a period of time. This

prompt helps you to present the key events in a logical order, making it easier for us to understand your concern and for you to feel confident that nothing important has been left out.

Example 2 – Structuring a written complaint:

"I need to write a formal complaint to my child's school. The issue is [describe the issue]. I have already tried to resolve this informally by [describe what you did]. The key facts are [list the facts]. The outcome I am looking for is [describe what you want to happen]. Can you help me structure this into a clear letter, using plain language and a respectful tone? Do not add any facts or details that I have not provided."

Why this helps: A well-structured complaint is more likely to be understood and dealt with effectively. This prompt helps you to set out the issue, the steps you have already taken, the relevant facts, and the outcome you are seeking in a clear and logical way, without the AI tool adding anything you have not told it.

Example 3 – Checking tone and clarity:

"I have drafted the following complaint to my child's school: [paste your draft, with names removed]. Can you suggest how I could make this clearer and more constructive in tone, without changing the facts or adding anything new?"

Why this helps: When raising a concern or complaint, it is natural to feel frustrated or upset. This prompt allows you to check that your draft communicates your concern clearly and constructively, which is more likely to lead to a productive response, without altering the substance of what you have written.

Example 4 – Identifying what outcome to request:

"I am raising a complaint with my child's school about [describe the issue]. I am not sure what outcome to ask for. Based on the facts I have described, can you suggest some realistic outcomes I could request? Please do not suggest legal remedies or refer to specific laws."

Why this helps: It is not always easy to know what to ask for when raising a complaint. This prompt can help you to think through realistic and proportionate outcomes, whilst ensuring that the AI tool does not stray into providing legal advice, which it is not equipped to give.

Annex 3: Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

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

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

Investigator

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

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

The investigator should:

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

Complaints Co-ordinator (Trust Governance Professional)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, head teacher, CEO, Chair of Governors, Chair of Trust or the Clerk and to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records
- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale

Clerk to the Governing Body / Trust Board

The Clerk is the contact point for the committee and should:

- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision

Panel Chair

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

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one)

Panel Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so. No governor / Trustee may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

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

If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend. However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount

Annex 4: Formal Complaint Form



FORMAL COMPLAINT FORM

Your Name	
Pupil's Name	
School	
Relationship to pupil (if relevant)	
Address	
Contact Number	
Contact email address	
Details of complaint	
Actions already taken to resolve complaint	

Actions you feel may resolve your complaint	
Any attachments (please detail)	
Signature	
Date	

Annex 5: Request for a Stage 3 complaints committee

Before completing this form, please refer to Section 8 ('Raising matters effectively') of our feedback, concerns and complaints procedure.

Your name:	
Student's Name:	
Your relationship to the student	
Your address:	
Your contact number:	
Your email address:	
What action have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? Who did you speak to and what was the response?	
Why you are not happy with our decision about your formal complaint (if you have more than one complaint, please number these):	
What you would like the complaints committee to do to put things right (if you have more than one outcome, please number these)	

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, give details here:	
Your signature:	
Date:	

Annex 6: Hearing Panel Procedures

Procedures for Hearing Panel:

- The hearing is as informal as possible
- The hearing will be clerked by an independent person
- The Hearing panel will keep an open mind
- Any member of the Hearing panel must declare any conflict of interests or any prior involvement with the complaint or the circumstances surrounding it.
- The panel should be aware that parents and carers can be emotional, nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Every effort should be made to ensure that everyone is appropriately supported and breaks are conveyed throughout the proceedings.
- The panel should nominate a chair in advance of the hearing
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses
- The Headteacher/CEO may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken
- The Headteacher/CEO is then invited to explain the school/Trust actions and be followed by the school/Trust witnesses
- The complainant may question both the Headteacher/CEO and the witnesses after each has spoken
- The panel may ask questions at any point
- The complainant is invited to sum up
- The Headteacher/CEO is then invited to sum up
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within a set time-scale as outlined in the policy.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues

The safety and welfare of pupils is paramount

Annex 7: Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Complaints

In rare cases, we may not follow the usual procedure. This includes where your concern or complaint is classified as repetitious, vexatious or pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner.

The decision to classify your concern or complaint in this way will be made by an appropriately senior member of staff, such as the Headteacher, CEO or Chair of Trustees (as appropriate).

Repeated complaints

If you make a complaint that is the same, substantially similar or based on the same facts as one we have already fully considered, and we have:

- Done everything we can reasonably do to address your concerns; and
- Given you a clear explanation of our position and your options;

we will write to tell you that the complaints procedure is finished, and we will not respond to further correspondence about these matters. We will tell you how to contact the Department for Education if you wish to take things further.

If we have already fully considered a complaint about the same subject from another member of your family, we may inform you that the matter has already been considered and the local process is complete. We will advise you to contact the Department for Education if you are dissatisfied with our handling of the original complaint.

Vexatious concerns/complaints and concerns/complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

A concern or complaint may be considered vexatious if it:

- Is obsessive, persistent, harassing, or repetitive;
- Pursues matters that have no merit, or seeks unrealistic outcomes;
- Pursues matters in an unreasonable way;
- Is designed to cause disruption or annoyance; or
- Demands action that has no serious purpose or value.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- Refusing to explain your concern or complaint or what outcome you want, even when we offer to help;
- Refusing to cooperate with our investigation;
- Refusing to accept that some issues are not covered by this procedure;
- Insisting we deal with your concern or complaint in ways that do not fit with this procedure or good practice;
- Raising trivial or irrelevant information and expecting us to respond to it;

- Asking many detailed but unimportant questions and demanding immediate answers;
- Changing what your concern or complaint is about as we investigate;
- Seeking unrealistic outcomes, such as asking for staff to be dismissed;
- Making excessive demands on staff time through frequent, lengthy, or complicated contact while we are dealing with your concern or complaint;
- Knowingly providing false information;
- Posting information about your concern or complaint on social media or other public forums – sharing your complaint on social media can be harmful to those involved, is unlikely to lead to a quicker resolution and may be considered unreasonable behaviour;
- Encouraging or coordinating with other parents to submit multiple complaints about the same issue – your complaint should be specific to you and your child, and organising others to raise the same matter may be treated as a complaint campaign and may not be dealt with under the usual complaints process; or
- Using artificial intelligence (AI) tools to draft complaints or to cite laws, regulations or guidance, where the AI-generated content is inaccurate, misleading or makes the complaint more complex than necessary.

We will not accept behaviour or language towards staff, local governors, trustees, or members that is aggressive, abusive, offensive, discriminatory, or threatening or makes insulting personal comments or threats about staff.

Action we may take

In these situations, we may:

- Issue a verbal or written warning setting clear expectations for your future conduct, which may include putting in place a communication plan to manage future contact;
- Pause the complaints process until the unacceptable behaviour stops;
- Hold a complaints committee review based on written documents only, without a hearing; and/or
- Refuse to consider your complaint any further and direct you to the Department for Education.

Where you continue to send correspondence raising matters that are the same as, or broadly similar to, issues that are already being considered under this procedure, we may decide not to review or respond to such further correspondence until the existing complaint has been fully considered and responded to at the current stage of this procedure. We will write to let you know if we decide to do this. Any matters that are genuinely distinct from your existing complaint should be raised separately and will be considered on their own merits.

We may also restrict your access to the school, Trust or our staff or governors/trustees, e.g. requesting contact in a particular form (for example, in writing only), requiring contact to take place with a named person only or limited to a particular email address, restricting telephone calls to specified days and times or number of contacts, or banning you from the school/Trust's premises. Any decision to cease responding to correspondence or to decline to consider a complaint further will be communicated to you in writing, with reasons for the decision.

Where behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the safety and welfare of staff, governors/trustees, 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 you prior warning of that action.

Annex 8: Complaints Policy Timescales

Stage 1: Informal	Concern raised with the school. Within 5 days, the school will acknowledge the concern Within 15 school days (from receipt of the concern) a response to the concern will be sent to the complainant.
Stage 2: Formal complaint heard by the CEO	The complainant writes to the CEO if they remain unhappy within 10 school days of receipt of the stage 1 response. Within 5 days, the Trust Governance Professional will acknowledge the complaint Within 25 school days the CEO will commission an investigation and respond in writing
Stage 3: Formal complaint hearing	Complainant writes to the Chair of the Trust to say they remain unhappy, within 10 school days of receipt of the stage 2 response. Within 5 days, the Trust will acknowledge the complaint. A hearing will normally be conveyed within 20 school days of receipt of the request to proceed to the hearing. 10 school days notice of the date and time of a hearing will be given to the complainant. All papers (panel pack) will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days prior to the hearing. The outcome of the hearing will be communicated in writing within 10 school days.
The complainant may refer their complaint to the Department for Education (DfE) if they remain unhappy.	