# COMPLAINTS POLICY

This Policy is reviewed by the Trust Board upon either a change in legislation, by request of Local Governing Committees within our schools, or as directed by the Trust HR Provider. Minor content changes are made over the course of the Academic Year.

**Drafted by:** Alastair Heath-Robinson

**Version Number:** **V2.4 approved 20 October 2026**

**Signed** RM Slater

**Chair of Trustees: Ruth Slater**

**Trust Address:** **Halifax Primary School**
**Prince of Wales Drive**
**Ipswich**
**IP2 8PY**

**Registered in England and Wales, Company Number: 10650092**

WHERE LEARNING IS UNSTOPPABLE AND ASPIRATIONS HAVE NO LIMITS

This policy must be made available to parents of pupils.

There may be times where parents/carers don't agree with something the school is doing, or they may have specific concerns. We welcome feedback, and the opportunity to address any concerns.

The most appropriate way to raise concerns is directly with the school, in line with this complaints policy. Airing complaints or negative opinions on social media doesn't help the school to address the issue in the most constructive way.

1. **Complaints made by someone who is not a parent of a current pupil at a school within the trust.**

For the avoidance of doubt, this policy ***does not*** *apply* to those who are not parents of **current** pupils at a School within the Trust.

Complaints that fall into this category (not parents of current pupils) will be dealt with as follows:

Complainants should first attempt to address their complaint to the School or Trust (as appropriate) informally. Only if this fails to resolve the situation should the complaint be submitted in writing using **Appendix 3: Complaints Form,** to the Head Teacher (if the complaint is about the school in general) or to the Chair of Governors (if the complaint is about a Head Teacher specifically). The Head Teacher or Chair of Governors (as appropriate) will acknowledge receipt of the complaint before considering it and issuing a **final written response**.

2. **Complaints made by someone who is a parent of a current pupil at a school within the trust. (Please refer to Appendix 1)**

This policy applies to any matter which has been raised with a School by parents of **current** pupils as a matter of concern but which has not been capable of resolution informally and which the complainant or the School considers should be dealt with on a formal basis. Matters relating to admissions, suspensions and permanent exclusions, statutory SEN assessments and matters involving child protection have separate statutory procedures and are not considered under this complaints policy. Where a concern relates to a suspension or permanent exclusion, the school will follow the statutory procedures set out in the Department for Education's Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Guidance (latest edition). Please refer to Appendix 5 Where necessary, the School will exercise its discretion. Whistleblowing, staff grievances and discipline matters will not be considered under this policy.

We recognise that people feel passionately about education and may express complaints in robust terms. However, where a complainant acts in an aggressive, abusive, vexatious, or otherwise unreasonable manner we may decline to further investigate a complaint.

Complaints will normally only be considered from those with a direct interest in the matter.

## 3. Stage 1 – Informal Resolution (Please refer to Appendix 2)

Most complaints can be resolved quickly and amicably through informal discussion between parents and school staff.

When a parent has a concern, their first action should be to communicate this to their main point of contact at the school, for example, their child's class teacher. If a parent is unsure of whom to contact, they should ask the school reception or main office for help.

Once contacted, staff should make a brief note of any complaint. The note may contain:

- the name, age / year group / of the relevant pupil(s)
- the name and contact details of the complainant(s)
- a brief summary of the complaint, including key times and dates and any witnesses to any specific incident(s)
- any steps agreed to resolve the complaint

A copy of the note will be passed to the Headteacher, or another delegated senior member of staff, for use in the event the complaint remains unresolved.

If it is not possible to initially resolve the concern with a member of school staff, the parent may request or be invited to have an informal discussion or meeting with an appropriate senior member of staff. This may then be escalated to the Headteacher if the complaint remains unresolved. The Headteacher and appropriate senior member of staff will keep a record of the complaint and the agreed actions to resolve.

Where the complaint is regarding the Headteacher, the parent should first seek to resolve the complaint directly with the Headteacher themselves and follow section **10. Complaint against a Headteacher.**

It is a precondition to the operation of this policy that the complainant shall have made reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution and shall have acted in relation to the matter in a reasonable and measured way. The Chair of Trustees shall have a discretion, which will be exercised reasonably, not to allow a complaint to be pursued where this precondition has not been met.

Please allow **5 school days** for a response from the school (please refer to **Appendix 2** for **response procedure**). After which, where the matter is not resolved at the informal stage, the parent may elevate it to the formal stage.

Please note that we will always discuss concerns with you verbally either in person or on the telephone. We **do not respond in writing** to concerns raised at the informal stage. However, we may confirm the outcome of any meetings or discussions in writing when appropriate.

## 4. Stage 2 – Formal Resolution at Local Level: Investigation by a member of the Senior Leadership Team

A. The complainant must put the complaint in writing, using **Appendix 2: Complaints Form** and submitted to the Headteacher of the School, setting out briefly the facts and stating what it is that the complainant considers should have been done or where the school has not met reasonable expectations along with what they anticipate being the resolution for their complaint. **Only complaints sent in using Appendix 2:**

**Complaints Form will be considered (if you need help completing the form, please ask the relevant School or Trust staff member to help you).**

B. An investigation will be carried out by a member of the Senior Leadership Team of the School; which may include the offer of a meeting with the complainant. The investigator will speak to others involved. Whenever reasonably possible, any meeting with the complainant will take place within 15 school days of the written complaint being received.

C. The investigator will put her/his findings in writing and will indicate what, if any, steps should be taken to resolve the matter. Whenever reasonably possible, this will be done within 15 school days of any meeting with the complainant; if no meeting is arranged it will be within 15 school days of the written complaint being received.

***5. Please note that there are exceptions to following Stage 2 in full:***

**A. If you choose to use Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools (such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Co Pilot, Google Gemini or similar) to help you draft or structure your concern or complaint, please be mindful of the "Don'ts" when using AI. Please DO NOT:**

- Copy and paste AI generated text without reading and checking it thoroughly
- Generate excessively long correspondence with unreasonable numbers of requests
- Submit a complaint that contains facts, events or details that you have not personally verified as accurate
- Rely on any legal advice, references to legislation or statements about your rights generated by an AI tool without checking them independently
- Enter the names or personal data of other children, staff members or any other individuals into an AI tool
- Use AI to generate multiple or repetitive complaints about the same issue

If your complaint indicates any of the issues stated above or is clearly only AI generated with no details of the complaint, the school will offer a face-to-face meeting with a staff member to try to clarify the exact concerns before moving to the current Stage 2 Formal procedures.

B. If the complaint is directly about the **headteacher** (not including their handling of the original complaint or decision made at Stage 1), this must be clearly stated on the submitted **Complaint Form** and it will then be passed on to the CEO of the Trust. You will receive an email from the school confirming that this has happened. Section **10. Complaint against a Headteacher** process, outlined later in this policy, will then be followed.

C. If the complaint is directly about a **member of the Local Governing Committee, Chair of the Local Governing Committee, the CEO or a member of the Trust Board,** this must be clearly stated on the submitted **Complaint Form** and it will be passed on to the relevant person as outlined in section **11**. **Complaint against a member of a Local Governing Committee / Chair of a Local Governing Committee/ Trustee or CEO** process outlined later in this policy. You will receive notification from the school confirming that this has happened.

Where the complainant remains dissatisfied s/he may request the complaint is dealt with at Stage 3. Any such request **must** be set out in writing, stating where the complainant remains dissatisfied and lodged within **10** school days of the complainant receiving the findings in writing.

## 6. Stage 3 – Formal Resolution: Local Governing Committee

1. The complainant must put the complaint in writing using **Appendix 2: Complaints Form**, and submitted to the Chair of the Local Governing Committee, setting out briefly the facts and stating what it is that the complainant considers should have been done or where the school has not met reasonable expectations along with what they anticipate being the resolution for their complaint. **Only complaints sent in using Appendix 2: Complaints Form will be considered (if you need help completing the form, please ask the relevant School or Trust staff member to help you). N.b. Section 5 exceptions would remain at Stage 3.**

2. The Chair of the Local Governing Committee may appoint a member of the Local Governing Committee of the school to investigate the complaint. The investigation may include the offer of a meeting with the complainant. Whenever reasonably possible, any meeting with the complainant will take place within 15 school days of the written complaint being received.

3. The investigator will put her/his findings in writing and will indicate what, if any, steps should be taken to resolve the matter. Whenever reasonably possible, this will be done within 15 school days of any meeting with the complainant; if no meeting is arranged it will be within 15 school days of the written complaint being received.

Where the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may request that the complaint is dealt with at **Stage 4**. Any such request **must** be set out in writing, stating where the complainant remains dissatisfied, what remedies are being sought and be lodged within **10** school days of the complainant receiving the findings in writing. The request must be addressed to the Clerk for the Trustees, who will pass it on to the Chair.

## 7. Stage 4 – Formal Resolution: Panel Hearing

A. The Complaints Panel of the Academy Trust will consider all complaints at Stage 4.

B. The Complaints Panel must comprise at least three people, which will include one person who is independent of the management and running of the Academy Trust and any of its schools.

C. The Complaints Panel may also include one or more persons from the following categories:

   i. A member of the local governing committee of the school where the complaint emanated from;
   ii. A member of a local governing committee from another school within the Academy Trust;
   iii. A member of the Board of Trustees from the Academy Trust.

D. None of the members of the Complaints Panel will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.

E. The Complaints Coordinator will invite the school to put in writing its response to the complainant. The school will provide this within 15 school days. At the end of that period (whether or not the academy has responded) the Complaints Coordinator will convene a meeting of the Complaints Panel. That meeting will be held as quickly as practicable given the need to find a date that is reasonably convenient for the complainant, the school and the members of the Complaints Panel. Whenever possible, the meeting will be held within 15 school days of the end of the school's response time. At any meeting, the complainant will be entitled to be accompanied by a friend, but legal representation will not be allowed.

F. The meeting is not a court case, it will be held in private, and will be as informal as circumstances allow. The complainant will have the opportunity to put her/his reasons for dissatisfaction and to enlarge on them but may not introduce reasons that were not previously put in writing. The school will have the opportunity to put its side of things and each side, as well as the Panel members, will be able to ask questions. The complainant will have the opportunity to make final comments to the Panel.

G. The Panel may make findings and recommendations and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be:

    a. sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and

    b. available for inspection on the school premises by the Academy Trust, the Headteacher and the Chief Executive Officer.

H. The Panel will formulate its response as quickly as reasonably possible, aiming to do so within 10 school days, and the Complaints Coordinator will notify all concerned.

The report of the panel hearing is final and no appeal is possible on the substance of the complaint.

**8. Attendance at a Complaints Panel Hearing**

The Complaints Panel will only proceed if the complainant and/or their representative attend. If the complainant does not confirm attendance or fails to attend on the day without compelling reasons, the Complaints Panel will not proceed and the complainant will lose their right to the complaint being heard. Any further attempt to re-open the matter will be considered as falling under the serial/persistent complaint section as below.

**9. Serial or persistent complainants**

If at any level a complainant attempts to reopen an issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this complaints procedure, the Chair of the Academy Trust may write to the complainant to inform them that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter closed, that continued correspondence on the same matter is vexatious and that

the Academy Trust will not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

The Academy Trust also reserves the right to manage contact from complainants whose behaviour places a disproportionate and unreasonable burden on staff time and resources. This may include, but is not limited to, the repeated submission of numerous minor matters which would more appropriately be addressed through routine home-school communication, the sending of excessive volumes of correspondence, the submission of lengthy or repetitive communications which require disproportionate time to review and respond to, or the raising of multiple issues in an unreasonable or persistent manner.

In such circumstances, the Academy Trust will not restrict a parent's right to raise legitimate concerns. However, where the frequency, volume or nature of communications is having a detrimental impact on the effective operation of the school, staff wellbeing, or the school's ability to focus its resources on pupils' education and welfare, the Academy Trust may implement a Communication Strategy. This may include measures such as requiring correspondence to be directed through a single point of contact, limiting the frequency or length of communications, combining responses to multiple issues into a single response, or agreeing specific timescales for correspondence. The complainant will be informed in writing of any such arrangements, the reasons for them, and the period for which they will apply. These arrangements will be reviewed periodically and will not prevent the complainant from raising new and substantive concerns.

## 10. Complaint against a Headteacher *(put in a separate section to clarify)*

Any complaint relating to the Headteacher of the School must be raised directly with the Headteacher initially, following **Stage 1,** to allow them an opportunity to resolve any concerns rapidly and informally.

If, after 5 school days, the Headteacher has not resolved a parent's concern, they may follow the first part of **Stage 2,** by submitting a **Complaint Form (Appendix 2)** to the school and clearly stating that the complaint is about the headteacher.

The complaint will then be forwarded to the CEO and the person raising the concern will receive confirmation that this has been done by the school.

The CEO will then seek to resolve the issue informally initially within 5 school days. If this is not possible, a member of the Local Governing Committee will be designated to investigate the complaint as per **Stage 3**.

Please note that complaints received by the CEO directly, that have not followed this process will be referred back for the parent to raise with the Headteacher of the school.

## 11. Complaint against a member of a Local Governing Committee / Chair of a Local Governing Committee/ Trustee or CEO

Where a complaint is brought against the Chief Executive Officer of the Trust, the Chair of the Trust Board will seek an informal resolution initially. If after 5 school days, a resolution cannot be reached, the Chair of the Trust Board will designate a member of the Board of Trustees to investigate the complaint as per **Stage 3**. **Stage 2** does not apply.

Where a complaint is brought against a member of the Local Governing Committee, the Chair of the Local Governing Committee will investigate the complaint (or appoint another member of the Local Governing Committee to do so) in the same way as in the first stage of the formal process at **Stage 3**. **Stage 2** does not apply.

If the complaint is against the Chair of the Local Governing Committee, then the Vice Chair of the Local Governing Committee will investigate the complaint (or appoint another member of the Local Governing Committee to do so) in the same way as in the first stage of the formal process at **Stage 3**. **Stage 2** does not apply.

If the complaint is against a member of the Board of Trustees, then the Chair of the Board, (or in the case of a complaint against the Chair, the Vice Chair) will investigate the complaint (or appoint another member of the Board to do so) in the same way as in the first stage of the formal process at **Stage 3**. **Stage 2** does not apply.

In exceptional circumstances the Chair of the Board of Trustees may at his or her absolute discretion determine that a complaint against a Headteacher, Chief Executive Officer, or member of the Local Governing Committee should be dealt with at Board level and if so, determined the Chair of the Board of Trustees will oversee **Stage 3.**

**12. Complaints to the Secretary of State for Education**

Parents may complain about a school to the Secretary of State for Education. These complaints are considered on their behalf by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Where a complaint is made to the ESFA, they will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the Trust. They will consider complaints about academies that fall into any of the following three areas:

- where there is undue delay or the academy did not comply with its own complaints procedure when considering a complaint
- where the academy is in breach of its funding agreement with the Secretary of State
- where an academy has failed to comply with any other legal obligation

The ESFA will not overturn an academy's decision about a complaint. However, if the ESFA finds an academy did not deal with a complaint properly they will request the complaint is looked at again and procedures meet the requirements set out in the Education (Independent School Standards (England) Regulations 2014, Schedule 1, Part 7.

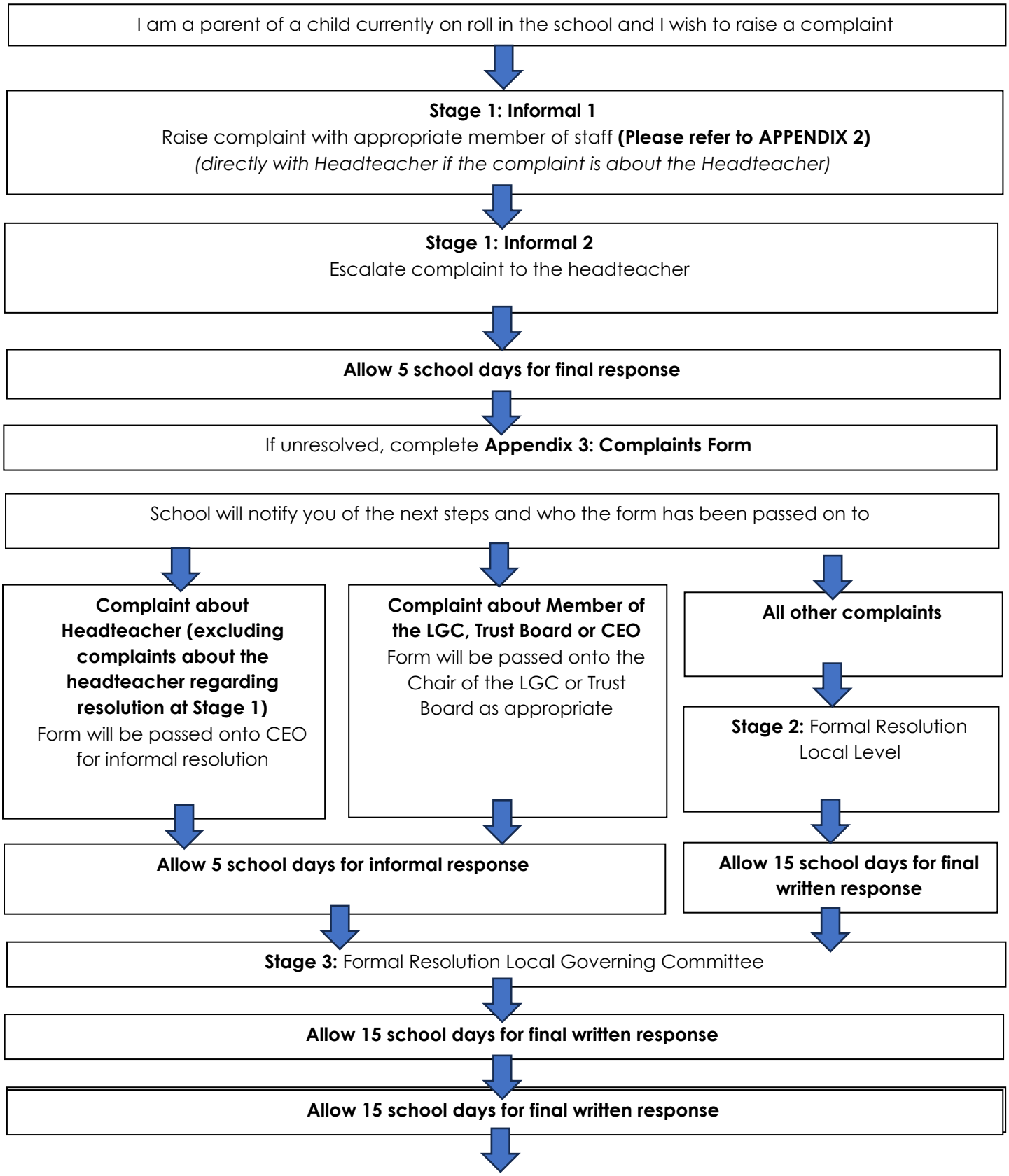
**13. Record Keeping**

A written record will be kept of all complaints that were resolved at the formal stage of the complaints procedure. Records will contain details of whether the complaint was resolved at stage 2, stage 3 or whether it proceeded to a stage 4 panel hearing. The action taken by the school or the Academy Trust as a result of a complaint (regardless of whether they are upheld) will also be recorded.

**14. Confidentiality**

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

## Appendix 1: Orwell Multi Academy Trust Complaints Procedure Flow Chart



## Appendix 2: Responding to Parents at Stage 1 Informal Part of Procedure

**Start**

⬇️

**1. Is the individual a parent of a current pupil?**

➡️ ❌ No → **End (Process not applicable)**

➡️ ✅ Yes → Continue

⬇️

**2. Concern of a safeguarding nature?**

➡️ ✅ Yes → **Handled using safeguarding procedures (Staff will escalate appropriately)**

➡️ ❌ No → Continue

⬇️

**3. Parent raises concern with Class Teacher**

⬇️

**4. Was the issue resolved by the Class Teacher?**

➡️ ✅ Yes → **End (Concern resolved)**

➡️ ❌ No → Continue

⬇️

**5. Escalate to Senior Staff (specific to individual school protocol)**

⬇️

**6. Acknowledgement in a reasonable time frame (2-5 school days)**

⬇️

**7. Respond or meet with parent**

⬇️

**8. New correspondence received?**

➡️ ✅ Yes → **Reset response timeframe (see step 6)**

➡️ ❌ No → Continue

⬇️

**9. Was the issue resolved by Senior Staff?**

➡️ ✅ Yes → **End (Concern resolved)**

➡️ ❌ No → Continue

⬇️

**10. Escalate to Headteacher**

⬇️

**11. Acknowledgement a reasonable time frame (2-5 school days)**

⬇️

**12. Respond or meet with parent**

⬇️

**13. New correspondence received?**

➡️ ✅ Yes → **Reset response timeframe (see step 11)**

➡️ ❌ No → Continue

⬇️

**14. Was the issue resolved by the Headteacher?**

➡️ ✅ Yes → **End (Concern resolved)**

➡️ ❌ No → Continue

⬇️

**15. Submit formal complaint using school's Complaints Form (available on website)**

⬇️

**End**

## Appendix 3: Complaint Form

Please complete and return to school who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

| |
|---|
| **Your name:** |
| **Pupil's name (if relevant):** |
| **Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):** |
| **Address:**<br><br><br>**Postcode:**<br>**Day time telephone number:**<br>**Evening telephone number:**<br>**Email address:** |
| **Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.** |

| |
|---|
| **What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?** |
| **Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.** |
| **Signature:**<br><br>**Date:** |
| **Official use** |
| **Date acknowledgement sent:** |
| **By who:** |
| **Complaint referred to:** |
| **Action taken:** |
| **Date:** |

## Appendix 4: Panel hearing procedures

**Panel membership**
The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the Trust and consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. The Trust will ensure that one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school.

**At the meeting**
Although this is a formal meeting, every effort should be made to make it as informal as possible for all concerned. Consideration should be given to the seating arrangements to make everyone feel equal and comfortable.

A clerk may attend to take notes and advise but cannot make any decisions for the Panel.
The chair of the panel should open the meeting stating the purpose and the format of the meeting to clarify this to all in attendance.

People present should introduce themselves stating their reason for being at the meeting. The chair of the panel should request a short verbal statement from the complainant in support of their written letter of complaint and how they feel the issue has not been resolved. The panel members can ask questions to make sure they understand the issue from the complainant's point of view.

The chair of the panel should request a short verbal statement from the Headteacher in support of their written account of the complaint and the steps taken to resolve the issue. The panel members can ask questions to make sure they understand the issue from the Headteacher's point of view.

The members of the panel should make sure they fully understand the issues and ask any further questions to clarify any points that are still not clear to them.

The chair of the panel must ask the complainant and the Headteacher if they are satisfied that they have provided all relevant information and if they feel they have had a fair hearing.

When the panel members understand all the issues, the chair will close the hearing.

**After the meeting**
The panel members will discuss the issues in private and, with the assistance of the clerk, produce a written report of findings and recommendations.

A copy of the findings and recommendations will be provided within 10 working days of the panel hearing to: the complainant; the Trust; the Headteacher; and where relevant the person complained about.

**Department for Education (DfE)**

Once the complaints process is concluded (or a complaint has been terminated due to undue delay or failure to lodge a stage 3 request within the time stated in the policy) the matter is closed. If the complainant is still not satisfied, then they may contact the DfE. Guidance on how to complain can be found by https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe

## Appendix 5: Complaints and Representations relating to Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions

**Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions**

Suspensions and permanent exclusions are governed by statutory guidance issued by the Department for Education and are **not dealt with through this Complaints Policy**.

Where a parent wishes to challenge a suspension or permanent exclusion, the school and Trust will follow the statutory procedures set out in the current **Department for Education Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Guidance**.

**Suspensions**

Parents may make representations regarding a suspension.

The Headteacher will ensure parents are informed of:

- the reason for the suspension;
- the length of the suspension;
- their right to make representations;
- whether the Local Governing Committee is required to meet to consider reinstatement under the statutory guidance.

Where legislation requires, or where the Local Governing Committee exercises its discretion to do so, a meeting will be convened to consider the suspension in accordance with the statutory guidance.

The Local Governing Committee will only consider matters permitted by the statutory guidance, namely whether the suspension should be upheld or the pupil reinstated. It is **not** a complaints hearing.

**Permanent Exclusions**

Permanent exclusions are subject to separate statutory procedures, including:

- consideration by the Local Governing Committee;
- where applicable, the right to request an Independent Review Panel;
- any additional rights provided under the statutory guidance.

These matters will not be considered under the Trust's Complaints Policy.

**Complaints about the Process**

If a parent believes that the school **failed to follow the statutory suspension or exclusion procedures**, rather than disagreeing with the decision itself, this concern may be considered under the Trust's Complaints Policy **only after the statutory suspension or exclusion process has concluded**.

The Complaints Policy cannot overturn or reconsider the decision to suspend or permanently exclude a pupil. It may only consider whether the statutory procedures were followed appropriately.

**Statutory Guidance**

The Trust will administer suspensions and permanent exclusions in accordance with the current version of:

**Department for Education – Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Guidance**