



---

<b>Policy Approved:</b>	<b>4 March 2025</b>
<b>Next Review:</b>	<b>December 2026</b>
<b>Effective Date:</b>	<b>5 March 2025</b>

### **Introduction**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action, whether made orally or in writing. This Policy addresses general complaints.

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

We will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Complainants should not approach individual Local Governors/ Trustees to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against Academy staff (except the Principal) should be made in the first instance to the Principal's Personal Assistant via the Academy Office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

### **Complaints against specific role-holders**

Complaints that involve or are about the Principal should be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer and complaints concerning the Chief Executive Officer should be addressed to Mr C. Howorth (the Chair of Trustees), via the Trust office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Trustees, any individual Local Governor/ Trustee or the whole Governing Council/ Board of Trustees should be addressed to the Governance Professional via the Trust office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the Academy/ Trust office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice Bureau to help you.

### **Part A- General principles**

#### **Anonymous complaints**

Where an anonymous complaint is received, the Academy/Trust will use its reasonable endeavours to consider the complaint as best as it reasonably can. However the Academy/Trust will not be required to consider the complaint pursuant to any specific process and will handle anonymous complaints on a case by case basis.

#### **Complaint campaigns**

Where the Academy/Trust receives a number of complaints all based on the same subject which, in its reasonable opinion, may be deemed a 'complaint campaign', it will deal with the complaints in the following way: individual responses will not be sent to Complainants in such cases. Instead, either a template response will be sent to all Complainants or a single response will be published on the Academy/Trust's

website at the discretion of the Principal /Chair of Trustees.

Where the complaint campaign involves Complainants who are parents, they will be entitled to escalate the complaint to a Panel hearing if they are dissatisfied with the Academy/Trust's response. The Academy/Trust will consider how best to manage Panel hearings in such circumstances.

### **Serial or persistent Complainants**

If at any level a Complainant or connected party attempts to reopen an issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this Complaints Policy, the Chair of Trustees may write to the Complainant to inform him/her that the procedure has been exhausted, the matter is closed and that the Trust will therefore not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

### **Vexatious complaints**

Complaints with the following characteristics may be deemed to be vexatious:

- obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
- insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
- insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance;
- demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value.

In such cases, the Chair of Trustees may write to the Complainant to inform him/her that the complaint is deemed to be vexatious and that the Trust will not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

### **Time scales**

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will only consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

### **Complaints received outside of term time**

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first Academy day after the holiday period. For the avoidance of doubt, timescales referred to in this document apply solely to the published Academy days of the academic year.

### **Scope of this Complaints Procedure**

Usually, complaints relating to the matters set out in the table below will not be considered under this policy as they have their own appeal or complaint processes. Where necessary, the Trust will exercise its discretion.

Complaints may be raised under this policy about staff conduct, however, any action taken under the Trust's internal disciplinary procedures is confidential and Complainants will not be provided with information about this.

<b>Exceptions</b>	<b>Who to contact</b>
Admissions to schools Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with the relevant Local Authority.

Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).</p>
Exclusion of children from school*	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</a>.</p> <p>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the Trust's complaints procedure.</p>
Whistleblowing	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters directly with their employer. Referrals can be made at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns should complain through the Trust's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the Trust's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the Trust's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use the Trust's premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.
National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant threatens or commences legal action against Unity Schools Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

### Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Unity Schools Trust wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we **may** offer one or more of the

following:

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

### **Withdrawal of a Complaint**

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

### **Record Keeping**

- Written records will be kept of all complaints, findings and recommendations and copies provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, and be available for inspection on the Academy premises by the proprietor and the Principal
- Written records of all complaints whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing will be retained detailing the action taken by the Academy as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld)
- All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

## **Part B- Complaints procedure for parents/carers of current pupils<sup>1</sup>**

### **Staged Approach**

The staged approach of the complaints policy is designed to ensure that every effort is made to deal with complaints informally at Academy level in partnership with the complainant. The formal stages may be triggered where the complainant remains dissatisfied.

- Stage 1 is the informal stage. In the case of a complaint by a Parent/Guardian, the Head of Year/ Year Team Leader will respond to the first approach and the majority of issues should be resolved at this stage.
- Stage 2 is a formal stage involving the Principal/ Chief Executive Officer;
- Stage 3 and 4 refers the formal complaint to the Chair of the LGC and the Board of Trustees.

The Policy is designed to manage all complaints but complaints vary in their nature and complexity. Therefore, the Academy will need to consider at which stage a complaint should be dealt with when it is initially raised and which member of staff is best placed to deal with it. Our principal aim is to deal with complaints openly, fairly, promptly and without prejudice.

### **Stage One: Discuss concerns informally with the relevant Head of Year/ Year Team Leader**

- Any matter of concern or complaint should be raised and attempted to be resolved, on an informal basis. Complainants are advised to speak to their child's Head of Year/ Year Team Leader, before a request is made to deal with it under the formal stages (stages 3 and 4) of this policy.
- The Academy will seek to resolve matters at the informal stage within 15 academy days<sup>2</sup> of the issue being raised by the parent.
- Where the matter is not resolved at the informal stage, it may be elevated to the formal stage as set out below.

---

<sup>1</sup> Where the complaints process has been started (but not completed) whilst parents/carers have children at the Academy, but the children have since left, the procedure for current parents should continue to be used.

<sup>2</sup> Academy days in this policy refers to days when the Academy is open to pupils for teaching, and does not include INSET days.

## **Stage Two: Formalising the complaint and lodging it with the Principal**

- Stage 2 complaints must be set out in writing, within 10 Academy days of the Stage 1 response and addressed to the Principal of the Academy (unless the complaint relates to the Principal, in which case please refer to the section headed 'Complaints against specific role-holders')
- The Principal may choose to delegate the complaint for further investigation to a member of the Senior Leadership Team. Whenever reasonably possible, any meetings that are held with the complainant in relation to the complaint should be arranged within 10 Academy days. However, more complex complaints may require an extension to this time limit.
- The Principal or member of the Senior Leadership Team investigating the complaint should communicate the outcome to the complainant in writing. Any agreed actions should be put in writing within 10 Academy days of notification of the outcome.
- If, as a result of the investigation, issues remain unresolved or arise relating to staff discipline or capability, details should remain confidential and be directed to the Principal. However, the complainant should be informed that the Academy has taken appropriate follow-up action.
- Where the matter is not resolved at this stage, the complainant may escalate this to Stage Three as set out below

## **Stage Three: Formal Complaint referred to the Chair of the Local Governing Council (LGC)**

- The Chair of the LGC will only proceed with this formal stage of the Complaints Procedure if a complaint has been received in writing addressed to the Chair of the LGC and all previous stages have been exhausted;
- The complaint should be made within 10 Academy days of the response at Stage 2 and set out why the complainant remains dissatisfied;
- Acknowledgement of the written complaint should normally be sent by the Governance Professional to the Chair of the LGC and to the complainant within 5 Academy days;
- The Chair of the LGC will notify the Principal and the complainant as to whether they will be invited to attend a meeting. Alternatively, the Chair of the LGC may decide to consider written material only. The Chair of the LGC will usually consider the complaint within 15 Academy days of notification by the Governance Professional;
- If the complaint relates to a staff disciplinary or capability matter about which the Principal has already taken action, the Chair of the LGC should focus on how the original complaint was managed to avoid prejudicing any ongoing disciplinary or capability procedures;
- If the complaint relates to a student matter, parents will be notified of their right to be accompanied at a meeting if the Chair of the LGC decides to hold one;
- After the Chair of the LGC has considered the complaint a copy of the findings and recommendations will be sent to the complainant, the person complained about and the Principal within 10 Academy days.
- Any complaint relating to the Principal must be raised in the first instance with the Chief Executive Officer who will, if an informal resolution cannot be reached, designate a person to investigate in the same way as in the first stage of the formal process outlined above.

## **Stage Four: Formal Complaint referred to the Board of Trustees**

- The Board of Trustees will only proceed with this formal stage of the Complaints Procedure if they have received a complaint in writing addressed to the Board of Trustees and all previous stages have been exhausted;
- The complaint should be made within 10 Academy days of the response at Stage 3 and set out why the complainant remains dissatisfied;
- Acknowledgement of the written complaint should normally be sent by the Governance Professional within 5 Academy days;
- The Governance Professional will invite the Academy and the Chair of the LGC to respond in writing to the complaint. The Academy will do this within 15 Academy days and at the end of that period (whether or not the Academy has responded) the Governance Professional will convene a meeting of the Complaints Panel of the Board of Trustees. That meeting will be held as quickly as practicable given the need to find a date that is reasonably convenient for the complainant, the Academy and the members of the Panel. Whenever possible, the meeting will be held within 15 Academy days of the

end of the Academy's response time.

- The parent/s will be invited to attend the meeting and may be accompanied by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation is not appropriate. The meeting may be a virtual meeting or held face to face and the format will be determined by the Chair of the Complaints Panel. The meeting cannot be recorded by any party.
- The Board of Trustees will convene a panel of at least three persons who have not previously been involved in the complaint. At least ONE of the THREE persons must be independent of the management and running of the academy. It is essential that this process is fair and objective. To avoid a conflict of interest, it is vital that Trustees do not consider complaints at an earlier stage;
- Trustees who have previously been involved in the complaint may not be members of the Panel;
- The panel will be provided with copies of the complaint and all other documentation and at least 5 working days' notice of the hearing will be given to all concerned. All parties involved may be accompanied, if desired, by a friend or representative and may call witnesses.
- The meeting is not a court case and will be as informal as circumstances allow. However, the structure of the hearing will be as follows:
  - i. The complainant will have the opportunity to present their reasons for dissatisfaction and to call witnesses.
  - ii. The panel and the Academy will have an opportunity to question the complainant and witnesses.
  - iii. The Academy will have the opportunity to respond to the complainant and to call witnesses if appropriate.
  - iv. The Panel and the complainant will have the opportunity to question the Academy and any witnesses.
  - v. Both the complainant and the Academy will have the opportunity to make final comments and summarise their position to the Panel.
  - vi. All but the members of the Panel and the Governance Professional will withdraw while the panel decision is reached. The panel may make findings and recommendations and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be sent to the Principal, Chief Executive Officer and complainant. The findings should include an explanation of the conclusion, the reason for it, and any action taken, including details of any request made of those complained against to take particular action in respect of the complaint.
  - vii. The Panel will formulate its response as quickly as reasonably possible, aiming to do so within 5 Academy days, and the Governance Professional will notify the complainant, the person complained about, the Principal, Chief Executive Officer and the Chair of Trustees;
  - viii. If the complaint relates to a staff disciplinary or capability matter about which the Principal has already taken action the Panel should focus on how the original complaint was managed to avoid prejudicing any ongoing disciplinary or capability procedures;
  - ix. If the complaint relates to a student matter, parents will be notified of their right to be accompanied at the panel hearing
  - x. This is the final stage in the Trust's Complaints Policy

### **Part C- Complaints raised by those who are not parents/carers of current pupils**

Complaints made by those who are not parents of current pupils, which includes complaints made by parents of former pupils after they have left the Academy, will be dealt with as follows:

- Complainants should first attempt to address their complaint to the relevant Academy or the Trust (as appropriate) informally by raising the matter with a relevant member of Academy or Trust staff, within 3 months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 3 months of the last of these incidents. The Academy/Trust (depending on the nature of the complaint) will seek to resolve the matter informally within 15 academy days.
- If it is not possible to resolve the matter informally, the complaint may be submitted in writing, to the Chief Executive Officer, or, where the complaint relates to the Chief Executive Officer, to the Chair of Trustees.
- The complaint will be acknowledged within 5 academy days and a final written response will be issued within 15 academy days.

**Complaint Form- Stage 2 and above**

Please complete and return this form to the Academy/ Trust office, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

<b>Your name:</b>
<b>Pupil's name (if relevant):</b>
<b>Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):</b>
<b>Address:</b>  <b>Postcode:</b> <b>Day time telephone number:</b> <b>Evening telephone number:</b>

<p><b>Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the Academy about it.</b></p>

**What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?**

**Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.**

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**Official use**

**Date acknowledgement sent:**

**By who:**

**Complaint referred to:**

**Date:**