Four Hills Education Trust

Where Every Step is Shaped with **CARE**

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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1. Aims, and Definitions

1.1 Aims

Our Trust aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to concerns and complaints from parents/carers of young people (students/pupils) in our academies (schools), and others.

This complaints policy and procedure is not limited to parents or carers of young people that are registered at the academies within the Trust. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to the Trust about any facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (see Section 3), we will use this complaints procedure.

We need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. We recognise that a difficulty that is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, which could be damaging to relationships and to the culture in our academies. We intend that parents/carers and young people should never feel (or be made to feel) that a complaint will be perceived negatively or will adversely affect a young person or their opportunities at the academy. We want to learn and improve wherever possible, so that we are providing the very best for all our young people.

We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage of the complaint's procedure are set out below in the relevant paragraphs.

We are also happy to receive any other feedback, including compliments. Feedback can be provided to an individual academy or to the Trust using the details in the relevant 'contact us' or 'get in touch' sections on our website (www.fourhillseducationtrust.org.uk).

1.2 Definitions

A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaint's procedure. The Trust takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

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

We understand, however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, the Headteacher will attempt to resolve the issue by following the stages outlined within this complaint's procedure.

For the purposes of this policy, a "school day" is defined as a weekday during term time, when the academy is open. The definition of "school day" excludes weekends, Bank Holidays and school holidays.

1.3 How we aim to respond

When responding to concerns and complaints, we aim to:
•Be impartial and non-adversarial
•Facilitate a full and fair investigation at the appropriate level, including by an independent person or panel, where necessary
•Address all the points at issue and provide a sympathetic, 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

We try to resolve complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

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 Trust and school website pages.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals (e.g., providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations).

If, at any stage, a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, the Trust will ask for confirmation of this in writing.

2. Legislation and guidance

This policy complies with:

•DFE guidance for academies
•Trust 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.

3. Scope

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- SEND assessments
- Safeguarding
- Exclusions
- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievances or discipline
- Curriculum withdrawal
- School reorganisation
- Third-party services
- Allegations against staff

Complaints about services provided by other providers used by the Trust - please complain directly to the third-party provider.

Complaints against school staff (colleagues), which should be raised with the Headteacher of the Academy (see Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy)
Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Any personal information recorded in relation to a complaint will be kept in accordance with the principles of the UK General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (ref: The Information Commissioner's Office)

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or Chief Executive will determine whether a complaint received anonymously warrants investigation

Where a complaint is felt by the Headteacher, CEO or the Complaints Coordinator to have become unreasonable or persistent, it will be dealt with as set out in Appendix D.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

The complainant

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

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school or Trust throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not approach individual colleagues or Trustees about the complaint
- Do not publish details about the complaint on online/social media

The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- For complaints dealt with at Stages 2 and 3 (see section 6 for definitions), prepare a comprehensive report to the Headteacher, Complaints Coordinator or Complaints Committee, which includes the facts and potential solutions

If at any formal stage of the complaint it is determined that staff disciplinary or capability proceedings are necessary in order to resolve the issue, the details of this action will remain confidential to the Headteacher and/or the individual's line manager. The complainant is entitled to be informed that action is being taken, however they are not entitled to participate in the proceedings or receive any detail about them, including any outcome.

The complaints coordinator

The Complaints Coordinator can be:

- The Headteacher / CEO
- Any other colleague providing administrative support (often the Governance Professional / Clerk to the Board of Trustees)

The Complaints Coordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the Headteacher, Chair of Trustees, Clerk and CEO

Be aware of issues relating to:

- Sharing third-party information
- Additional support needed by complainants; for example, interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person

4.4 Clerk to the Board of Trustees

The clerk will:

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

4.5 Panel chair

The panel chair will:

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

5. Principles for Investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

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

Timescales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved. When complaints are made outside of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

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

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

5.2 Complaints about our fulfilment of early years requirements

We will investigate all written complaints relating to the Trust's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. Schools will keep a record of the complaint (see section 9) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

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

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

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

6. Stages of Complaint (not complaints against the Trust, CEO or Trustees)

We have adopted a 3-stage process for dealing with complaints:
•Stage 1 – informal resolution
•Stage 2 – formal investigation
•Stage 3 – review by panel hearing

A flowchart of this is set out in **Appendix B.**

The Trust will endeavour to abide by timeframes stated under each stage but acknowledges that in some circumstances, this is not possible due to the complexity of information needed to review a complaint or difficulties regarding the availability of key individuals to deal with the complaint, for example. If it becomes apparent that it is not possible to complete any stage within the expected timeframe, the individual responsible for handling the complaint will contact the complainant as soon as possible and keep them updated about progress and the likely timescale.

6.1 Stage 1: informal

We make every effort to address any concerns or complaints early through informal measures. The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible within the timescales set out in section 5.1.

The complaint should be addressed to the relevant Class Teacher or Headteacher, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact their school office by phone/email, asking for advice about how to complain.

The Trust will acknowledge informal complaints in writing within three school days, which will confirm how the Trust intends to proceed, including an indication of the anticipated timescale.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the Headteacher or someone else if more appropriate (e.g., Class Teacher). The Trust will aim to provide a written response within 10 school days following the informal meeting.

If the complaint involves the Headteacher, Stage 1 will be completed by another Headteacher within the Trust.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint (Stage 2).

6.2 Stage 2: formal

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint in writing (unless the complainant has a sufficient reason to request a reasonable adjustment be made to amend this). Their letter or form should provide details such as:
•Relevant dates and times
•The names of witnesses of events
•What the complainant feels would resolve the complaint

See **Appendix C** for a Complaint Form setting out the key details required. This should be completed electronically or by hand and sent to the relevant academy office.

The letter / form should be submitted alongside copies of any other relevant documents.

Addressing the complaint

Complaints not involving the Headteacher should be directed to the Headteacher or the Complaints Coordinator (usually the Clerk to the Board of Trustees).

This can be done by:
Email: tricia.gurney@fourhillseducationtrust.org.uk (Clerk to the Board of Trustees)

Letter / form marked confidential and addressed to the Headteacher of the Academy, delivered to the relevant school office

Complaints involving the Headteacher should be directed to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or the Complaints Coordinator (usually the Clerk to the Board of Trustees).

This can be done by:
Email: tricia.gurney@fourhillseducationtrust.org.uk (Clerk to the Board of Trustees)
Letter / form marked confidential and addressed to the CEO, delivered to the relevant school office

•If the complainant needs assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office, who will assist them or put them in touch with the Complaints Coordinator by phone or email, who will help.
•Should a formal written complaint be received by another member of the academy's staff, this should be immediately passed to the Headteacher concerned, the appropriate Senior Leadership Team or CEO.

Investigation

•The complainant will receive written acknowledgement of their complaint within three school days.
•The Headteacher, CEO or someone else nominated by them, as appropriate, will then conduct their own investigation. In most cases, the Headteacher, CEO or nominated Investigating Officer will meet or speak with the complainant to further discuss their complaint, and / or to outline their findings or proposed actions.
•The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 15 school days.
•If the Headteacher / CEO / Investigating Officer is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.
•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 to be taken to resolve the complaint.
•If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure, they should appeal by informing the Clerk to the Board of Trustees in writing within 5 school days.

6.3 Stage 3: review panel Convening the panel

Complaints will be escalated to a panel hearing stage (Stage 3) if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at Stage 2 and has submitted a written appeal within 5 school days.

The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of this appeal in writing within 3 school days of receipt and inform the complainant of the steps involved in the process. The Clerk will be the contact point for the complainant.

- The panel will be convened by the Clerk on behalf of the Trust and must consist of 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and have not been involved in Stages 1 or 2.
- The panel will usually be Trustees and one panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school. The panel will select its own Panel Chair.
- The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 9).
- The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The Clerk will aim to find a date within 20 school days of the request, where possible.
- If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the Clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead (without the complainant if they have rejected 3 proposed dates) using written submissions from both parties.
- Any written material from both sides to be considered by the panel must be sent to the clerk no later than 7 school days before the date of the panel. This will then be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting.
- The Panel Chair and Complaints Coordinator will ensure that formal minutes of the hearing are taken and circulated.

At the meeting

There is a useful checklist in **Appendix A.**

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless required as part of reasonable adjustments. If recording is to take place, prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in the minutes.

The aim of the hearing will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the academy and the complainant.

The Panel Chair will ensure that:
•the remit of the panel is explained to all parties and that each party has the opportunity to put their case without undue interruption, as well as to ask questions at an appropriate point
•the issues are addressed
•key findings of fact are made
•parents or others not used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease
•the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with all parties treating each other with respect and courtesy
•the panel is open-minded and acts independently
•no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome or has had any involvement in an earlier stage of the process
•written material is seen by all parties in advance. If a new issue arises, good practice would be to give all parties time to consider and comment on this.

At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school (usually involving the Headteacher), as appropriate, will be present, including the Investigating Officer from Stage 2. Each will have an opportunity to set out written submissions prior to the meeting.

Any other person considered by the Complaints Panel to have a reasonable and just interest in the appeal, and whose contribution would assist the panel in their decision making, may attend – see **Appendix A** for details of how they will contribute to proceedings.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing (except if they have rejected 3 dates for the hearing – see 'convening the panel' section) and be accompanied if they wish. We don't encourage either party to bring legal representation but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

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

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

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

The outcome

The panel can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part If the complaint is upheld, the committee will:
- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The panel will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 school days. The decision reached is final, with no right of appeal.

7. Complaints about the Trust, CEO or Trustees

7.1 Stage 1: informal

We make every effort to address any concerns or complaints early through informal measures. The complainant should raise any concerns as soon as possible within the timescales set out in section 5.1.

The complaint should be addressed to the relevant member of the Trust's central team, or the CEO. If the concern regards the CEO, the complainant should contact the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

If the complainant is unsure who to contact or needs to get in touch with the Chair of the Board of Trustees, they should contact the Trust's Head Office.

This can be done by:
Email: tricia.gurney@fourhillseducationtrust.org.uk (Clerk to the Board of Trustees)

Letter / form marked confidential and addressed to the Chair of the Board of Trustees, (Four Hills Education Trust, C/O Millbrook Primary School, Grainger Drive, Leegomery, Telford, TF1 6UJ).

In the instance of complaints made against any Trustees, details should be sent to the Clerk of the Board of Trustees.

This can be done by:
Email: tricia.gurney@fourhillseducationtrust.org.uk (Clerk to the Board of Trustees)

Letter / form marked confidential and addressed to the Clerk to the Board of Trustees, delivered to any academy office or to the Trust's Head Office (Four Hills Education Trust, C/O Millbrook Primary School, Grainger Drive, Leegomery, Telford, TF1 6UJ).

The process and timescales for responding to and investigating a complaint about the Trust or central staff are the same as those set out in section 6.1.

7.2 Stage 2: formal

If the complaint is not resolved satisfactorily at the informal stage (Stage 1), the complainant must submit a formal complaint in writing to move to Stage 2.

The complainant will receive written acknowledgement of their complaint within 3 school days.

The investigating officer will then conduct an investigation, in line with the process set out in section 6.2 above, providing a written response to the complainant within 15 school days.

7.3 Stage 3: panel hearing Convening the panel

Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage (Stage 3) if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal stage (Stage 2).
A panel will be appointed by the Trust and will consist of 3 members (as set out in section 6.3 above).

At the meeting

The process and timescales for holding the meeting will be as set out in section 6.3 above.

The outcome

The panel can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part

- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld, the committee will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The panel will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 school days. The decision reached is final, with no right of appeal.

8. Referring Complaints on Completion of the School and Trust Procedures

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school or Trust complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly. The DfE will not overturn the school or Trust's decision about a complaint but will intervene if a school or Trust has:

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

If the complaints procedure is found not to meet regulations, the Trust will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see this webpage: www.gov.uk/complain-about-school We will include this information in the outcome letter to complainants.

Should the above policy and procedures not address or resolve the content of your complaint, **Appendix E** sets out details of a number of organisations which may be able to assist you further

9. Record keeping and Confidentiality

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

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

The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes related to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and stored securely and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

In the case of complaints about the Trust or central staff, these records will be managed by the Clerk to the Board of Trustees and will be stored securely in the Trust's offices under restricted access.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or under the terms of the Data Protection Act 2018, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and Retention of Documents Policy.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole Board of Trustees in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the Board of Trustees is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage (Stage 3), the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.
Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the Board of Trustees, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

9.2 Subject Access and Data Requests

In accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, individuals have the right to request access to personal data held by the Trust or its academies. This includes students, staff, and parents acting on behalf of their children.

Requests may be submitted verbally or in writing and will be acknowledged within five school days. The Trust will respond within one calendar month, unless an extension is justified under the law.

We may request proof of identity before processing a request. Where a parent submits a request on behalf of a child, we will assess the child's capacity to understand and consent to the request.

In line with data protection legislation:

- We do not charge a fee for standard requests.
- A reasonable fee may be charged for requests that are manifestly unfounded, excessive, or for additional copies of data.

All requests will be handled in accordance with our Data Protection Policy and Retention of Documents Policy.

10. Learning Lessons

The Audit & Risk Committee, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the CEO / CFOO / Executive Leadership Team, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, will 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.

Trustees, the CEO and other relevant Trust leaders 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.

11. Monitoring Arrangements

The Audit & Risk Committee will monitor the effectiveness of the Trust's complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly.

The Audit & Risk Committee will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in the section entitled 'Learning Lessons' (section 10).

The complaints records are logged and managed by the school's Governance Professional (Clerk to the Board of Trustees).

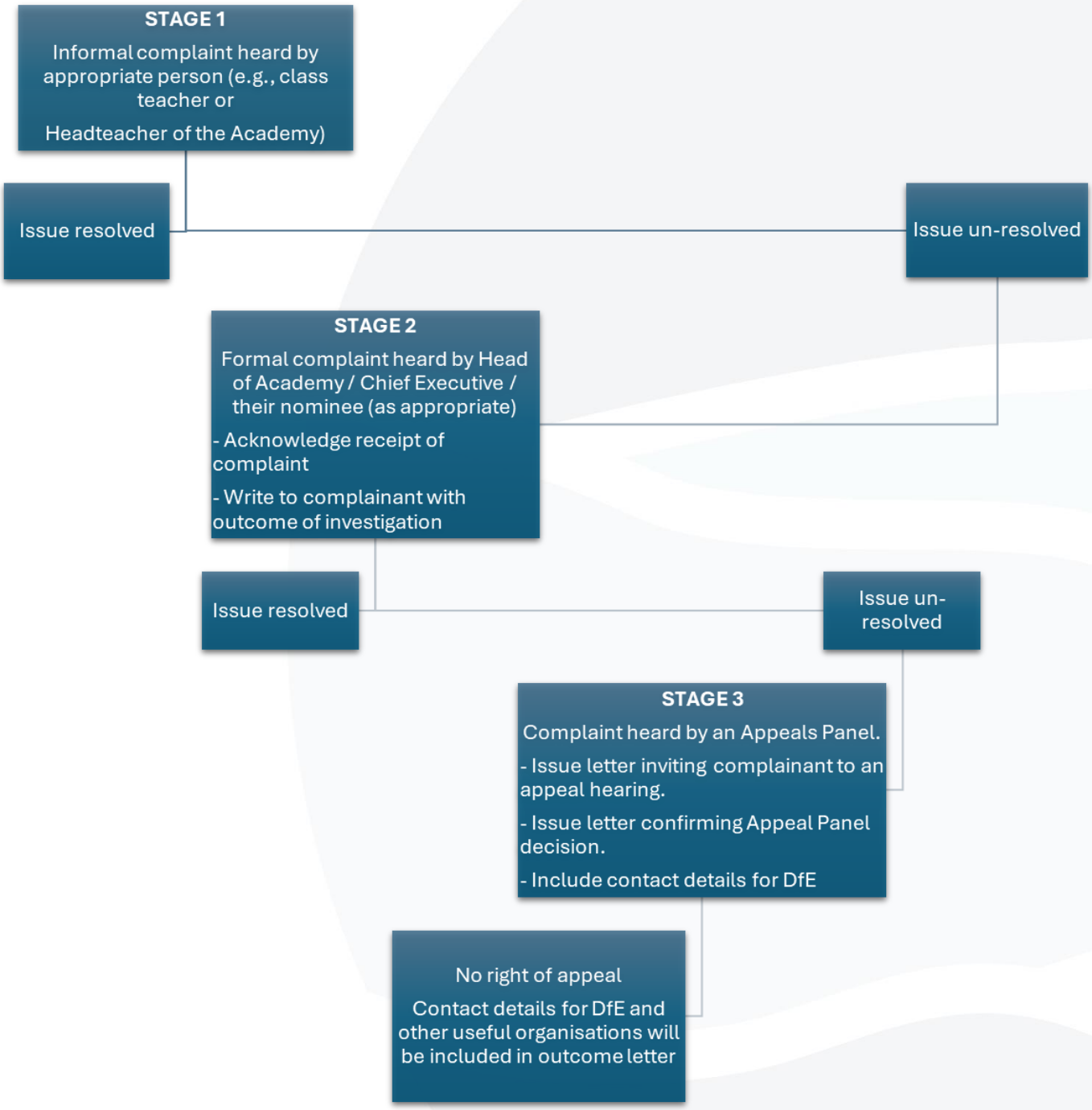
The CEO, CFOO and Governance Professional will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure Trust-wide.

This policy will be reviewed by the CEO every year. At each review, the policy will be approved by the Audit & Risk Committee.

Appendix A: Checklist for a Complaints Appeal Panel (on the day)

☑ The hearing is as informal as possible
☑ 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 may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken
☑ The Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the academy's witnesses
☑ The complainant may question both the Headteacher and the witnesses after each has spoken
☑ The Panel may ask questions at any point
☑ The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint
☑ The Headteacher is then invited to sum up the academy's actions and response to the complaint
☑ Both parties leave together while the Panel decides on the issues
☑ The Chair explains that both parties will hear from the Panel within a set time-scale

Appendix B: Flowchart – Summary of the Complaints Process



Appendix C: Complaint Form

Please complete and return this form to the Clerk to the Board of Trustees (Complaints Coordinator) who will acknowledge receipt and explain the complaints process.

ACADEMY	
Your Name	
Pupil's name	
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant)	

Address

Telephone number (day)	
Telephone number (evening)	

Please give brief details of your complaint, including details of witnesses if applicable

What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? (Who did you speak to and what was their response?)

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

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, Please give details

Signature of complainant

Date

Appendix D: Unreasonable and Persistent Complaints

Unreasonable Complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:
•Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
•Refuses to co-operate with the complaint's investigation process
•Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaint's procedure
•Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint's procedure or with good practice
•Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
•Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
•Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
•Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
•Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
•Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the DfE
•Seeks an unrealistic outcome
•Makes excessive demands on school time (what is excessive is defined by CEO) by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
•Uses threats to intimidate
•Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
•Knowingly provides falsified information
•Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

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

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

Steps we will take

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

Whenever possible, the school/Trust will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues, the school/Trust will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may:
•Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
•Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
•Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as Citizens Advice
•Put any other strategy in place as necessary

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

Serial/Persistent Complaints
If the complainant contacts the school/Trust again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. We may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:
•We have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
•The complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options
•The complainant contacts the school/Trust repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

The case to stop responding is stronger if:
•The complainant's communications are often or always abusive or aggressive
•The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff
•We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school/Trust with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

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

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

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

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

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

Complaint Campaigns

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

•Publishing a single response on the school/Trust website

•Sending a template response to all the complainants

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

Appendix E: Contact with Other Organisations about Complaints

Should the above policy and procedures not address or resolve the content of your complaint, the following organisations may be able to assist you further:

For complaints relating to:

•The quality of education or leadership, or concerns affecting the academy as a whole, please contact the Department for Education or Ofsted How DfE handles complaints about academies - GOV.UK https://complain.ofsted.gov.uk

•Discrimination, please contact Equality Advisory Support Service https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en

•Data protection, please contact Information Commissioner's Office https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/

•Exam malpractice or maladministration, please contact the Office of Qualifications and Exams Regulations (Ofqual) and relevant awarding body https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual/about/complaints-procedure

•Criminal behaviour, please contact the Police

•Employment matters, please refer to the academy's other published policies or the Employment Tribunal Service https://www.gov.uk/employment-tribunals

•Child protection, please refer to the Trust's Safeguarding and Young Person Protection Policy or refer to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and/or the Director of Children's Services

•A young person's EHCP needs, please refer as an example to the First Tier Tribunal (Special Education Needs and Disability) service formerly the Special Education Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST) First-tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability) - GOV.UK