



**BISHOP
HOGARTH**
Catholic Education Trust

Complaints Policy

Review date: September 2026

Date of next review: September 2028

Review History				
Review Date	Reviewer	Approved by	Date Approved	Implemented
April 2026	Head of Governance, Compliance and Policy	Finance & Resources Committee	April 2026	September 2026
September 2028				
Recent Revisions				
Issue No.	Date	Revisions made		
7	April 2026	Included link to guidance from Parentkind.		
		Updated the procedure for hearing a stage 3 complaint.		

1. Introduction

The policy applies to the Trust and all schools across Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust (BHCET) for all concerns and complaints raised against a school or the Trust. The Trust will review this policy every two years and assess its implementation and effectiveness. The Trust will monitor the implementation of the policy to ensure that all concerns and complaints are dealt with in accordance with the policy.

The complaints policy is published on the Trust and school websites, and a copy can also be provided by the relevant school.

The Trust provides a good education for all our children and young people, and all staff work hard to build positive relationships with all parents/carers, the local community, and other stakeholders. However, there is a statutory obligation to have in place a complaints procedure and that any such complaints will be dealt with in accordance the guidance set out by the Department for Education (DfE), The Education Funding Agency (EFA) and the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, Schedule 1, Part 7.

The Trust aims to be fair, open, and honest when dealing with any complaint. When considering a complaint, we endeavour to deal with them as swiftly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding, and in all cases, we put the interests of the child above all other issues. The policy provides sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed and then resolved.

The aim of this policy is to:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible.
- Be easily accessible and publicised.
- Be simple to understand and use.
- Be impartial.
- Be non-adversarial.
- Allow swift handling by adhering to time limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress. Delays within the process will be communicated to all parties.
- Ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary.
- Respect people's desire for confidentiality.

- Address all the points at issue and provide effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary.
- Provide information to the Trust and the school's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to enable services to be improved.

The policy will ensure that we are clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. We will take concerns seriously at the earliest stage to reduce the numbers that develop into complaints. To be effective, the application of the procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

2. Who can make a complaint?

Parents/carers of children that are registered at any of the schools in Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust can make a complaint using this policy.

3. Scope

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by the Trust and its schools, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those exceptions listed below.

Exception	Who to contact
Admission to schools	Concerns about admissions will be addressed by the admission appeals process or via the Trust as the admissions authority.
Statutory assessments of special educational needs	Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with the relevant local authority.
Matters likely to require a child protection investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled in accordance with the school's Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

Exclusion of children from school *	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions *Complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with in accordance with the Trust's HR policies and procedures, if appropriate. Parent/carers will not be informed of any action taken against a staff member because of a complaint. However, the parent/carer will receive one notification that the matter is being addressed.
Organisations or individuals using school premises (e.g., community groups, sports associations or service providers that run extra-curricular activities.	Allegations relating to an incident that happened when an individual or organisation was using Trust and/or school premises for the purposes of running activities for children. As with any safeguarding allegation, the Trust safeguarding policy and procedures will be followed, and the relevant LADO will be notified.
Data Protection related complaints	Complaints regarding data protection matters, including those received direct from the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) must be referred to the Trust Data Protection Officer immediately upon receipt (email: governance@bhcet.org.uk). This will ensure deadlines set by the ICO are met.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the Diocese, police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams, or any Tribunals, this may impact on ability to adhere to the timescales within this policy or result in the policy being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, parents/carers will be made aware of the proposed new timescale.

If a parent/carer commences legal action against the Trust and/or any of its schools 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.

4. The difference between a concern and a complaint

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.'

The Trust acknowledges that 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 complaints procedure. The Trust takes concerns very seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If parent/carer has difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect their views. In such a case, the Headteacher will refer them to another member of staff. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher will refer the parent/carer to another senior member of staff.

The Trust appreciates that there are occasions when a parent/carer would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, an attempt will be made to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints policy.

5. How to raise a concern or make a complaint

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 of a parent/carer, if they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns/complaints raised in person, in writing (including email) and/or by telephone with staff including Class Teachers/Pastoral Learning Manager/Curriculum Leader/Assistant Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher will be treated as informal complaints (Stage 1). If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint. All formal complaints at stage 2 and 3 must be made in writing, unless there is sufficient reason for the person making the complaint to request a reasonable adjustment be made to amend this.

Formal complaints (Stage 2) about an incident in school and/or a member of staff should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Formal complaints (Stage 2) that involve or are about the Headteacher should be marked 'Private and Confidential' and addressed to Chair of the Local Governing Committee c/o the school.

Formal complaints (Stage 2) that involve or are about the Chair of the Local Governing Committee, any individual governor or the whole Local Governing Committee will be dealt with by the CEO and should be marked as 'Private and Confidential' and sent to the Head of Governance, Compliance and Policy c/o Carmel College, The Headlands, Darlington, County Durham, DL3 8RW or by email to governance@bhcet.org.uk

Formal complaints (Stage 2) against the CEO should be marked as 'Private and Confidential' and sent to the Chair of the Directors, c/o Carmel College, The Headlands, Darlington, County Durham, DL3 8RW or by email to governance@bhcet.org.uk

For ease of use, a template complaint form (Appendix 1) is included at the end of this procedure. Advice and support on completing the form, is available from the Head of the Governance, Compliance and Policy. Independent advice and support is also available from third party organisations, for example, Citizens Advice.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable parent/carers to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting parent/carers in raising a formal complaint or holding hearings in accessible locations.

Concerns and/or complaints MUST not be made to individual Governors and/or Directors. They have no power to act on an individual basis, and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 and/or Stage 3 of the policy.

6. Advice for parents/carers

The Trust and its schools share the same goal as parents/carers: supporting children's education. The Trust would respectfully ask parents/carers consider the following when submitting their formal complaint:

- Not using social media – sharing a complaint on social media can be harmful to all involved and may not lead to a quicker resolution – contact the school directly.
- Not building a crowd – other parents/carers may share your views, but your complaint should be specific to your child.
- Not targeting people – making it personal to individual staff members can take things too far, keep the complaint to challenging Trust/school policy.
- Not behaving aggressively: abusive and aggressive behaviour will never be tolerated by the Trust and its schools and can lead to consequences for parents/carers.
- Only using Artificial Intelligence (AI) with caution – AI does not always get it right when citing laws and can make a complaint more complex than necessary or potentially inaccurate.
- Working in partnership – having a good relationship with your school is important and it benefits all to move on after complaints are resolved.

Further advice and guidance can be found in 'Parent guide to school complaints' published by Parentkind. The guide can be accessed [here](#)

7. Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated. Anonymous complaints received by a school will be shared with the Head of Governance, Compliance and Policy who will pass the complaint to the CEO who will then determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

8. Time scales

Complaints 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.

9. Complaints received outside of term time

Complaints made outside of term time will be considered on the basis that it was received on the first school day after the holiday period.

10. Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, the aim is to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, it may 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 acknowledgement of the parent/carer's perspective.
- An admission that the situation could have been managed 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 Trust/school policies considering the complaint.
- An apology.

Schools will endeavour, where appropriate, to undertake restorative practices to resolve complaints in the first instance. This should involve bringing together all those affected by the issue, creating a safe environment, and developing emotional intelligence through listening and acknowledgment. Restorative practice aims to allow participants to come to a shared understanding, identify creative ways to deal with the issue, and provide opportunities to rebuild damaged relationships.

11. Withdrawal of a complaint

If a parent/carer wants to withdraw their complaint at stage 2, this must be confirmed in writing. An email to the school will suffice. If a parent/carer wants to withdraw their stage 3 complaint, this must be confirmed in writing to the Head of Governance, Compliance and Policy. An email to governance@bhcet.org.uk will suffice.

12. Dealing with concerns/complaints

Informal Complaints – Stage 1

It is hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis. Concerns raised with Class Teachers/Pastoral Learning

Manager/Curriculum Leader/Assistant Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher will be treated as informal complaints (Stage 1).

They will be investigated and the person making the informal complaint will be asked how they believe the complaint may be resolved. On conclusion of the investigation, the person investigating the informal complaint will provide an informal written response (either by letter or email) within five school days of the date of receipt of the informal complaint. The response will confirm that the complaint has been resolved informally. If the complaint remains unresolved at the end of Stage 1, the parent/carer can progress it to Stage 2.

Formal Complaints – Stage 2

On receiving the formal complaint, the Headteacher will inform the Head of Governance, Compliance and Policy. The school will acknowledge receipt in writing (either by letter or email) within two school days.

The acknowledgement will confirm the process to be followed along with the deadline date for a response. Where appropriate, clarification of the content of the complaint may be sought, including what remains unresolved and what outcome the parent/carer may wish to see.

The Headteacher may choose to delegate the investigation to another member of the school's Leadership Team, however the decision regarding the outcome of the complaint will be made by the Headteacher.

The Headteacher/Investigating Officer will consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this. If the Headteacher/Investigating Officer arranges such a meeting, another member of staff will attend the meeting to take notes.

During the investigation, the Headteacher/Investigating Officer will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied by a member of staff if they wish. The Headteacher/Investigating Officer will arrange for a member of staff to take notes at all meetings arranged as part of the investigation.
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will send a formal written response within fifteen school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the parent/carer 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 that the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
- not uphold the complaint.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the Headteacher will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- where appropriate, recommend changes made to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The letter will also include how to escalate the complaint to Stage 3 should the parent/carer remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

The Trust Leadership Team may be consulted about appointing a suitable senior member of staff from the Trust to respond to a complaint about a school.

A suitable senior member of staff from the Trust will be appointed by the CEO to support the Chair of the Local Governing Committee to complete all the actions at Stage 2 (see above) when dealing with complaints relating to the Headteacher and/or a member of the Local Governing Committee.

The CEO/or their nominated delegate will complete all the actions at Stage 2 (see above) when dealing with complaints relating to Chair of the Local Governing Committee, the entire Local Governing Committee, and/or the majority of the Local Governing Committee.

Complaints Panel Hearing – Stage 3

If the parent/carer is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to the Complaints Panel

(Stage 3). A request to escalate a complaint to a Complaints Panel (Stage 3) must be made in writing (an email will suffice and reasonable adjustments can be requested if required) to the Head of Governance, Compliance and Policy, within ten school days of the date of the Stage 2 response. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The request MUST include clear reasons as to why the parent/carers believe the complaint is unresolved and confirmation of any outcome that would resolve the issues. This is the final stage of the complaints process.

The Complaints Panel for the hearing will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. Membership will be two members of the Board of Directors and one person independent of the management of and running of the Trust and school involved. The Trust is satisfied that a Governor, from a Local Governing Committee at a different school within the Trust can be the independent panel member.

The Head of Governance, Compliance and Policy will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within two school days. In the acknowledgement, the Head of Governance, Compliance and Policy will write to the parent/carers to confirm that we will aim to convene a hearing within twenty school days of receipt of the request to escalate to a Complaints Panel (Stage 3). If this is not possible, the Head of Governance, Compliance and Policy will provide an anticipated date and keep the parent/carers informed.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair; or
- the entire Local Governing Committee; or
- the majority of the Local Governing Committee

two Directors and an independent panel member will hear the stage 3 complaint. One of the panel members will be independent of the management and running of the Trust and school involved. This means that the independent panel member will not be a Director or an employee of the Trust.

All hearings will be held in person at the Trust headquarters; Carmel College, The Headlands, Darlington, County Durham, DL3 8RW. Any party may request the

meeting be held virtually via Microsoft Teams. Where this is requested, agreement will be sought from all parties.

A parent/carer may bring someone along to the Complaints Panel hearing to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. We do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the hearing because the Complaints Panel is not a form of legal proceedings. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a Complaints Panel hearing, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least ten school days before the hearing, the Clerk to the Complaints Panel will:

- confirm and notify the parent/carer of the date and time of the hearing ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
- circulate a procedure for the hearing along with copies of the original stage 2 complaint submitted by the parent/carer, the response to the stage 2 complaint that was sent to the parent/carer and the request from the parent/carer to progress the complaint to stage 3.
- request copies of any additional information to be submitted to the Head of Governance, Compliance and Policy for circulation at least five school days before the hearing.

Any additional written material will be circulated to all parties at least seven school days before the date of the hearing. The Complaints Panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

If the parent/carer rejects the offer of the first date, a second date will be arranged as soon as is practicably possible. If both dates are rejected without good reason, the Head of Governance, Compliance and Policy will decide when to hold the hearing. The hearing will then proceed in the parent/carer's absence based on written submissions from both parties.

Where a parent/carer fails to attend the Complaints Panel hearing without any explanation, the panel may decide to proceed in their absence. The Complaints

Panel will consider the written representations from both parties. The Complaints Panel may also consider any verbal representations made by the school representatives at the hearing.

The Complaints Panel will only examine the Stage 2 outcome and process in relation to the original complaint. The Complaints Panel will not review any new complaints at Stage 3 or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be considered. New complaints must be raised at Stage 1 of the procedure.

The hearing will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings and/or conversations are not normally permitted unless a parent/carer's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before the recording of a hearing takes place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

Further information about the Complaints Panel hearing is included in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 is the procedure that will be followed at the hearing.

The Complaints Panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The Complaints Panel may:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part; or
- not uphold the complaint; or
- be unable to decide based on the information presented.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the Complaints Panel will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Clerk to the Panel will send the parent/carer and the Headteacher a full explanation of the Complaints Panel decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within five school days.

The response will 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.

The response will include details of how the parent/carer can contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been dealt with.

The response will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher and will be retained for three years.

13. Complaints escalated to/about the Trust, CEO or Director

If a complaint is escalated to “the Trust” or if a parent/carers wishes to complain directly about the Trust, then the complaint should be sent to the CEO to be investigated.

The CEO will complete all actions at Stage 2 and 3 (See section 12) when dealing with complaints directly about the Trust. The CEO may choose to delegate the investigation to a member of the Trust Leadership Team, however the decision regarding the outcome of the complaint will be made by the CEO.

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a Director, the Chair of Directors will investigate the complaint. If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice-Chair of Directors for investigation. The process followed will be the same as Stage 2 and Stage 3 (See section 12).

In the exceptional circumstance that all Directors are included in the complaint or are aware of the substance of the complaint before the Complaints Panel stage, the Trust will (where reasonably practicable) arrange with another Multi Academy Trust for an entirely independent investigator, decision maker, and Complaints Panel to deal with the complaint.

14. Next steps

If a parent/carers remains dissatisfied once all stages of the complaints policy have been completed, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State. The Trust will refer them to the relevant DFE school complaint form, and prompt them to follow the instructions on this form to submit a complaint to the DfE. The DfE can also be contacted by post at Ministerial and Public Communications Division, Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Stire Street, Manchester, M1 2WD or by telephone on 0730 000 2288 (Monday to Friday 9.30am to 5pm).

The DfE will not overturn the Trust or the Complaints Panel decision about a complaint or re-investigate the original complaint. The DfE will only intervene following a complaint if it believes that:

- The Trust and/or school failed to follow its own complaints policy.
- The Trust and/or school did not comply with its funding agreement.

- The Trust and/or school failed to act in accordance with its legal duties.

When making a final decision about a complaint, the Trust reserves the right to seek advice from the DfE on whether they are acting reasonably and lawfully; however, they will not be able to advise on how to resolve the complaint.

The DfE cannot deal with all types of complaint, and you may need to contact a different agency as follows:

Complaint	Who to contact
Data protection	Information Commissioner's Office
Discrimination	Equality Advisory and Support Service
Exam malpractice or maladministration	Ofqual and the awarding body

Ofsted

Complaints can be made to [Ofsted](#) about any state school if there is a problem that affects the whole school. This includes problems with the quality of education or poor management.

A response should be received within thirty working days and will explain if Ofsted will investigate or not, and why.

15. Record keeping

The Trust and schools will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the outcome. Records will include copies of letters, emails and notes relating to meetings and phone calls. The written records will be in accordance with Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Section 33 sub-paragraph (e) with details of whether they were resolved following a formal procedure, or progression to a Complaints Panel hearing.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or members of the Complaints Panel. Findings and recommendations of the Complaints Panel will

be available on the school premises for inspection by the proprietor and the Headteacher/CEO/Deputy CEO.

This is except where the Secretary of State (or someone acting on their behalf) or the parent/carer requests access to records of a complaint through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request or under the terms of the Data Protection Act 2018 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), or where material must be made available during a school inspection under Section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 where access is requested.

Where the complaint involves a child/young person, the complaint will be kept on file in accordance with the statutory requirements.

Details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with all Directors in case a Complaints Panel needs to be organised at a later date.

16. Complaint campaigns

In the unfortunate circumstance that school within the Trust becomes the focus of a campaign and as a result receives large volumes of complaints that are all based on the same subject and/or from individuals not connected to the school, we will deal with this as follows:

- Send a template response to all complainants.
- Publish a single response on the school website.

Complainants who remain dissatisfied with the response will be directed to the DfE.

17. Managing serial and unreasonable complaints

The Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact parents/carers have with schools. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will act to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive, or threatening. The Trust defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the parent/carer's contact with the school, such as, if the parent/carer:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be considered 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 Department for Education.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
- Uses threats to intimidate.
- Uses abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language or violence.
- Knowingly provides falsified information.
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

The characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint are:

- Complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, and/or 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.

Parents/carers should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, 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.

The Trust will not refuse to accept further correspondence or complaints from an individual that has repeatedly and/or excessively contacted the school. The application of a 'serial or persistent' marking will be against the subject of the complaint rather than the complainant.

Whenever possible, a senior member of Trust staff will discuss any concerns with the parent/carer informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, a senior member of Trust staff will write to the parent/carer explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For parents/carers who excessively contact a school causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

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 all Trust premises.

18. Communication strategy for persistent correspondents

Where an individual's behaviour is causing a significant level of disruption, the Trust will:

- Restrict the individual to a single point of contact via an email address.
- Limit the number of times that contact can be made, e.g., a fixed number of contacts per term.

The Trust acknowledges that regardless of the application of any communication strategy, parents and carers will receive the information they are entitled to under the Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2005, within the statutory timeframe.

Should an individual persist to the point that their behaviour may constitute harassment, the Trust will seek legal advice.

19. The decision to stop responding

The decision to stop responding to an individual will never be taken lightly and will not be made until the Trust are confident that:

- Every reasonable step has been taken to address the parent/carer's concerns.
- The parent/carer has been given a clear statement of the Trust and/or school's position and their options.
- The parent/carer continues to contact the Trust and/or school repeatedly, making the same points each time.

The Trust will also take into consideration the following when making the decision to stop responding to a complaint:

- The individual's letters, emails or telephone calls are often and/or always abusive or aggressive.
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about or makes threats towards staff.
- The Trust have reason to believe the individual is intent on causing disruption or inconvenience through their excessive contact.

Where the Trust decides to stop responding the individual will be informed in writing.

Appendix 1 – Formal Complaint Stage 2

Name of pupil/student	
Pupil/student date of birth	
Name of school	
Name of parent/carer	
Name of person completing the form (if not parent/carer)	
If you are not the parent/carer, do you have consent to submit a complaint on behalf of the parent/carer?	
Parent/carer home address	
Parent/carer contact telephone number	
Parent/carer email address	
Details of complaint – please provide full details of your complaint, including relevant dates and persons concerned.	

What action, if any, have you taken already to try and resolve your complaint (please include details of who you spoke with and their response).

How do you feel the complaint could be resolved at this stage?

Please include any paperwork you feel is relevant to your complaint. You may wish to provide details of any attachments. It is advisable not to include original copies of any paperwork, copies will suffice.

Signed	
Date	
The completed form should be returned to the relevant person as confirmed in the Trust's Complaints Policy.	

Appendix 2 – Complaints Panel Hearing

The Complaints Panel will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. One of the panel members must be independent and not directly involved in the management and running of the school.

Parents/carers 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 Directors who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

The person escalating their complaint to a Complaints Panel may be accompanied by one person at the hearing. The DFE guidance and the regulations recommend that neither the parent/carer nor the school bring legal representation as these hearings are not a form of legal proceedings.

In cases where the person making the complaint is a child/young person the Trust will ask in advance if any support is needed to assist them in the presentation of their complaint. The Trust will allow the parent/carer to decide if the child/young person should attend. However, parents/carers need to be aware that this may not always be possible should the Complaints Panel consider it is not in the child/young person's best interests.

The Complaints Panel will also ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated by the atmosphere and proceedings during the hearing.

The Complaints Panel will respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

The aim of the Complaints Panel will be:

- reconciliation
- to put things right that may have gone wrong

The Complaints Panel will make findings and recommendations, a copy of which will be provided to the person making the complaint and, where relevant, the person complained about.

The outcome letter will also include the conclusions and reasons for any decisions and any further rights of appeal.

Appendix 3 – Procedure for the Complaints Panel Hearing in respect of a stage 3 complaint

	Time allocated
The Chair will welcome all parties to the hearing and following introductions will confirm the purpose of the hearing and the procedure to be followed.	5 minutes
The parent/carer will be invited to summarise their reasons for appealing the outcomes of the stage 2 response and clearly state what they are seeking as a resolution to their complaint.	20 minutes
The school representatives will be invited to respond to the parent/carer representations and confirm the actions taken to respond to the complaint.	20 minutes
The parent/carer will be offered the opportunity to ask questions of the school representatives.	10 minutes
The school representatives will be offered the opportunity to ask questions of the parent/carer.	10 minutes
Members of the Complaints Panel will be offered the opportunity to ask questions of the parent/carer and school representatives.	20 minutes
The school representatives then the parent/carer will be invited to sum up.	20 minutes
The Chair of the Complaints Panel will check with all parties that they have been given sufficient opportunity to present their case, that they have been listened to and that the process followed has been fair.	5 minutes
At this stage, both the parent/carer and school representatives will leave the hearing to allow members of the Complaints Panel to deliberate. The Complaints Panel will agree a written response which will be sent by the Clerk to the Complaints Panel to the parent/carer within five school days of the hearing. The Headteacher will also receive a copy of the outcome letter.	