



Fylde Coast Academy Trust
(FCAT)

Procedures for the Handling of Complaints 2021-2022

Related Policies:
FCAT Managing Violent and Abusive Parents, Carers and Visitors Policy

Policy Version/Issue Date and amendments	Version 8 – 1 st September 2021 Amendments: Updated timescales for the outcomes of an appeals panel.
Electronic copies of this plan are available from	FCAT CENTRAL
Hard copies of this plan are available from	FCAT / All FCAT Academy Websites
Date of next review	April, 2022
Person responsible for Policy / review	CG

Introduction

The policy of FCAT is to work in partnership with parents and the wider community. It is based on the belief that co-operation and a sense of joint purpose between staff, parents and the academy will assist in ensuring open and positive relationships. From time to time, however, parents and members of the public may express concern or make a complaint, either orally or in writing, about some aspect of the conduct/operation of the Trust, a particular academy, the conduct of the Chief Executive Officer, FCAT central staff, a Headteacher or Executive Headteacher, an individual member of staff, the Academy Council or an individual Academy Council member. FCAT and its academies will always give serious consideration to concerns and complaints that are brought to its attention and ensure that these are dealt with effectively and with fairness to all parties. Where possible, complaints will be resolved informally. Where a complaint has not been resolved informally, then the formal procedures set out in this policy will be followed.

Formats

This document can be made available in a variety of alternative formats e.g. audio, large print, Braille and in languages other than English. Please contact FCAT Business Services to request this.

What is a concern or complaint?

- (a) A concern or complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction about the conduct/operation of FCAT or an academy within the FCAT organisation, the conduct of, actions or lack of actions by a member of staff / FCAT executive, an academy council /an individual governor, unacceptable delay in dealing with a matter or the unreasonable treatment of a pupil or other person.
- (b) Concerns or complaints relating to any of the following are not covered by these procedures, as separate procedures apply.
 - Safeguarding and Child Protection
 - Collective Worship
 - Freedom of Information Access
 - Student Exclusions
 - School Admissions
 - Sex Education
 - Grievance
 - Statementing procedures for special educational needs
 - Whistle-blowing by an employee
 - Headteacher's decisions on unauthorised absence in term time
- (c) Services provided by other organisations, serious complaints or allegations relating to the abuse of children, assault, criminal or financial matters are also subject to separate procedures.

- (d) We will not respond to complaints made about incidents that have happened six months previously or earlier.

Making a complaint - who to complain to:

If the complaint is about:

- FCAT, its policies or practices, or an issue with a member of the central FCAT team, contact John Topping, FCAT Community Relations and Estates Lead on jt@fcat.org.uk.
- Something that has happened or failed to happen in a particular academy, contact the Headteacher of that academy.
- A staff member at a particular academy, contact the Headteacher of that academy.
- The actions of the Headteacher, contact the Executive Headteacher of that academy.
- The actions of the Executive Headteacher, contact the Governance Lead, Ciara Gregson on ciara.gregson@fcat.org.uk who will pass the matter on to the Chief Executive of Fylde Coast Academy Trust.
- The actions of an Academy Council member or members, contact the Governance Lead, Ciara Gregson on ciara.gregson@fcat.org.uk who will pass the matter on to the appropriate Academy Council Chair.
- The Chair of an Academy Council, contact the Governance Lead, Ciara Gregson on ciara.gregson@fcat.org.uk who will pass the matter on to the Chief Executive of Fylde Coast Academy Trust.

We would hope to resolve most concerns and complaints at an informal stage, but the procedures allow for formal consideration of a complaint and an appeal stage if this is not possible. We are committed to dealing with complaints as speedily as possible and would plan to complete each stage of the procedure within 20 school days. When we are not able to complete the process within that timescale the complainant will be informed of any delays.

Should a complaint regarding a member of staff employed by FCAT require management in accordance with any of FCAT's HR Policies or Procedures or referral to a separate body through legal compliance, such processes would run concurrently with this FCAT Complaints Policy.

The Complaints Procedures

In dealing with complaints FCAT will take account of its public sector equality duty and have due regard for the need to:-

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it

- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it

Where complaints are made against an individual member of staff or governor, that person will be informed of the complaint at the earliest opportunity.

Informal stage

We will seek to resolve concerns and complaints informally and encourage the complainant to discuss the matters causing them concern in order to avoid formal stage complaints.

At the informal stage, the person leading the response to the complaint should:

- Acknowledge the complaint;
- Make enquiries to establish the facts;
- Seek advice as appropriate;
- Work to resolve the matter;
- Establish whether or not the complainant is satisfied;
- Reply to the complainant explaining clearly the outcome of any investigation/action and advise of the next stages if he/she wishes to proceed to a formal stage consideration of the complaint;
- Make a record of the complaint and actions taken to resolve it on the academy Complaints Register.

This stage would normally be expected to be completed in 20 school days.

The informal stage will not be used if the allegations made refer to:

- Criminal activity which may require the involvement of the police
- Financial or accounting irregularities
- Abuse of children

The Complaints Register

The Complaints Register is a written register of all complaints, available for inspection on the school premises by the Headteacher, Executive Headteacher and FCAT Governance Lead. The register details the stage at which a complaint was resolved, including whether a panel meeting was held and records the action taken by the school as a result of the complaint.

Formal stage

Where an informal complaint has not been resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, there is an option to take the matter to a formal stage. To do this, the complainant is required to write to FCAT detailing their complaint in full within 20 days of being notified of the outcome of the informal stage. The letter should be sent to:

Ciara Gregson, Governance Lead

FCAT Offices
Armfield Academy
488 Lytham Road
Blackpool
FY4 1TL

Or by email to ciara.gregson@fcatschools.org.uk

The Governance Lead will ensure that any written complaint is forwarded to appropriate personnel within FCAT and that an investigation into the matter is carried out and a response to the complainant sent out within 20 school days of receipt of the formal complaint.

Appeals stage

A Complaints Appeals Committee will consider complaints that the Trust has not been able to resolve to the satisfaction of the complainant at the formal stage and the complainant wishes to make an appeal.

Any appeal must be made in writing to the Governance Lead Ciara Gregson, FCAT Offices, Armfield Academy, Blackpool FY4 1TL, who will convene an appeals committee meeting to hear the case. The committee will consist of three governors from across the Trust, all of whom are independent of the management of the academy concerned and have had no previous direct involvement in the matters detailed in the complaint. The committee will meet with the complainant at a meeting held within 20 days of receipt of the written appeal. A parent can attend and be accompanied at the meeting, witnesses and individuals providing support are also able to attend. One of the committee will be nominated to chair the meeting and a Governance Administrator should also be present to take formal minutes of the meeting.

Prior to the meeting, the Governance Administrator will:

- Formally acknowledge the request for the meeting;
- Ensure that the Headteacher/other appropriate people is/are informed of the request;
- Arrange a time for the meeting that is mutually convenient for the committee and the complainant and make sure all parties are informed of this and the venue;
- Provide papers to all parties attending the meeting at least one week in advance of it taking place. These should include the written formal complaint, details of any investigations into the case by FCAT personnel, any reports from the Headteacher and/or other staff in respect of the complaint and the response to the complainant on the outcome of the formal stage. Other papers can also be circulated to substantiate particular issues e.g. witness statements from the complainant and/or academy/Trust if appropriate.

At the meeting, the Chair will:

- Welcome everyone to the meeting, introduce attendees and explain the procedure to be followed which is that:
- The complainant will be invited to make their case about the complaint and the reasons for requesting an appeal against the original outcome.
- Questions from the panel will take place during the course of the meeting.

- When all information has been submitted and questions asked, the complainant will be asked to leave in order for the committee to consider the issues raised and make a decision on whether or not the original outcome to the complaint was valid.
- The committee can also request further information from the Headteacher/other appropriate people in light of the complaint/appeal either by asking him/her to attend part or all of the meeting. It may be appropriate to hear their statements in the absence of the complainant in order to avoid unnecessary anxiety between parties. However, the complainant, the Headteacher and any individuals supporting either party, must leave the meeting while the committee comes to its decision.

After the meeting, the Governance Administrator will:

- Inform the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about of the outcome of the meeting in writing within 5 school days, and, where the appeal has been dismissed, signpost him/her to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), via the Department for Education website if they would like to take the matter further.
- Inform all other parties of the outcome of the meeting and any further actions identified at the meeting.
- Make a record of the outcome and ensure that it is added to the Complaints Register.
- Report all appeals and decisions to the next meeting of the FCAT Directors.

Unreasonable Complainants

FCAT will deal with complaints fairly and impartially but will not allow the occurrence of unacceptable behaviour from any complainant that the Trust regards as:

- Abusive
- Offensive
- Threatening
- Behaviour deemed to be harassment
- Repeated complaints that previous investigations have found to be unsubstantiated or are felt to have been addressed.

(See FCAT Managing Violent and Abusive Parents, Carers and Visitors Policy).

Further stages

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept as confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

If, after following all stages of this complaints procedure a complainant wishes to take the matter further, the complaint should be sent to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) via the Department for Education (DfE).

The ESFA will normally only consider a complaint after FCAT's own complaints procedure has been exhausted.

The ESFA cannot review or overturn decisions about complaints made in respect of academies. The ESFA can only investigate whether the academy considered the complaint appropriately.

If the ESFA finds that an academy/trust did not consider a complaint appropriately it can request that the complaint be reconsidered and/or its complaints procedure be amended.

Complaints should be sent by post to Academies Central Unit (Academy Complaints), Education and Skills Funding Agency, Earlsdon Park, 53-55 Butts Road, Coventry, CV1 3BH or by email to academyquestions@efa.education.gov.uk

Withdrawal of a complaint

If the complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing.

Complaints about an Academy Council member, the Chair or the Academy Council

Complaints about a governor should be referred to the Governance Lead who will refer the matter to the appropriate chair of the academy council. A response will be provided by the chair via the Governance Lead.

Any appeal against the chair's response would be dealt with by the Complaints Appeals Committee via the Governance Lead.

Complaints about the Chair must be referred to the Chief Executive of Fylde Coast Academy Trust via the Governance Lead.

Serious allegations or complaints

If the allegations refer to criminal activity which may require the involvement of the Police, the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher will inform the Chair of the Academy Council and seek appropriate advice as necessary from FCAT HR, and FCAT Policies and procedures.

If the allegations relate to financial or accounting irregularities involving misuse of FCAT funds or assets or any circumstances which may suggest irregularities affecting cash, stores, property, remuneration or allowances, the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher will inform the FCAT Services Lead, and FCAT's external auditors.

If the allegations relate to the abuse of children, the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher will seek the advice of the Senior Designated Person for Child protection in the academy, FCAT and/or the Local Authority Designated Officer. Serious allegations of this nature will be referred under Child Protection Procedures.

In all cases, FCAT policies and procedures will be followed, without prejudice.

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment

Date: September 2016	FCAT Complaints Policy	Assessor: GFL
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Number	Protected Characteristics	Any Concerns Arising?	Details of Concerns	Recommendations
1	Disability			
	Example: physical disabilities, learning difficulties or medical needs	x	Potential accessibility issues	Make a range of accessibility tools available e.g. 'text to audio', large text, etc., as needed.
2	Gender			
	Females/Males			
3	Sexual Orientation			
	Example: Gay, lesbian			
4	Gender Reassignment			
	Gender Reassignment			
5	Race/Ethnic Group			
	Example: Black, Asian, Chinese, etc.			
6	Pregnancy/Maternity			
	Pregnancy or maternity/paternity			
7	Marriage/Civil partnership			
	Marriage/Civil Partnership			
8	Religion or Beliefs			
	Example: Jewish, Muslim, Christian etc.			
9	Age			