



Mater Ecclesiae

Catholic Multi Academy Trust

'One Family in Christ'

Trust Complaints Policy and Procedure





Document Control

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1. General Principles

Catholic schools aim to be places where love of one's neighbour is evident at all times. We aim to be "One Family In Christ." It is in wishing to uphold this principal that Catholic schools, and those who work there, commit themselves to care for their school community and uphold the Catholic doctrine and the ethos of the school. Nevertheless, as in any organisation, there can be times when a complaint may arise and the aim of this Complaints Policy is to set out how those complaints will be dealt with and how the school will work with all parties involved towards achieving a satisfactory resolution.

1.1 Legal context

Since 1 September 2003 Governing Bodies of all maintained schools and maintained nursery schools in England were required, under Section 29 of the Education Act 2002, to have in place a procedure to deal with complaints relating to the School and to any community facilities or services that the School provides. The law also requires the procedure to be publicised. On 1 September 2010, The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010 which outline the provisions for complaints within Academies came into force.

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 provided an additional function of the Governing Body to establish and publish procedures for dealing with complaints relating to the school, other than those covered by legislation and formal procedures elsewhere.

1.2 Scope

As the complaints policy is based upon [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), it only applies to complaints from parents/carers of pupils at your school, regarding their child.

The policy of the Trust and its Academies is to work in partnership with parents and members of the public. It is based on the belief that co-operation and a sense of joint purpose between staff, parents, members of the public and the Trust/Academy will assist in ensuring open and positive relationships. From time to time, however, parents or members of the public may express concern or make a complaint, either orally or in writing, about the conduct of a member of staff or Director of the Trust.

Anonymous complaints will be considered and an outcome of any findings will be recorded in the schools recording systems. In dealing with complaints, the Trust/Academy will ensure that they are dealt with effectively and with fairness to all parties.

This document provides advice and guidance on how the Trust/Academies should respond when an external complaint has been made about the actions of the Trust's staff or Directors.

A copy of the Complaints Procedures can be found on the Trust's website. A written copy may be obtained upon request from the Headteacher (throughout this policy the term Headteacher includes an Executive Headteacher/CEO) of the Academy.

1.3 Resolution

It is encouraged to resolve any areas of concern(s) informally before the formal process is commenced.

2. Complaints

2.1 What is a complaint?

- a) For the purposes of this procedure a complaint is described as an expression of dissatisfaction about the conduct of, actions or lack of action by a member of staff, unacceptable delay in dealing with a matter or unreasonable treatment of a pupil or other person. The complaint needs to put in writing or if made verbally will be verified by the complainant and the school / academy.
- b) This procedure does not cover complaints under legislation for which separate arrangements are in place for example those relating to:
 - the National Curriculum
 - Collective Worship
 - Freedom of Information Access
 - School/Academy Admissions
 - Pupil Exclusions
 - Staff Grievance
 - Statementing procedures for Special Educational Needs
 - other functions of the Trust/Board
- c) Serious complaints or allegations relating to the abuse of children, assault, criminal or financial matters are also the subject of separate procedures, which may involve other agencies. Where this may be the case, contact should be made with the Headteacher in the first instance.

2.2 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'.

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 Mater Ecclesiae Catholic Multi Academy 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, a senior leader will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, a senior leader will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff 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, Mater Ecclesiae will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

2.3 Serious allegations or complaints

If the allegations refer to criminal activity, which may require the involvement of the Police, the Headteacher, Chief Executive Officer and Chair of the Board should be informed, unless this would compromise the investigation, and seek advice from an appropriate source. If allegations refer to safeguarding children, advice should be sought from the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and Human Resources.

If the allegations relate to the abuse of children, the Headteacher, Chief Executive Officer or Chair of the Board, as appropriate, should seek the advice of their Human Resources provider and LADO. Serious allegations of this nature must be referred under Trust's/Academy's Child Protection Procedures to the Local Authority. It will usually be necessary for a strategy meeting to be convened in order to consider a way forward.

If the allegations involve financial or accounting irregularities or circumstances which may suggest irregularities affecting cash, stores, property, remuneration or allowances, the Chief Executive Officer (Accounting Officer) must be informed so that the complaint can be investigated under the procedures normally applied for suspected financial irregularities.

If the allegations refer to maladministration of tests, the appropriate authority should be contacted (in the case of primary schools, the Standards and Testing Agency, in the case of Secondary Schools, the appropriate examination board).

In all the above, consideration will be given under the appropriate procedures where necessary.



Anonymous complaints will continue to be considered and an outcome of any findings will be recorded in the Trust's/Academy's recording systems.

2.4 Who to complain to:

The Trust/Academy would in most cases hope to resolve concerns and complaints informally, but the procedure allows for an informal and formal consideration of a complaint and an appeal stage if matters cannot be resolved. It may in some stages require an independent investigating officer to be included in the process. Where this is the case, this will be fully communicated to the complainant.

Complaint Against	Investigating Officer for Informal Investigation	Formal Investigation	Appeal
Chair of the Board	External person to be appointed by the Vice Chair of the Board	Trust Complaints Committee	Trust Appeal Panel
Other Director (inc CEO)	Chair of the Board	Trust Complaints Committee	Trust Appeal Panel
Headteacher	Chair of LGB	Chief Executive Officer	Trust Complaints Committee
A member of the Academy Leadership Team	Headteacher	Chief Executive Officer	Trust Complaints Committee
Other Teaching and Support Staff	A member of the Academy Leadership Team appointed by the Headteacher	Headteacher/Chair of LGB	Chief Executive Officer

Where a complaint is made against an individual member of staff, that person will be informed of the complaint at the earliest opportunity by the Investigating Officer, in writing, and will be provided with a copy of the complaint. Full confidentiality must be adhered to at all times during these processes but it is important to note that the anonymity of the complainant cannot be guaranteed.

It is useful to encourage complainants to indicate what actions they feel might resolve the problem. Identifying areas of agreement and clarifying any issues can also create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues. In this respect it should be noted that complainants' views on this may be unreasonable and they should be made aware of what are reasonable and appropriate outcomes in relation to the specific nature of their complaint.

These procedures are in addition to the Trust's Whistleblowing procedures and other statutory reporting procedures applying to the Trust and its academies.

2.5 Timescales

The Trust/Academy is committed to dealing with complaints as speedily as possible and would plan to complete each stage within ten working days, that is, days upon which the academy is open to educate children or INSET days. From time to time, it may not be possible to complete the process in that timescale.

Where that is not possible the complainant will be informed of any delays in writing. Where a complaint leads to criminal proceedings, this will always be the case, therefore timescales within this procedure may need to be reviewed.

2.6 Confidentiality

All conversations and correspondence will be treated confidentially. Personal information will only be shared between staff and directors on a 'need to know' basis. It is essential that any information shared with any party, as a result of this procedure, is kept strictly confidential.

It is essential that Directors do not discuss any matters disclosed to them with other members of the Board, to ensure that sufficient Directors have no prior knowledge of the complaint to enable a Complaints Panel to be convened, if required, at the Formal Stage. It is also essential that Directors are mindful that details of situations occurring within the school should not be discussed or made reference to at any Board Meetings.

2.7 Accompaniment

Throughout this procedure, all parties will have the opportunity to be represented. In the case of a member of staff you may be accompanied by a companion who must be either a willing work colleague not involved in the issue related to you or an accredited trade union representative of a union recognised by the Trust and in the case of a Parent, you may be represented by a friend or a colleague at any informal or formal stages.

It is not appropriate for Solicitors or representatives of similarly professional environments who are not linked to a Professional Trade Union, to be present at any formal meetings.

2.8 Recording and monitoring complaints

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision. A record of complaints, how they were dealt with and the outcome will be maintained as a separate complaints file, in the interests of the members of staff concerned and the Trust/Academy.

Records of complaints against Directors or Headteachers will be maintained by the Chief Executive Officer and for all other staff employed by the Trust by the Headteacher of the Academy.

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

3. The Complaints Procedure

3.1 The Complaints Procedure

In dealing with complaints the school/academy will take account of its public sector equality duty and have due regard to 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

Except in exceptional circumstances previous stages of the procedure should be exhausted before a complaint is referred to a subsequent stage.

3.2 The Informal Stage

In most cases complaints are successfully resolved informally by teachers, senior managers and Headteachers. However, if this does not resolve the problem then the matter should be brought to the attention of the appropriate Investigating Officer at the Informal Stage as outlined in the table in 2.4

The Investigating Officer will:

- Acknowledge the complaint.
- Make enquiries to establish the facts.
- Seek advice as appropriate.
- Attempt to resolve the matter informally.
- Establish whether or not the complaint is satisfied.

- Advise the complainants of the next stages if they wish to proceed to a formal consideration of the complaint.

Make a brief note of the outcome.

This stage would normally be expected to take no more than 10 Academy days.

If the Headteacher/Chair of Governors is not able to resolve the complaint and/or the complainant still remains unhappy the complaint should be dealt with at the Formal Stages.

3.3 The Formal Stages

Where an informal complaint has not been resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant they should write to the Headteacher or Chief Executive Officer within 10 working days of the receipt of the outcome at the previous stage. On receipt, the Headteacher or Chief Executive Officer will:

- Ensure the complainant is aware of the procedures.
- Require a written record of the complaint (someone else may write this on behalf of the complainant).
- Formally acknowledge the complaint.
- Seek advice as appropriate.
- If the complaint concerns a member of staff inform them and provide them with a copy of the complaint.
- Prepare a report as a result of the investigation and consider actions to be taken.
- Advise the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about the outcome. Where it is considered no further action is needed or the complaint is unsubstantiated, the complainant should be advised, in writing. They should also be informed of their right to appeal within 10 working days.
- Make a record of the complaint and its outcome; a copy of the findings, recommendations and outcome, as appropriate, must be retained on the premises for inspection by the proprietor and headteacher.

This stage would normally be expected to take no more than 10 working days.

3.4 Appeals

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal investigation they should write to the Clerk of the Board within 10 working days of the receipt of the outcome at the previous stage stating why and request that their complaint be referred to the Appeals Panel, Complaints Committee or Chief Executive Officer as appropriate.

An Appeals Meeting will be convened within 10 working days of the request.

The Appeal/Complaints Panel will comprise two Directors who have not previously been involved in the complaint and/or do not have a personal or pecuniary interest plus an independent panel member determined by the Diocesan Education Service.

The Trust's Human Resources service provider and Diocesan Officer will be available to assist the Committee and to offer advice as required.

At least 5 days before the meeting, members of the Appeal/Complaints Panel or Chief Executive Officer will receive papers about the complaint which should include as appropriate:

- A copy of the original complaint.
- An outline of any investigation carried out by the Investigating Officer Informal Stage.
- A copy of the letter sent to the complainant about the outcome at Informal Stage.
- A copy of the letter from the complainant expressing their dissatisfaction with the outcome at Informal Stage.
- A copy of the letter to the Investigation Officer requesting an investigation at Formal Stage.
- An outline of any investigation carried out by the Investigation Officer at Formal Stage.
- A copy of the letter sent to the complainant about the outcome at Formal Stage.
- A copy of the letter from the complainant expressing their dissatisfaction with the outcome at Formal Stage.
- A copy of the appeals letter from the complaint.
- A copy of the Trust's current adopted Complaints Procedure.

The Panel/Chief Executive Officer will:

- Consider the written materials.
- Consider the complaint and the Investigating Officers actions.
- Invite the Investigating Officers and the complainant to the meeting.
- Have an opportunity to question the complainant and Investigating Officer when they have stated their cases.
- Seek advice and support as necessary.
- When the Panel/Chief Executive Officer is satisfied that it has all the information it needs it will consider all the evidence and decide an outcome.

At the end of their consideration the Panel/Chief Executive Officer can:

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.



- Recommend changes to the Trust's/Academy's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

and will:

- Advise the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about the decisions in writing within 5 working days.
- Advise the complainant of any further action they may wish to take if they remain dissatisfied.
- Retain a copy of the findings, recommendations and outcome, as appropriate, on the premises for inspection by the proprietor and headteacher.

This decision is the final stage of the Trust's internal Complaints Procedure.

3.5 Withdrawal of a complaint

If the complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing/email. The individual of whom the complaint refers will be informed that the complaint has been withdrawn.

4.1 Register of Complaints

The school will maintain a register of all formal complaints received and note whether each one was resolved at the end of Stage 2 or whether the proceed to a Stage 3 panel hearing. This register will record any action taken by the school or Multi Academy Company as a result of the complaint, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld or not.

4.2 Confidentiality

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

4.3 Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints may not be investigated under this policy unless there are exceptional circumstances. These would include serious concerns such as Child Protection issues, where the School would either involve external agencies or else conduct its own internal review to test whether there is any corroborative evidence which might trigger a formal investigation.

4.4 Serial and Persistent Complaints

There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. Where a complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of Governors will inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

4.5 Complaint Campaigns

If the school becomes the focus of a campaign and receives a large volume of complaints that are all based on the same subject and/or are from complainants unconnected with the school, then they will be dealt with separately. The school will establish the most appropriate way to deal with these which could include sending a template response to all complainants or publishing a single response on the school's website.

4.6 Third Parties

If a complaint relates to a third party who is using the school premises or facilities then that complaint must be submitted directly to the third party concerned following their own complaints procedures. For example, this could be where the school site is being used for community facilities or services.

5. Time Scales

Clear timescales are set out in this procedure defining the time frame that a complaint will be dealt with at each stage. However, in the event of a complaint being complex and further investigations are necessary it may become clear that the published timescale cannot be met. In this event then the school will set new timescales. The complainant will be sent the details of the next timescales and be provided with an explanation of the delay.

Where a complainant submits a complaint outside of the time frame outlined in these procedures the school will take exceptional circumstances into account when deciding whether to accept or progress a complaint and will not refuse to deal with a complaint simply because it has been lodged outside of this preferred timescale.

6. Taking a complaint further

If a complainant has completed the stages in this Complaints Policy and is still dissatisfied, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has a duty to consider all complaints raised but will only intervene where the Governors have acted unlawfully or unreasonably and where it is expedient or practical to do so.



The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) considers complaints relating to academy schools in England on behalf of the Secretary of State. The ESFA will consider complaints about academies that fall into any of the following three areas:

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

The ESFA will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint. However, if it finds that the school did not deal with a complaint properly it will request the complaint is looked at again and procedures meet the requirements set out in the Regulations.

If the school's complaints procedure does not meet the Regulations, it will ask the school to put this right. It may seek to enforce the decision under the terms of the funding agreement on behalf of the Secretary of State if appropriate.

The ESFA can be contacted as follows:

Website <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure>

Address:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit

Education and Skills Funding Agency

Cheylesmore House

5 Quinton Road

Coventry

CV1 2WT