



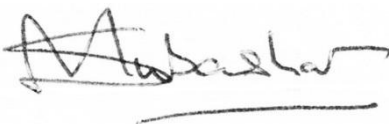
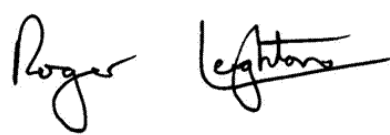
## Partnership Learning

### **Complaints Policy and Procedure: Trust Central Staff and Central Services**

#### **MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW**

The Board of Trustees will assess the implementation and effectiveness of this policy at appropriate intervals. The policy will be published on the Trust's website.

This Policy will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees every three years and must be signed by the Chair of the Board of Trustees and Chief Executive.

Policy Adopted/Approved by Board of Trustees:	1st December 2025
Next Review:	December 2028
Signature of Chair of the Board of Trustees: 	Signature of Chief Executive: 



## Partnership Learning

### Complaints Policy and Procedure: Trust Central Staff and Central Services

#### 1.0 Scope

This policy relates only to complaints against Partnership Learning ('the Trust') as a central entity, including its centrally employed staff and its Board of Trustees.

Complaints against a school within the Trust are **not** within the scope of this policy – they must be made directly to the school concerned, in line with the individual school's complaints procedure. The Trust cannot review or overturn a Trust school's decisions about complaints because the operation of school complaints procedures is a matter delegated to schools by Trustees. If a complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the DfE after they have completed all stages of the school's complaints procedure.

This policy does not cover complaints that are dealt with under other procedures, statutory or otherwise, including those listed below:

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Admissions to schools</li></ul>	Complaints about admissions are handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the relevant local authority.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Statutory assessments of special educational needs</li></ul>	Complaints about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with local authorities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation</li></ul>	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under the Trust's and individual schools' child protection and safeguarding policies and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.  A complainant with serious concerns may wish to contact the relevant local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exclusion of children from school</li></ul>	Further information about raising complaints about exclusion can be found at: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</a> .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff grievances</li></ul>	Complaints from Trust employees will be dealt with under internal grievance procedures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Whistleblowing</li></ul>	The Trust has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all its employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed

	person for matters relating to education, for whistle-blowers who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a> .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complaints about services provided by other suppliers who may use the Trust premises or facilities</li> </ul>	Complaints should be raised directly with the external provider, and should use their complaints procedure

If other bodies are investigating aspects of a complaint - for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals - or aspects of a complaint have become subject to the Trust's internal Staff Disciplinary Procedures, this may impact on the Trust's ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until these investigations or procedures have been completed. If this happens, the complainant will be informed of a proposed new timescale.

## 2.0 Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at one of the Trust's schools. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that are provided centrally by the Trust.

## 3.0 How to raise an issue or make a complaint

An issue may be raised informally, or a formal complaint made, in person, in writing (by letter or email) or by telephone. They may also be raised or made by a third party, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so from the person raising the issue or making the complaint.

Any communications should be marked as Private and Confidential.

<i>For issues or complaints about:</i>	<i>Submit your issue/complaint to the Trust office, for the attention of:</i>	<i>Decision-Maker</i>
Trust staff (except the CEO) or central Trust services	Trust Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	Trust Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
CEO or a Trustee	Chair of Trustees	Chair of Trustees
Chair of Trustees	Trust Governance Professional	Trust Member*
Whole Board of Trustees	Trust Governance Professional	Trust Member*

*\*Trust 'Members' are appointed to oversee the membership and constitution of the Board of Trustees*

For ease of use, a template issue/complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If help is required in completing the form, the Trust office may be contacted for assistance. A third-party organisation such as Citizens Advice may also be able to provide assistance.

In accordance with equality law, the Trust will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable access to and completion of this complaints procedure: for instance, by providing information in alternative formats, assisting in raising a complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Individual Trustees should not be approached to raise issues or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure if this is necessary.

#### **4.0 Anonymous complaints**

The Trust will not normally investigate anonymous complaints about its central staff and services. However, the CEO or Chair of Trustees, as appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation despite the complainant's anonymity.

#### **5.0 Serial, persistent or vexatious complaints**

The Trust will do its best to resolve matters for all who contact it with an issue or complaint about its central staff or services.

However, there may be occasions when, despite all stages of the complaint procedure having been followed, a complainant remains dissatisfied. If a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the Trust will inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed.

If the complainant contacts the Trust again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the Trust may choose not to respond.

Complaints which fall under one or more of the following categories may be considered as 'vexatious':

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

In the case of such vexatious complaints, the Trust may take the decision to stop responding (and inform the complainant accordingly) if some or all of the following apply:

- every reasonable step has been taken to address the complainant's concerns
- the complainant has been given a clear statement of the Trust's position and their options
- the complainant contacts the Trust repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time
- the complainant's letters, emails, or telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive
- the complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff
- the Trust has reason to believe the individual is contacting it with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

## 6.0 Time-scale for raising issues or making complaints

Issues must be raised, or complaints made, within three months of the relevant incident or cause of concern, or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. The Trust will consider issues raised or complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply, at the discretion of the CEO or Chair of Trustees as appropriate.

## 7.0 Complaint Campaigns

On occasion, the Trust may become the focus of a campaign and receive large volumes of complaints that are all based on the same subject and/or are from complainants unconnected with the Trust. In such exceptional circumstances, the Trust may decide to send a template response to all complainants and/or publish a single response on the Trust's website. This will depend upon the nature of the issue and all the prevailing circumstances at the time.

## 8.0 Procedure for resolving issues or complaints

### Possible outcomes

At each stage in the procedure, the Trust will endeavour to resolve the issue or complaint to the satisfaction of the person raising it.

Potential outcomes at each stage of the procedure include:

- Dismissal of the issue or complaint in whole or in part, with an explanation of why the Trust feels that this is the appropriate outcome
- Upholding of the issue raised or complaint made, in whole or in part, in which case the Trust may offer one or more of the following:
  - an explanation
  - an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
  - an assurance that the Trust 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 policies in light of the complaint
  - an apology.

Note: An issue raised or complaint made about a member of central Trust staff may involve their actions being dealt with under the Trust's internal disciplinary procedures. If this is the case, the person raising the issue or making the complaint will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member. However, they may, if appropriate, be notified that the matter is being addressed under the Trust's disciplinary procedures, as part of the notification of outcome of an issue or complaint.

## Records

A written record will be kept of all issues raised or complaints made, and of whether they are resolved at Stages 1 or 2 or proceed to a Complaint Panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

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

## Withdrawal from the process

If a person raising an issue or making a complaint decides to withdraw from the process, the Trust will ask them to confirm this in writing.

## Stage 1 – Informal stage

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

Issues should be raised with the CEO if about central Trust staff (except the CEO) or central Trust services; with the Chair of Trustees if about the CEO or an individual Trustee; or with the Trust Governance Professional if the issue is about the Chair of Trustees or the whole Board of Trustees.

The appropriate decision-maker will provide a response within 15 working days of the date of the issue being raised.

If the person raising the issue considers the matter to remain unresolved, the next step would be to make a formal complaint.

## Stage 2 – Formal stage

Formal complaints must be made to the appropriate person, as outlined in Paragraph 3 above, via the Trust office, preferably by completing, and submitting to the appropriate person, the Complaint Form provided below. However, formal complaints can also be made in person, in writing (by letter or email) or by telephone. Whichever method is used, complainants should make clear that they wish to make a formal complaint.

The recipient of the complaint (the CEO/Chair of Trustees/Trust Governance Professional as appropriate) will write to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the complaint within 5 working days of the date that the complaint was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy and will confirm the expected date for providing a response to the complainant.

Within this initial response, the CEO/Chair of Trustees/Trust Governance Professional (as appropriate) will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. A face-to-face meeting may be offered as the most appropriate and effective way of clarifying these matters.

Note: The CEO/Chair of Trustees/Trust Member as Decision Maker may delegate any investigation and/or the management of the complaints process to another suitable person but not the decision to be taken and any potential actions to follow.

During the investigation, the CEO/Chair of Trustees/Trust Member as appropriate (or appointed investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

Following the investigation of the complaint, the CEO/Chair of Trustees/Trust Member (as appropriate) will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 15 working days of the date that the complaint was received (with a copy to the CEO). If this time limit cannot be met, the appropriate person will write to the Complainant within 10 working days of the date that the complaint was received, explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

The response to the complainant 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 any actions the Trust will take to resolve the complaint. It will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

### **Stage 3 Complaint Panel (See details in ‘Appendix – Complaints Panel Arrangements’)**

If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 2, they may write to the Trust Governance Professional requesting the complaint be heard before a Complaint Panel.

Requests must be received within 15 working days of the complainant receiving confirmation of the outcome of their Stage 2 complaint. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Complaint Panel will consist of three members. None of the three members of the Complaint Panel will have been involved in the incidents or events which led to the complaint, or have been involved in dealing with the complaint in the previous stages, or have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint.

One of the Complaint Panel members will be independent of the management and running of the Trust. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will not be a Trustee, a Trust Member, a Local Governor at any of the Trust's academies, or an employee of the Trust either at Trust level or at any of its academies.

The Complaint Panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The Complaint Panel can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the Complaint Panel may:

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

The Chair of the Complaint Panel will provide the complainant and the Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 working days of the Panel meeting. Where appropriate, the response will include details of actions the Trust will take to resolve the complaint and any recommended changes to systems or procedures.

### **Next Steps**

If the complainant believes the Trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can, after the completion of Stage 3, contact the DfE.

The DfE will not normally re-investigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the Trust. They will consider whether the Trust has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

The DfE may be contacted via the online enquiry form at [https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact the Department for Education](https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact%20the%20Department%20for%20Education) ticking the 'complaint' box.

Using the online enquiry form is the most effective way to contact the DfE, but the Department can also be contacted at the following address:

Department for Education, School Complaints Compliance Unit,  
Piccadilly Gate, Store Street  
Manchester M1 2WD

## **9.0 Trust Office Contact Details**

Email: [office@partnershiplearning.com](mailto:office@partnershiplearning.com)

Postal Address:  
Partnership Learning,  
Parsloes Avenue,  
Dagenham,  
Essex, RM9 5QS

Tel: 020 3909 2333

### **Appendix – Complaints Panel Arrangements**

#### **Requests for a Panel Hearing**

A Complaints Panel Hearing is a hearing to consider those elements of the Stage 2 response to the complaint with which the complainant remains dissatisfied. The Complaint Panel is not obliged to consider any new complaints which have not been previously raised.

Requests must be received in writing within 10 working days of the complainant receiving confirmation of the outcome of their Stage 2 complaint. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

If assistance with the request is required, for example because of a disability, please inform the Trust Governance Professional who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

The request should include:

- a copy of any relevant documents and full contact details of the complainant;
- details of all the grounds of the complaint about which the complainant remains dissatisfied and the outcome desired;
- whether the complainant proposes to be accompanied to the Panel Hearing

The Trust Governance Professional will record the date the request is received and acknowledge receipt of the request in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 working days.

Complainants may withdraw their request for a Panel Hearing at any point up to and including the intended date of the Panel Hearing. Such requests must be made in writing.

#### Arrangements for the Panel Hearing

The Trust Governance Professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the Complaint Panel meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 30 working days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Trust Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

At least 15 working days before the meeting, the Trust Governance Professional will:

- confirm and notify the complainant and Panel members of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the date is convenient to all parties\* and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request, of the complainant and Stage 2 decision-maker, copies of any further written material - to be submitted to the Trust Governance Professional in time for distribution to the Panel at least 5 working days before the meeting.

*\*If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Trust Governance Professional will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.*

The Trust Governance Professional will endeavour to circulate a copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the Complaint Panel to all parties at least 5 working days prior to the Panel Hearing. The bundle of documents will include all records held in the complaint file following Stage 1 and 2, together with any correspondence and documents received from the complainant or Stage 2 decision-maker following notification of the formal response at Stage 2.

## Attendees

The complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend.

The panel may be advised by an appropriate HR or governance professional.

The Panel Hearing is an internal process, not legal proceedings. Generally, therefore, neither party is encouraged to bring legal representatives to the Complaint Panel meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a Trust employee is called as a witness in a Complaint Panel meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

If the complainant wishes to be accompanied by a relative or friend who is legally qualified, the complainant is required to notify the Trust Governance Professional in the initial request for a Panel Hearing. The complainant should note that the Complaint Panel will wish to speak to that person directly prior to the Panel Hearing, and they will not be permitted to act as an advocate or address the Complaint Panel at the Panel Hearing unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Complaint Panel.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

## Composition of the Panel

The Complaint Panel will comprise three individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint. One member of the panel will be independent of the management and running of the Academy Trust (i.e. they will not be a Trustee, a Trust Member, a Local Governor at any of the Trust's academies, or an employee of the Trust either at Trust level or at any of its academies). The remaining two members may be Trustees, Local Governors, Trust Members or other suitable individuals.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair of Trustees or
- the entire Trust Board or
- the majority of the Trust Board

all three members of the complaint panel will be independent of the management and running of the Academy Trust.

The Trust Governance Professional will inform the complainant of those who have been appointed to sit on the Complaint Panel when confirming the date and time of the Panel meeting. Fair consideration will be given to any reasonable objection to a particular member of the panel.

Complaint Panel members will appoint one of their number to be the Chair of the Complaint Panel throughout the proceedings.

An appropriate person will be appointed by the Trust to take minutes of the Panel Hearing.

## Role of the Complaint Panel

The role of the Complaint Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaint/s that have been made by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties; and
- any representations made by the parties

and to review the decision reached at Stage 2 and to consider, on a balance of probabilities, as to whether or not to uphold each aspect of the complaint.

### The Panel Hearing

Unless prior to the commencement of the Panel Hearing, a complainant confirms they are satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, the Panel Hearing will proceed notwithstanding that the complainant may decide not to attend. In these circumstances, the Complaint Panel will consider the complaint in their absence and issue its findings on the substance of the complaint.

The Complaint Panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The Complaint Panel will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior consent to any recording must be sought from all parties attending before any recording of meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The panel will usually hear representations from the Stage 2 decision-maker and the complainant.

During the Panel Hearing, the parties shall have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments relevant to the complaint in an appropriate manner. However, all questions must be directed through the Chair of the Complaints Panel and not asked directly to the other party or their representatives. This procedure ensures that the hearing remains orderly and professional. Direct cross-examination between the parties is not permitted, and the Panel reserves the right to rephrase, decline, or limit any questions that are deemed irrelevant, repetitive, or otherwise unsuitable for the proceedings.

The Panel Hearing is not a legal process and the Complaint Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.

All statements made at the Panel Hearing will be unsworn.

All those present during the Panel Hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the Panel Hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the Panel Hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and their comment will be minuted.

The Chair may, at their discretion, adjourn the Panel Hearing if they consider it appropriate to do so. This may include an adjournment for welfare reasons, to enable additional information to be obtained and/or considered or for the parties to take advice on a specific issue arising.

A Panel Hearing before the Complaint Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media (including social media).

### Panel Outcome

When the Chair of the Complaint Panel is satisfied that sufficient consideration has been given to the documentation provided and any representations made by the parties, they will conclude the Panel Hearing.

The Complaint Panel will, and may also make recommendations for actions.

The Complaint Panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The Complaint Panel can make findings about each aspect of the complaint on the balance of probabilities and:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part, or
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the Complaint Panel may:

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

It is not within the powers of the Complaint Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on Trustees or Executive Officers.

The minutes of the Panel Hearing, together with the Complaint Panel's decision and the reason(s) for it, and any recommendations, will be provided in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, within 10 working days of the Panel Hearing. The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education (DfE) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the Trust.

The Complaint Panel's findings and any recommendations will also be made available for inspection on the Academy Trust's premises by the Chair of Trustees and the Chief Executive Officer.

The decision of the Panel is final. There will be no further opportunity within the Academy Trust for consideration of the complaint. The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the Academy Trust's complaints procedure.

If a duplicate complaint is received by a new complainant following completion of the Stage 3 procedure, the Academy Trust will inform the new complainant that the matter is closed.



## Partnership Learning

### Complaint Form

Complaints against Partnership Learning ('the Trust') as a central entity, including its centrally employed staff and its Board of Trustees

*This form should be used only for complaints against Partnership Learning ('the Trust') as a central entity, including its centrally employed staff and its Board of Trustees. Complaints against a school within the Trust are not within the scope of this policy – they must be made directly to the school concerned, in line with the individual school's complaints procedure. The Trust cannot review or overturn a Trust school's decisions about complaints because the operation of school complaints procedures is a matter delegated to schools by Trustees.*

Please complete and return this form to the Trust Office for the attention of the CEO/Chair of Trustees/Trust Governance Professional as appropriate (see table below) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

<b>For complaints about:</b>	<b>Submit your complaint to the Trust office for the attention of:</b>
Trust staff (except the CEO) or central Trust services	Trust Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
CEO or a Trustee	Chair of Trustees
Chair of Trustees	Trust Governance Professional
Whole Board of Trustees	Trust Governance Professional

How to contact the Trust office:

Email: office@partnershiplearning.com  
Postal Address: Partnership Learning, Parsloes Avenue, Dagenham, Essex, RM9 5QS  
Tel: 020 3909 2333

Your name:	
Address including postcode:	
Telephone number:	
Email address:	
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have already communicated with anybody at the Trust about it.	

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
Signature:	
Date:	
Official use	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By who:	
Complaint referred to:	