



**SANCTA
FAMILIA**

CATHOLIC ACADEMY TRUST

Complaints Policy

External Use

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Definitions

In this Complaints policy, unless the context otherwise requires, the following expressions shall have the following meanings:

- 'Academy Trust Company' means the company responsible for the management of the Academy and, for all purposes, means the employer of staff at the Academy.
- 'Board' means the Trust Board of the Academy Trust Company.
- 'Calendar month' refers to a period measured according to the standard calendar, either from the first to the last day of a month or from a specific date in one month to the corresponding date in the next month.
- 'Chair' means the Chair of the relevant Local Governing Board or committee thereof, unless otherwise stated, or a member of the Trust Team.
- 'Chief Executive Officer (CEO)' means the most senior executive officer of the Academy Trust Company.
- 'Clerk' means the Clerk to the Local Governing Board as appointed from time to time.
- 'Complainant' means the individual making the complaint.
- 'Directors' means directors appointed to the Board from time to time.
- 'Headteacher' means the most senior teacher in the Academy who is responsible for its management and administration. Such teacher may also be referred to as the Head of School or Principal.
- 'Local Governing Board' means the Local Governing Board appointed to carry out specified functions in relation to the Academy as delegated by the Academy Trust Company.
- 'Nominated Individual' means the individual who will manage the Stage 2 Formal Investigation process
- 'Panel Chair' means the individual who is nominated for the Stage 3 Panel Hearing.
- 'Panel member(s)' means the individual(s) who participates in the Stage 3 Panel Hearing.
- 'Parents' references to 'parents' in this policy include carers.
- 'School days' refers to days when the Academy is open to pupils for teaching and does not include INSET days.
- 'Vice-Chair' means the Vice-Chair of the relevant Local Governing Board as elected from time to time.

1. Introduction

At Sancta Familia Catholic Academy Trust, we are committed to providing a working and learning environment that reflects is based on our values Love, Service, Humility and Faith alongside the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. The Trust approaches all complaints as an opportunity to learn, improve and demonstrate the values of fairness and compassion that underpin everything we do at Sancta Familia Catholic Academy Trust.

- 1.1 The aim of this policy is to resolve complaints or concerns about Sancta Familia Catholic Academy Trust the 'Trust'), any Academy within the Trust or any individual connected with the Trust, in a fair, thorough and transparent way. The Trust takes complaints seriously and views them as a chance to learn and improve for the future.
- 1.2 At Sancta Familia Catholic Academy trust we believe that everyone's voice matters and therefore anyone can make a complaint.

1.3 Complaints about matters where an alternative process exists will not generally be dealt with under this policy. These are set out in Part B.

1.4 Requests for reasonable adjustments to the process set out below will be considered to ensure that all complainants can access and complete the process.

1.5 The complaint procedures set out in this policy do not apply to and are not intended for use by pupils or staff.

1.6 The Trust's Complaints Procedure complies with the requirements of the Academies Complaints Code (the 'Code') issued by the Department for Education. In the event of any conflict between this policy and the Code, the Code shall take precedence.

Resolution Manager Matrix

The table below sets out who is responsible for managing complaints at each stage, depending on who the complaint concerns.

Complaint relates to	Stage 1 – Informal Resolution	Stage 2 – Formal Investigation	Stage 3 – Complaints Panel
Class Teacher / Support Staff	Class teacher / Middle / Senior Leader	Nominated individual appointed by Headteacher	Panel of 3 incl. 1 independent (see 4.3)
Headteacher	Headteacher / Regional Trust Lead	Member of Local Governing Body / Member of Executive Team designated by CEO	Panel of 3 incl. 1 independent, chaired by Chair of LGB or Director
Member of Trust Staff (non-teaching)	Member of Executive Team	CEO or appointed Director	Panel of 3 incl. 1 independent
Chief Executive Officer	CEO / Director appointed by Chair	Chair of Board of Directors	Panel determined by Board; 1 independent required
Member of Local Governing Body (excl. Chair)	Chair of the LGB / Regional Trust Lead	Member of Executive Team (or another LGB Chair from another Trust school)	Panel of 3 incl. 1 independent; Chair / Director of another Academy Trust where needed
Chair of Local Governing Body	Chair of LGB / Regional Trust Lead	Member of Executive Team (or another LGB Chair from another Trust school)	Panel constituted by Chair of Directors or Vice / Committee Chair of Directors; 1

			independent member required
Director / Trust Board Member	Director / Member / Chair of Board of Directors (via Clerk)	Diocesan School's Commissioner (via Clerk)	Panel determined by Members; 1 independent required
Chair of Board of Directors / Board as a whole	CEO / Chair / Diocesan School's Commissioner (via Clerk)	Members or appropriately appointed person	Members determine Panel constitution; 1 independent required

Part A – Complaints procedure

2. Feedback, concerns, and complaints

We recognise that families and other members of our community will, from time to time, raise an issue or give feedback regarding something that they feel could have been done better or communicated better. This feedback is invaluable, and we have a duty to learn from the wisdom of others to help us to continue to improve.

We know that in schools across our country, teachers and leaders receive regular feedback each day. As important as this concern / feedback is, it would not form part of this complaints process unless the complainant does not feel that the response they have received is adequate. In this situation, the concern / feedback would move to Stage 1 – Informal Resolution (see below).

3. Stage 1 – Informal resolution

- 3.1 Any matter of complaint should be raised, and attempted to be resolved, on an informal basis. Generally, it is expected that, where the matter relates to a pupil, it will have been raised with the pupil's class teacher, form tutor or Head of Year, before a request is made to deal with it under the stages of this policy.
- 3.2 The complaint should be raised with the school or Trust (as set out in the resolution manager matrix) within **3 calendar months** of the incident. Complaints made outside of this time frame will not be considered unless exceptional circumstances apply. Where a Complainant requests an extension of time, the Trust will consider such requests on a case-by-case basis and confirm its decision in writing.
- 3.3 The school will seek to resolve matters at the informal stage within **15 school days** of the issue being raised by the parent.
- 3.4 Where the matter is not resolved at the informal stage, it may be elevated to the formal stage as set out below.

4. Stage 2 – Formal resolution: Investigation by a nominated individual

- 4.1 Stage 2 complaints must be set out in writing, using the form available at Appendix 1, within 10 school days of the Stage 1 response and addressed to the Headteacher of the school (unless the complaint relates to the Headteacher or another specific role-holder, in which case please refer to the Resolution Manager Matrix above). The complaint should set out briefly the grounds of the complaint, stating what it is that the parent considers should have been done, and what they would like to result as the outcome of their complaint.
- 4.2 An investigation will be carried out by a nominated individual identified as appropriate (see matrix above). The nominated individual must have had no prior involvement in the matters which are the subject of the complaint. The investigator will acknowledge the complaint within 5 school days and may offer the parent a meeting. The investigator will speak to others involved.
- 4.3 Whenever reasonably possible, any meeting with the parent will take place within 15 school days of the written complaint being received.
- 4.4 The investigator will put their findings in writing and will indicate what, if any, steps should be taken to resolve the matter. Whenever reasonably possible, this will be done within 15 school days of any meeting with the parent; if no meeting is arranged it will be within 25 school days of the written complaint being received.
- 4.5 Where the parent remains dissatisfied, they may request that the complaint be escalated to Stage 3.

5. Stage 3 – Formal resolution: Complaints panel meeting

- 5.1 Stage 3 complaints must be set out in writing, stating where the parent remains dissatisfied and the outcome sought, and lodged with the Clerk to the Board of Directors within 10 school days of the Stage 2 response.
- 5.2 The Clerk to the Board of Directors will acknowledge the Stage 3 complaint within 5 school days and will convene a Complaints Panel.
- 5.3 The Complaints Panel must comprise of at least three people. In accordance with the Academies Complaints Code, at least one member of the Panel must be independent of both the management and the governance of the school — that is, they must not be a Director, Governor or employee of the school or Trust.
- 5.4 The Complaints Panel may include, but is not limited to, one or more persons from the matrix above (please see table).
- 5.5 In line with our Catholic values we are committed to ensuring fairness throughout every stage of the process, therefore, none of the members of the Complaints Panel will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.
- 5.6 The independent panel member may be a member of a Local Governing Body from another school within the Trust, provided that they have no conflict of interest, no prior knowledge of the complaint, and are genuinely independent of the management and governance of the school concerned.
- 5.7 The Clerk will invite the school to put in writing its response to the Stage 3 complaint within 15 school days of receiving the request. Whether or not the school has responded, the Clerk will convene a meeting of the Complaints Panel. That meeting will be held on school premises as quickly as practicable given the need to find a date that is reasonably convenient for the parent, the school and the members of the Complaints Panel. Whenever possible, the meeting will be held

within 15 school days of the end of the school's response time. The meeting date, time and location will be confirmed to all parties at least 10 school days in advance.

- 5.8 The meeting is not a court case; it will be held in private and will be as informal as circumstances allow. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted unless a parent's disability or special needs demonstrates that they need it, and then recording may be permitted. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before any recording takes place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. The Complaints Panel will not accept, as evidence, recordings obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.
- 5.9 The parent will have the opportunity to put forward their reasons for dissatisfaction and to enlarge on them but may not introduce reasons that were not previously put in writing. The parent and the Academy / Trust will have the opportunity to put forward their respective versions and views of events, and the Complaints Panel members will be able to ask questions. The parent will have the opportunity to make final comments to the Complaints Panel.
- 5.10 The Complaints Panel may make findings and recommendations, and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be:
- (a) sent by electronic mail or otherwise provided in writing to the parent and, where relevant, the Academy or person complained about; and
 - (b) available for inspection on the Academy premises by the Trust, the Headteacher and the Chief Executive Officer.
- 5.11 The Complaints Panel will formulate its response as quickly as reasonably possible, aiming to do so within 10 school days, and the Clerk will notify all concerned.
- 5.12 At any meeting, the parent will be entitled to bring a companion to provide support. The companion may address the Panel in order to put the parent's case, sum up, respond to any view expressed and ask questions on the parent's behalf. The companion may also confer with the parent during the meeting. The companion may not answer questions on the parent's behalf unless the parent wishes and may not prevent the parent from explaining their own case. Legal representation will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances.
- 5.13 If the parent fails to attend the Complaints Panel Meeting on the day without compelling reasons, the Complaints Panel will still proceed in their absence, and the process will continue to its conclusion. Any further attempt to re-open the matter will be considered as falling under the 'Serial or Persistent Complainants' section set out below.

6. Department for Education

- 6.1 Once the complaints process is concluded (or a complaint has been terminated due to undue delay or failure to lodge a request for a Stage 3 Complaints Panel Meeting within the time stated in this policy) the matter is closed. If the Complainant is still not satisfied, they may contact the Department for Education (DfE) at: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe>
- 6.2 The Complainant may also write to the DfE at:

Ministerial and Public Communication Division, Department for Education, 2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate, Manchester M1 2WD

7. Complaints against specific role-holders

The Resolution Manager Matrix in Section 1 above sets out who manages complaints at each stage depending on the subject of the complaint.

Part B – General provisions

8. Complaints that will not be considered under this policy

8.1 Usually, complaints relating to the matters set out in the table below will not be considered under this policy as they have their own appeal or complaint processes. Where necessary, the Trust will exercise its discretion.

8.2 Complaints may be raised under this policy about staff conduct; however, any action taken under the Trust's internal disciplinary procedures is confidential and Complainants will not be provided with information about this.

Matter	Route for raising concern / complaining
Admissions	Admissions Appeal — see Individual Academy's Admissions Policies and Statutory Admissions Appeal Code, or complaint to DfE
Exclusions	Statutory review process — see Academy's Suspension and Exclusions Policies and www.gov.uk/school-behaviour-exclusions/exclusions
Statutory SEN assessments	SEND Tribunal (and see SEN Code of Practice)
Matters likely to require child protection investigation	Raise with Designated Safeguarding Lead or direct referral to Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and/or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)
Data protection / Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)	Raise with Data Protection Officer (DPO) at DPO@Schoolpro.uk in the first instance. Complaints may also be raised with the Information Commissioner's Office.
Staff Grievances and Disciplinary matters	SFCAT Grievance Policy / Disciplinary Policy
Whistleblowing	SFCAT Whistleblowing Policy
Third party contractors / suppliers	Third party complaints process

9. Complaints relating to fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage ('EYFS') requirements

9.1 In order to comply with the statutory framework, written concerns or complaints relating to the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be dealt with in accordance with the following process:

- (a) The written concern/complaint will be acknowledged within **5 school days**;

(b) The headteacher will investigate the concern or complaint, which may include meeting with the Complainant and the Head of Early Years. A written response notifying the Complainant of the outcome of the investigation will be sent within **28 school days** of the complaint being received;

(c) Where the Complainant remains dissatisfied, the Clerk will ensure that a formal Complaints Panel will be convened in accordance with Stage 3 of this policy.

9.2 A record of the written complaints and their outcome will be maintained and made available to Ofsted on request.

9.3 Parents are further advised that, where they have concerns regarding the Academy meeting EYFS requirements, they may contact Ofsted on 0300 123 4666.

10. Complaints received outside of term time

The Academy/Trust (as appropriate) will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first working day after the holiday period.

11. Withdrawal of a complaint

If a Complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm the withdrawal in writing.

12. Record keeping and confidentiality

12.1 A written record will be kept of all complaints that reach the formal stage, whether they are resolved following Stage 2, or proceed to a Panel hearing (Stage 3), and any action taken by the Trust as a result (regardless of whether they are upheld). Complaint records will be maintained securely and in line with the Trust's Data Protection and Retention Policy by Clerk to the Board.

12.2 Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection requests access to them.

12.3 The Complainant should keep all correspondence, statements and records relating to their complaint confidential, and should not disclose (by way of electronic communication, social media or otherwise) any information or documents relating to their complaint.

12.4 Records of complaints will be retained in line with the Trust's records retention schedule. Complaint records will normally be retained for a period of years from the date the complaint was closed.

13. Anonymous complaints

In order to ensure every voice is being heard and considered, anonymous complaints can be made under this policy. This is because we value the input of all within our community. Where an anonymous complaint is received, the school / Trust will use its reasonable endeavours to consider the complaint as best as it reasonably can. However, the school / Trust will not be required to consider the complaint pursuant to any specific process and will handle anonymous complaints on a case-by-case basis.

14. Complaint campaigns

Where the school / Trust receives a number of complaints all based on the same subject which, in its reasonable opinion, may be deemed a 'complaint campaign', it will deal with the complaints as follows: individual responses will not be sent to Complainants in such cases. Instead, either a template response will be sent to all Complainants, or a single response will be published on the Academy/Trust's website at the discretion of the Headteacher or Chair of Trustees (as appropriate to the matter).

15. Serial or persistent complainants

If at any level a Complainant or connected party attempts to reopen an issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this Complaints Policy, the Chair of Trustees may write to the Complainant to inform them that the procedure has been exhausted, the matter is closed and that the Trust will therefore not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

16. Vexatious complaints

16.1 Complaints with the following characteristics may be deemed to be vexatious:

- obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, 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.
- complaints that are unkind.

16.2 In such cases, the Chair of Trustees may write to the Complainant to inform them that the complaint is deemed to be vexatious and that the Trust will not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

17. Legal proceedings

If a Complainant threatens or commences legal action against the Academy/Trust (including the issuing of a letter before claim) 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.

Appendix 1 – Sancta Familia Catholic Academy Trust Complaints Form

This form should be used to raise a formal complaint only after a matter has been raised informally under either Part A or Part B of the Complaints Policy and you are not satisfied with the response. Please refer to the Complaints Policy when completing this form.

Your Details	
Name	
Email	
Address	
Name of pupil, year group and your relationship to them (if applicable)	
Complaint Details	
School name (if complaint relates to a specific School)	
Grounds of complaint	
Date(s) of incident(s) complained about	
Date informal concern was raised and with whom	
What steps have been taken to resolve the complaint informally (including details of who the matter was raised with, when and what solution was offered)	
Why have the steps taken so far failed to resolve the complaint? (including what you consider should have been done or where the Academy or Trust has not met reasonable expectations)	

Outcome Sought	
What action would you like taken to resolve the matter?	
Additional Information	
Name of companion attending (if any)	
Do you require any reasonable adjustments to participate in the complaints process? If so, please give details.	

Signed: Date:

Please send completed forms to info@sanctafamilia.co.uk or hand them in to the school office in a sealed envelope marked for the attention of the relevant addressee (generally the Headteacher for complaints about a specific

Academy, or the Clerk to the Board of Directors for complaints about the Trust — please refer to Section 6 and the Resolution Manager Matrix for further guidance).



SANCTA FAMILIA

CATHOLIC ACADEMY TRUST

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