



The

MAST

Academy Trust

Policy	Complaints policy and procedures	
Owner	Executive Lead: Governance, People & Communications	
Date approved	10 th July 2024	
Approver	Education & People Committee	

Current version	V7.0
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Next review due	Annually (Summer 2025)
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Objective of Policy	
To provide guidance on the policy and process of raising a concern or complaint relating to the Mast Academy Trust and/or its schools, or the services that it provides.	

Version Control	
Version Number	Summary of amends from previous version
2.0	Review and appropriate updates since last version, front cover amends.
3.0	Annual Review. Alignment to model policy provided by the DfE
3.1a	Slight amend to Stage 1 – adjustment of Trustee to Governor for dealing with complaints about Headteacher. Addition of dealing with a complaint about a Headteacher to Stage 2.
4.0	Annual review, inclusion of ‘managing unreasonable and serial complaints policy’ – previously separate – section 12.0.
5.0	Updated to comply with statutory requirements using the model policy provided by the DfE for academies – reflected in section 10 and the addition on subsection 10.4
6.0	Annual Review
7.0	Annual Review against DfE model policy. Update to adjust responsibilities related to scheme of delegation

Sign off requirements	
Approvers	Position
Education & People Committee	Trust Board
Reviewers	Position
Natasha Greenough	CEO The MAST
Dorcas Atkinson	Trustee

Section Number	Content	Page Number
1.0	Who can make a complaint?	3
2.0	The difference between a concern and a complaint	3
3.0	How to raise a concern or make a complaint	3
4.0	Anonymous complaints	4
5.0	Timescales	4
6.0	Complaints received outside of term time	4
7.0	Scope of this Complaints Procedure	4
8.0	Resolving complaints	7
9.0	Withdrawal of a Complaint	7
10.0	Raising a concern or complaint	7
11.0	Next Steps	13
12.0	Managing serial or unreasonable complaints	14
Appendices		
A	Complaint Form	16
B	Roles and Responsibilities	18

1.0 Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at one of our schools. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to The Mast Academy Trust about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

2.0 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 Mast Academy Trust and our schools take 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 colleague, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Headteacher or the CEO (if the concern is in relation to the Headteacher), will refer you to another colleague. Similarly, if the colleague directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher or the CEO (if the concern is in relation to the Headteacher) will refer you to another colleague or deal with it directly. The colleague 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, The Mast Academy Trust or the school concerned will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

3.0 How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complaints against school colleagues (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer, The Mast Academy Trust, c/o Scissett Middle School, Wakefield Road, Scissett, HD8 9JX or by email to ngreenough@themast.co.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Trustees or Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole Trust Board or local governing committee body should be addressed to Executive Lead, The Mast Academy Trust, c/o Scissett Middle School, Wakefield Road, Scissett, HD8 9JX or by email to mhumphreys@themast.co.uk.

Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a trustee of the Mast Academy Trust, should be addressed to Chair of Trustees, The Mast Academy Trust, c/o Scissett Middle School, Wakefield Road, Scissett, HD8 9JX or by email to office@themast.co.uk .

Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the relevant school office or the governance professional for the Trust on email at office@themast.co.uk. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

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

4.0 Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or the Trust CEO, or the Chair of Trustees, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

5.0 Timescales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

6.0 Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

7.0 Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by The Mast Academy Trust, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions to schools 	<p>Concerns about admissions are handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>To raise a complaint, contact the Safeguarding and SENCo lead for the Trust in the first instance at The Mast Academy Trust., c/o Scissett Middle School, Wakefield Road, Scissett, HD8 9JX. Or by email to gseior@themast.co.uk.</p> <p>If your complaint relates to a colleague of the school/trust, please contact the Headteacher of that school.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).</p> <p>LADO: Sandra Shaw - kirklees.LADO@kirklees.gcsx.gov.uk MASH: DutyandAdvice@kirklees.gcsx.gov.uk</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/schooldiscipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure. Schools' behaviour policy can be found on the individual school website.</i></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary colleagues and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer colleagues who have concerns about our school should complain through the complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colleague grievances 	<p>Complaints from colleagues will be dealt with under the grievance policy.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colleague conduct 	<p>Complaints about colleagues will be dealt with under the disciplinary policy, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a colleague as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Curriculum - content 	<p>Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus</p>

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against The Mast Academy Trust 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.

8.0 Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, The Mast Academy Trust will work towards resolving the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, or not upheld.

9.0 Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

10.0 Raising a concern or complaint

10.1. Informal Process

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, relevant manager, Headteacher or the Trust CEO.

Complainants should not approach individual governors or trustees to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the formal procedures.

The formal procedures set out below will need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue have been unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further. It is normally appropriate to communicate directly with the colleague concerned. This may be by letter, by telephone or in person by appointment.

If you are uncertain about who to contact, please seek advice from one of the school offices.

At the conclusion of the informal investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide an informal response within ten school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. This may be in writing or in person/over the phone.

Most complaints are resolved satisfactorily at this stage and are brought to a close. In the case of serious complaints or where a complaint has not been brought to a satisfactory conclusion the complaint moves on to Formal Process – Stage 1.

Note: for the formal process relating to a school refer to section 10.2 and 10.3, for the formal process relating to the Mast Academy Trust refer to section 10.4.

10.2. Formal Process - Stage 1

Formal complaints relating to a school must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by telephone.

The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days.

Note: The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Headteacher (or 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.

The Headteacher will provide a formal written response at the conclusion of the investigation and within fifteen school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), the CEO and a suitably skilled colleague will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

10.3. Formal Process - Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1, or wishes to appeal the outcome, and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a panel hearing consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school. The independent panel member can be another suitability skilled colleague or governor from a school within the Mast Academy Trust. This is the final stage of the complaints' procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the trust at:

The Mast Academy Trust, c/o Scissett Middle School, Wakefield Road, Scissett, HD8 9JX or by email to office@themast.co.uk;

within ten school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The trust will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days.

Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The trust will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within fifteen school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the trust will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the trust 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.

A complainant may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not permit either party to bring legal representatives to the panel hearing.

If a colleague is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union representation.

Note: Complaints about colleague conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any colleague conduct complaints will be considered under colleague disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least five school days before the meeting, the trust will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the panel at least three school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least two school days before the date of the meeting. The 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 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 the informal stage of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The 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 panel will:

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

The panel chair will provide the complainant and the school or trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within five school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school and/or The Mast Academy Trust.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide an explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school and/or The Mast Academy Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor (The Mast Academy trust) and by the Headteacher and/or CEO.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at stage 1 or proceed to a panel hearing at stage 2, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision as per our retention period specified in the Data Protection Policy.

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.

10.4. Complaints escalated to / about the Trust, CEO or a Trustee

If a complaint is being escalated to The Mast Academy Trust or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the Trust, then the complaint should be sent to the CEO to be investigated at ngreenough@themast.co.uk.

The CEO will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within five school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 1 of the process and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

Following the investigation, the CEO will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within ten school days of the date that the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the CEO will write to the complainant within five school days of the date that the letter was received, explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a Trustee, the complaint will be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board, email office@themast.co.uk. If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation.

Note: Where the Chair of the Trust Board has investigated the complaint, they will write the letter of outcome to the complainant and provide a copy to the CEO.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the governance professional within five school days, asking for the complaint to be heard by a Complaint Panel at Stage 2 of the process – email office@themast.co.uk

The governance professional will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days.

Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The governance professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within ten school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the governance professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the 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.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire trust board or

- the majority of the trust board

Stage 2 will be heard by a completely independent panel.

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 Academy Trust. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will not be a Trustee or an employee of the Trust.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the panel hearing. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a trust employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about colleague conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any colleague conduct complaints will be considered under colleague disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend. At least five school days before the meeting, the governance professional will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the panel at least five school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least three school days before the date of the meeting. The 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 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 the informal stage 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 knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The 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 panel will:

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

The panel chair will provide the complainant and The Mast Academy Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within five school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by The Mast Academy Trust.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions The Mast Academy Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor (The Mast Academy trust) and by the Headteacher and /or CEO.

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

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.

11.0 Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school or the Mast Academy 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 contact the ESFA after they have completed Stage 2.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by The Mast Academy Trust. They will consider whether The Mast Academy 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 complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

12.0 Managing serial or unreasonable complaints

The Mast Academy Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have within our schools. However, we do not expect our colleagues to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect colleagues from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

The MAST Academy Trust defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaint's investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaint's procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint's procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be considered and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about colleagues who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- makes complaints which are designed to be malicious and are made to cause distress to colleagues and school/Trust
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to ESFA
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with colleagues regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence

- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school/Trust that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or CEO will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Schools within The Mast Academy Trust, causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from a school in The Mast Academy Trust.

APPENDIX A - Complaint Form

Please complete and return to person advised in section 3 who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number: Email address:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

APPENDIX B - Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - interviewing colleagues and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - consideration of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Headteacher or complaints panel that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
 - The Headteacher or complaints panel will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator (this could be the Headteacher or CEO / designated complaints or trustee or other colleagues member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with colleague, head teacher, CEO, Chair of Trust or the governance professional and to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Governance Professional to the Trust Board

The governance professional is the contact point for the complainant and the panel and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the panel's decision.

Panel Chair

The panel chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Executive Lead) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person

- the remit of the panel is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the panel is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the panel has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Executive Lead (and complaints co-ordinator if the school has one).

Panel Member

Panel members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so

No governor or trustee may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting

Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.

- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

The panel should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the panel should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the panel should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the panel considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.