Wigston Academies Trust

SCHOOL COMPLAINTS POLICY

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APPROVED BY:	Board of Trustees
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Signed by Chair of Trustees: Date: November 2026

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General principles

Our Trust is committed to working in close partnership with parents and the community. However, we recognise that from time-to-time concerns or complaints may arise and it is our aim to work with all parties involved to resolve these as quickly and efficiently as possible. Usually, concerns can be resolved quickly through day-to-day communication between parents and school staff.

As the intention is to resolve matters where there is conflict, the investigation process is undertaken by the Investigating Officer (IO) and can be reviewed by a panel. This means that the IO is required to gather relevant material to determine an outcome. The investigation and panel process seeks to understand the issues from every individual's perspective.

This policy should also be read consistently with current national guidance for schools and parents on managing complaints. In particular, the school/trust will seek to distinguish between feedback, a concern and a formal complaint; encourage concerns to be raised with the right person at the right level first; keep communication clear, factual and proportionate; work to realistic timescales; and explain clearly how a matter may be escalated if it remains unresolved.

Trust and school policies

When the Trust adopts or approves a policy, and the school puts the policy into operation, that is part of the day-to-day running of the school. If there is an objection to a policy, this is a matter that needs to be referred back to the Trust. It is separate to the complaint process.

Day-to-day operational decisions about curriculum and timetabling should be referred to Trust for review. They are operational decisions that are expected of Headteachers and senior leaders by virtue of the Contract of Employment and expectations set out by the Department for Education (DfE). The method to address these issues is to refer these to the Trust.

For clarity, an objection to the content of a policy itself, or to an operational, curriculum or timetabling decision properly taken by senior leaders, is not normally a matter for this complaints procedure. This procedure may, however, consider whether a policy has been applied unfairly or unreasonably to an individual.

The complaints process exists to enable parents, carers, pupils, former pupils, advocates and other individuals to complain about the *application* of policies, concerns about treatment or mistreatment or issues relating to prejudicial decisions to be properly reviewed in school and by an independent panel of governors.

However, for those situations an informal resolution is not reached, there is a more formal process to investigate and deal with complaints.

The aim of this procedure is to:

- provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use
- attempt to resolve concerns through informal discussions at the earliest stage
- provide clarity of who will be co-ordinating the process in school
- give clear timelines for resolution
- encourage resolving the issues and finding a way to move forwards
- demonstrate a fair approach to managing complaints and concerns
- explain how vexatious and unreasonable behaviour by complainants is dealt with

Complaints will be managed in line with the Complaints Process set out within this procedure:

Stage 1: Informal discussion

Stage 2: Referral to the relevant investigating officer

Stage 3: Review by an appointed panel

Stage 4: Appeal to the DFE

'Management of stages' sets out who will be involved in the management of your complaint depending on the stage it has reached.

Who can make a complaint?

The complaints process exists to enable parents, carers, pupils, former pupils, advocates and other individuals to complain about the application of policies, concerns about treatment or mistreatment or issues relating to prejudicial decisions to be properly reviewed in school and by an independent panel of governors.

Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

If the matter relates to a member of staff that passes the threshold for a potential HR procedure, that will be implemented. Please note that the procedure and outcome of any HR process will not be shared with the complainant as to do so would breach the Data Privacy rights of the individual.

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 complaint's procedure. We take concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

On receipt of an expression of dissatisfaction, the Trust may first clarify whether the matter is feedback, a concern or a formal complaint. Feedback will usually be noted and considered without a formal response; concerns will normally be handled informally at Stage 1; and formal complaints requiring investigation will be handled under Stage 2 or Stage 3 as appropriate.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, discuss the matter with the headteacher or the lead governance professional/complaint co-ordinator for the Trust, and arrangements can be made to refer you to another staff member.

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, arrangements will be made to refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, the Trust will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaint's procedure.

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 staff (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 CEO, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing Board should be addressed to the Clerk to the Board of Trusts via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a Trustee of the Trust, should be addressed to Chair of Trustees, via the Trust office. 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 school office. You can also ask a third-party organisation, for example, 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.

Use of artificial intelligence or template correspondence

Some complainants may use AI tools, template services or third-party drafting support to help organise their thoughts. Use of AI or a template is not, of itself, a reason to treat a complaint less seriously or to refuse to engage. However, correspondence that is very lengthy, generic, inaccurate, mis-cites legislation or does not explain the specific factual concern may make it harder for the school/trust to identify the issue and respond promptly.

Where correspondence appears to be AI-generated or template-generated and the key issues are unclear, the school/trust may ask the complainant to provide a short, plain-English summary of the specific issue, relevant dates, the impact relied upon and the outcome sought. A meeting or call may also be offered to help clarify the substance of the concern. Any safeguarding disclosure within such correspondence will still be considered promptly under the safeguarding and child protection policy.

Where a concern relates to special educational needs or disability, the school/trust will seek to explain what is within the school's responsibility and what is for the local authority or other external agency. Complaints about the school's delivery of SEN support may be considered under this policy, but disputes about statutory assessment decisions or the content, issue, amendment or

funding of an Education, Health and Care Plan should be directed to the local authority and, where appropriate, SENDIASS or the SEND Tribunal route.

Anonymous complaints

An anonymous complaint that raises a safeguarding concern will always be considered under the school/trust's safeguarding and child protection procedures, even if it is not investigated under this complaints policy.

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

Unreasonable actions

Our Trust defines unreasonable actions 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 taken into account 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 staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- 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 the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff 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 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 will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher, or other appropriate person, will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable.

If the complainant continues to behave unreasonably, and not modify their behaviour to enable a fair process to be followed, then they may be notified that the complaint process is frustrated. In those circumstances, the investigating officer will conclude the process – taking into account information available at that time.

For complainants who excessively contact our school 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.

A communication plan may include directing all future contact to a single point of contact, restricting the method of contact, limiting the frequency of responses, requiring correspondence to be concise and focused on the core issue, or declining to respond further to correspondence that only repeats matters already concluded. Any restriction will be proportionate, time-limited where appropriate, and reviewed periodically.

Time scales

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.

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.

Scope of this complaint's procedure

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

Exceptions	**Who to contact**
Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our safeguarding and child protection policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. 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).
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. **complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.*

Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's 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.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.

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 in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

When the Trustee Board of a school adopts or approves a policy, and the school put the policy into operation, this is a matter for dispute that needs to be referred back to the Trustee Board rather than form part of the complaints process, if any person is unhappy with the content of that policy.

Day to day operational decisions about curriculum and timetabling should be referred to the Trust Board for review. They are operational decisions that are expected of Headteachers and senior leaders by virtue of the Contract of Employment and expectations set out by the Department for Education. These are not open to this complaints process.

As the Trust delegates responsibility for managing complaints to each school to manage, the Trust would not expect to have any role in reviewing the complaint or process. In exceptional circumstances the Trust may agree to review the process, and may give direction to a school. However, this will be subject to the absolute discretion of the Trust CEO. If policies and procedures have been correctly implemented and followed it is unlikely that any further action will be required. If a complainant wishes the Trust CEO to review an outcome, this must be requested in writing. The request must set out why the complainant feels that the process has not been properly followed.

This does not stop the complainant making a referral to the DfE. A trust review is an internal procedure only.

If details of an active complaint are published on social media or a public forum in a way that compromises confidentiality or the ability to conduct a fair and objective investigation, the school/trust may ask for the material to be removed or amended. Where necessary and proportionate, complaint timescales may be paused while this is addressed.

Information for the person complained about

When a complaint or concern has been received, the person, or persons, complained about will have full details of the complaint made against them unless there is a good reason why this should not be the case. On receipt of a complaint, the person administering the complaint process will consider if there is any need for clarification or if any material should be withheld from the person complained about.

Unless there is good reason to withhold the complaint details or the whole complaint, it will be shared with the complainant. In any event, the person complained about will have full visibility of the scope of the investigation and issues that are to be addressed.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Wigston Academies Trust wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we 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 we 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 school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology

Withdrawal of a complaint

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

Complex complaints

There may be occasions where a complaint becomes more complex following individual meetings. Complex complaints may require additional time to work through and understand the issues. This may include time to gather relevant material, consider safeguarding, SEND, HR or data protection issues, obtain external advice or support, or clarify the scope of the complaint and the outcome sought.

In some instances, a more specialist or experienced investigator may be required.

Complex complaints may also need to be assessed and reviewed with external support.

If a matter is determined to be 'complex' all parties will be notified by the investigating officer, with details of how the matter will be progressed.

Each complex complaint is likely to require an individually scheduled timeline, which may be outside the scope of the standard complaint timelines.

Where a matter is determined to be complex, the investigating officer or complaint co-ordinator should notify the complainant and any relevant person complained about, explain how the matter will be progressed, and provide an individually scheduled timeline. This may be outside the standard complaint timescales in this policy.

Stage 1 – Informal complaints

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

Concerns should be raised with the person to whom the complaint is directed.

Complainants should not approach individual governors 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 3 of the procedure.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide an informal written response within 5 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Stage 2 – Formal complaints

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

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 5 school days.

Within this response, the Headteacher (or relevant Trustee depending on who the complaint is about) will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher (or relevant Trustee) can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

If the matter is within the scope of the complaint policy, it is important that the right person to investigate is identified. The Headteacher (or relevant Trustee) will look, initially, within the resources of the school or Academy Trust (if appropriate), but it may be necessary to seek an external, neutral third party to undertake this role. The Headteacher (or relevant Trustee) has discretion to appoint this person, and to notify the complainant about who the person is and reasons for the decision. This person will be the Investigating Officer (IO)

If the complaint is upheld about a member of staff, an HR process will be followed. That is outside the scope of this complaint guidance.

The Headteacher (or relevant Trustee) may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team or suitable investigating officer.

During the investigation, the IO 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.

Meetings may be arranged on a face to face basis, phone calls or online. It will be dependent on the timescale and availability of the parties. It may be necessary for one or more party to join a face to face meeting using a phone or online service. Where the majority of meeting participants are physically present, the attendance of one or more parties remotely will not change the status of the face to face meeting. This is to ensure that there is no unnecessary delay.

Part of the investigation may require the person complained about, other school or trust staff and the investigator to access records that contain personal data about the complainant and/or pupils. Please note that this will be determined on a case by case basis to ensure that all potentially relevant material can be properly considered.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the IO will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the IO 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 that will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher (or relevant Trustee) will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of stage 2.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or a member of the governing Board (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled IO will be appointed to complete all the actions at stage 3.

Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the Board must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

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

Stage 2 will be escalated to the CEO of the Trust.

Records

The records of a complaint process are subject to the Data Protection Act 2018 and other statutory requirements.

There is an obligation to keep appropriate records. The Investigating Officer will collect and keep records of meetings as necessary. When the investigating officer writes their report, they may decide to combine their notes into that report, and destroy original copies. They may decide to summarise their notes in the report and keep original copies. This will be specified in any report.

Schools keep necessary records and not a note of every meeting or discussion that is held between school staff or with parents, carers and pupils. To try and retain a record of every interaction or discussion about a pupil would be impossible on a daily basis.

On occasion emails may also be deleted as part of the retention and information management process.

Stage 3 – Panel hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to stage 3 – 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. This is the final stage of the complaint procedure.

The panel is not normally a full reinvestigation of every matter considered at Stage 2. Its focus will ordinarily be whether the Stage 2 process was fair, whether relevant material was considered, whether the conclusion was reasonably supported by the evidence, and whether any remedy or recommendation is appropriate.

The complainant will need to specify which part of the complaint procedure at Stage 2 they feel is incorrect or, in the complainant's opinion, has not been correctly completed. The complaint will also need to specify what part of the conclusion they disagree with, and the basis for holding that opinion.

The Stage 2 process is the investigation, assessment and review part of the complaint process. Unless there are procedural flaws or a failure to consider relevant material or evidence that has been put forward by the complaint with no good reasons, the Stage 3 panel will not expect to undertake a full review of the evidence in this matter.

Right to seek a panel

Following an investigation, or an outcome, either the complainant or the person complained about, can seek to take the matter to a panel hearing if they disagree with the outcome of the investigator's report and recommendations.

Procedure for stage 3

A request to escalate to stage 3 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the stage 2 response.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

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

Arrangements for the panel

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 5 school days of receipt of the stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk 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 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 committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. If the complainant is bringing any supporter or advocate, the identity and/or details of this person must be notified to the clerk at least two school days before the meeting.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaint's procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under (Human Resources) staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

Material for the panel hearing

At least 5 school days before the meeting, the Clerk 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 10 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

Staff from school who are connected with the complaint will be invited to attend. There may be occasions when it is not appropriate for them to attend a panel hearing, and it is for the Trust to consider whether or not to require their attendance. It is not a decision for the complainant.

All parties will be notified two school days before the meeting of final details of all attendees.

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 stage 1 of the procedure.

The panel hearing

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 committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented, the focus of the meeting will be on the investigation process followed at stage 2. The complainant is expected to set out why they feel that the investigation was flawed, or why the wrong conclusion was reached. The committee 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 committee will consider what actions are

required.

The committee may also make recommendations to improve systems, communication, record-keeping, staff guidance or policy implementation, even where a complaint is not upheld in full.

- 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 Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Wigston Academies Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (DFE) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Wigston Academies 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 Wigston Academies 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 and the Headteacher.

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

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

In person or online meetings

It is the usual expectation that any meeting will be in person, however if the complainant wishes to request an online meeting, this will be considered.

There may be occasions when some panel members, school staff or the clerk may need to attend remotely. This will be explained to the complainant if it is necessary.

Complaints escalated to the Trust

If a complaint is escalated to the Trust, or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the Trust, then the complaint should be sent to the CEO to be investigated.

An Independent Investigating Officer can be appointed. The investigation will focus on the matters raised in the complaint.

The CEO will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 5 school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under stage 15 of this Complaints Policy 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 5 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 5 school days of the date that the letter was received**,** explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

Complaint about the CEO or a trustee

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a trustee, the complaint should be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board. If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation

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 Clerk to the Trust Board asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel, within 5 school days.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

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

Arrangements for the Trust complaint panel procedure

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk 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 3 will be heard by a completely independent committee 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, of 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 committee 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 meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

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

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

Material for the panel hearing

At least 15 school days before the meeting, the Clerk 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 committee at least 10 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee 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 Trust panel hearing

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 committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee 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 committee 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 Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Wigston Academies Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (DFE) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Wigston Academies 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 Wigston Academies 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 and the Headteacher.

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

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

Data protection

Prior to commencing any investigation, it is necessary for the complainant to give consideration to what personal data that they are content to be shared with an investigating officer. Attached to the complaint form is consent to share material to enable an investigation to be undertaken.

Over the course of the investigation, information may be gathered from third parties. On occasion, this information may contain personal data, but it may be given in confidence by witnesses. The investigating officer will have to determine if whole statements or summaries can be provided to parties and the panel.

If the complainant does not give consent to share information, it is important to note that the scope of the complaint may be limited and, therefore, the actions available to conclude the complaints process may also be limited. In some instances, the complaint may not be able to proceed. The complainant will be informed if this is the case to give an opportunity to consider consent to share the material again within five school days.

The investigation does not place any limits on school staff processing pupil data as required. Additionally, this can include reviewing information to prepare for interviews with the investigating officer or the panel.

The same complaints process will be applied to Data Protection issues. A written outcome will be provided.

If the school does not comply with a Subject Access Request within 1 month (subject to any extension), or refuses all or part of the request, written reasons will be provided, setting out the principles for the refusal.

However, if you feel that the school has not dealt with your matter satisfactorily you can complain to the Information Commissioner.

Where a complaint is solely about data protection, information rights, a subject access request or an alleged personal data breach, the school/trust may deal with it under its data protection complaints or information rights procedure rather than under this complaints policy. Where the data protection issue is part of a wider school complaint, the school/trust will explain how the different issues will be managed and which process applies.

By post: Customer Contact, Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, SK9 5AF

Or by email: casework@ico.org.uk

More information is on the ICO website www.ico.org.uk/

Next steps

If the complainant believes the school / 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 DFE after they have completed stage 3.

The DFE will not normally reinvestigate 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 complainant can refer their complaint to the DFE 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

Vexatious complaints

If properly followed, a good complaints procedure will limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same

issue, the Chair of Trustees is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

If a complaint amounts to harassment of an individual, then any future complaints may be considered as vexatious.

If a complaint or complainant is determined to be vexatious then investigations may be terminated, limited, or refused. Written reasons will be provided.

A decision that a complaint or complainant is vexatious does not prevent the school/trust from considering a genuinely new complaint raising matters not previously considered, nor does it remove essential safeguarding or welfare communication. The complainant should be told why the restriction has been applied and how it will be reviewed or challenged.

Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint
- If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again

Complaint campaigns

There can be occasions where the school receives large volumes of complaints from multiple sources. In these cases, we reserve our right to treat this as a complaints campaign and as such we may choose to manage these complaints as a whole and produce a single statement which is shared with all complainants.

Although the subject matter of the complaint will be taken seriously and fully investigated, the issue will not be investigated repeatedly without good reason.

In the event of a complaint which is identified as a part of a series of near identical complaints, the following process will be followed:

- the complainant begins the complaints process as usual

- school staff identify that this complaint is one of many very similar complaints
- a single letter of response is prepared
- this letter of response is shared with each complainant
- complainants will have an opportunity to appeal the outcome of the complaint

As there may be a high volume of complainants and therefore a high number of appeals received, appeals may also be managed as a whole and as such the procedure will be varied. It will not be possible for all complainants to attend an appeal panel meeting, however an opportunity to submit additional information will be provided.

Complaint campaigns

Complaint against academy or academy staff

Complaint relates to	**Stage 1** **Informal**	**Stage 2** **Formal** **Investigating Officer**	**Stage 3** **Complaint Panel**
Pupils, parents or staff (other than the Headteacher)	The appropriate member of staff	The Headteacher or another Senior Leader	Panel appointed consisting of at least three people who are not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school.
The Headteacher	The Headteacher	The Chair of Trustees	Panel appointed consisting of at least three people who are not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school.
A Governor or Governors (other than the Chair of Trustees)		The Chair of Governors	Panel appointed consisting of at least three people who are not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school.
The Chair of Trustees		Chief Executive Officer of Academy Trust	Panel appointed consisting of at least three people who are not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint with one panel member who is independent of the

			management and running of the school.
The whole Board of Governors		Chief Executive Officer of Academy Trust	Panel appointed consisting of at least three people who are not directly involved in matters etailed in the complaint with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school.

Complaint against academy trust or academy trust officer

Complaint relates to	Stage 1 - Informal	Stage 2 - Formal Investigating Officer	Stage 3 Complaint Panel
Academy Trust Officer (other than the Chief Executive Officer)	The appropriate Academy Trust Officer.	Chief Executive Officer of Academy Trust	Panel of Trust Directors appointed by the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Trust.
Chief Executive Officer	Chief Executive Officer	Chair of Trust Board	Panel appointed of completely independent members
Trust Director (other than the Chair of the Trust)		Chair of the Trust Board	Panel appointed of completely independent members
The Chair of the Trust (or group of Directors including the Chair of Directors)		Vice-Chair of the Trust	Panel appointed of completely independent members
The whole Board of Trust directors		Lead Governance Professional	Members to appoint an independent investigation and Panel completely independent members

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 staff 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 committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems
- The Headteacher or complaints committee 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 governor or trustee or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, Headteacher, CEO, Chair of Trust or the Clerk and to ensure the smooth running of the complaint's 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 of concerns and complaints, including any communication plans, vexatious complaint decisions and AI or template correspondence concerns, so that themes and learning can be reviewed periodically.

Clerk to the governing board / trust board

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee 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 committee's decision

Committee chair

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

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) 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 committee 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 committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee 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 Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one)

Committee member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so no governor / trustee may sit on the committee 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 committee 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 committee 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 committee 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 committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount

Model request for concise summary where correspondence is AI-generated or excessive

Thank you for your recent correspondence about [brief description]. We want to make sure that we properly understand and respond to your concern as quickly as possible. Some of the correspondence is lengthy and appears to include template or AI-generated material, including legal or policy references that may not be directly applicable. To help us respond properly, please provide a short, plain-English summary, ideally no more than 200–300 words, setting out the specific issue or decision you are unhappy with, the relevant dates, what you would like the school/trust to do, and whether this is new information or a matter already addressed. We are happy to arrange a short call or meeting if that would be easier. This request does not remove your right to have your concern considered under the complaints policy, but it may be necessary to pause the response timescale until the key issues are clear.

Complaint form

Your name	
House/ flat/ building number and street name	
Town	
County	
Postcode	
Your telephone number	
Your email address	

Formal complaint

Please provide as much detail as possible. All of the boxes expand to take additional text.

I am writing to make a formal complaint against/about	
Please describe what your complaint is and when it arose	
What you think the School did wrong or did not do. Include dates, names of witnesses etc.	
Please provide details about the consequences of what happened	

What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? (who have you spoken with or written to and what was the outcome?).	
What do you think the School should do to resolve matters at this stage?	
Please list copies of any documents you are attaching to the complaint.	

Please consider if you give consent to share your personal data with any investigating officer or not. Please delete either

I give my consent for information held in paper and electronic records in respect of the complaint to be made available to facilitate any investigation. I consent to this confidential and sensitive data to be shared for that specific purpose. I realise that any information held about any third party cannot be shared without their specific consent.

Should it be necessary in the view of the investigator to seek that third party consent I give my approval that they may share sufficient information with that third party to enable that person to make an informed choice about whether or not to give consent to sharing that person's information with the investigator.

OR

I do not give my consent to share my personal data to an allocated investigating officer. I acknowledge that this may limit the scope of the complaint investigation.

Signed

Date