



COMPLAINTS POLICY

Multi-Academy Trust – Complaints Against the Trust

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1 **Aims**

- 1.1 This is the Complaints Policy of Reach South Academy Trust, a multi academy trust (**Academy Trust**).
- 1.2 Complaints relating to an individual academy within the Academy Trust must be made to that Academy using their own Complaints Policy, which can be accessed via that academy's website.
- 1.3 The aims of this policy and related procedures are to provide a framework for the resolution of complaints which:
 - 1.3.1 Concern the Trust Board / Chief Executive Officer / the Executive Team;
 - 1.3.2 allows for their resolution informally and sets out the Academy Trust's formal procedures where this is not achievable;
 - 1.3.3 is easily accessible and publicised, simple to understand and use and impartial and non-adversarial;
 - 1.3.4 enables a full, fair and transparent investigation;
 - 1.3.5 respects people's desire for confidentiality;
 - 1.3.6 addresses all the points at issue and provides an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
 - 1.3.7 provides information to the Trust Board / Chief Executive Officer / Executive Team so that services can be improved;
 - 1.3.8 helps promote a whole school culture of safety, equality and protection.

2 **Definitions and interpretation**

- 2.1 Where the following words or phrases are used in this policy:
 - 2.1.1 references to school days mean Monday to Friday during term time. The dates of terms are published on the Academy Trust's website.
 - 2.1.2 references to **Parent** or **Parents** means the natural or adoptive parents of the pupil (irrespective of whether they are or have ever been married, with whom the pupil lives, or whether they have contact with the pupil) as well as any person who is not the natural or adoptive parent of the pupil, but who has care of, or parental responsibility for, the pupil (e.g. foster carer / legal guardian).
 - 2.1.3 references to **Complainants** means any third party other than Parents. The complaints procedures for Complainants is dealt with under this policy at Appendix 4.
 - 2.1.4 references to complainants (with a small "c") refers to both Parent or Parents (as defined at paragraph 2.1.2 and Complainants (as defined at paragraph 2.1.3).
- 2.2 All parental complaints should be identified at the outset by the Academy Trust and dealt with in accordance with the Academy Trust's Complaint's Policy.
- 2.3 Timescales for each stage of the complaints procedure are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. It is expected that the management of every complaint will progress in a timely manner.

- 2.4 The Academy Trust aims to resolve all complaints efficiently and promptly and Parents are encouraged to bring any matter causing concern to the Academy Trust's attention as soon as possible.
- 2.5 Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay to the timescales for a stage of the complaints procedure, the Academy Trust will notify the Parent and inform them of the new timescales and explain the delay as soon as possible.
- 2.6 Complaints raised should be in writing unless a reasonable adjustment is requested by the Parent to amend this.

3 Scope and application for Parents

- 3.1 This policy applies to the whole Academy Trust
- 3.2 This policy applies to complaints by Parents (as defined at paragraph 2.1.2). The scope and application of this policy for persons other than Parents is outlined at Appendix 4. The Academy Trust and each Academy has separate grievance and whistleblowing policies to cover concerns that a member of staff may have.
- 3.3 This policy applies to any expression of dissatisfaction however made about actions taken, or a lack of action, by the Academy Trust where the Parent may seek an apology, explanation and / or action by the Academy Trust.
- 3.4 This policy does not apply to matters for which there are separate statutory procedures (e.g. admission appeals, exclusion reviews, special educational needs appeals, etc.).
- 3.5 This policy applies to complaints from each of the following:
 - 3.5.1 Parents of current pupils at an Academy within the Academy Trust;
 - 3.5.2 Parents of former pupils of an Academy within the Academy Trust, if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was registered as a pupil at the Academy, or within three months of the pupil being removed from the register
 - 3.5.3 Parents of prospective pupils.
- 3.6 The Academy Trust will not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless it is appropriate to do so.
- 3.7 Requests for financial awards, such as claims for compensation or damages are beyond the scope of the Academy Trust's Complaints Policy.
- 3.8 All Parents should be aware that the complaints process is designed to address concerns and ensure appropriate resolutions. However, regardless of the nature of a complaint or its outcome, this process does not allow for requests or demands for specific actions/sanctions to be imposed on staff, pupils or other Parents. Furthermore, for reasons of data protection and confidentiality, Parents will not be provided with details of any disciplinary actions or measures that may be taken against staff, pupils, or other Parents.
- 3.9 There may be occasions when it is necessary to deviate from this complaints procedure if this is reasonable and justified, subject to the Academy Trust continuing to meet the statutory requirements under Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Parents will be notified of any changes.

4 Time scales

- 4.1 Whenever possible, in the interests of a prompt resolution of issues, a complaint should be raised 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, however, consider

complaints made outside of this timeframe where exceptional circumstances apply. A complaint raised outside this timeframe should therefore confirm the reasons for the delay in raising it.

- 4.2 Timescales for each stage of the Academy Trust's complaints procedure are set out below. It is expected that the management of every complaint will progress in a timely manner. Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay to the timescales for a stage of the complaints procedure (such as other bodies investigating aspects of the complaint), the Academy Trust will notify the Parent and inform them of the new timescales as soon as possible.
- 4.3 Complaints which are raised in the school holidays will usually be deemed to have been received on the first school day after receipt.
- 4.4 If a Parent commences legal action against the Academy Trust in relation to their complaint, the Chief Executive Officer or Chair of Trustees will consider whether or not to suspend the complaints procedure until those proceedings have been concluded.

5 **Regulatory framework**

- 5.1 This policy has been prepared to meet the Academy Trust's responsibilities under:
 - 5.1.1 Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014;
 - 5.1.2 EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers (DfE, January 2024);
 - 5.1.3 Education and Skills Act 2008;
 - 5.1.4 Children Act 1989;
 - 5.1.5 Childcare Act 2006
 - 5.1.6 Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation (**UK GDPR**); and
 - 5.1.7 Equality Act 2010.

6 **Responsibility statement and allocation of tasks**

- 6.1 The Academy Trust has overall responsibility for all matters which are the subject of this policy.
- 6.2 The Academy Trust is aware of its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the requirement under s 149 of the Equality Act 2010 to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty. This means in carrying out its functions, the Academy Trust is required to have due regard to the need to:
 - 6.2.1 eliminate discrimination and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act;
 - 6.2.2 advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
 - 6.2.3 foster good relations across all characteristics - between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- 6.3 To ensure the efficient discharge of its responsibilities under this policy, the Academy Trust has allocated the following tasks:

Task	Allocated to	When / frequency of review
Keeping the policy up to date and compliant with the law and best practice	Deputy CEO	As a minimum annually, ideally termly, and as required
Monitoring the implementation of the policy	Deputy CEO	As a minimum annually, ideally termly, and as required
Seeking input from interested groups (such as Trustees and Executive Officers) to consider improvements to the Academy Trust's processes under the policy	Deputy CEO	As a minimum annually, ideally termly, and as required
Formal annual review of complaints and implementation of any recommendations, to identify trends and recommend further improvement to policies and procedures	Academy Trust	Annually

7 Publication and availability

7.1 This policy is published on the Academy Trust's website.

7.2 This policy is available in hard copy on request.

7.3 A copy of this policy is available for inspection from the Academy Trust's office during the school day.

7.4 This policy can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required and the Academy Trust will make other reasonable adjustments required to enable Parents to access and complete this procedure, such as holding meetings in accessible locations.

7.5 Information regarding the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure of this policy during the preceding school year is available to Parents of pupils and Parents of prospective pupils and, on request, to the Chief Inspector of Ofsted, or the Secretary of State. The Academy Trust makes this available by ensuring a digital record is held, maintained and made available upon request.

8 Management of complaints

8.1 The Academy Trust's policy allows for complaints from Parents to be considered at three stages (Appendix 4 of this policy outlines the complaints procedure for persons other than Parents):

Stage 1: Informal raising of a complaint. Further details of this procedure are set out in Appendix 1.

Stage 2: A formal complaint in writing. Further details of this procedure are set out in Appendix 2.

Stage 3: Complaint Panel Hearing. Further details of this procedure are set out in Appendix 3.

8.2 The roles and responsibilities of those involved in the Academy's complaints procedures are outlined at Appendix 8.

9 **Expected standards of behaviour by those making complaints**

9.1 Attention is drawn to the information included in Appendix 5, which has been developed having regard to:

9.1.1 Best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures (Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), March 2021).

9.1.2 Controlling access to school premises (DfE, November 2018)

10 **Complaint meetings**

10.1 The Academy Trust may use recording devices to record complaints meetings at any stage in the Academy Trust's complaints procedure where there are communication difficulties with the Parents. The recording will only take place if all parties confirm they do not have any objections.

10.2 The Academy Trust may, at its discretion and having taken into account all the circumstances, permit the Parents to record meetings for the purposes of a reasonable adjustment or where it deems that there is a fair and reasonable purpose for allowing the Parents to record meetings. The recording will only take place if all parties confirm they do not have any objections.

10.3 Unless exceptional circumstances apply, the DfE will support the Academy Trust if it refuses to accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without informed consent of all parties being recorded.

10.4 If the Academy Trust has made reasonable attempts to accommodate the Parents with dates for complaints meetings at any stage of the Academy Trust 's complaints procedure and they refuse or are unable to attend, the Academy Trust can:

10.4.1 convene meetings in the Parents' absence

10.4.2 reach a conclusion in the interests of drawing the complaint to a close.

11 **Record keeping and confidentiality**

11.1 All records created in accordance with this policy are managed in accordance with the Academy Trust's policies that apply to the retention and destruction of records.

11.2 The Academy Trust keeps a written record of all formal complaints, including the following:

11.2.1 whether they were resolved at Stage 2 or Stage 3.

11.2.2 the action taken by the Academy Trust as a result of the complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

11.2.3 In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will be kept only for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in the circumstances.¹

11.3 The information created in connection with this policy may contain personal data. The Academy Trust has a number of privacy notices which explain how the Academy Trust will use personal data. The Academy Trust's approach to data protection compliance is set out in the Overarching Data Protection Policies. In addition, staff must ensure that they follow the Academy Trust's data protection policies and procedures when handling personal data created in connection with this policy; this includes the Academy Trust's Data Protection Policy.

11.4 Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of an inspection or under other legal authority or court order.

12 **Complaints to the Department for Education (DfE)**

12.1 Parents who are dissatisfied with the way the Academy Trust has handled their complaint may contact the DfE, which will consider this on behalf of the Secretary of State.

12.2 The DfE cannot overturn the decision about a complaint. The DfE's role is to make sure the complaint is handled properly in line with the regulatory framework.

12.3 Further information about making a complaint to the DfE, including an online enquiry form, can be accessed on the DfE's website here - [How DfE handles complaints about academies](#).

13 **Training**

13.1 The Academy Trust ensures that regular guidance and training is arranged on induction and at regular intervals thereafter so that Trustees and Executive Officers understand what is expected of them by this policy and have the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out their roles.

13.2 The level and frequency of training depends on role of the individual Trustees and Executive Officers.

13.3 The Academy Trust maintains written records of all training provided to Trustees and Executive Officers.

14 **Version control**

Date of adoption of this policy	November 2024
Date of last review of this policy	N/A
Date for next review of this policy	November 2025

¹ In accordance with the terms of reference of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse all schools are required to retain information which relates to allegations (substantiated or not) of organisations and individuals who may have been involved in, or have knowledge of child sexual abuse or child sexual exploitation; allegations (substantiated or not) of individuals having engaged in sexual activity with, or having a sexual interest in, children; institutional failures to protect children from sexual abuse or other exploitation. Details of any complaints made about such matters will be retained.

Appendix 1: Stage 1 - Informal complaint

1. Informal resolution of a complaint

- 1.1 We hope and expect that most complaints can be resolved informally without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure.

2. Who to contact

- 2.1 An informal complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within 5 school days of receipt, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely timescales. Such action may include an investigation and / or a meeting with the Parent.
- 2.2 Wherever appropriate, the Academy Trust will ask the Parent at the earliest stage what they think might resolve the issue.
- 2.3 The Parent will receive a response to the complaint within **15 school days**.
- 2.4 If the Parent is dissatisfied with the response to the informal complaint or in the event that the complaint cannot be resolved by informal means, the Parent may make a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure as set out in Appendix 2.

3. Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer

- 3.1 The procedure for dealing with an informal complaint about the Chief Executive Officer is set out below:
- 3.1.1 Parents may choose to raise complaints directly with the Chief Executive Officer if they feel that the matter is capable of resolution informally. The complaint may be raised orally or in writing. If in writing, the Academy Trust will not automatically treat the complaint as a formal (Stage 2) complaint and the Chief Executive Officer will endeavour to resolve the complaint informally under Stage 1;
- 3.1.2 the Chief Executive Officer will acknowledge informal complaints within **5 school days** and will seek to resolve the matter under this Stage 1 by means of direct conversation or a meeting with the Parents, to be held within **15 school days** of the initial complaint;
- 3.1.3 If the Parent is dissatisfied with the Chief Executive Officer's response to the informal complaint or in the event that the complaint cannot be resolved by informal means, the Parent may make a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure as set out in Appendix 2.
- 3.2 Alternatively, Parents may choose to make their complaint about the Chief Executive Officer in writing to the Chair of Trustees, and they should send this to the Clerk to the Trustees. In this case, the complaint will be treated as a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure as set out in Appendix 2.

4. Complaints about the Trustees

- 4.1 Complaints about individual Trustees should be made in writing to the Clerk to the Trustees.
- 4.2 The Clerk to the Trustees will then arrange for the complaint to be considered by the Chair of Trustees who will confirm their decision in writing. A panel hearing in accordance with Appendix 3 will be requested if applicable.
- 4.3 Complaints against the Chair of Trustees, the whole Trust Body or complaints involving both the Chair and the Vice Chair should also be sent to the Clerk to the Trustees, who will acknowledge the complaint within **5 school days**. The Clerk to Trustees should then determine the most appropriate course of action which will be explained in writing.

Appendix 2: Stage 2 - Formal complaint

How to make a formal complaint:

- 1.1 Complaints will usually only progress to Stage 2 after first being considered at the informal stage, and where the Parent indicates that they intend to escalate a matter to the formal stage.
- 1.2 The formal complaint must be in writing addressed to the Chief Executive Officer and should include:
 - 1.2.1 a copy of any relevant documents and the Parent's name and full contact details; and
 - 1.2.2 details of all the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired.
- 1.3 The complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within **5 school days**, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely timescales.
- 1.4 The complaint form in Appendix 7 can be used to submit a formal complaint to the Clerk to Trustees, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.
2. **Investigation**
 - 2.1 The independent investigator will be commissioned by the Trust. The subject matter of the complaint will be investigated in the most appropriate manner, which may include some or all of the following steps:
 - 2.2 delegation of the investigation to a senior member of staff or third party;
 - 2.3 involvement of one or more Trustee;
 - 2.3.1 request for additional information from the Parent, including what they think might resolve the issue (if not already requested at Stage 1); and
 - 2.3.2 request for a conversation and / or a meeting with the Parent personally and / or others with relevant knowledge of the circumstances to define the scope of the complaint and / or assist in the investigation.
 - 2.4 Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. Where the investigation has been delegated to a senior member of staff, he / she will prepare a report on the investigation which will be considered by the Chief Executive Officer. Personal data may be redacted and names anonymised or cyphered in line with data protection principles.
3. **Decision**
 - 3.1 The Chief Executive Officer will notify the Parent by email or letter of his / her Stage 2 decision and the reasons for it within **15 school days** from receipt of the formal complaint.
 - 3.2 If the Parent is dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response to the complaint, the Parent can request that the complaint be referred to a Complaint Panel under Stage 3 using the procedure set out in Appendix 3.
4. **Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer**
 - 4.1 The procedure for dealing with a formal complaint about the Chief Executive Officer is set out below:

- 4.1.1 the complaint should be put in writing to the Chair of Trustees, and should be sent to the Clerk to Trustees. The written complaint should include a copy of all relevant documents and full contact details and details of all the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired;
- 4.1.2 the Clerk to Trustees will acknowledge the complaint behalf of the Chairman of Trustees by telephone, email or letter within **5 school days** of receipt and indicate the action that is being taken and the likely timescale. Such action may include an investigation and / or a meeting with the Parent. The Parent will receive a response to the complaint within **15 school days**; and
- 4.1.3 if the Parent is dissatisfied with the response to the complaint, the Parent can request that the complaint be referred to a Complaint Panel under Stage 3 using the procedure set out in Appendix 3.

Appendix 3: Stage 3 - Complaint Panel Hearing

Complaint Panel Hearing

- 1.1 If a Parent is dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response to the complaint, the Parent can request a Complaint Panel Hearing (**Panel Hearing**).
- 1.2 A Panel Hearing is a hearing to consider those elements of the Stage 2 response to the Parent's complaint with which the Parent remains dissatisfied. The Complaint Panel is not obliged to consider any new complaints which have not been previously raised.
2. **How to request a Panel Hearing**
 - 2.1 A request for a Panel Hearing must be put in writing to the Chair of Trustees and will usually only be considered if the procedure at Stage 2 has been completed.
 - 2.2. The written request should usually be made within **15 school days** from receipt of the Stage 2 decision and include:
 - 2.2.1 a copy of any relevant documents and full contact details;
 - 2.2.2 details of all the grounds of the complaint about which the Parent remains dissatisfied and the outcome desired;
 - 2.2.3 a list of the documents which the Parents believe to be in the Academy Trust's possession and wish the Complaint Panel to consider; and
 - 2.2.4 whether the Parent proposes to be accompanied to the Panel Hearing (see paragraph 3.5 below).
 - 2.3 If assistance with the request is required, for example because of a disability, please inform the Clerk to the Trustees who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.
 - 2.4 The Clerk to the Trustees will acknowledge the request for a Panel Hearing in writing within **5 school days** of receipt.
 - 2.5 Every effort will be made to enable the Panel Hearing to take place within **25 school days** of receipt of the request.
 - 2.6 Parents may withdraw their request for a Panel Hearing at any point up to and including the intended date of the Panel Hearing.
3. **Planning the Panel Hearing**
 - 3.1 The Chair of Trustees will endeavour to send written notification to each party of the date, time and place of the Panel Hearing at least **15 school days** before the date of the Panel Hearing.
 - 3.2 Copies of any additional documents that the Parent wishes the Complaint Panel to consider should be sent to the Chair of Trustees to be received at least **10 school days** prior to the Panel Hearing.
 - 3.3 The Chair of Trustees will endeavour to circulate a copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the Complaint Panel to all parties at least **5 school days** prior to the Panel Hearing. The bundle of documents will include all records held in the complaint file following Stage 1 and / or 2, together with all correspondence and documents received from the Parent following notification of the formal response at Stage 2.

- 3.4 The Parent may be accompanied at the Panel Hearing, for example by a relative or friend. The Panel Hearing is an internal process, not legal proceedings, and legal representation is unnecessary.
- 3.5 If the Parent wishes to be accompanied by a relative or friend who is legally qualified, the Parent is required to notify the Chair of Trustees in the initial request for a Panel Hearing. The Parent should note that the Complaint Panel will wish to speak to that person directly prior to the Panel Hearing, and they will not be permitted to act as an advocate or address the Complaint Panel at the Panel Hearing unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Complaint Panel.
- 3.6 A person will be appointed to take minutes of the Panel Hearing.

4. **Composition of the Complaint Panel**

- 4.1 The Complaint Panel will comprise at least 3 individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint, including at least 1 person who is independent of the management and running of the Academy Trust (i.e. they will not be a Trustee, a Local Governor at any of the Trust's academies, or an employee of the Trust either at Trust level or at any of its academies).
- 4.2 The Parent may ask the Chair of Trustees to inform them who has been appointed to sit on the Complaint Panel ahead of the Panel Hearing. Fair consideration will be given to any reasonable objection to a particular member of the panel.
- 4.3 Complaint Panel members will appoint one of their number to be the Chair of the Complaint Panel throughout the proceedings.

5. **Role of the Complaint Panel**

- 5.1 The role of the Complaint Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:
- 5.1.1 the documents provided by both parties; and
 - 5.1.2 any representations made by the parties and to review the decision reached at Stage 2 and to consider, on a balance of probabilities, as to whether or not to uphold each complaint.

6. **The Panel Hearing**

- 6.1 Unless prior to the commencement of the Panel Hearing, a parent confirms they are satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, the Panel Hearing will proceed notwithstanding that the Parent may decide not to attend. In these circumstances, the Complaint Panel will consider the Parent's complaint in his / her absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint.
- 6.2 The panel will usually hear representations from the Stage 2 decision-maker and the Parent(s).
- 6.3 During the Panel Hearing, the parties shall have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. The Panel Hearing is not a legal process and the Complaint Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and / or may take written statements into account.
- 6.4 All statements made at the Panel Hearing will be unsworn. The parties will be entitled to write their own notes for reference purposes.
- 6.5 All those present during the Panel Hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the Panel Hearing may be adjourned or

terminated at the discretion of the Chair. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the Panel Hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his / her comment will be minuted.

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

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

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

7. **Decision**

7.1 The Complaint Panel will make findings about each complaint on the balance of probabilities, and may make recommendations.

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

7.3 The minutes of the Panel Hearing, together with the Complaint Panel's findings and any recommendations will be provided in writing to the Parent and, where relevant, the person complained about, within **10 school days** of the Panel Hearing.

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

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

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

Appendix 4: Complaints procedure for persons other than Parents

- 1.1 The Academy Trust encourages persons other than Parents (**Complainants**) (see paragraph 2.1.3 of the Academy Trust's Complaints Policy) who have concerns about the Academy Trust's operation to raise them with the Academy Trust.
- 1.2 They should do so by sending a letter to the Reach South Headquarters setting out their concerns and the action sought. Any concerns raised will be investigated and responded to under Stage 2 of this procedure as set out in Appendix 2.
- 1.3 If the Complainant is dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response to the complaint, the Complainant can request a review of the decision by writing to the Clerk to the Trustees. The review will be carried out by a Trustee who will confirm their decision in writing.
- 1.4 A request for a review must be put in writing and will usually only be considered if the complaints procedure at Stage 2 has been completed.
- 1.5 The written request should usually be made within **15 school days** from receipt of the Stage 2 decision and include:
 - 1.5.1 a copy of any relevant documents and full contact details;
 - 1.5.2 details of all the grounds of the complaint about which the Complainant remains dissatisfied and the outcome desired; and
 - 1.5.3 a list of the documents which the Complainant believe to be in the Academy Trust's possession and wish the Trustee to consider.
- 1.6 The role of the Trustee is to:
 - 1.6.1 establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering the documents provided by the Complainant;
 - 1.6.2 review the decision reached at Stage 2; and
 - 1.6.3 consider, on a balance of probabilities, as to whether or not to uphold each complaint.
- 1.7 The Trustee will make findings about each complaint, on the balance of probabilities, and may make recommendations.
- 1.8 Any recommendations will be provided in writing to the Complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, within **15 school days** from receipt of the written request for the review.
- 1.9 The Trustee's findings and any recommendations will also be made available for inspection on the Academy Trust 's premises by the Trust and the Headteacher.
- 1.10 The decision of the Trustee is final. The completion of the review represents the conclusion of the Academy Trust's complaints procedure for all persons other than Parents. There will be no further opportunity within the Academy Trust for consideration of the complaint.
- 1.11 If, at the conclusion of the review, a duplicate complaint is made the Academy Trust will inform the Complainant that the matter is closed.
- 1.12 On receipt of a complaint from a Complainant the Academy Trust may amend the procedure set out in Appendix 4 and may attempt an exploration of an informal resolution if appropriate. If this is not possible, there may be an investigation and

determination of the complaint with the right to request a review of the decision made at the informal stage.

- 1.13 Complainants who are dissatisfied with the decision of a Complaint Panel may contact the Department for Education (**DfE**), which complaints about academies on behalf of the Secretary of State. Further information about making a complaint to the DfE, including an online enquiry form, can be accessed on the DfE's website here - [How DfE handles complaints about academies](#).

Appendix 5: Serial and persistent complaints

- 1 Serial and persistent complaints are taken seriously by the Academy Trust as they put a strain on valuable resources and hinder the progress of proper investigations.
- 2 If a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the Academy Trust will inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed.
- 3 If the complainant contacts the Academy Trust again on the same issue, the correspondence may be viewed as "serial" or "persistent" and the Academy Trust may choose not to respond.
- 4 The Academy Trust will not mark a complaint as "serial" before the complainant has completed all stages of the complaints procedure.
- 5 Under no circumstances will a complainant be marked as "serial" for exercising their right to refer their complaint to their MP, regardless of which stage the complaint has reached.
- 6 The Academy Trust may consider a complaint to be "frivolous" or "vexatious" if:
 - 6.1 complaints are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
 - 6.2 there is insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and / or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
 - 6.3 there is insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;
 - 6.4 complaints are designed to cause disruption or annoyance; or
 - 6.5 demands for redress lack any serious purpose or value.
- 7 Complainants should try to limit their communication with the Academy Trust about the complaint while it is being progressed, as it is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) which is likely to delay an outcome being reached.
- 8 For complainants who excessively contact the Academy Trust causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify particular methods of communication, provide a single point of contact and / or limit the number of communications which may be made with the Academy Trust in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after three months.
- 9 The Academy Trust will stop responding to a complainant where:
 - 9.1 the Academy Trust has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns;
 - 9.2 the complainant has been given a clear statement of the Academy Trust's position and their options; and
 - 9.2 the complainant contacts the Academy Trust repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.
- 10 The Academy Trust's case to stop responding will be stronger if it agrees with any of the following statements:
 - 10.1 the complainant's letters, emails, or telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive;

- 10.2 the complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff; and / or
 - 10.3 the Academy Trust has reason to believe the individual is contacting the Academy Trust with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience.
- 11 In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the Academy Trust will immediately report this to the police for criminal investigation. The Academy Trust may also withdraw the complainant's implied permission to enter or be on the Academy Trust site(s)

Appendix 6: Complaint campaigns

- 1 Where the Academy Trust becomes the focus of a campaign and receives a large volume of complaints all based on the same subject, particularly if these complaints come from complainants unconnected with the Academy Trust, the Academy Trust may respond by:
 - 1.1 sending a consistent response to all complainants; and
 - 1.2 publishing a single response on the Academy Trust website.
- 2 The normal procedures will apply if the complainant is not satisfied with the Academy Trust's response.

Appendix 7: Complaint form

(Please continue on additional pages if necessary)

Complaint Form			
Name of complainant(s)			
Address:		Telephone:	Mobile:
			E mail:
Name and role of who the complaint has been raised with			
(Please include any relevant dates)			
Reason for complaint			
(Please include as much information as possible about what specifically you are unhappy about and why)			
Desired outcome			
(Please note that while you may outline the outcome you are seeking, this process does not permit requests or demands for specific actions/sanctions to be imposed on staff, pupils or other parents.)			
List of relevant documents enclosed with the complaint form			

Declaration

The information included in this complaint form is accurate to the best of my knowledge. I agree to cooperate fully with the complaints procedures and acknowledge my ongoing obligation to treat the Academy Trust, each Academy and its staff in a reasonable manner at all times.

Signed:**Date:**

Appendix 8: Roles and responsibilities

1 Parent / Complainant

- 1.1 The Parent or Complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:
- (a) explain the complaint in full as early as possible
 - (b) co-operate with the Academy Trust in seeking a solution to the complaint
 - (c) respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
 - (d) ask for assistance as needed
 - (e) treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
 - (f) refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

2 Investigator

- 2.1 The individual investigating the complaint at Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:
- (a) providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - (i) sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - (ii) interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - (iii) consideration of records and other relevant information
 - (iv) analysing information
 - (b) liaising with the complainant and the Clerk as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.
- 2.2 The investigator should:
- (a) ensure each and every ground of complaint is identified;
 - (b) review all *relevant* documentation;
 - (c) conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
 - (d) keep notes of all interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting;
 - (e) ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal;
 - (f) be mindful of the timescales to respond;
 - (g) prepare a comprehensive Report for the Chief Executive Officer or Complaints Panel that sets out the facts and where requested identifies appropriate solutions, recommends courses of action to resolve problems

and lists all documents considered and interviews held as an Appendix to their Report; and

- (h) The Chief Executive Officer 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.

3

Clerk to the Trust Board

3.1 The Clerk to the Trust Board:

- (a) ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure; and
- (b) liaise with the Trust Board, Chief Executive Officer and the Executive Team and to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- (c) be aware of issues regarding:
 - (i) sharing third party information and / or required redaction; and
 - (ii) additional support (e.g. interpretation support)
- (d) keep records.
- (e) 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);
- (f) 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;
- (g) 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;
- (h) record the proceedings;
- (i) circulate the minutes of the meeting; and
- (j) notify all parties of the Complaints Panel's decision.

4

Complaint Panel Chair

4.1 The Complaint Panel Chair, who is nominated in advance of the Panel Hearing, should ensure that:

- (a) 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;
- (b) 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;
- (c) Parents who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease;
- (d) the remit of the Complaints Panel is explained to the Parent;

- (e) 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 UK GDPR;
- (f) both the Parent and the Academy Trust 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;
- (g) the issues are addressed;
- (h) key findings of fact are made;
- (i) the Complaints Panel is open-minded and acts independently;
- (j) no member of the Complaints Panel has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- (k) the meeting is minuted; and
- (l) they liaise with the Clerk.

5 **Complaint Panel Member**

5.1 Complaint Panel members should be aware that:

- (a) the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so no Local Governor / Trustee may sit on the Complaint Panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it;
- (b) the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the Academy Trust and the Parent. It is recognised that the Parent 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;
- (c) many Parents will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child;
- (d) extra care needs to be taken when a child / young person is present during all or part of the meeting:
 - (i) careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child / young person does not feel intimidated;
 - (ii) the Complaints Panel should respect the views of the child / young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults;
 - (iii) the Complaints Panel should give the Parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child / young person needs to attend;
 - (iv) 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 Complaints Panel considers is not in the child / young person's best interests; and
- (v) the welfare of the child / young person is paramount.