DDAT
Derby Diocesan Academy Trust

Complaints Procedure for Trust Board and Local Trust Committees

March 2026

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Please do not amend the procedure in any way other than adding the school logo and school related contact details.

1 Aims and application

1.1 The aims of the procedure are to deal with complaints and concerns:

- about an academy, the academy trust ("trust") or any individual connected with it by following the correct procedure;
- thoroughly, and
- in an open, honest and fair manner.

1.2 This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children who are registered at one of the academies within the Trust. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to an individual academy within the Trust, or the Trust itself, about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Part 1 of this policy outlines how parents/carers of registered pupils currently attending academies within the Trust can raise a concern or complaint. Concerns or complaints from other persons will be dealt with in accordance with Part 2 of this policy. Complaints from registered pupils should be raised by their parents/carers.

1.3 This procedure does not apply to concerns and complaints relating to the matters listed in Annex 1.

1.4 Anonymous concerns or complaints will not normally be investigated under this procedure. Headteacher or Chair of the Local Trust Committee of an academy, or the Chief Executive Officer (as appropriate), will determine whether there are exceptional circumstances to justify conducting an investigation into the issues raised.

1.5 All staff will be made aware of this complaints procedure and are expected to review this policy regularly in order that they are familiar with our process of dealing with complaints and can be of assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

1.6 In this procedure:

- 'complaint' means an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action;
- 'concern' means an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought;
- 'meeting' and 'hearing' means an in person or virtual meeting or hearing (i.e. telephone or video conference where all parties can participate verbally), virtual meetings/hearings will only be held if all parties have access to appropriate equipment to attend and are happy to do so;
- 'parent' means a biological parent, carer or anyone with parental responsibility or care for a child;
- 'school days' excludes weekends and academy holidays and periods of partial or total academy closure;
- 'Headteacher' means Head of Academy, Headteacher or Executive Headteacher;
- 'Trust' means the academy trust.

1.7 The timeframes referred to in this policy are our usual timeframes, and the academy will seek to adhere to these timeframes where possible.

1.8 Reasonable adjustments will be made to this procedure where required to ensure that all complainants can access and complete this complaints procedure. For example, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

2 Key principles

Our academy/Trust is committed to fostering a supportive, respectful, and collaborative community built on positive relationships between pupils, parents, staff, and leaders. When concerns arise, we believe that early, open conversation is the most effective way to resolve issues quickly and constructively. This approach reflects both our educational values and our Christian ethos.

2.1 The Trust acknowledges that raising concerns or complaints can be a difficult, emotional, and courteous when dealing with you. We also expect you to treat our staff with the same respect and courtesy. We will not accept abusive and threatening behaviour towards our staff from anybody at any time. In circumstances where this happens the Trust will take the action outlined in Part 3 of this policy.

2.2 The Trust expects all complainants to make reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution. This will usually be the most effective way to swiftly resolve any concerns.

2.3 The Trust encourages parents and others to approach the academy with any concerns and refrain from airing concerns about the academy and its staff on social media sites. Posting negative comments on social media can cause damage and upset and is often counter-productive to pupil education.

2.4 To investigate your complaint properly and fairly, we have implemented a staged approach. We anticipate that almost all complaints that arise will be resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2 outlined below.

2.5 We expect our members of staff to be addressed in a respectful manner, and for communication to remain calm at all times. The procedure under Part 3 will only be used on very rare occasions to deal with repetitious and/or vexatious complaints or complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner.

2.6 Concerns or complaints should be brought to our attention as soon as possible. Any matter raised more than three months after the incident being complained of (or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three calendar months of the last of these incidents) will not be considered unless the Headteacher or Chair of the Local Trust Committee accepts that there are exceptional circumstances to justify accepting the complaint out of time.

2.7 Where a complaint is received outside of term time, we will consider it to have been received on the first school day following the holiday period.

2.8 On rare occasions an academy or the Trust may receive complaints from a number of individuals relating to the same issue. In order to deal with these complaints efficiently the academy/Trust will follow the procedure set out in Part 4.

2.9 If it becomes necessary to alter the time limits and deadlines set out within this procedure, you will be advised accordingly and given an explanation as to why this has been the case and provided with revised timescales. If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority safeguarding teams, or tribunals/courts, 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. Where a complaint is raised but we do not have clarity from the complainant on the issues and/or desired outcomes, we will inform the complainant what information we need to progress the complaint and pause this procedure until reasonable clarity is achieved.

2.10 Complainants should not approach individual local trust committee members or trustees to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis, and it may prevent them from considering complaints at later stages.

2.11 If a complainant commences legal action against the trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether it would be appropriate to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

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

3 The Complainant

If you wish to raise a complaint about the academy/Trust, please do try to:

3.1 Resolve the concern informally first with academy staff.

3.2 Ask for assistance if needed, we are happy to support you.

3.3 Follow these procedures starting at Stage 1, unless the complaint is about the Headteacher.

3.4 Say clearly what you think might resolve the issue at the earliest stage, confirming early what outcome you are seeking. Please use the complaints form at Annex 2 to record your complaint.

3.5 Co-operate with the academy/Trust throughout the process, responding to timeframes and communication promptly. Failure to respond to timeframes and communication may delay the complaint being resolved and may result in a paper-based investigation and hearing, or the academy/Trust may stop responding to the complaint if there is no co-operation or a written statement detailing the complaint and outcomes requested.

3.6 Not publish details about the complaint on social media.

3.7 Treat all those involved with respect and use appropriate language at all times. Please refer to the academy/Trust Parent Code of Conduct.

3.8 Contact the appropriate staff member or the clerk to the local trust committee to raise your concern and not multiple people in the school and at DDAT, as this may lead to an uncoordinated and duplicated response.

3.9 Not send repeated communication to the academy/Trust whilst 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 issue being resolved and the outcome being reached.

3A Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) when expressing a concern or making a complaint

The academy/Trust recognises that some complainants may use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to help draft concerns or complaints. Whilst this can be helpful, concerns or complaints generated in this way may sometimes be overly detailed, may include incorrect references to legislation, or may lack a clear explanation of how the issues relate specifically to the concern or complaint being made. Parents and carers are also advised not to include any personal information about pupils, staff, or other individuals when using AI tools, as entering such details into these systems can pose risks to privacy and data security.

To ensure that concerns or complaints can be considered fairly and efficiently, the school may ask complainants to clarify or re-present their concern or complaint where AI use is suspected. This may include asking the complainant to:

- Clearly separate the concern or complaint into individual points.
- Explain how any referenced legislation applies to their specific concern or complaint.
- Use clear and concise language.
- Provide relevant dated evidence, rather than general statements.
- Outline, where appropriate, the outcome they are seeking.

Using the complaints form in Annex 2 will address the points outlined above. This method will support the school in understanding and responding to the complainant's concern or complaint in a timely and effective manner.

4 Records of complaints

A record will be kept of all written formal complaints, including at what stage they were resolved, and action taken by us as a result of those complaints regardless of whether they were upheld. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where:

- Access is requested by the Secretary of State.
- Disclosure is required in the course of an academy inspection.
- An individual has a legal right to access their own personal data contained within such documentation; or
- Under other legal authority.

We will make the findings and recommendations of the complaints panel available for inspection on the academy premises by the Trust and the Headteacher.

5. Part 1: Complaints procedure for parents

Introduction

Our trust and academies are committed to fostering a supportive, respectful, and collaborative community built on positive relationships between pupils, parents, staff, and leaders. When concerns arise, we believe that early, open conversation is the most effective way to resolve issues quickly and constructively. This approach reflects both our educational values and our Christian ethos.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline how the school manages concerns and complaints, ensuring that:

- Issues are addressed promptly and fairly
- Relationships are strengthened rather than damaged
- Communication remains open, honest, and respectful
- The process remains aligned with our Christian foundation

Biblical Foundation

As a trust rooted in Christian values, we draw upon biblical guidance when shaping our approach to conflict and communication. Scripture teaches that when disagreements arise, we should first seek resolution through direct conversation. Jesus says:

"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,"

— James 1:19

This passage demonstrates that if we listen attentively, demonstrating respect and we seek to understand the other person's feelings and perspective, we are better placed to respond thoughtfully, rather than reacting emotionally.

We follow this principle by encouraging informal discussion as the first step in our complaints process.

Our aim is to conclude the complaints process in a way that promotes understanding, restoration of relationships, and mutual respect. We encourage all parties to approach any grievance with patience, compassion, and a willingness to forgive, acknowledging that reconciliation is an important part of our community values.

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

— Colossians 3:13

Stage 1: Informal concerns – resolution through conversation

5.1 An informal concern can be raised in person, by email or by telephone. Concerns may also be raised by a third party acting on behalf of a parent, if they have appropriate authority to do so. Most enquiries and concerns can be dealt with satisfactorily by the class teacher, or other members of staff without the need to resort to the formal procedure. We value informal meetings and discussions and encourage parents to approach staff with any concerns they may have and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding.

5.2 It is always helpful if you can fully explain the nature of the concern and identify the outcome you are looking for. Where appropriate, you may be invited to an informal meeting with the member of staff most appropriate for dealing with that concern. The member of staff dealing with the concern will make sure that you are clear on what action (if any) has been agreed. This may be put in writing if appropriate.

5.3 If the matter is brought to the attention of the Headteacher they may decide to deal with your concerns directly at this stage. If the concerns are about the Headteacher these should be referred directly to the Clerk of the Local Trust Committee under Stage 2.

5.4 The academy will respect the views of a parent who indicates that they would have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff. In this case, the Headteacher will refer the parent to another designated member of staff. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved in the circumstances leading to the concern feels the same, the Headteacher may consider referring the parent to another member of staff.

5.5 Staff members should log all informal concerns on the school management information system and inform the Headteacher of any serious concerns.

5.6 It is expected that most issues will be resolved through informal discussion within 15 school days. Where no satisfactory solution has been found, you will be advised that if you wish your concerns to be considered further you should write to the Headteacher under Stage 2 of this procedure within 15 school days.

Stage 2: Formal written complaints

5.7 If your concerns are not resolved under Stage 1, you are entitled to put your complaint in writing, the complaint form at Annex 2 will help, and send this to the Headteacher of the relevant academy. Please use ‘complaint’ as the subject of your email or mark it clearly on your letter. This will ensure that your correspondence gets the priority it deserves from a large volume of communications the academy receives each day.

5.8 It is very important that you describe your complaint clearly and include a clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint. The Complaint Form provided at Annex 2 of this procedure will help you to provide the information required below. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the academy office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you. In all cases your written complaint must include:

- The nature of the complaint.

- Details of how the matter has been dealt with so far.
- The names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events and copies of all relevant documents; and
- A clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint.

5.9 Your complaint will normally be acknowledged in writing within five school days of receipt. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the [academy/Trust's] complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This will normally be within 15 school days of receipt.

5.10 If appropriate, Headteacher (or someone appointed by them) may invite you to a meeting to clarify your complaint and to explore possible resolutions. If you choose to accept the invitation, you may be accompanied by one additional person for support, such as a friend, relative, or an interpreter if required. Please inform the Headteacher (or someone appointed by them) if you will be accompanied. Where possible, this meeting will take place within 10 school days of receipt of the written complaint.

5.11 If necessary, witnesses will be interviewed and statements taken from those involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, the pupil will usually be interviewed. Pupils will normally be interviewed with their parent present, but if this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint or if the pupil has specifically said that they would prefer that their parents were not involved, another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable will be present. If the matter includes a complaint relating to a member of staff, the member of staff will have the opportunity to respond to the complaint.

5.12 Once the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, you will be provided with a written response to the complaint, including an explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. This will include what action will be taken to resolve the complaint (if any). You will be advised that if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, you may request that your complaint be heard by the complaints panel under Stage 3 of this procedure.

5.13 The Trust may engage an independent, external person to carry out the investigation into the Stage 2 complaint, or to review the investigation and response at Stage 2. This may be appropriate where the complaint is particularly complex or involves legal issues.

Q. What if the complaint is about the Headteacher or the Headteacher has already considered your complaint under Stage 1?

In these cases, your complaint should be sent to the Clerk of the Local Trust Committee at the academy's address who will arrange for a Local Trust Committee member to carry out the Stage 2 procedure.

Q. What if the complaint is about a Local Trust Committee member?

Complaints about the Chair of local trust committee or any individual local trust committee member should be sent to the Governance Lead at ddatgovernance@ddat.org.uk who will then determine the most appropriate action with regards to Stage 2 and Stage 3. The Governance Lead will arrange for an appropriate DDAT representative or local trust committee member (as applicable) to investigate the concerns in accordance with Stage 2.

If the complaint is about the Clerk of the Local Trust Committee or the Local Trust Committee as a whole, you should send your complaint to the Governance Lead at ddatgovernance@ddat.org.uk who will then determine the most appropriate action with regards to Stage 2 and Stage 3.

Q. What if the complaint is about the Chief Executive Officer?

If the complaint is about the Chief Executive Officer of the trust, or if they have been closely involved at Stage 1, your complaint should be sent to the Governance Professional of the trustees at Jason.Hampton@ddat.org.uk who will arrange for a trustee to carry out all the Stage 2 procedures.

Q. What if the complaint is about a trustee, or a member of the trust?

If the complaint is about a trustee or member of the trust, you should contact the Governance Professional of the trustees at Jason.Hampton@ddat.org.uk who will arrange for another trustee to investigate the concerns in accordance with Stage 2.

If your complaint is about the Trust board as a whole, you should send your complaint to the Governance Professional of the trustees at Jason.Hampton@ddat.org.uk who will arrange for the matter to be independently investigated.

Q. What if the complaint is about the governance professional of the trustees?

If the complaint is about the governance professional of the trustees, your complaint should be sent to the Chair of the trustees c/o Sarah.Charles@ddat.org.uk

Please be aware that where your complaint relates to an employee a copy of the complaint may be shared with them in order to investigate the issues raised.

Stage 3: Referral to the Complaints Panel

5.14 If you are dissatisfied with the decision under Stage 2, you may request that a complaints panel be convened to consider your complaint. The complaints panel will principally consider how the complaint was handled at the previous stages but has discretion to review other aspects of the complaint as it sees fit. The complaints panel will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

5.15 To request a meeting before the Complaints Panel, you should write to the Governance Lead at ddatgovernance@ddat.org.uk within 15 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 2. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. You should ensure that you provide copies of all relevant documents and state all the grounds for your complaint and the outcome that you are looking for.

5.16 The Governance Lead will arrange for an appropriate Governance Professional or Clerk to assume responsibility for all administrative functions relating to the Stage 3 complaints panel. This includes undertaking the required pre-meeting preparations and attending the panel hearing to provide clerking support and take an accurate record of proceedings.

5.17 Your written request will be acknowledged within five school days of receipt.

5.18 The Governance Professional or Clerk will arrange for a Complaints Panel to be convened, made up of at least three panel members, who have had no prior connection with the complainant, including:

- Local trust committee members and/or trustees of the Trust (as appropriate) with no prior involvement in the matter; and,
- One person who is independent of the management and running of the academy (for example, this might be a local trust committee member from another academy within the Trust, a governor from another local school/college or an educational professional who has no link to the academy).
- The Governance Professional or Clerk shall appoint one of these panel members to be the Chair of the complaints panel.

5.19 Every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within 20 school days of the receipt of your request. As soon as reasonably practicable and in any event at least five school days before the hearing, you will be sent written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the panel members who will be present. Fair consideration will be given to any bona fide objection to a particular member of the complaints panel. You will also be informed of the name of the person who will be presenting the case on behalf of the academy/trust (referred to in this policy as the 'academy representative'). This may be the person who is the subject of the complaint, the person who undertook the investigation at Stage 2 and/or another person with sufficient knowledge of the matter.

5.20 The Governance Professional or Clerk will propose a date for the panel hearing, offering up to a maximum of three possible dates. If it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date and time for a hearing within a reasonable timeframe, the Governance Professional or Clerk may determine that the hearing proceeds on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

5.21 You have the right to be accompanied to the hearing by a friend, relative or interpreter. You should notify the Governance Professional or Clerk (whichever is applicable) in advance if you intend to bring anyone to the complaints panel hearing. We do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the complaints panel meeting. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend. The complaints panel itself may take legal advice and/or be supported by a legal advisor at the hearing on matters of law and procedure.

5.22 A copy of the complaint and any other documents provided by you in support of your complaint, or by the academy representative in defence of the complaint, will be provided to the complaints panel as soon as practicable upon receipt. Copies of these documents shall also be provided to you and/or academy representatives (as applicable) at least three school days before the hearing. The complaints panel reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented by either party less than three school days prior to the hearing. The complaints panel is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from those other than the parties (e.g. witnesses) but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. The complaints panel will not normally accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

5.23 The hearing will be conducted to ensure that each party has the opportunity to address the complaints panel. The procedure to be followed during the hearing will be explained to the parties by letter in advance of the hearing. The Governance Professional / Clerk will ensure that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken, or actions agreed. Electronic recordings of the hearing will not normally be permitted and, in any event, would require the consent of all those present.

5.24 Unless otherwise stated, the procedure for the Stage 3 hearing is as follows:

- The parent and academy representative will enter the hearing together.
- The chair of the complaints panel will introduce the panel members and outline the process.
- The parent will explain the complaint.
- The academy representative and panel members will question the parent.
- The academy representative will explain the academy/Trust's actions.
- The parent and the panel members will question the academy representative.
- The parent will sum up their complaint.
- The academy representative will sum up the academy/Trust's actions.
- The chair of the complaints panel will explain that both parties will hear from the panel within five school days.
- Both parties will leave together while the complaints panel decides.
- The Governance Professional / Clerk, and any legal advisor assisting the complaints panel (if applicable), will stay to assist the complaints panel with its decision making.

5.25 The Governance Professional or Clerk and/or complaints panel reserves the right to modify the above procedure at their sole discretion, for example requiring the parent and the academy representative to present their complaint/actions separately to the complaints panel in the absence of the other party.

5.26 If the complainant has not arrived by the start of the complaints panel, the Governance Professional or Clerk will attempt to contact the complainant via telephone to ascertain if they are delayed, have chosen not to attend, or wish to withdraw their complaint. If the Clerk or Governance Professional is unable to speak with the complainant, or if the complainant confirms that they have chosen not to attend, the hearing will proceed in the complainant's absence 30 minutes after the scheduled start time. Findings and recommendations will be based on the written submissions previously provided by both parties.

5.27 A complaints panel may be adjourned if the complaints panel require further evidence, or in exceptional circumstances (for example, if clarification sought by the complaints panel is essential to the proceedings). The adjourned date must be as soon as possible.

5.28 After the hearing, the Complaints Panel will consider their decision and inform you and, where relevant, the person complained about of their decision in writing within five school days. The letter will set out the decision of the complaints panel together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The complaints panel can (by a majority if necessary):

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.

- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- Recommend changes to the academy systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

5.29 The complaints panel is the final stage of the academy/Trust-based complaints process. Following the panel's decision, no further updates will be provided regarding actions taken in response to the panel's recommendations.

Stage 4: Referral of complaint to the Department for Education (DfE).

5.29 If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the complaints panel, you are entitled to refer your complaint to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will only investigate the complaint in limited circumstances.

5.30 For more information on the DfE's remit in relation to academy complaints, visit: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complain-about-an-academy/complain-about-an-academy

Roles and Responsibilities

A. The role of the Governance Lead, Governance Professional of the trustees or Clerk of the local trust committee

The Governance Lead, Governance Professional or Clerk of the local trust committee (whichever is applicable) is the contact point for the complainant and the complaints panel, and should:

- Ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure.
- Liaise with staff, [Headteacher], the Chief Executive Officer, [chair of local trust committee] of an academy and chair of the trust board (as applicable) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure.
- Be mindful of the timescales for responding to complaints.
- 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).
- Ensure that the complaints panel has access to legal advice, where appropriate.
- Set the date, time and venue of the hearing, taking reasonable steps to find a date that is convenient to all parties 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 hearing within an agreed timescale.
- Minute the hearing.
- Notify all parties of the complaint panel's decision.
- Assist the academy/Trust in issuing a summary letter to the complainant.

B. The role of the Headteacher (or other party investigating as applicable in accordance with the procedure) at Stage 2

- To ensure that the complainant is fully updated throughout the Stage 2 procedure.
- To ensure that the correct procedure has been followed.
- To ensure that an investigation is carried out, and a report compiled.
- To meet the complainant, if appropriate,
- If the complaint is being referred to Stage 3, liaise with the Governance Lead, to arrange the complaints panel.

C. The role of the chair of the complaints panel

The chair of the complaints panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- The hearing 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 hearing are put at ease.
- The remit of the complaints panel is explained to the complainant.
- The 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).
- Key findings of fact are made, and that any issues not previously mentioned in writing should not be raised at the meeting and, if they are mentioned at the hearing, these should not be noted or considered by the complaints panel.
- Both the complainant and the academy trust are given the opportunity to make their case, and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the hearing, or verbally in the meeting itself.
- The complaints panel is open-minded, acts independently, and no panel member has an external interest in the outcome, or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure.
- The hearing is minuted.

7. Part 2: Concerns or complaints from other persons

Part 1 of this complaints policy applies only to complaints made by parents or carers of current registered pupils of the Trust. However, the Trust wishes to work closely with other members of the local community and will deal with their concerns and complaints as follows:

7.1 Stage 1 - a concern regarding an academy or its operations may be made to any member of staff. That member of staff will attempt to resolve the matter immediately or may, if appropriate, refer the matter to their line manager or member of the senior leadership team (SLT) who is best placed to deal with the concern. It is expected that most concerns will be responded to orally or in writing within five school days. If a longer period is required, you will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation.

7.2 Stage 2 - where a concern is not resolved at Stage 1, or you wish your concerns to be dealt with immediately as a formal complaint, you should put your complaint in writing and send this to the Headteacher of the relevant academy to investigate. The Headteacher may delegate the task of investigation and/or responding to the complaint to a member of SLT or may escalate the complaint straight to Stage 3. A formal response to the complaint will usually be provided within 15 school days of receipt of the letter of complaint although if a longer period is required to respond, you will be kept updated.

7.3 Stage 3 - if you are not satisfied with the response at Stage 2, you may request a review by writing to the clerk of the local trust committee of the academy. You should write to the clerk of the local trust committee within 15 school days of receipt of the letter at Stage 2. Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. The clerk of the local trust committee will usually arrange for a local trust committee member to consider the complaint alone, or may refer the matter to the Governance Lead ddatgovernance@ddat.org.uk to convene a complaints panel on the same terms as set out in Part 1 of this complaints policy. The decision at this stage will usually be sent to you within 15 school days of receipt of the request for a review, or within five school days of the complaints panel hearing (as applicable).

7.4 **Stage 4** - If you are dissatisfied with the decision at Stage 3, you are entitled to refer your complaint to the Department for Education as outlined in Part 1 of this complaints policy.

Concerns or complaints regarding the Headteacher or the trust should be referred direct to the Governance Lead who will arrange for the stages above to be considered by an appropriate person.

8 Part 3: Repetitious and vexatious complaints and complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

There are rare circumstances where we will deviate from the Complaints Procedure set out in Parts 1 and 2. These include, but are not necessarily limited to:

8.1 Repetitious, including serial and/or persistent, complaints

Where the complainant's complaint is the same, similar to, or based on the same facts of a complaint which has already been considered in full and we have:

- Taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns; and
- Given the complainant a clear statement of our position and their options.

We will write to the complainant to advise that the complaints procedure has been exhausted, and that we will not be responding to any further correspondence in relation to these matters. The complainant will be referred to Stage 4.

8.2 Vexatious complaints

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator defines the characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint as:

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

Examples include but are not limited to:

- Refusal to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refusal to co-operate with the complaint's investigation process.
- Refusal to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure.
- Insistence on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint's procedure or with good practice.
- Introducing trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on.
- Raising large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insist they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced.
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Seeking an unrealistic outcome, such as the inappropriate dismissal of staff.

- Making 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.
- Knowingly providing falsified information.
- Publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

8.3 Complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

Where the complainant's behaviour or language towards staff, local trust committee members, trustees or members is aggressive, abusive, offensive, discriminatory or threatening or insulting personal comments are made about, or threats are made towards, staff.

In the circumstances outlined in (8.2 Vexatious complaint) and (8.3 Complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner) above, we may:

- Inform the complainant that we consider their complaint to be vexatious or the manner in which they are pursuing their complaint to be unreasonable and why and ask them to desist.
- Conduct the complaints panel on the papers only i.e. not hold a hearing.
- Refuse to consider the complaint any further and refer the complainant directly to the Stage 4.

We may also restrict the complainant's access to the academy, e.g. requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only), requiring contact to take place with a named person only, restricting telephone calls to specified days and times or number of contacts, or banning the complainant from the academy's premises in line with our Parental Conduct Policy.

Where the complainant's behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, local trust committee members, trustees or members, we will consider other options, for example, reporting the matter to the police, or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

9 Part 4: Complaint campaigns

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint campaign is defined as a complaint from three or more separate individuals (whether or not connected with the academy) which are all based on the same subject.

Depending on the subject in question, we may deviate from the procedure set out in this policy and instead:

- Send a template response to all complainants; and/or
- Publish a single response on the academy's website (as applicable).

Annex 1

Matters excluded from the scope of this policy

Excluded Matters	Signposting
Admissions	The process for challenging admissions decisions is set out in our admissions policy in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.
Child protection matters	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding 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).
Data protection matters	Complaints about data protection matters are handled under our data protection policy and in accordance with relevant guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the ICO directly, but the ICO will usually expect you to have raised your concerns with our Data Protection Officer in the first instance.
Exclusions	The process for challenging exclusions decisions is set out in the DfE's statutory guidance and information can be found at: School suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Freedom of information matters	Complaints about our compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 are handled under our freedom of information policy and in accordance with relevant guidance from the ICO. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the ICO directly, but the ICO will usually expect you to have raised your concerns with us in the first instance.
Local trust committee member/trustee grievances	Complaints from local trust committee members and trustees will be dealt with by the chair of the trustees under the Trust's internal governance procedures. This does not preclude local trust committee members or trustees from raising complaints in their capacity as parent.
National Curriculum content	Please contact the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk/contactus
School re-organisation proposals	Where concerns are not adequately addressed by the academy, complaints can be raised directly with the Department for Education.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Certain complaints about staff may need to be dealt with under the academy'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.
Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with the local authority.
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 whistleblowers 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 should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of the complaint

Annex 2

Complaints Form

Your name:
Pupil's name:
Your relationship to pupil:
Your address and postcode:
Your daytime telephone number:
Your evening telephone number:
Your email address:
Your complaint is: (if you have more than one complaint, please number these)
What action have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint(s) in accordance with Stage 1 of the academy's complaints procedure? (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)

What would you like as an outcome from your complaint(s)?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, give details here:

Your signature…… Date ……

All functions of the complaints procedure must adhere to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Please complete and return to the academy office in a sealed envelope, marked private and confidential, addressed to the Headteacher, Clerk of the local trust committee, Governance Lead or Governance Professional of the trustees (as appropriate).

Office use

Date received ……

Date acknowledgement sent ……

Responsible member of staff ……

Annex 3

Summary of Complaints Procedure for Parents & Carers (Part 1)

Stage 1: Informal concerns	Parent brings complaint to attention of member of staff
	Issue to be resolved (guide: within 15 school days)
	Where no satisfactory solution has been found, parent to be advised that they should proceed to Stage 2
Stage 2: Formal Written Complaint	Parent to put complaint in writing using Complaint Form within 15 school days
	Complaint to be acknowledged within five school days
	Meeting with parents within 10 school days (where appropriate)
	Response to the complaint sent within 15 school days
Stage 3: Referral to Complaints Panel	Parent to request hearing within 15 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 2
	Request to be acknowledged within five school days
	Hearing to take place within 20 school days of receipt of request
	Notification of date, time and place of the hearing and details of the committee members present sent at least five school days before the hearing
	Academy representative and complainant to submit evidence in support of their case to assigned Governance Professional or Clerk, or Governance Lead or Governance Professional of the trustees (as applicable) at least three school days before the hearing
	Complaints Panel decision sent not more than five school days after the hearing