

Complaints Policy & Procedure

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1. Statement of Intent

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.

2. Trust and school policies

2.1 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.

2.2 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.

2.3 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.

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

2.5 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.

2.6 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

2.7 The table entitled 'Management of stages' at Appendix 1 sets out who will be involved in the management of your complaint depending on the stage it has reached.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 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

3.2 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

3.3 Complaints co-ordinator

The school will appoint a complaints co-ordinator (this could be the Headteacher or CEO / designated complaints 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 Governors, 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

3.4 Clerk to the 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

3.5 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)

3.6 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

4. Who can make a complaint?

4.1 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.

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

4.3 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.

5. The difference between a concern and a complaint

5.1 A concern may be defined as *‘an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought’*.

5.2 A complaint may be defined as *‘an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action’*.

5.3 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.

5.4 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.

5.5 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.

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

6. How to raise a concern or make a complaint

6.1 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.

6.2 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.

6.3 Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Governance Professional via email to clerk@respectschools.co.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

6.4 Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing Board should be addressed to the Governance Professional via email to clerk@respectschools.co.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

6.5 Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a trustee of the Trust, should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees via the Governance Professional, by email to clerk@respectschools.co.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

6.6 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.

6.7 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.

7. Anonymous complaints

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

8. Unreasonable actions

8.1 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.

8.2 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.

8.3 Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

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

8.5 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.

8.6 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. Scope of this complaint's procedure

11.1 This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Respect Collaboration 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 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). Derby City Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO): 01332 642376 / cpmduty@derby.gov.uk Derby City Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH): 01332 642855
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure. Behaviour Policy Sept 2025-26</i>
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.

11.2 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.

11.3 If a complainant commences legal action against in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

11.4 When the Governing 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 Governing Board rather than form part of the complaints process, if any person is unhappy with the content of that policy.

11.5 Day to day operational decisions about curriculum and timetabling should be referred to the Governing 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.

12. Information for the person complained about

12.1 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.

12.2 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.

13. Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Respect Collaboration 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

14. Withdrawal of a complaint

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

15. Complex complaints

15.1 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.

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

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

15.4 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.

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

16. Stage 1 – Informal complaints

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

16.2 Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, year head / subject head or Headteacher. 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.

16.3 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.

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

17. Stage 2 – Formal complaints

17.1 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).

17.2 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.

17.3 Within this response, the Headteacher (or relevant Governor or 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 Governor or Trustee) can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

17.4 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 Governor or 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 Governor or 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)

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

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

17.7 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.

17.8 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.

17.9 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.

17.10 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.

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

17.12 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.

17.13 The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of stage 2.

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

17.15 Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the governing Board must be made to the Governance Professional via the school office.

17.16 If the complaint is:

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

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

18. Records

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

18.2 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.

18.3 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.

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

19. Stage 3 – Panel hearing

19.1 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.

19.2 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.

19.3 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.

20. 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.

21. Procedure for stage 3

21.1 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.

21.2 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.

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

22. Arrangements for the panel

22.1 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.

22.2 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.

22.3 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.

22.4 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.

22.5 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.

22.6 Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

23. Material for the panel hearing

23.1 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.

23.2 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.

23.3 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.

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

23.5 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.

24. The panel hearing

24.1 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.

24.2 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

24.3 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

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

24.5 The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the DFE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Respect Collaboration Trust.

24.6 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 Respect Collaboration Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

24.7 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.

24.8 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.

24.9 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.

25. In person or online meetings

25.1 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.

25.2 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.

26. Complaints escalated to the trust

26.1 If a complaint is escalated to Respect Collaboration Trust “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.

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

26.3 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 2 of this Complaints Policy and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

26.4 Following the investigation, the CEO will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 15 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.

27. Complaint about the CEO or a trustee

27.1 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

27.2 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.

27.3 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.

27.4 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.

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

28. Arrangements for the trust complaint panel procedure

28.1 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.

28.2 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.

28.3 If the complaint is:

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

28.4 Stage 3 will be heard by a completely independent committee panel.

28.5 The Complaint Panel will consist of three members. None of the three members of the Complaint Panel will have been involved in the incidents or events which led to the complaint or have been involved in dealing with the complaint in the previous stages, or have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint.

28.6 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.

28.7 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.

28.8 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.

28.9 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.

28.10 Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

29. Material for the panel hearing

29.1 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.

29.2 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.

29.3 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.

30. The trust panel hearing

30.1 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.

30.2 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

30.3 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

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

30.5 The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department of Education (DfE) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Respect Collaboration Trust.

30.6 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 Respect Collaboration Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

30.7 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.

30.8 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.

30.9 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.

31. Data protection

31.1 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.

31.2 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.

31.3 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.

31.4 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.

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

31.6 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.

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

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/

32. Next steps

32.1 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.

32.3 The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Respect Collaboration Trust. They will consider whether the school 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](#).

32.3 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:

Ministerial and Public Communications Division

Department for Education

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

33. Vexatious complaints

33.1 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 Governors is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

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

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

34. Duplicate complaints

34.1 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.

34.2 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

35. Complaint campaigns

35.1 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.

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

35.3 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

35.4 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.

Appendix 1

Management of stages - Complaint against academy or academy staff

An Investigating Officer can be an independent person appointed by the Board

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 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.
A Governor or Governors (other than the Chair of Governors)		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 Governors		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 detailed in the complaint with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school.

Management of stages - Complaint against academy trust or academy trust officer

(An Investigating Officer can be an independent person appointed by the Board)

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

Appendix 2

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the School Office addressed to the relevant person (see para 6. of the Complaints Policy and Procedure). The school will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

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

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

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

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to for investigation:

Date: