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Change Record

Version	Date	Description
1.1	05/02/2024	Changes to Background, Expressing Concerns, Formal Complaints, Recording complaints, monitoring, Evaluation & Review. Unreasonably persistent complaints added.
1.2	18/03/24	Addition to Stage 1 section
1.3	14/10/24	Changes to Introduction, Stage 3, Stage 4, Summary of Dealing with Complaints, Appendix 2
1.4		
1.5		

Primitas Learning Partnership promotes the safeguarding and welfare of all children in its care; all policies are developed and formulated with this in mind

Complaints Policy

1. Background

This policy covers all matters relating to the life of the Trust (except admissions, exclusions, child protection allegations and Local Authority Statutory Assessment of Special Educational Needs, as there are separate statutory arrangements for them). The policy includes complaints related to the curriculum and religious worship. Allegations of abuse against staff are covered by a separate policy.

This policy is available on request to those with parental responsibility for students in any Primitas Academy. While students may, themselves, raise concerns, complaints to the Academy will be through parents. Complaints from external agencies and third parties are not accepted, complaints can only be made by those with parental responsibility of a child in the Academy. Please note that external agencies, such as the police or social services, will be notified of a complaint, where appropriate.

2. Introduction

The main purpose of a complaint's procedure is to solve problems and to give parents a means to raise issues of concern and have them addressed. The requirement to have a complaints procedure need not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern informally.

Complainants should be treated respectfully during and after the course of any complaint's investigation. All members of staff should be aware of the complaints procedure and understand:

- The importance of attempting to resolve problems before they become formal complaints
- The importance of treating complaints respectfully

The majority of issues raised by parents are concerns rather than complaints. The Trust/Academy is committed to taking concerns seriously in the hope of keeping the number of formal complaints to a minimum and without recourse to formal procedures. However, in those instances where a parent does not feel a concern has been addressed, or it is of sufficient gravity, the Trust's formal complaints procedure should be used. The prime aim of the Trust's policy is to resolve the complaint as fairly and speedily as possible. Formal complaints will be dealt with in a sensitive, impartial, timely and confidential manner.

Where this Policy effects the Central Team staff, Academy should be replaced with Central Team, Local Governing Body should be replaced with the Trust Board, Governors should be replaced with Trustees and Headteacher should be replaced with Chief Executive Officer.

3. The Processes

EXPRESSING CONCERNS

Concerns can be raised with the Trust/Academy at any time and will often generate an immediate response which will resolve the concern. Concerns can be raised by telephone, email or letter and if the concern is about a specific incident, then the date, time, location and persons involved should be identified where possible. Apart from the Academy's Parental Consultation Evenings, or other arranged meetings with specific staff, the Trust/Academy requests that contact is first made with the appropriate staff member. This could be the student's tutor/class teacher, subject teacher, Subject Leader or other pastoral staff. On some occasions,

the concern raised may require investigation or discussion with others, in which case there will be an informal but informed response **within two working days**. It is anticipated that the vast majority of concerns will be satisfactorily dealt with in this way.

FORMAL COMPLAINTS

If it has not been possible to resolve a concern informally then it may be appropriate to use the formal complaints procedure detailed below.

Anonymous complaints are not normally investigated.

A complaint made more than three months after the event will not be considered, except in exceptional circumstances.

Any complaint received outside of term time will be considered to have been received on the first Academy day after the Academy closure period.

Action through a complaint's procedure may lead to action being initiated under other procedures. This may be disciplinary or child protection procedures and consideration should be given to this possibility at the earliest stage. In these cases, the publicised complaints procedure will be suspended until action under the other procedures (including appeals) has been concluded. The complainant should be advised if this is the case and also informed of the likely delay in the final resolution of their complaint.

The following details outline the stages that should be used to resolve parental complaints.

Stage 1 - The Academy receives a formal complaint either in person, by telephone or in writing. A proforma complaints form can be found at Appendix 1. If the matter is not resolved, the complaint progresses to:

Stage 2 - The Headteacher hears the details of the complaint and arranges a further investigation. If the matter is still not resolved, the complaint progresses to:

Stage 3 – Complaint heard by the Governors, if the matter is still not resolved it progresses to Stage 4.

Concerns or complaints regarding the Headteacher will be heard at Stage 3 of the Policy.

If the complaint is about the following EHCP concerns then Stage 4 is not followed as explained below:

- If the complaint is about the quality of the written EHCP and associated issues, the complaint should be directed to the correct Local Authority via the child's SEND key worker. At the point the complaint is forwarded to the LA then Stage 4 does not apply and the complaint will then be dealt with in accordance with the LA Complaints Policy.
- If the complaint is about the admissions arrangements as outlined in Section I of the EHCP and associated issues, the complaint should be forwarded to the Local Authority. At the point the complaint is forwarded to the LA then Stage 4 does not apply and the complaint will then be dealt with in accordance with the LA Complaints Policy.

Stage 4 - The Trust Board's Complaints Panel for a formal hearing of the complaint.

Stage 1 – Making a Complaint

A complaint may be made in person, by telephone or in writing to the Complaints Co-ordinator who will co-ordinate the complaint. If the compliant is about a specific incident, then the date, time, location and persons involved should be identified where possible. Should the complaint be received in person or verbally, the complainant will be asked to complete the complaints form at Appendix 1. The Complaints Co-ordinator will log the complaint, including the date it was received and the subject matter, who made the complaint and the dates for any meetings and responses (also see Section 4: Recording Complaints below). The Complaints Co-ordinator will liaise with the Headteacher in order to decide:

a. whether the complaint should be addressed as a Stage 1 complaint or whether it should be treated as a concern to be quickly resolved as per the Expressing Concerns process.
b. the senior member of staff who is most appropriate to investigate the complaint.

If the decision is made to deal with the complaint at Stage 1, then the Academy, through the Complaints Co-ordinator, will normally acknowledge receipt of the complaint **within two working days** of receiving it. In many cases, this response will also report on the action the Academy has taken to resolve the issue. Alternatively, a meeting may be convened to discuss the matter further. This meeting will normally take place **within five working days** of the receipt of the formal complaint but, in any case, within no more than ten working days. If, on the other hand, it is felt that the matter is too serious to be dealt with at this stage, the matter will be passed directly to the Headteacher (see Stage 2 below). The aim throughout is to resolve the matter as speedily as possible. If a complaint form is not completed then the complaint will not be heard.

Stage 2 – Complaint heard by the Headteacher

If the matter has not been resolved at Stage 1, or it is felt that the matter is too serious to be dealt with at Stage 1, the Headteacher or another designated member of the Senior Leadership Team will undertake a further investigation (but the Headteacher will make the decision on action to be taken). As part of this investigation, a meeting may be convened to discuss the matter further. This meeting will normally take place **within five working days** of the receipt of the formal complaint but, in any case, within no more than ten working days. Following the investigation, the Academy will normally give **a verbal or written response within five working days but, in any case, within no more than 10 working days.**

NB. Please note that, in cases where a complaint concerns the Headteacher, the complainant should be referred to the Chair of Governors who will arrange for the matter to be further investigated. The Headteacher will be informed of the complaint. The Academy will normally give a response **within five working days** but, in any case, within no more than 10 working days**.**

Stage 3 – Complaint heard by Governors

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response of the Headteacher or the complaint is about the Headteacher, the complainant may write to the Chair of Governors, via the Complaints Co-Ordinator. The letter must include the Complaints Form and must clearly request that their complaint is considered further. The letter must be received by the Complaints Co-ordinator within 5 Academy days of receiving the response of the complaint at Stage 2. The Complaints Co-ordinator will then forward the letter and form to the Chair of Governors. Requests made outside of the timescale will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

The Chair of Governors may address the complaint themselves or refer the matter to another Governor. The Chair of Governors (or a delegated Governor) will seek to resolve the complaint within 10 days of

receiving the letter and will communicate with the complainant accordingly. Alternatively, the Chair of Governors has the right to convene a Complaints Panel.

If a Governors Complaints Panel is convened, the panel should be made up of 3 impartial Governors who have no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. They will nominate a panel chair between them.

As part of this investigation, a meeting may be convened to discuss the matter further. This meeting will normally take place **within five working days** of the receipt of the formal complaint but, in any case, within no more than ten working days. Following the investigation, the Academy will normally give **a written response within five working days but, in any case, within no more than 10 working days.**

Stage 4 – Complaint heard by Trust Board Complaint's Panel

A complaint directly against the Trust will begin at Stage 4 of this process. The complaint will be responded to by the CEO and if required a Trust Complaints Panel will be formed to consider the complaint. This panel would consist of 3 Trustees. If the compliant is about the CEO then this should be addressed to the Chair of the Trust Board.

If the complainant is raising that Governors have failed to consider their complaint properly and reasonably at Stage 3, then this matter can be considered by the Trust.

It is not a general right of appeal for any complainant who disagrees with the Governors' decisions. If the Governors have followed a proper procedure and considered the complaint reasonably, the Trust cannot reverse their decision. If a complainant remains unsatisfied after Stage 3, they should put in writing:

- what the complaint to the Governors was
- what response the Governors have given
- why the complainant believes the Governors have not followed a proper procedure in considering the complaint
- why the complainant believes the Governors consideration of the complaint is unreasonable.

The letter should be sent to the Chief Executive Officer, Primitas Learning Partnership, The Old Mining College, Queen Street, Burntwood WS7 4QH email: info@primitas.co.uk).

The CEO will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 5 Academy days. Requests outside of this time frame will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

The Trust will first seek to assure themselves that all possible avenues of resolution at Stages 1, 2 and 3 have been explored and that at Stages 1, 2 and 3 procedures have been properly followed. This may involve meetings or telephone conversations with the complainant or with the Academy staff, and records of these conversations will be kept.

If the Trust is satisfied that the process has been followed correctly and all three stages complete, then the CEO will contact the complainant to explain this and the matter will close. If the complainant tries to re-open the same issue this is classed as a persistent or serial complaint.

However, if the Trust is satisfied that the procedures have not been properly followed, a Trust Complaints Panel will be convened to address the matter.

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

The Trust Complaints Panel will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring a friend or family member to provide support, this will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. However, legal representatives or representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

On receipt, any written material will be circulated to all parties. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The panel will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The panel meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The panel will consist of three members, including one who is independent of the management and running of the Trust and none of whom would have had any previous dealings with the complaint. The Trust Board Complaints Panel will convene **within 15 working days** of receipt of the complaint, or as soon as practicable thereafter. Parents will be invited to attend the panel hearing and, if they wish, to be accompanied. Should parents not attend the hearing without a justified reason, the panel hearing will continue without them and a decision made in their absence.

The aim of the Trust Board Complaints Panel hearing is to impartially resolve the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between the Academy and the complainant.

OUTCOMES

Both parties are informed of the decision in writing no later than **seven working days** after the hearing. The panel will make findings and recommendations available by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about and made available for inspection on the Academy premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher. The response will cover:

- The complaint
- The scope of the investigation
- The conclusion of the investigation
- Any action which has resulted

The complainant may also be offered the opportunity to discuss the response.
The aim of the investigation or review will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the Academy and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be

satisfied with the outcome if the Trustees do not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his/her complaint has been taken seriously.

IF THE INVESTIGATION UPHOLDS THE COMPLAINT, redress should be appropriate to the complaint and may include:

- An appropriate expression of regret
- Providing the solution desired by the complainant
- Changing the procedures to avoid future problems

The Academy will take responsibility for:

- Deciding who can take remedial action
- Ensuring that the remedy is carried out
- Ensuring that any remedy is within the Academy's powers
- Ensuring the approach to remedies is reasonable and consistent

WHERE A COMPLAINT IS NOT UPHELD, the complainant must be given a response and informed of any further action that might be appropriate in their situation.

The decision of the Trust Board will be binding on the Headteacher, Chair of Governors and the Academy. If the complaint is a curricular one and the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome, she or he may refer the matter to the DfE on the grounds that the Trust Board has behaved unreasonably.

Once a Trust Board Complaints Panel has heard a complaint, and it is clear that correct procedures have been followed, that specific complaint cannot be reopened. If a request is received in this respect, the Chair of Trustees should inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

Should an investigation into a complaint lead to disciplining a member of staff, those involved in the investigation or hearing will not participate in the disciplinary action that may follow in order to secure natural justice.

4. Unreasonable Complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore will be treated seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive.
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaint's procedure, beyond all reason.
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this complaint's procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames it sets out.
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on Academy time.
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value.
- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the Trust's complaints procedure.
- A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so:

- Aggressively
- Using threats, intimidation, or violence.
- Using abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language.
- Knowing it to be false.
- Using falsified information.

Every reasonable step will be taken to address the complainant's concerns, and give them a clear statement of the Academy's/Trust's position and their options. The Trust will maintain the role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including meetings with individuals.

If the complainant continues to contact the Academy/the Trust in a disruptive way, communications strategies may be implemented. Which:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address.
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term.
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as Citizens Advice.
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary.

Stopping Responding

The Trust may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- The Trust believes they taken all reasonable steps to help address the complainant's concerns.
- The Trust has provided a clear statement of the position and the options.
- The complainant contacts the Trust repeatedly, and it is believed that their intention is vexatious or malicious or is to cause disruption and/or inconvenience.

The Complainant will be informed when the Trust intents to stop responding. However any new complaints will be considered at Stage 1 of the Complaints Policy.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the Trust will immediately inform the police and communicate the actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from an Academy/Trust site.

Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a person with parental responsibility for any student in a Primitas Academy, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to consider.
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 process is complete.

If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

Complaints not considered

The Trust will not consider complaints under the following circumstances:

- Anonymous complaints (unless there are exceptional circumstances).
- Where the complaint concerns a third party used by the Academy. The complaint should be
- sent directly to the third party to respond themselves.
- Complaints that relate to an incident which took place more than 3 months previously (unless
- otherwise agreed by the Academy/Trust);
- Complaints made on behalf of a third party
- Where the complainant has used social media to air their alleged grievance.

- Malicious, serial or duplicate complaints
- Unreasonable or vexatious complaints
- Where the Academy receives complaints from a person who does not have parental responsibility for a student in a Primitas Academy

Time scales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.
Exceptions to this time frame, **will only** be considered in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.
When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the next Academy day.
If at any point we cannot meet the time scales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant.
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay.

5. Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)

The Trust Board Complaints Panel hearing is the last Academy-based stage of the complaints process. If a complainant feels that the complaint is still unresolved, they should contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

Complaints about Academies should be made in writing to the Department for Education, Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 2GJ or by email: academy.questions@education.gsi.gov.uk

The EFSA will investigate complaints about:

- Undue delay or non-compliance with complaints procedures;
- An Academy's failure to comply with a duty imposed on it under its Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State or
- An Academy's failure to comply with any other legal obligation, except in cases where there is another organisation better placed to consider the matter.

To access the EFSA's procedures:

- Go to the 'Complaints about Academies' page on the Department for Education's website: http://www.gov.uk/dfe
- Write to the Department for Education, Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 2GJ

6. Recording Complaints/Keeping Records

At the end of a meeting or telephone call, the Complaints Co-ordinator should ensure that the complainant and the Academy have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls should be kept and a copy of any written response added to the complaint record/file. The Investigating Officer is responsible for holding such records securely and confidentially.

Written records will be kept of all complaints and the stage at which they were resolved. All correspondence, statements and records of complaints are to be kept confidential except where legal obligations prevail. Records will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, Trust privacy notices and data record retention schedule.

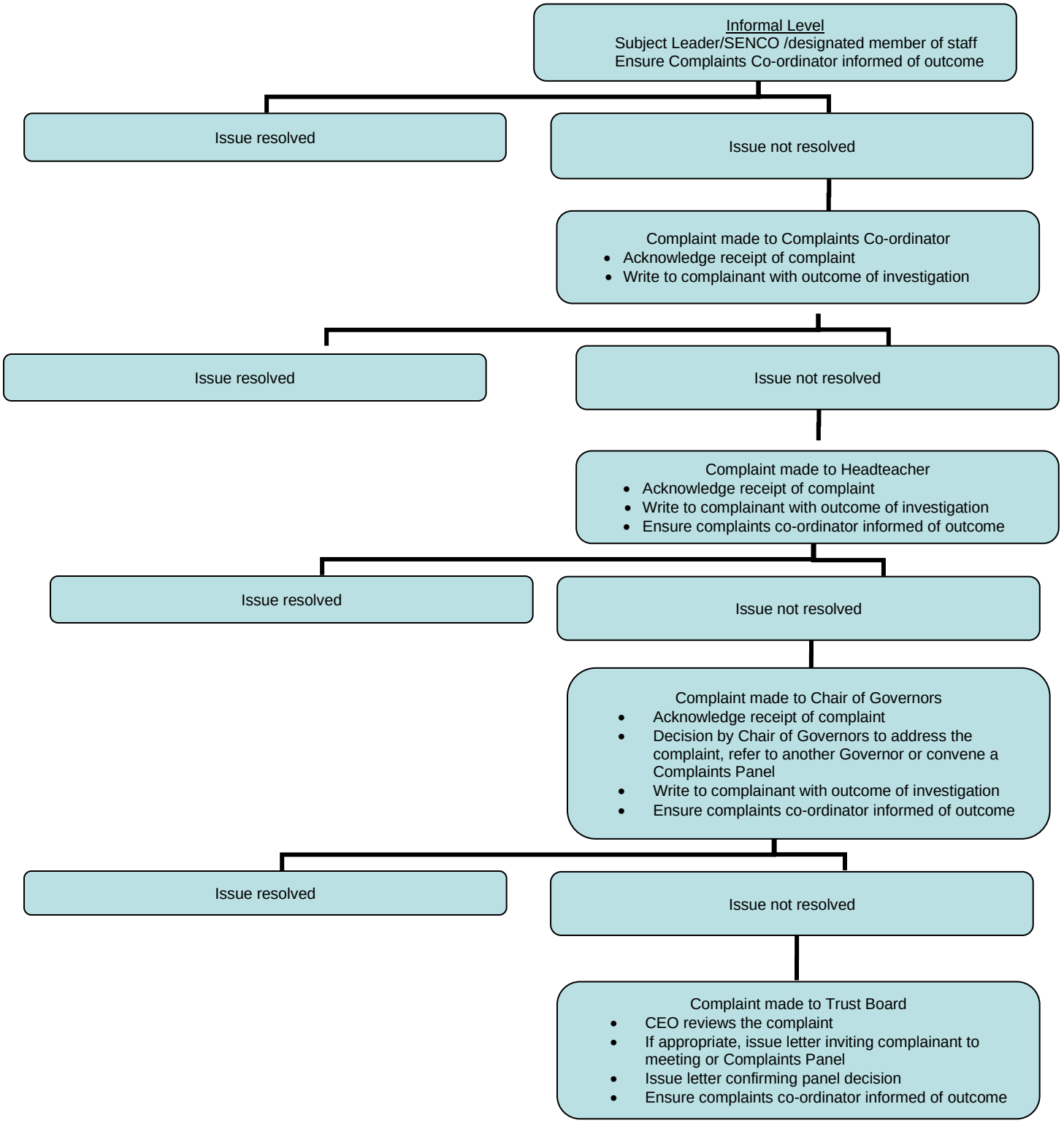
7. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

The number, type and stage of resolution of complaints are reported to the Senior Leadership Team, Trust Board and Governing Body on an annual basis. Complaints information shared with the full Trust Board and Governing Body will not name individuals. A review of any underlying issues raised through complaints will be undertaken to identify whether there are any improvements that the Academy can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

The Trust Board will review this policy at least every two years and assess its implementation and effectiveness. The policy will be promoted and implemented throughout the Trust.

See next page for flow chart

SUMMARY OF DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS



Appendix 1

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Complaints Co-ordinator. Receipt will be acknowledged together with an explanation of what action will be taken.

Your name:
Academy:
Student's name & Tutor Group:
Your relationship to the student:
Address: **Postcode:** **Day time telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:**
Please give details of your complaint.
What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint. **(Who did you speak to and what was the response)?**

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature: **Date:**
Official use **Date acknowledgement sent:** **By who:** **Complaint referred to:** **Date:**

Appendix 2

Complaints Appeals Procedure

Complaint Heard by Trust Board Complaints Panel

If the Trust is satisfied that the procedures have not been properly followed, a Trust Complaints Panel will be convened to address the matter. The nominated Trustee (Chair of Trustees) will convene a Trust Board Complaints Panel, none of whose members will have been directly involved in previous consideration of the complaint.

The panel of Trustees will consist of three members; two Trustees and one member who is independent of the management and running of the Academy. The complaints panel will convene **within 15 working days** of receipt of the complaint, or as soon as practicable thereafter. The panel will choose their own Chair.

The Trust Board Complaints Panel hearing is the last Trust based stage of the complaints process and is not convened to merely rubber-stamp previous responses to the complaint.

Individual complaints would not be heard by the whole of the Trust Board at any stage as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

Written evidence will be circulated to both parties and members of the Panel in advance of the meeting and the procedure will be as follows:

1. Introductions by the Chair of the Panel.
2. Complainant makes statement of complaint and background.[1]
3. Questions to complainant by the Chair of Governors/Chair of Trustees and members of the Panel.
4. Chair of Governors makes statement.
5. Questions to Chair of Governors by complainant and members of the panel.
6. Chair of Governors makes final statement.
7. Complainant makes final statement.
8. Interested parties withdraw from the meeting and the Panel reaches a decision on whether the complaint is upheld or rejected. In either case, the Panel may call for certain action to be taken by the Academy.
9. Both parties are informed of the decision no later than seven working days after the hearing. The letter will also contain details of any further rights of redress as detailed. See below.

[1] In presenting its case, each party may call witnesses who could be questioned by the other side and members of the panel.

The Remit of the Trust Board Complaints Panel

The Panel can:

- 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's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

There are several points which any Trustee sitting on the Trust Board Complaints Panel needs to remember:

a. It is important that the hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No Trustee may sit on the Panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the Panel, Trustees need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of Trustees and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.

b. The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the Academy and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

c. The panel should acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.

d. Where the complainant is a parent they should be allowed to attend the Panel hearing, and, if they wish, to be accompanied. It would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, they feel a student needs to attend.

e. The Trustees sitting on the Panel need to be aware of the complaint's procedure.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Role of the Complaints Co-ordinator

The Complaints Co-ordinator should receive all complaints that are raised in relation to the Academy. The Complaints Co-ordinator is the contact point for the complainant and is required to:

- ensure the Complaints Form is completed by the complainant.
- log the complaint, including the date it was received and the subject matter, who made the complaint and the dates for any meetings and response.
- pass on the Complaints Form to an appropriate senior member of staff to investigate.
- acknowledge the complaint **within two days** of receiving it.

If the complaint progresses to Stage 3 the Complaints Co-Ordinator will:

- pass the complaint directly to the Chair of Governors.

Governance Professional

If the complaint is raised at Stage 3 the Governance Professional will:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing (recommended at least five Academy days in advance);
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- following the meeting circulate the minutes to all attendees;
- notify the complainant in writing of the Panel's decision;
- on the direction of the Chair notify the Headteacher of any actions following the complaint.

The Role of the Nominated Trustee

The Nominated Trustee:

- checks that the correct procedure has been followed;
- if a hearing is appropriate, notifies the Governance Professional to arrange the Panel.

The Role of the Chair of the Panel

The Chair of the Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the Panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease;
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner, with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;
- the Panel is open-minded and acting independently;
- no member of the Panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;

- written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it;
- a written record is kept.

Notification of the Panel's Decision

The Chair of the Panel must ensure that the complainant is notified of the Panel's decision in writing (including the reasons for the decision) **within seven working days** of the date of the hearing. The letter needs to explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.