



Learners' Trust Complaints Policy

This policy is reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees.

Next Scheduled review:	September 2026
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Statement of Intent

Schools within the LEARNERS' Trust and the LEARNERS' Trust aim to resolve all complaints at the earliest possible stage and are dedicated to continuing to provide the highest quality of education possible throughout the procedure.

This policy has been created to deal with any complaint against a member of staff, the school, or the Trust as a whole, relating to any aspects of the provision of facilities or services.

Any person, including a member of the public, can make a complaint.

The Complaints Co-ordinator (School Administrator) will be the first point of contact for school-level complaints.

The Chief Operations Officer will be the first point of contact for Trust-level complaints.

Legal Framework

This policy adheres to statutory legislation, including, but not limited to, the following:

- The Education Act 2002;
- The Equality Act 2010;
- The Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR);
- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (specifically Schedule 1, Part 7);

- The Academy Trust Funding Agreement and the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH);
- and the requirements of current best practice guidance issued by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

Definition

Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction regarding actions taken or a perceived lack of action.

Concern: An expression of worry or doubt for which reassurance is sought.

For the purpose of this policy, all subsequent references to "complaints" include "concerns" that cannot be resolved informally.

Days: Refer to school days (working days within term time and school hours). (Note: Timeframes are suspended during school holidays.)

Making a Complaint

The school/Trust ensures that all aspects of the complaints procedure are easily accessible, impartial, fair, and respectful of confidentiality duties. Complaints are expected to be made as soon as possible after an incident arises.

Schools within the LEARNERS' Trust and the LEARNERS' Trust uphold a 12-month time limit in which a complaint can be lodged regarding an incident.

Exceptions will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Complaints should be made using the appropriate channels of communication, including the use of the Complaints Procedure Form for formal complaints.

Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints will be treated at the discretion of the Headteacher or CEO.

If the complaint raises serious concerns (e.g., safeguarding issues), the Trust reserves the right to investigate the matter internally, though the anonymous nature may limit the ability to complete all procedural stages.

Complaints Procedure Structure

The LEARNERS' Trust operates a three-stage complaints procedure: one informal stage followed by two formal stages. Details of who to contact at each stage will be included on the Trust's website on the page outlining how to make a complaint.

Stage	Focus	Responsible Party	Key Timescale (School Days)
Informal Resolution	Discussion and Mutual Resolution	Relevant Staff Member/HT/COO	Within 10 days to resolve/report back.
Formal Stage 1: Senior Leader Investigation	Formal Fact-Finding & Decision	Investigating Officer (HT/Trust Partner/CEO/Chair of Board)	5 days: Acknowledge complaint. 20 days: Investigation conclusion & written outcome.
Formal Stage 2: Appeal Panel Hearing	Independent Review of Case and Process	Complaints Appeal Panel (3 members)	10 days: Complainant requests panel. 5 days: Acknowledge request. 25 days: Panel hearing convened. 15 days: Written findings provided.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution (Pre-Formal Stage)

A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing to the relevant member of staff (e.g., Class Teacher, Headteacher, or Chief Operations Officer).

A decision will be made as to who is the most appropriate person to seek an informal resolution at school and at Trust level.

The member of staff will discuss the issue in a respectful and informal manner to seek a mutual resolution.

The staff member, in discussion with the complainant, will seek to resolve the issue within 10 school days.

Brief notes of meetings and telephone calls shall be kept to record dates, times, and any agreed outcomes.

Caution: Complainants should not approach individual Trustees or School Champions to raise concerns, as this may prejudice their ability to serve on the Appeal Panel.

If an appropriate resolution cannot be sought at this informal level, the complainant may proceed to Formal Stage 1.

Formal Stage 1: Senior Leader Investigation

If the informal stage fails to resolve the complaint, the complainant must submit a formal complaint using the Complaints Procedure Form to the Investigating Officer (IO).

The IO (Headteacher, Trust Partner, or Chief Executive Officer, depending on the complaint subject) will acknowledge the complaint in writing within 5 school days.

Note: If the complaint is directly against the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the Chair of the Trust Board will appoint an independent IO to conduct the investigation.

The IO will gather evidence, including conducting interviews with relevant parties and reviewing records, to establish all facts.

Support or reasonable adjustments will be made for complainants experiencing communication difficulties.

The IO shall contact the complainant in writing with an explanation of the decision and any further action the school/Trust plans to take within 20 school days of receiving the formal complaint.

If the situation is complex, the IO will inform the complainant of the revised target date in writing.

If the complaint involves staff conduct, the complainant will be advised that the matter has been addressed internally, but no details of internal disciplinary proceedings will be disclosed.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, they may escalate the matter to Formal Stage 2.

Reasonable adjustments will be made for any complainant who may be disadvantaged in accessing or participating in the procedure. This may include support with communication, meeting arrangements, formats of information or any other adjustment required under the Equality Act.

Formal Stage 2: Complaints Appeal Panel Hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the Formal Stage 1 Investigation, they may request a review by the Complaints Appeal Panel.

The request for a review must be made in writing to the Clerk of the Trust Board within 10 school days of receiving the Formal Stage 1 outcome. Written acknowledgement of this request will be made within 5 school days.

The Clerk will aim to convene a panel hearing within 25 school days of receipt of the review request.

Panel Composition and Independence (Statutory Requirement)

The panel shall comprise three people who have not been involved in the complaint so far.

The panel composition must be as follows:

- One Independent Member: This individual must be genuinely independent of the management and running of the LEARNERS' Trust, as required by the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. This member must be sourced externally (e.g., a Headteacher, Trustee, or Governor from a different Multi-Academy Trust or organization) and must not be a current employee or governor of the LEARNERS' Trust.
- Two Internal Members: These members will be sourced from the pool of LEARNERS' Trust Trustees or School Champions.
- They must have had no prior involvement in the complaint or the circumstances surrounding it.

Panel Hearing

The Panel Hearing will be convened.

The complainant has the right to be accompanied by a friend, relative or advocate at the Panel Hearing.

Neither the school/Trust nor the complainant should bring legal representation to the panel proceedings, although an exception exists when a Trust employee acting as a witness is entitled to bring union or legal representation.

At the hearing, all participants will be given the opportunity to present their case.

The panel will consider the issues raised in the original complaint and any procedural issues highlighted during the complaints process.

The Panel will write to the complainant explaining its findings and recommendations within 15 school days of the hearing.

The complainant will receive a summary of the panel's findings and recommendations, and a copy of the minutes, subject to necessary redactions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the GDPR.

The letter will explain the final rights of appeal (e.g., to the DfE).

Final Stage – Referral to the Secretary of State

If a complainant has exhausted the academy's full complaints procedure (Formal Stage 2), they may submit a complaint to the DfE.

The Secretary of State will only intervene if they believe the school/Trust has acted unlawfully or unreasonably.

Managing Unreasonable and Persistent Complaints

The Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly but does not expect staff to tolerate abusive, offensive, threatening, or harassing behaviour.

For the purposes of this policy, "unreasonable complaints" include those that are obsessive, persistent, harassing, or repetitive, or which insist upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.

The Trust's classification of a complaint as 'serial' or 'persistent' is based on the complainant's conduct and persistence after the Trust has made every reasonable attempt to resolve the matter, regardless of whether every procedural stage has been formally completed.

The Trust may decide to limit or cease correspondence if:

- Every reasonable step has been taken to address the complainant's concerns.
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the Trust's final position and their remaining options (e.g., referral to the DfE).
- The complainant persists in contacting the Trust repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.
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If a complainant attempts to re-open an issue that has previously fully completed the Formal Stage 2 Appeal Panel, the Trust will inform the complainant that the matter is now closed.

If the complainant contacts the Trust again regarding the same issue, the complaint may be classed as 'serial' or 'persistent'.

If a complainant is abusive, aggressive, or threatening, the Trust reserves the right to immediately specify methods of communication and limit contact to protect staff, and may inform the police or issue a ban from the premises.

A decision to cease responding will be made in writing to the individual.

Recording a Complaint

A written record shall be kept of all complaints made, detailing the main issues raised, the findings, whether the complaint was resolved informally or formally, and the actions taken by the school/Trust as a result (regardless of whether the complaint was upheld).

Correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential and stored securely (e.g., on CPOMS) and retained in line with the school's Records Management Policy.

Covert Recordings

The school/Trust relies on evidence gathered through its own established procedures (e.g., interviews with informed consent) for its internal investigation.

The school/Trust will not permit or rely on covert recordings obtained without the informed consent of all parties being recorded as formal evidence to determine the facts of the complaint.

The Trust expects all parties to explicitly inform others before any meeting or conversation begins if they intend to record it.

Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs requires it, and only with the prior knowledge and informed consent of all parties attending.

Complaints Not Covered by this Procedure

Complaints regarding the following topics should be directed to the relevant external body, as they are governed by separate statutory regimes:

- Statutory assessments of SEND.

- School re-organisation proposals.
- Admissions to schools.
- Child Protection matters (LADO/MASH).
- Complaints about children being excluded from the school (statutory exclusions appeal process).
- Staff grievances and internal disciplinary procedures.
- Services provided by a third party who may use the school premises or facilities.
- Complaints about the content of the national curriculum or collective worship (made to DfE/LA/SACRE).