

Alexandra Academy Trust Complaints Policy



If you need this in an alternative format
please contact the Alexandra Academy Trust.

For approval by the Trust Board	Spring 2023
For Review annually	Spring 2024

Signed _____ (*Chair of Trust Board*)

Dated _____

Complaints Policy

Trust Mission statement

‘Working together to create better futures’

Introduction

The Alexandra Academy Trust is required to establish a Complaints Policy and Procedures and to publicise this on each of the Academy websites. Paper copies are available by request from the main offices.

The intention of this policy is to provide a clear and transparent process that will enable all complaints to be dealt with as quickly and efficiently as possible. The length of time that this takes will vary with the gravity and complexity of the complaint and the urgency with which it needs to be settled. However, all complaints should be settled within a period which is reasonable in the circumstances.

This procedure takes into account current Department for Education guidance.

All references to working days refer to days on which the Academies are open to children and for staff training days

Scope of this Procedure

1. This complaints procedure is not limited to parents, carers or guardians of children that are registered at any of the academies in the Trust. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint about any facilities or services that the school provides. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), all Academies in the Trust will use this complaints procedure.

Any complaints which subsequently lead to staff conduct actions will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes of this will be confidential and will not be shared with the complainant. The scope of this complaints procedure is covered in more detail in Appendix A.

Timescales

2. Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. The Trust/individual academy will consider complaints made outside of this timeframe only if the Chair of Trustees and Principal/Executive Headteacher, having taken advice, are of the view that exceptional circumstances apply.

3. All timescales in this procedure refer to school working days for individual academies within the Alexandra Academy Trust, excluding school holidays, in- service training (Inset) days and bank holidays.
4. Any complaints made outside of term time will be considered to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Anonymous complaints

5. Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated. However, the Chair of the LGB or Principal/Executive Headteacher, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Serial or Unreasonable Complaints

6. Where the Academy Trust/individual academy judges a complaint to be unreasonable or where a complainant is making serial complaints or raising issues again that have previously been addressed under the final formal stage of the Academy Trust's complaints procedure, the procedure outlined at Appendix D may be invoked.

How to Raise a Complaint

7. A concern/informal complaint can be made initially in person, in writing or by telephone. It may also be made by a third party acting on someone else's behalf, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.
8. In the first instance parental concerns should normally be raised with the class teacher or, if the concern is about the class teacher, with a member of the Senior Leadership Team or the Principal/Executive Headteacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint under Formal Stage 1 of this procedure.
9. Complainants should not approach individual Trustees/Governors to raise concerns or complaints. Trustees/Governors have no power to act on an individual basis and this may also prevent them from considering a complaint if it reaches Stage 2 of this procedure.
10. A formal complaint against a member of school staff (except the Principal) should be made in the first instance to the Principal via the relevant Academy office and should be marked as private and confidential.
11. A formal complaint that involves or is about the Principal should be addressed to the Chair of Governors via the relevant Academy office, and should be marked as private and confidential.
12. A formal complaint about the Chair of Trustees/Chair of the Local Governing Body, any individual Trustee/Governor or the whole Trust Board/Local Governing Board

should be addressed to the Clerk to the Board via the relevant Academy office and should be marked as private and confidential.

13. For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure (Appendix B). Help in completing the form can be accessed via the relevant Academy office.³

14. In accordance with equalities law, the Alexandra Academy Trust will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. This may include providing information in alternative formats, assisting individuals in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Resolving Complaints

15. At each stage in the procedure, the Alexandra Academy Trust/individual Academy will hope to be able to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, it will be acknowledged that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, one or more of the following may be offered:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that the Academy Trust 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 Academy Trust policies in light of the complaint
- an apology

Withdrawal of a Complaint

16. If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing. Once a complaint has been withdrawn the same issue cannot be raised again.

Informal Complaints

17. It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. All academies within the Alexandra Academy Trust aim to take all concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve issues raised as quickly as possible.

18. If an individual has difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, the Academy Trust will respect this. In this case the complainant will be referred to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the complainant will be referred to another staff member. The

member of staff will usually be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

19. All academies within the Alexandra Academy Trust would hope and expect to be able to deal with most concerns raised on an informal basis, and a complainant should not raise a formal complaint before discussing their concerns informally with an appropriate member of staff. It is understood, however, that there are occasions when people remain dissatisfied and would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case every attempt will be made to resolve the issue through the formal stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

Formal Stage 1

20. Formal complaints must be in writing, preferably on the complaints form provided at Appendix B, to the Principal/Executive Headteacher other than in the circumstances referred to in paragraphs 11 and 12.
21. The Principal/Executive Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within **five** school days.
22. Within this response, the Principal/Executive Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Principal/Executive Headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.
23. The Principal/Executive Headteacher may delegate any investigation to another member of the relevant Academy's Senior Leadership Team but will not delegate the decision about the merits of the complaint.
24. During an investigation, the Principal/Executive Headteacher (or designated member of staff) will, if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish, and will keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to the investigation. Staff members may be accompanied at these meetings by a colleague or trade union representative if they wish.
25. At the conclusion of the investigation, the Principal/Executive Headteacher will provide a formal written response, within **twenty** school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.
26. If the Principal/Executive Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.
27. 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 the individual Academy/Academy Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

28. The Principal/Executive Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Formal Stage 1.
29. If the complaint is about the Principal/Executive Headteacher, or a member or members of the Trust/Local Governing Board (including the Chair and/or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled Trustee/Governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Formal Stage 1.
30. Complaints about the Principal or member(s) of the Trust/Local Governing board (must be made to the Clerk to the Board), via the Academy office.
31. If the complaint is about significant members, proportions or indeed the entire Trust/Local Governing Board, Formal Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Trustees. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Formal Stage 2

32. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Formal Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Formal Stage 2 – a meeting with a panel of three members of the Trust Board/Local Governing Board convened for this purpose. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.
33. A request to escalate to Formal Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk to the Board, via the individual Academy office, within **twenty** school days of receipt of the Formal Stage 1 response. Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if the Clerk to the Board, having taken appropriate advice, considers that exceptional circumstances apply.
34. The Clerk to the Board will record the date the request to escalate the complaint is received, and acknowledge receipt in writing (either by letter or email) within **five** school days.
35. The Clerk to the Board will aim to convene a meeting of the Complaints Panel which is within **twenty** school days of receipt of the Formal Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.
36. The complaints panel will comprise at least three impartial Trustees/Governors with no prior involvement with the complaint. **In academies there is a statutory requirement for there to be at least one panel member that is entirely independent of the complaint and the management and running of the academy.** The complainant will be informed in advance of the meeting of the membership of the panel and asked whether they wish to raise any objections to

individual members. If objections are raised, the panel will give them reasonable consideration. If the ability of a panel member to give the case a fair hearing is called into question, the reasons given will be considered and that panel member may be replaced.

37. If there are fewer than three Trustees/Governors available, the Clerk to the Board, or the minute clerk for the hearing, will seek to source additional, independent governors through another local school or academy, in order to make up the panel. Alternatively, an entirely independent panel may be convened to hear the complaint at Formal Stage 2.
38. If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk to the Board, or the minute clerk for the hearing, will decide when to hold the meeting, in consultation with the complaints panel. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.
39. A suitable venue must be provided for the meeting which includes separate waiting areas for the two parties and refreshments for all involved.
40. At least **ten** school days before the meeting, the Clerk to the Board, or the minute clerk for the hearing, will:
 - confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
 - request copies from both parties of any further written material to be submitted to the panel at least **five** school days before the meeting;
 - request that both parties provide names of any witnesses to be called and the nature of the evidence which they will be providing, at least **five** days in advance of the meeting. The panel has the discretion not to admit a witness if they do not consider their evidence to be relevant to the complaint.
41. The complainant may bring someone with them to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Other than in exceptional circumstances (as agreed in advance with the Trustees' panel) this should not be a legal representative. This companion will not have the right to speak on the complainant's behalf.
42. If a school employee is called as a witness in a complaints meeting, they may wish to be supported by a representative of their trade union. Any such representative will be present in a supportive capacity only and will not be allowed to speak on the member of staff's behalf.
43. Minutes of the meeting will be taken by the Clerk to the Board, or a minute clerk appointed specifically for the hearing by the complaints panel.

44. There will be no audio or visual recording of the proceedings by any party unless a complainant's own disability or individual needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before recordings of meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. A copy of the minutes of the meeting, once approved by the complaints panel, will be shared with all parties.
45. 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.
46. The panel will 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 Formal Stage 1 of the procedure.
47. The meeting will be held in private and proceedings will be treated as confidential.
48. The meeting will follow the process outlined in Appendix C.
49. The complaints panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel can:
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
 - dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
50. If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the panel will:
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
 - where appropriate, recommend changes to the relevant academy's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future
51. The Chair of the Panel will provide the complainant and the Principal/Executive Headteacher, Chair of Trustees/Chair of Local Governing Board (depending on who conducted Formal Stage 1) with a full explanation of the complaint panel's decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within **five** school days. The response will also detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and, where appropriate, will include details of actions the Academy Trust will take to resolve the complaint.
52. 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 the Academy Trust.

Next Steps

53. If the complainant believes the Academy Trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with this complaints procedure, or it acted unlawfully or unreasonably in

the exercise of its duties under education law, they can contact the DfE after they have completed Formal Stage 2.

54. The DfE will not reinvestigate the substance of complaints generally, or overturn any decisions made by the individual academy. They will consider whether the Alexandra Academy Trust has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

55. 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:

Department for Education,
Piccadilly Gate,
Store Street,
Manchester,
M1 2WD

Outcomes

This policy will promote the excellent ethos of the Academy Trust.
It will promote the high standards and expectations set out in the Academy Trust's aims, values and Mission Statement.

This policy should also be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- Acceptable Use Policy
- Accessibility Policy
- Admissions Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Attendance Policy
- Cared for Children Policy
- CCTV Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Children Missing in Education Policy
- Critical Incident Policy
- Curriculum Policy
- Educational Visits and Overnight Stays Policy
- E-Safety Policy
- Extremism and Radicalisation Policy
- First Aid Policy
- Forest School Policy
- GDPR Policy
- Gender Reassignment Policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- Inclusion Policy
- Individual Curriculum Policy
- Intimate Care Policy
- Medicines Policy
- Missing Child Policy
- Overnight Stays and Educational Visits Policy
- Positive Behaviour Policy

- Protecting Children, Staff and Visitors Policy
- Single Equality Policy
- Social Media Policy
- Special Educational Needs Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Supporting Children with Medical Needs
- Whistleblowing Policy

Appendix A: Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints other than those that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below. As noted below, Academy employees may not use this procedure to raise concerns relating to their employment.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals 	<p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Cheshire East Borough Council,</p> <p>School Admissions and Organisation 0300 123 5012 http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/schools/admissions/admissions.aspx</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>Safeguarding Children in Education (SCiES) 01606 275039 http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/schools/safeguarding_in_education/safeguarding_in_education.aspx</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the Behaviour Policy can be made through this procedure.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whistleblowing 	<p>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 whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about any of the academies in the Trust should complain through the Academy Trust's complaints procedure.</p> <p>You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the DfE (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff grievances 	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the Academy Trust's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint.</p> <p>However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use Academy Trust premises or facilities 	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Curriculum - content 	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, 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 a complainant commences legal action against the Alexandra Academy Trust, the complaints procedure may be suspended until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Appendix B: Complaints Form

Please complete and return to the relevant Academy office marked private and confidential for the attention of the Principal/Executive Headteacher or Chair of Trustees/Local Governing Board who 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: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the Academy about it.

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 C: Arrangements and Procedure for Complaints Panel Hearing

1. The Complaints Panel will agree a Chair from amongst their number.
2. Although this procedure may appear formal, the hearing should be conducted in as informal a way as possible, and the Chair of the Panel should make every effort to make all parties feel comfortable.
3. The Chair of the Panel will introduce all the parties present and explain the procedure to be followed, and that every effort will be made to keep the process as informal as possible.
4. The complainant will outline their complaint and explain why they are dissatisfied with the Academy Trust's response at Formal Stage 1. The complainant may call any witnesses in support of their complaint who will attend the meeting only for the time that they are providing information, and may be questioned by all parties.
5. The Principal/Executive Headteacher and/or Chair of Trustees/Local Governing Board and the members of the panel will have the opportunity to ask questions of the complainant.
6. The Principal/Executive Headteacher and/or Chair of Trustees/Local Governing Board will explain their involvement in the complaint and the reasons for their decisions at the informal and first formal stage. The Principal/Executive Headteacher and/or Chair of Trustees/Local Governing Board may call any witnesses in support of his/her statement who will attend the meeting only for the time that they are providing information, and may be questioned by all parties.
7. The complainant and the members of the panel will have the opportunity to ask questions of the Principal/Executive Headteacher and/or Chair of Trustees/Local Governing Board.
8. Both parties will be given the opportunity to sum up their statements, ending with the complainant. No new material may be introduced at this stage.
9. The Complaints Panel may decide to adjourn the hearing pending further investigation at any stage, if this seems necessary.
10. Both parties will leave the meeting and the panel will consider the information that has been put to them. The clerk will remain for this part of the meeting in order to clarify anything if necessary, but the Complaints Panel's deliberations will not be minuted.
11. The panel must reach a unanimous or majority decision as to whether or not to uphold the complaint wholly or in part, and what action (if any) the Academy Trust needs to take to resolve the complaint. This may include referring the matter to another formal process, whether in relation to a complaint against a Trustee/member of the Local Governing Board or a member of the Academy Trust staff. Normally the Complaints Panel will reach a decision at this point but they may feel the need to take further advice. Where this is the case they should endeavour to reach a decision as soon as possible.
12. The Complaints Panel will communicate their response to both parties in writing as soon as possible but, in any case, within **five** working days of reaching their decision.

Appendix D: Policy for Managing Serial or Unreasonable Complaints

1. The Alexandra Academy Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our Academies. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.
2. The Alexandra Academy Trust defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the Academy involved. For example 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 complaints investigation process
 - refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
 - insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints 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 Academy Trust's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the DfE
 - 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.
3. Complainants should try to limit their communication with the Academy 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.

4. Whenever possible, the Principal/Executive Headteacher and/or Chair of Trustees/Local Governing Board will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.
5. If the behaviour continues, the Principal/Executive Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the Academy involved 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**.

In response to any incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police, where appropriate, and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from any of the Academy Trust premises.

Appendix E

Additional Information outside of the policy.

Appendix E.1

Academy Trust Complaints Procedure Guidance for Trustees/Local Governors– on Formal Stage 2

The Alexandra Academy Trust has a complaints procedure to ensure we respond to complaints as quickly and as effectively as possible. (A copy of the full policy can be obtained from our individual Academies).

If the Academy/Chair of Trustees/Local Governing Board is unable to resolve the matter informally, the complaint can be referred to a Complaints Committee appointed by the Trust board. The aim of the hearing is to establish any areas of agreement and identify actions that can be taken to resolve the complaint. The Trust board may nominate a number of Trustees with delegated powers to hear complaints at that stage, and set out its terms of reference. These can include:

- drawing up its procedures; hearing individual appeals
- making recommendations on policy as a result of complaints.

The procedure adopted by the committee for hearing appeals is part of the Academy's complaints procedure. The committee can be drawn from the nominated Trustees/Local Governors and or other independent governing boards. The usual complement is **three** members. The committee may choose its own Chair. This committee **MUST** have at least **one** member that is independent of the leadership or running of the individual Academy.

The Remit of the Complaints Committee

The committee has delegated powers to:

- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- Recommend changes to the Academy Trust's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

There are several points which any Trustee/Governor sitting on a complaints committee needs to remember:

- It is important that the hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No Trustee/Governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the committee, Trustees/Governors need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of Trustee/Governor and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.
- 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 that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may not be possible for the panel to establish the facts e.g. if there is insufficient

corroborative evidence to enable it to form a view; its only alternative in this case is to make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that their complaint has been taken seriously.

- An effective committee will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The committee 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.
- Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The committee needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent, carer or guardian is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent, carer or guardian the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.

Role of the Chair of the Complaints Committee

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

- The remit of the committee is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case forward 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 committee is open minded and acting independently
- No member of the committee 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.

Checklist for a Complaints Panel Hearing

The committee needs to take the following points into account:

- The hearing is as informal as possible
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses

- The Principal/Executive Headteacher may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken
- The Principal/Executive Headteacher is then invited to explain the Academy's actions and be followed by the Academy's witnesses
- The complainant may question both the Principal/Executive Headteacher and the witnesses after each has spoken
- The Complaints Panel may ask questions at any point
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint
- The Principal/Executive Headteacher is then invited to sum up the Academy's actions and response to the complaint
- Both parties leave together while the Complaints Panel decides on the issues
- The Chair explains that both parties will hear from the Panel within a set timescale.

Notification of the Complaints Panel's Decision

The Chair of the Complaints Panel needs to ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, with the Complaint Panel's response; this usually will be within **5** days of the date of the hearing. The letter needs to explain how to contact the DfE if they remain unsatisfied.

Appendix E2

Investigating Complaints – Interviewing Best Practice Guidance for Schools

Children

Children should be interviewed in the presence of another member of staff, or in the case of serious complaints (e.g. where the possibility of criminal investigation exists) in the presence of their parents, carers and guardian.

However, it might not always be possible to conduct an interview in case it prejudices a (LADO) Local Authority Designated Officer or police investigation. Care should be taken in these circumstances not to create an intimidating atmosphere.

Children should be told what the interview is about and that they can have someone with them.

Staff / Witnesses

Explain the complaint and your role clearly to the interviewee and confirm that they understand the complaints procedure and their role in it.

Staff are allowed a colleague to support them at their interview. The colleague must not be anyone likely to be interviewed themselves, including their line manager.

Use open, not leading questions.

Do not express opinions in words or attitude.

Ask single not multiple questions, i.e. one question at a time.

Try to separate 'hearsay' evidence from fact by asking interviewees how they know a particular fact.

Persist with questions if necessary. Do not be afraid to ask the same question twice. Make notes of each answer given.

Deal with conflicting evidence by seeking corroborative evidence. If this is not available, discuss with the complaints co-ordinator/Principal/Executive Headteacher/Chair of Trustees/Local Governing Board the option of a meeting between the conflicting witnesses.

Make a formal record of the interview from the written notes as soon as possible while the memory is fresh. Show the interviewee the formal record, ask if they have anything to add, and to sign the record as accurate.

Taken from the Department for Education's 'Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2016' – Departmental advice for maintained schools, maintained nursery schools and local authorities.

Appendix E3

Barring from the Academy Trust's Premises

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. The Alexandra Academy Trust will therefore act to ensure their schools remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community.

If a parent/carer/guardian's behaviour is a cause for concern, an Academy can ask them to leave the premises. In serious cases, the Principal/Executive Headteacher can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on Academy Trust premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent/carer/guardian may wish to make. The Alexandra Academy Trust will always give the parent/carer/guardian the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing. The decision to bar will then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent/carer/guardian, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent/carer/guardian should be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the Principal/Executive Headteacher or Chair of Trustees/Local Governing Board. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the DfE. Once the Academy Trust's own complaints procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.

Adopted on:

For Review on:

Signed

Chair of Trust Board

Date

Appendix E4

Example Policy on managing aggressive behaviour of parents/carers/guardians and visitors to our Academy Trust

Statement of Principles

The Trust Board encourages close links with all parents/carers/guardians and their communities. It believes that children benefit when the relationship between home and school is a positive one.

Complaints Policy

The vast majority of parents/carers/guardians and others visiting academies within the Trust are keen to work with us and are supportive. However, on the rare occasions when a negative attitude towards one of the academies is expressed, this can result in aggression, verbal and or physical abuse towards members of Academy Trust staff or the wider Academy community.

The Trust Board expects and requires its members of staff to behave professionally in these difficult situations and attempt to defuse the situation where possible, seeking the involvement as appropriate of other colleagues. However, all members of staff have the right to work without fear of violence and abuse, and the right, in an extreme case, of appropriate self-defence.

We expect parents/carers/guardians and other visitors to behave in a reasonable way towards members of Academy Trust staff. This policy outlines the steps that will be taken where behaviour is unacceptable.

Types of behaviour that are considered serious and unacceptable and will not be tolerated:

- shouting at members of the Academy Trust staff, either in person or over the telephone
- physically intimidating a member of staff, e.g. standing very close to them
- the use of aggressive hand gestures
- threatening behaviour
- shaking or holding a fist towards another person
- swearing
- pushing
- hitting, e.g. slapping, punching and kicking
- spitting
- breaching the Academy Trust's security procedures.

This is not an exhaustive list but seeks to provide illustrations of such behaviour. Unacceptable behaviour may result in the police being informed of the incident.

Procedure to be followed:

If a parent/carer/guardian behaves in an unacceptable way towards a member of the Academy Trust's community, the Principal/Executive Headteacher or appropriate senior staff will seek to resolve the situation through discussion and mediation, and if the unacceptable behaviour continues, terminate the meeting and ask the visitor to leave the premises.

If necessary, the Academy Trust's complaints procedure should be followed.

Where all procedures have been exhausted, and aggression or intimidation continue, or where there is an extreme act of violence, a parent/carer/guardian may be barred by the Principal/Executive Headteacher from the relevant Academy premises for a period of time, subject to review.

In imposing a bar the following steps will be taken:

1. In the first instance the individual academy may warn the parent, carer or guardian that they are minded to bar them and seek reassurance about future behaviour. If reassurance is not forthcoming, then the Academy will proceed as in 2 below including details of how long the bar will last. Depending on the severity of the offence, the Academy may impose an immediate ban as in 2 below.
2. The parent/carer/guardian will be informed, in writing, that they are barred from the premises, subject to review, and what will happen if the bar is breached, e.g. that police involvement or an injunction application may follow. If the bar is due to aggressive communication via phone calls or the school communication system, the parent, carer or guardian could be asked to communicate with the Academy via email until the bar is no longer in place.
3. Where an assault has led to a bar, a statement indicating that the matter has been reported to the police will be included.
4. The Chair of Governors will be informed of the bar.
5. Where appropriate, arrangements for children being delivered to, and collected from the relevant Academy premises will be clarified.

Conclusion

The Alexandra Academy Trust may take action where behaviour is unacceptable or there are serious breaches of our Home-School Agreement or health and safety legislation. In implementing this policy, the Academy Trust will as appropriate, seek advice from the external legal team to ensure fairness and consistency.

This Policy will be reviewed annually.

Adopted on:

For Review on:

Signed

Chair of Trustees Date

Appendix E5 (added 14th April 2020)

Handling complaints during the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak

The Alexandra Academy Trust will **not** be handling new or existing complaints during any period of school closure.

The Academy Trust will, however, still communicate with parents/carers/guardians/pupils during this time and if parents/carers/guardians have any concerns during this period, we will endeavour to respond as soon as possible.

Complainants can contact the DfE for more information about complaints during this period.

DfE helpline Mon to Fri 9am – 5pm 0370 000 2288

You can also contact the DfE online www.gov.uk/contact-dfe