

Concerns & Complaints Policy

Version:	2		
Ratified by:	Board of Trustees	Date:	20/5/2026 (coming into effect 1/6/2026)
Next Review date:	May 2027		

This concerns and complaints procedure applies to Sussex Learning Trust (the **Trust**) and its academies. Any person, including members of the public who are not parents or carers of children that are registered at the Trust's academies, may make a complaint to the Trust or relevant academy about any provision of facilities or services that the Trust provides. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (including Admissions, Statutory Assessments of SEND, Safeguarding and Child Protection, Suspension and Permanent Exclusion, Whistleblowing, Staff Grievances and Staff Discipline, Data Protection and Freedom of Information (see further details listed in [Appendix C](#))), the Trust will use this concerns and complaints process.

This policy adheres to the principles of [national guidance found here](#). In addition, the policy draws on the '[Parent guide to school complaints](#)' published by Parentkind, DfE and OFSTED.

The Trust and its academies will deal with concerns and complaints openly, fairly, promptly and without prejudice.

The Trust applies a staged approach to dealing with concerns and complaints incorporating informal and formal stages. (An [Executive Summary](#) of the stages is set out on the next page). The Trust and its academies wish to make every effort to deal with concerns or complaints informally in partnership with the complainant to seek a satisfactory resolution. The formal stages should only be triggered in exceptional circumstances where matters cannot be resolved informally.

In dealing with a complaint about the actions of a member of staff, the staff member's own rights to fair treatment set out in our staff policies will be safeguarded. If, during a concern or complaint, issues arise relating to staff discipline or capability, those matters will be investigated but details will remain confidential to the Headteacher. However, the complainant will be informed that appropriate follow-up action has been taken.

The Trust's policy on Unreasonable and Vexatious Complaints is set out in [Appendix A](#) to this policy.

Executive Summary

Stage 1		Stage 2	Stage 3
Concern	Elevated Concern	Complaint	Formal complaint
Usually made to or heard by			
The member of staff most directly involved, e.g. class teacher, curriculum or pastoral leader.	Headteacher* or academy Senior Leadership Team member. The Headteacher must be made aware of the concern.	Headteacher*	The CEO or DCEO initially review the complaint and either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● accept escalation to Stage 3; or ● refer complaint back to an earlier stage in the complaint process.
			A panel of three (Governors and/or Trustees and at least one person independent of the management and running of the academy that is the subject of the complaint).
Principles/outcomes			
<p>The concern is addressed via meeting(s), telephone calls, emails etc.</p> <p>The member of staff will follow up with a short email summarising what was discussed and any remedies agreed.</p>	<p>The Headteacher* or academy Senior Leadership Team member invites the concerned person to an informal meeting.</p> <p>Follow up email summarising what was discussed and any remedies agreed.</p>	<p>The complainant outlines clearly in writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the complaint; ● if already considered at Stage 1, why the complainant remains dissatisfied; ● what action might resolve matters at this stage. <p>The Headteacher* considers whether an investigation is required. (If required an appointed Investigator who investigates and produces an Investigation Report).</p> <p>The Headteacher* convenes a Stage 2 meeting and invites the complainant (and any Investigator) to attend.</p> <p>Official notes will be taken at the meeting, including details of any remedies, mitigations or interventions agreed.</p>	<p>The complainant outlines clearly in writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● why the complainant remains dissatisfied (and why the complaint addressed at Stage 2 needs to be escalated to Stage 3); ● what remedy, action or outcome they are seeking. <p>The Stage 3 complaint form is sent to the Headteacher* to respond via written representations.</p> <p>A review panel is convened and ascertains if further information or investigation is required before convening a complaint hearing.</p> <p>A Stage 3 complaint hearing is convened and the complainant and Headteacher* are both invited to attend.</p> <p>A pack of documentation to be considered at the Stage 3 complaint meeting will be circulated to the panel and attendees in advance of the meeting.</p> <p>Official notes will be taken at the meeting, including details of any recommended remedies, mitigations or interventions agreed. This is the final stage in the Trust's concerns and complaints procedure.</p>

*see A. ix below

A. Further definitions, principles and explanations

- i. A “concern” may be defined as ‘an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought’.
- ii. A “complaint” may be defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action’.
- iii. In most cases concerns will be raised directly with the member of staff most directly involved and responded to in line with Stage 1 of the procedure.
- iv. In raising a concern or complaint under this policy, the complainant must make reasonable attempts to seek to resolve the matter at Stage 1, and must at all times act in a reasonable and measured way. The CEO/DCEO has discretion, which will be exercised reasonably, not to allow a complaint to be pursued at the later stages where this precondition has not been met.
- v. Complainants should not approach individual Governors or Trustees to raise concerns or complaints but should instead follow this policy.
- vi. A concern or complaint regarding a decision made or action taken by a Headteacher should first be made to the Headteacher for consideration in their professional capacity at Stage 1 to enable the Headteacher to seek to address the matter directly. Headteachers will seek to resolve most concerns with appropriate discussions at Stage 1 and when required resolve complaints at Stage 2.
- vii. If the complaint is about the Headteacher’s professional conduct (rather than a complaint about a Headteacher’s decision), then the complainant should set out the complaint in writing (preferably using the Stage 3 Complaint Form ([Appendix B](#))) sent marked “Confidential: for the attention of the CEO/DCEO of the Trust” by email to clerk@sussexlearningtrust.co.uk (or by letter delivered to the Trust’s registered office¹). The CEO/DCEO may accept direct escalation to Stage 3 or, if appropriate, refer the matter back to Stage 2 giving reasons why it is appropriate for the Headteacher to seek to address the concern at Stage 2.
- viii. Complaints about the Chair of Governors will escalate to Stage 3 and be sent to the Clerk to the Board of Trustees at clerk@sussexlearningtrust.co.uk and the Chair of Trustees will take the lead in reviewing the complaint. Complaints about any other Governors will start at Stage 2, with the Chair of Governors replacing the role of the Headteacher at Stage 2. If it escalates to Stage 3 then the Chair of Trustees will lead. Complaints about the Chair of Trustees will be heard by the Vice Chair to the Board of Trustees at Stage 3.
- ix. If the concern or complaint is about:
 - a member of Central Trust staff, then the stages set out in this policy still apply with the Central Trust staff member's immediate line manager acting in the place of the Headteacher (and references in this policy to “Headteacher” should then be interpreted to refer to the member of Central Trust staff’s immediate line manager and “academy” should be interpreted to refer to the “Central Trust” as appropriate);
 - the CEO of the Trust and the CEO has been unable to address it at stage 1, the complaint will be escalated to Stage 3 and the Chair of Trustees will lead the Stage 3 process.
- x. A template complaint form is included in [Appendix B](#) and the Trust strongly encourages all complainants to use the form to submit their complaint. If a person requires help in completing the form, please contact the academy office. A third party organisation like the Citizens Advice may also be able to provide help. In accordance with equality law, the Trust will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable

¹ Sussex Learning Trust, Broad Street, Cuckfield, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 5DP

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.

- xii. Written records are kept of all complaints considered at Stage 2 and Stage 3, including details of whether they were resolved at Stage 2 or proceeded to a Stage 3 panel hearing.
- xiii. Complainants should note the Trust's policy on Unreasonable and Vexatious Complaints as set out in [Appendix A](#).
- xiii. All correspondence, statements and records of complaints are to be kept confidential (except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them).

B. Anonymous complaints

The Trust will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. If an anonymous complaint is received, the DCEO/CEO will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

C. Time scales

Complaints must be made within three months of the incident or where a series of associated incidents have occurred within three months of the last of those incidents. The Trust will only consider complaints made outside of this timeframe if exceptional circumstances apply.

D. Complaints received outside of term time

Any complaints made outside of term time will be considered to have been received on the first academy day² after the holiday period.

E. Scope of this Concerns & Complaints Procedure

- i. This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by the Trust other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed in [Appendix C](#).
- ii. 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, the Trust will inform the complainant of a proposed new timescale. If a complainant commences legal action against the Trust, or one of its academies, in relation to their complaint, the Trust will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

F. Withdrawal of a Complaint

- i. If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, the complainant must confirm this in writing sent via the Clerk to the Board of Trustees (via email: clerk@sussexlearningtrust.co.uk) expressly referencing the concern or complaint raised, the date it was raised and naming the academy (or the member of Central Trust staff) involved in the concern or complaint.

² The 'academy day' refers to the formal start and finish time of the academy involved in the concern or complaint.

G. Stages of the Procedure

1. Stage 1 - Informal Concern: Discuss concerns informally with the relevant member of staff or other designated person.

- i. Parents/carers or members of the public who have a concern are advised to speak to the member of staff, or other designated person, directly concerned. Experience has shown that most issues and concerns can be resolved at this informal stage rather than escalating to Stage 2 as a complaint. If the Headteacher is not involved in the informal element of Stage 1, the member of staff who is will make the Headteacher aware that a concern has been raised.
- ii. The concern will be discussed, with resolution as the aim, in a mutually agreed way between the academy and the person raising the concern. This could be via telephone, email or a meeting (virtual or in person).
- iii. If the person raising the concern indicates that they would have difficulty in discussing the issue with a particular member of staff, they should contact the Headteacher and request that Headteacher assign another member of staff (selected at the Headteacher's discretion) to address the issue. Similarly, if the member of staff initially approached feels unable to deal with the concern, they may request that the Headteacher assign another member of staff (selected at the Headteacher's discretion) to address the concern.
- iv. The member of staff who is dealing with the informal concern should ensure that the person raising the concern is reassured that the matter will be properly considered. All staff should be aware of the need for discretion.
- v. A brief record of any telephone calls, meetings and agreed actions relevant to the concern should be retained by the academy. The member of staff addressing the concern will email the person that raised the concern summarising what was discussed and any remedies or actions agreed. Every written record kept is subject to disclosure under current freedom of information and data protection legislation. It is important that staff are aware that written records including emails could be released on request.
- vi. In raising any concern the concerned party must act in a reasonable and measured way consistent with the academy's Home School Agreement. The Headteacher (at Stage 2) and DCEO/CEO (at Stage 3) shall have discretion, which will be exercised reasonably, to refer the matter back to Stage 1 prior to allowing a complaint to be pursued at the later stages where this precondition has not been met.
- vii. Where the concern is not resolved as a "concern" raised with the member of staff most directly involved, the complainant may refer the concern to the Headteacher or a member of the academy Senior Leadership Team as an "elevated concern". If a member of the Senior Leadership Team receives an "elevated concern", they will notify the Headteacher.
- viii. The Headteacher or member of the Senior Leadership Team addressing the elevated concern will invite the complainant to an informal meeting. After the meeting, the Headteacher or member of the Senior Leadership Team addressing the elevated concern will email the person raising the concern summarising what was discussed and any remedies or actions agreed. The intention is to seek to resolve the elevated concern at Stage 1 without requiring resort to a formal complaint at Stage 2.

2. Stage 2: Complaint

- i. If it has not been possible to resolve a concern or elevated concern by the end of Stage 1, the complainant may submit a Stage 2 complaint. The complainant must submit the Stage 2 complaint in writing³, preferably using the

³ If a complainant requires help in accessing or completing the form, please contact the academy office.

proforma in [Appendix B](#), addressed to the Headteacher either by letter delivered to the academy office or email setting out:

- the details of the complaint (and confirming whether this has already been raised at stage 1);
- where the issue has already been considered as a concern or elevated concern at Stage 1, why the complainant remains dissatisfied;
- what action the complainant feels might resolve matters at this stage.

ii. The Headteacher will acknowledge the Stage 2 complaint in writing within three academy days, either confirming that the Stage 2 procedure has begun or, where appropriate, that the matter should be dealt with at Stage 1 in the first instance.

iii. Where a Stage 2 complaint is confirmed, the Headteacher will consider whether an investigation is required. If an investigation is required, the Headteacher will nominate an appropriate senior colleague in the academy or the Trust to promptly carry out an investigation (the "Investigator"). The nominated Investigator may offer the complainant a telephone call or meeting to clarify aspects of their complaint. The Investigator will speak to others involved or with knowledge relevant to the complaint as necessary. The complainant has the right to be accompanied by a friend or family member if meeting the Investigator.

iv. At the end of the investigation, the Investigator will produce a written report (the "Investigation Report") summarising their investigation, their findings and, if appropriate, any recommendations or steps that the Headteacher may wish to consider in seeking to resolve the matter. The Investigation Report should be sent to all parties at least 3 days prior to any Stage 2 hearing meeting.

v. If, following the investigation, any issues relating to staff discipline or capability are identified, the details regarding those issues will remain confidential to the Headteacher. However, the complainant will be informed that the academy has taken appropriate follow-up action.

vi. The Headteacher will convene a Stage 2 hearing meeting and invite the complainant and any Investigator to attend. An official note taker will be present. The complainant may be accompanied by a friend or relative to provide support (a "Companion"), but not by a legal or other professional advisor or media representative. The complainant should provide the Headteacher with details of any Companion who will be attending in advance of the meeting.

vii. At the meeting:

- the complainant will be asked to introduce their complaint;
- the Headteacher will then invite the Investigator (if an Investigator was appointed) to present on the findings of their investigation and introduces their written Investigation Report;
- the complainant may ask questions about the investigation and any Investigation Report;
- the Headteacher may ask the complainant or the Investigator further questions about the complaint and any Investigation Report (and where appropriate seek further clarification on any matters discussed during the meeting);
- the Headteacher will consider any Investigation Report and the discussions at the meeting and come to a decision as to whether they:
 - uphold the complaint in whole or in part and any further action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
 - dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

The Headteacher's rationale for their decision will be clearly articulated and included in the notes of the meeting, which will be shared with the complainant (and other relevant parties) within five academy days of the meeting taking place.

viii. The Headteacher will endeavour to ensure that the Complaint meeting is held within 15 academy days of receipt of a written Stage 2 Complaint. If in exceptional circumstances a delay is required or more time is required to complete an investigation, the Headteacher will notify the complainant as soon as possible of the reasons for the delay and confirm the proposed later meeting date.

3. Stage 3: Formal complaint

i. If following completion of Stage 2 the complainant remains dissatisfied, or if the complaint is about the Headteacher's professional conduct, the complainant may submit a request to escalate the complaint to Stage 3. Any such request to escalate to Stage 3 must be set out in writing⁴, preferably using the template complaint form in [Appendix B](#), stating:

- why the complainant remains dissatisfied (and specifically why they feel their complaint was not addressed fully at Stage 2 and needs to be escalated to Stage 3);
- what remedy, action or outcome the complainant feels might resolve matters at this stage.

The panel at Stage 3 will not review any new complaints at Stage 3 or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New concerns or complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

ii. A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be sent in writing⁴ marked "for the attention of the CEO/DCEO of the Trust" by email to clerk@sussexlearningtrust.co.uk (or by letter delivered to the Trust's registered office⁵) within 10 academy days of the complainant receiving the Stage 2 response in writing. Stage 3 may only be used when all previous stages have been exhausted, unless the complaint is regarding a Headteacher's professional conduct, is about the Chair of Governors or the CEO.

iii. On receipt of a request to escalate a complaint to Stage 3, the CEO or DCEO will review the complaint to ensure it has progressed through the necessary prior stages and that a clear rationale for the escalation to Stage 3 and remedy sought has been provided. Within three academy days, the CEO or DCEO will notify the complainant in writing that:

- the complaint will be addressed at Stage 3; or
- the reason(s) why the complaint is being referred back to an appropriate earlier stage in the complaints process. (This typically will occur if the informal or Stage 2 processes have not been fully exhausted or no rationale has been given for the escalation to Stage 3).

Where a Stage Three complaint is confirmed

iv. A Governance Support Professional (normally the clerk to the relevant academy's local governing body or the clerk to the Board of Trustees) will be notified of the escalation to Stage 3 and will convene a review panel.

v. The review panel will consist of three individuals who do not have previous direct knowledge of the complaint. The review panel members may be Governors of any Trust academy and/or Trustees (or, in exceptional circumstances, an external, experienced and objective individual who is not a Trustee or a Governor of the Trust academy and not employed by the Trust). At least one panel member must be independent of the management and running of the academy that is the subject of the complaint. (This may be a Governor from another Trust

⁴ If a complainant requires help in submitting the complaint, please contact the academy office.

⁵ Sussex Learning Trust, Broad Street, Cuckfield RH17 5DP

academy not involved in the complaint). The Governance Support Professional will ask one of the panel to act as Chair.

vi. The Governance Support Professional will send the Headteacher the Stage 3 Complaint Form ([Appendix B](#)) and request that the Headteacher submit written representations responding to the points raised in the Stage 3 Complaints form within five academy days from receiving the request. If the Headteacher believes any matters raised in the Stage 3 Complaint Form have already been addressed and fully responded to at Stage 2, the Headteacher may expressly provide those details in the written representations.

vii. The Governance Support Professional will send all panel members:

- the Stage 3 Complaint Form ([Appendix B](#)) for consideration;
- written representations received from the Headteacher in response to the Stage 3 Complaint Form;
- all documentation considered at Stage 2, including any investigation report and the notes of the Stage 2 meeting setting out the Headteacher's rationale for their decision as shared with all parties at the end of Stage 2.

viii. Within six academy days of receipt of the above documentation, each panel member will review the documentation and confirm to the Chair of the panel whether they believe there is enough information to consider the Stage 3 complaint at a hearing or whether they believe additional documentation or further investigation is required in advance of the hearing. The Chair, having considered the views expressed by the other panel members, will decide either to:

- 1) ask the Governance Support Professional to proceed to arrange a Stage 3 complaint meeting within 12 academy days; or
- 2) specify in writing what additional documentation or further investigation of the points raised in the Stage 3 Complaint form is required before proceeding to the Stage 3 complaint meeting and will ask the Governance Support Professional to:
 - a. ask the original Investigator, or a newly-appointed suitable alternative Investigator, to provide specific documentation/information or complete further investigation on specific points set out in the Stage 3 complaint and respond in writing on the findings of that investigation within 10 academy days; or
 - b. directly contact individuals identified by the Chair (this may include contacting the complainant and/or the academy representatives) to request that they provide specified information or missing documentation within 10 academy days;

and arrange a Stage 3 complaint meeting ordinarily within 20 academy days of sending the requests set out under 2)a. or 2)b). Any additional information/documentation or additional Investigation Report submitted will be included in the pack sent to the panel members, the complainant and the Headteacher in advance of the Stage 3 complaint meeting.

The Stage 3 complaint meeting

ix. A Governance Support Professional will:

- invite the complainant and Headteacher to attend a Stage 3 complaint meeting;
- specify the proposed date, time and venue of the Stage 3 complaint meeting (which may be held in person and/or online);
- ask the complainant whether they have any access requirements.

x. If the complainant is unable to attend at the proposed date/time of the Stage 3 complaint meeting, the Governance Support Professional will offer two alternative meeting times/dates, which may extend the deadline for convening the meeting. If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed times/dates, without good

reason, the Governance Support Professional will decide when to hold the meeting. It will proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of the written submissions from both parties.

xi.If the complainant wishes to attend the Stage 3 complaint meeting, they may be accompanied by a friend or relative to provide support (a "Companion"), but not by a legal or other professional advisor or media representative. The Companion cannot speak on behalf of the complainant unless invited to do so by the panel. The complainant should provide Governance Support Professional with details of any Companion who will be attending at least two academy days in advance of the meeting.

xii.Once the Stage 3 meeting date is confirmed, any written material that will be considered at the meeting will be circulated to all parties including the panel at least five academy days in advance of the meeting. The panel will not normally accept as evidence any recordings of conversations that are obtained covertly or without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

xiii.The Stage 3 complaint meetings 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 or all parties attending expressly agree to the recording. Prior knowledge of the proposed recording and the consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

xiv.The Stage 3 meeting is not a legal proceeding but will be conducted in a professional manner and as informally as circumstances allow. The standard of proof applied will be 'on the balance of probabilities'. The complainant cannot introduce and the panel will not consider new reasons, evidence or elements of complaint that were not previously put in writing at Stage 2 or Stage 3.

xv.A Governance Support Professional or independent notetaker will attend the meeting to record minutes of the meeting. This will not be a verbatim transcription of the meeting.

At the meeting

xvi.The Chair will open the meeting and introduce the panel. The Chair will outline the panel's understanding of the Stage 3 complaint.

xvii.The Chair will invite:

- the complainant to provide any necessary further clarification of the complaint as presented at Stage 3 and what remedy or outcome is being sought;
- the Headteacher (and any other representatives from the academy or the Trust invited by the panel to attend the meeting) to ask questions of the complainant regarding the Stage 3 complaint;
- the panel will be given an opportunity to ask questions of the complainant regarding the complaint.

xviii.The Chair will invite:

- the Headteacher (and any other representatives from the academy or the Trust attending the meeting) to respond to the points raised in the written Stage 3 complaint or stated by the complainant during the meeting;
- the complainant to ask questions of the Headteacher (and any other representatives from the academy or the Trust attending the meeting) regarding their response at the complaint meeting;
- the panel to ask questions of the Headteacher and any other representatives from the academy or the Trust attending the meeting.

xix. The Chair will provide an opportunity to all parties attending to make a final brief statement by way of summing up. The panel will then withdraw to deliberate in private. The Governance Support Professional or independent notetaker will stay with the panel to take notes of the deliberations and the reasons for the panel's decisions.

xx. The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- not uphold the complaint in whole or in part.

xxi. If the panel uphold the complaint in whole or in part, the panel:

- may make recommendations on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint; and
- where appropriate, may recommend changes to the academy's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues arising in the future or recommend 'lessons learned' for the academy's Leadership Team or Central Trust to consider.

xxii. The Chair of the panel will ensure that the panel's findings and recommendations are sent in writing within five academy days of the Stage 3 complaint meeting to

- the complainant;
- the Headteacher and any other representatives from the academy or the Trust attending the stage 3 complaint meeting;
- the CEO/DECO of the Trust⁶.

This concludes the final stage of the Trust's concerns and complaints process.

H. Next Steps

i. A written record will be kept of all complaints that were addressed at Stage 2 or Stage 3 of this Concerns and Complaints policy. Records will contain details of whether the complaint was resolved at Stage 2 or Stage 3. Any action taken by the academy as a result of a complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld in full or in part) will also be recorded.

ii. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

iii. Once the complaints process is concluded (or a complaint has been terminated due to undue delay or failure to lodge a Stage 3 request within the time stated in the policy) the matter is closed. If the complainant is still not satisfied then they may contact the Department for Education (see the online procedure at www.gov.uk) or write to the Ministerial and Public Communications Division, Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD.

iv. If at any level a complainant attempts to reopen an issue or a closely-related issue that has already been dealt with under this complaints procedure, the Chair of Trustees may write to the complainant to inform them that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter closed, that continued correspondence on the same matter will be considered vexatious and that the academy and Trust will not respond to any further correspondence on that issue or a closely-related issue. The Trust's policy on Unreasonable and Vexatious Complaints is set out in [Appendix A](#).

⁶ Unless the Stage 3 complaint relates to a Governor, Chair of Governors or the CEO, in which case the Chair of Trustees will receive the panel's written findings and recommendation.

Appendix A

Unreasonable and Vexatious Complaints

1. Introduction

i. The Trust is committed to dealing with all concerns and complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. The Trust will not normally limit the contact complainants have with an academy. However, the Trust does not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive, threatening or harassing.

2. Definition

i. The Trust defines unreasonable complainants as 'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the academy, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'. This may include serial and persistent complaints or vexatious or frivolous complaints as [defined by the Department for Education](#).

ii. A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- 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 cooperate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the Complaints Policy or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately or to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues raised in the complaint, 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) including as defined as serial and persistent by the Department for Education;
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the Trust's Complaints Policy has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the DfE;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on academy time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the

complaint is being dealt with, including as defined as serial and persistent by the Department for Education

- makes a vexatious or frivolous complaint as defined by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. *This is defined as: complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious; insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason; insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner; complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance; demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value.*

iii.A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:

- maliciously
- aggressively
- using threats, intimidation or violence
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language
- knowing it to be false
- using falsified information
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers

3. Contact whilst a complaint is being investigated

i.Complainants should limit the number of communications with an academy while a 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. Steps taken before marking a complaint “unreasonable”

i.The Trust takes all complaints seriously, and follows the Trust’s Concerns and Complaints Policy in order to seek an agreed and amicable resolution and reconciliation. The Trust will always treat complaints reasonably and nothing in this policy prevents a parent/carer or member of the public raising a genuine new concern or complaint.

ii.Whenever possible, the Headteacher, CEO/DCEO, Chair of Governors or Chair of the Board of Trustees will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an ‘unreasonable’ marking to any complaint and may propose mechanisms to assist the complainant with contacting the academy or the Central Trust with respect to the complaint.

iii.If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher, CEO/DCEO, Chair of Governors or Chair of the Board of Trustees will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour with respect to complaints is unreasonable and asking them to change it.

- iv. For complainants who excessively contact an academy or the Trust causing a significant level of disruption with one or more unreasonable complaints, the Trust may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed regularly and at least termly.
- v. In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence or behaviour giving rise to cause for concern, the academy or the Trust will put its concerns and actions in writing immediately and the police may be informed.
- vi. An academy or the Trust may decide to bar an individual from their premises. This decision will be reviewed at regular intervals, and at least every term.
- vii. If an individual continues to make or pursue unreasonable complaints, the Trust and its academies reserve the right to seek further legal advice and take such steps as are appropriate in all the circumstances, including for example seeking court orders to limit the individual's contact with or presence in or near to the Trust or its academies premises, any pupils/students, staff, parents/carers or other third parties as set out in the court order.

Appendix B: Complaint Form (For Stage 2 and Stage 3) click here to access an [editable copy of the form](#)

Academy name:	
Name of complainant:	Complainant's email:
Student/pupil's name (if relevant):	
Relationship to the student/pupil (if relevant):	
Address:	Daytime telephone number:
Postcode:	Evening telephone number:
Stage of Complaint (please circle or delete as appropriate): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Stage 2</i>• <i>Stage 3</i>	
If at Stage 2, please give details of the complaint, including whether or not it has been attempted to be resolved as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a concern at Stage 1 by contacting a staff member or• as an elevated Concern by contacting the Headteacher OR If at Stage 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• please confirm whether you have attempted to resolve the matter at Stage 2• give details of why you remain dissatisfied (and specifically why you feel your complaint has not been addressed fully at Stage 2 and needs to be escalated to Stage 3);	

If at Stage 2, please outline what actions might resolve the complaint at this stage?

OR

If at Stage 3, please outline what further actions or remedies may be needed that did not occur at Stage 2?

Please give details of any related paperwork attached to this complaint.

Signature:

Date:

For Stage 2 complaints, please return marked “Confidential - for the attention of the Headteacher via the academy’s main office or main office email.

For Stage 3 complaints, please return marked “Confidential - for the attention of the CEO/DCEO of the Trust” by email to clerk@sussexlearningtrust.co.uk (or by letter delivered to the Trust’s registered office⁷)

Official use

Date received:

Received by:

Date acknowledgement sent:

Sent by:

Complaint referred to:

Date referred:

⁷ Sussex Learning Trust, Broad Street, Cuckfield RH17 5DP

Appendix C

Exceptions	Who to contact
<p>Admissions to academies</p> <p>Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, academy re-organisation proposals</p>	<p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or academy re-organisation proposals should be raised with West Sussex County Council – WSCC.</p>
<p>Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation</p>	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>For serious concerns, the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) might be an option.</p>
<p>Exclusion and suspensions of children from an academy</p>	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusions and suspensions can be found at: www.gov.uk/academy-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>Complaints about the application of an academy behaviour policy can be made through this complaints procedure.</i></p>
<p>Whistleblowing</p>	<p>The Trust has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff, volunteers and contractors.</p> <p>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 directly with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p>
<p>Staff grievances</p>	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the academy's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<p>Staff conduct</p>	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the academy'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. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
<p>Data Protection and Freedom of Information</p>	<p>Freedom of Information Policy</p>
<p>Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use academy premises or facilities</p>	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.</p>
<p>National Curriculum - content</p>	<p>Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus</p>

Change log				
Date	Version	Comment	Ratified by	Reviewer
April 2026	2	<p>New policy: Complete policy review to improve transparency and ease of use</p> <p>Key Protocol Changes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEO/DCEO Oversight: The CEO or Deputy CEO (DCEO) now acts as the gatekeeper for Stage 3 escalations, deciding if a clear rationale for the appeal has been provided. In addition, they are to be made aware when Headteachers are dealing with concerns so as to provide support and guidance. • Independent Panel Member: For any Stage 3 hearing, the panel must now include one person who is independent of the management and running of the academy that is the subject of the complaint. In cases regarding the CEO, at least one person on the panel should not be a Trustee. • There is an intention that concerns can be raised with teachers/staff most closely connected with the concern and then the Headteacher prior to matters escalating to a formal complaint. <p>The primary change is a structural shift from a four-stage process to a three-stage process, along with increased executive oversight from the Trust’s central leadership.</p>	<p>Board of Trustees</p> <p>20/5/2026</p>	CEO