



COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PRINCIPLES

This policy is intended to set out how the Academy will deal with general complaints. Parents should feel able to express their views knowing that they will be dealt with fairly. This policy does not cover those aspects of Academy life where the law sets specific complaints procedures i.e. admissions, exclusions, complaints about the delivery of the National Curriculum and the provision of collective worship and religious education.

RATIONALE

It is an essential part of building constructive relationships with our Academy community, and especially with parents, that we shape the way complaints are handled in the Academy and that we inform parents and others of these procedures so that they feel able to register complaints and feel confident that they will be managed sensitively, appropriately but with vigour; with an advocate present if desired. We would encourage parents to express their views at the earliest opportunity and through the appropriate channels. This policy assures Parents that making a complaint will not adversely affect their child.

This policy provides parents with an accessible and easily understood procedure for complaints.

STAGE ONE: COMPLAINT HEARD BY STAFF MEMBER

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the Academy can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To that end, if staff are made aware of the procedures, they will know what to do when they receive a complaint.

It would assist the procedure to respect the views of a complainant who indicates that they would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. In these cases, the complaints co-ordinator can refer the complainant to another staff member. Where the complaint concerns the Principal, the complaints co-ordinator can refer the complainant to the Chair of Governors.

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the complaints co-ordinator may consider referring the complainant to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial.

Where the first approach is made to a governor, the next step would be record the nature, date and time of the complaint, write to the complainant advising them of next steps and then refer the complainant to the appropriate person and advise them about the procedure. It would be useful if governors did not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure, or be involved at the early stages, in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the procedure.



STAGE TWO: COMPLAINT HEARD BY PRINCIPAL

At this point, the complainant may be dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at stage one as well as pursuing their initial complaint. The head may delegate the task of collating the information to another staff member but not the decision on the action to be taken.

STAGE THREE: COMPLAINT HEARD BY GOVERNING BODIES COMPLAINTS APPEAL PANEL

The complainant needs to write to the Chair of Governors giving details of the complaint. The Chair, or a nominated governor, will convene a GB complaints panel.

The governors' appeal hearing is the last Academy-based stage of the complaints process, and is not convened to merely rubber-stamp previous decisions.

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

The governing body may nominate a number of members 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 panel for hearing appeals is part of the Academy's complaints procedure. The panel can be drawn from the nominated members and may consist of three or five people. The panel may choose their own chair.

THE REMIT OF THE COMPLAINTS APPEAL PANEL

The panel can:

- ◆ dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- ◆ uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- ◆ decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- ◆ recommend changes to the Academy's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

There are several points which any governor sitting on a complaints panel needs to remember:

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



- b. The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the Academy and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.
- c. An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial
- d. 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 panel needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.
- e. The governors sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaints procedure.