



COMPLAINTS POLICY

Concerns and Complaints

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Person Responsible: Chief Executive Officer

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Scope of this Complaints Procedure

At 5 Dimensions Trust, our mission is to grow a vibrant community of exceptional people by creating a mutually supportive relationship with parents, carers and families. We know that there will be occasions when things do not go as planned or when someone feels we could have done something differently. When that happens, we want to listen, understand what has gone wrong and, wherever possible, put things right. Just as importantly, we want to learn from those situations so that we can continue to improve.

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by the Academy/ School other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
- Admissions to schools - Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs - School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with the Admissions Officer at the academy/school.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. Please contact the Safeguarding Officer in the first instance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Milton Keynes Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) - Milton Keynes Council (milton-keynes.gov.uk)
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure found on the academy/school website,</i>
Whistleblowing	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 whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at:

	www.education.gov.uk/contactus . Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. 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.
• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
• 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, 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 a complainant commences legal action against the academy/ school in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

How we resolve concerns and complaints

A key aspect of the 5 Dimensions Trust is that we aim to work with parents and families, every step of the way, with an emphasis upon partnership and in the best interests of our students. That is why we would always seek to resolve things at an informal level, whilst being fully prepared to support parents through our formal procedures if necessary. For this to be successful it is critical that parents engage constructively and respectfully. As an employer we cannot expose our staff to threatening or abusive behaviour, incidents of such behaviour may result in the complaint not being processed.

If something has gone wrong

Your child's experience is important to everyone at our school. We want to work together with you to ensure that your child is happy at school, and that they achieve their best. If you feel something has gone wrong, we want to hear from you.

Stage one: Informal Complaints

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved quickly and satisfactorily.

It's always best to begin by speaking with your child's form tutor or pastoral leader as soon as you can, letting them know what has happened and what you would like us to do to make it better. They will get back to you as soon as they can, usually within three school days.

It is important to be as clear as possible about

- What your concern/complaint is
- What outcome you are seeking

As you would expect we will not engage with unreasonable, serial, or vexatious complaints or contact with the academy/school as this would distract our staff from their core business of supporting our students.

Stage two: Formal Complaints

If you still have concerns, you can write to us with a formal complaint. When you write, include brief details of what happened, who was involved, who you've already spoken to, and what you would like us to do next. We have a form at the end of this policy that asks for the details we need. Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher, unless they are about the Headteacher. We will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 2 school days.

Within this response, the Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

For more complex concerns we may suggest an additional step of a joint meeting with someone from outside of the school to discuss the issue, to help understand and resolve your concerns.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

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 academy/school will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

Complaints about the Headteacher/Chair of Governors/Governing Body

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Governance Professional, in writing marked Private and Confidential or the school office or email.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body.

Stage 2 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage three: Panel Hearing

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wish to take the matter further, you can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a panel hearing consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school, such as a trustee. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made in writing within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The school will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 10 school days. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

We will write to you to inform you of the date of the meeting. We will aim to convene a meeting within 21 school days. You do not have to attend the meeting, however the meeting can proceed in your absence. The meeting will usually be in person, but it can be held online if that is more convenient for everyone. You can bring someone to the meeting to help you, for example a friend or relative. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

Before the meeting, we 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 of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 7 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

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

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

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

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

We will send a full explanation of the decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 15 school days. 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 academy/school will take to resolve the complaint.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision. All 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 2008 Act requests access to them.

Please note that if the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair, the entire governing body or the majority of the governing body, stage 3 will be heard by the trustees and an independent panel member.

Other things that are good to know

At each stage in the procedure, the academy/school wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

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

Who can raise concerns: This policy only applies to parents of children at the school. If you are not a parent at the school you can still get in touch but we will consider your concerns outside of this policy. We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

The type of concerns we can consider: This policy is for general concerns about how our school is run. Some areas have particular processes required by law or regulations. This includes admissions, exclusions and suspensions, safeguarding concerns, staff grievances, disciplinary matters, and whistleblowing. If your concern would be better handled through one of these processes we will let you know and explain the alternative process to you.

Time scales: You should let us know about any problem within three months of it happening; we cannot normally look into older problems. We will always try to keep to the time scales set out here, but for complex queries it may take longer to reply. We will let you know if this is the case. If at any point we haven't heard from you for four weeks after our reply, we will write to you to close your enquiry – but you can ask us to re-open it if there are special circumstances. We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Help from other organisations: We understand you might want to raise concerns with other organisations that oversee the work we do, such as the Government or Ofsted. It is best to talk to us first and go through the steps in this guide because it helps us put things right more quickly and avoids duplicating work for you and for us. In most cases external organisations will expect you to have completed our complaints policy before getting involved.

Duplicate enquiries: We will usually consider and reply to concerns individually. If we receive lots of similar concerns at the same time – for example from a campaign group – we may decide to deal with them together and send you a shared reply that responds to common concerns.

Mutual respect: In most cases, we work well with parents to resolve concerns. We recognise that emotions can run high, but we expect communication to remain respectful. Where behaviour becomes unreasonable, abusive, or intimidating, or where there is a refusal to engage with the policy and process, it can be harder for us to support a resolution. In these cases, we may suspend consideration of a complaint, or place proportionate restrictions on how we manage contact.

Confidentiality: Some complaints may involve confidential details of pupils and staff. We will share as much information as possible with you, while respecting their privacy and legal rights. We will keep a written record of written complaints and review panels, and actions we take as a result. We will keep details confidential but we may need to share them with the Secretary of State for Education or an inspection organisation like Ofsted if they ask to see them.

Withdrawal of a complaint: If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

If you need help raising concerns

We want this process to be easy for everyone to use. If you need help to set out your concern or complaint, the school office can give advice or suggest sources of independent support. We will consider requests for things like interpreters, accessible venues, and alternative formats.

Using AI

Some people like to use AI tools to help organise their thoughts. We recommend against using public AI tools because they can store and republish personal information, such as sensitive details about your child. AI tools can also introduce inaccurate information, like old rules or laws from other countries. This can delay us responding to you. You should always carefully check the output to make sure it is accurate.

If we are finding it difficult to clearly identify the key concerns from what you have shared, we may suggest a meeting or call to help us focus on what matters most and respond as accurately and helpfully as possible.

Help with special educational needs

We work together with the local authority to provide support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). We will always try to help, but for some things that are outside of our control we will refer you to the local authority.

- **What we are responsible for:** We provide teaching, with reasonable adjustments to help your child, and support from our own resources (known as SEN support). We monitor your child's progress, put support plans in place, and review these with you.
- **What the local authority is responsible for:** The local authority decides whether to assess a child for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), issues and maintains the EHCP, and provides the funding and services specified within it.
- **What an EHCP sets out:** An EHCP describes your child's needs, the provision required to meet those needs, and who must deliver it. Schools must implement the parts of the plan that fall within their control, and the local authority must provide the provision it is responsible for.

Some support depends on national or local funding decisions that are outside our control. We will always do our best within the resources available to us. If you are unsure about who is responsible for a particular aspect of SEND support, please ask.

This policy meets the requirements of Part 7 of The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and follows the Department of Education's expectations for school trusts to have a clear and accessible way for parents to raise concerns.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school / trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the ESFA after they have completed Stage 3.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the academy/school. They will consider whether the academy/school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit

Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

Complaints escalated to / about the Trust, CEO or Trustee

If a complaint is escalated to 5 Dimensions Trust, “the trust” or if you wish to complain directly about the trust, then the complaint should be sent to the CEO to be investigated. The CEO will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 2 school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 3 of this Complaints Policy and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

Following the investigation, the CEO will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 15 school days of the date that the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the CEO will write to the Complainant explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a Trustee, the complaint should be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board. If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation. Where the Chair of the Trust Board has investigated the complaint, they will write the letter of outcome to the Complainant and provide a copy to the CEO.

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the school via email or via reception.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Email Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

For example - an explanation, an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better, an assurance that we 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 school policies in light of the complaint or an apology.

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature:
Date:
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Date: