COMPLAINTS

Achieve + Learn Trust.
Better, together.

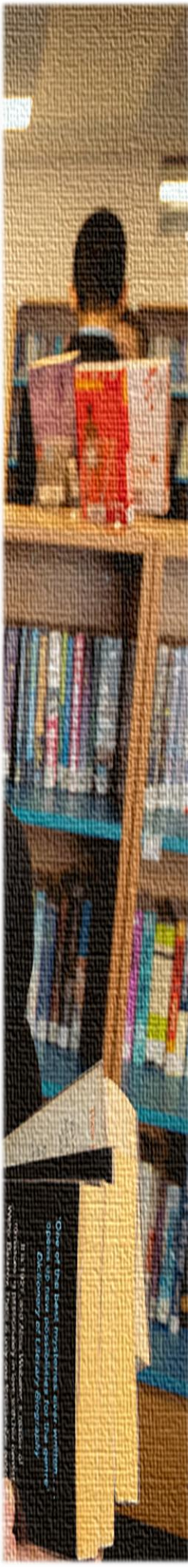
Complaints Policy

Adopted by:	Board of Trustees
Date:	October 2026
Date of Next Review:	October 2028



OUR VALUES

AMBITION	We instil a lifelong love of learning and nurture skills and talents.
INCLUSION	We welcome and respect people from all backgrounds, valuing and celebrating diversity.
ASPIRATION	We want people to be the best they can be, and for everyone to achieve their potential.
COMMUNITY	We develop local and global citizens for the future, always committed to working in partnership.
BELIEF	We encourage everyone to believe in themselves and their future, providing opportunities to excel.



Our Vision

Our vision is to make sure all students are afforded the best educational experience. This means that alongside our broad and aspirational curriculum, we offer students diverse enrichment opportunities to help them find their passions.

It's important to us that students grow both academically and personally. To do this, we create safe, inclusive and enriched learning environments in our schools, with opportunities outside of the classroom that open up pathways to successful futures.

We respect each school's individuality and the communities they serve, so we'll work with our staff to support their development without changing the school identity. Our network of schools collaborate and share knowledge to provide exceptional learning experiences and more opportunities for students to find what they love, and to discover for themselves where they may excel.

Our Aim

Our aim is to ensure that all schools within the Trust are strong providers and that our staff are fully supported and motivated to ensure the best outcomes for all our students at every age and stage.

Our Future

We strive for continuous improvement and development. The growth of our Trust will create and nurture a strong partnership of local schools, covering both primary and secondary phases. Simply put, we believe that we are better, together. Working collaboratively allows us to build on each school's strengths, while supporting areas of improvement and we believe this approach will improve even further as we enhance our family of schools.

Our Governance

We have five Members who hold the Board of Trustees to account for the performance of the Trust. In addition to the Trust Board, each member school has its own local governing body. Policies are ratified at both Trust level and local Governance level (policies bespoke to each school/locality). These are quality assured by our Director of People.

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A Introduction

Achieve and Learn Trust schools undertake to provide a friendly and safe environment in which students will be helped to achieve their potential, both academically and socially. We recognise, however, that sometimes things can go wrong and parents, carers and members of the public may need to raise a concern or make a complaint to the school. This policy outlines the formal complaints procedure.

The majority of issues raised by parents/carers, the community or students, are concerns rather than complaints. We are committed to taking concerns seriously, at the earliest stage, in the hope of keeping the number of formal complaints to a minimum and without the need for formal procedures. However, depending on the nature of the concern or complaint, you may wish or be asked to follow the Trust's formal complaints procedure.

The aim of this policy is to resolve a complaint as fairly and speedily as possible. Formal complaints will be dealt with in a sensitive, impartial and confidential manner.
The following details outline the stages that can be used to resolve complaints.

Stage 1 – A concern is raised informally with the relevant staff member. A meeting is usually held to discuss the matter.

Stage 2 – A formal complaint is heard by an appropriate member of staff. The formal procedures are only invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

Stage 3 – Complaint is heard by the Headteacher

Stage 4 – If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 3, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 4. 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 will hear the complaint.

B Stage 1 – Raising a concern

Concerns can be raised with the school at any time and will often generate an immediate response, which will resolve the concern. We request that parents/carers make their first contact with either the student's Form Tutor, Head of Year or a member of the Leadership Team.

On some occasions the concern raised may require investigation, or discussion with others, in which case you will receive an informal but informed response within 3 working days. The vast majority of concerns will be satisfactorily resolved in this way.

If a complainant is not satisfied with the result at Stage 1, they should write to or call the school within ten working days and state what they would like the school to do. The school will then take your complaint to the next stage.

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are 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.

C Stage 2 - Complaint heard by an appropriate staff member

Formal complaints should be put in writing and addressed to the Headteacher or an appropriate member of staff. The complainant may request or download a complaints form for this purpose. The complaint will be logged, including the date it was received. The school will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within three working days of receiving it. In many cases this response will also report on the action the school has taken to resolve the issue, however, if the issue requires complex investigation (e.g. interviewing a number of people) it may take up to five working days. Alternatively, a meeting may be convened to discuss the matter further.

This meeting will normally take place within ten working days. The aim will be to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. However, if the complainant is not satisfied with the result at Stage 2 they should write to or call the school within ten working days of receiving our response. The complainant will need to tell the school why you are still not satisfied and what you would like the school to do. You can request a further complaint form for this.

D Stage 3 – Complaint heard by Headteacher

If the matter has not been resolved at Stage 2, the Headteacher will arrange for a further investigation. Following the investigation, the Headteacher will normally give a written response within ten working days. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the result at Stage 3, they will need to let the school know within ten working days of receiving the response.

E Stage 4 – Complaint heard by the Governance Complaints Appeal Panel

If the matter has still not been resolved at Stage 3, then the complainant should write to the Chair of Governors giving details of the complaint. The Chair of Governors with the support of the Trust, will convene a complaints appeal panel. The hearing will normally take place within ten working days of the receipt of the written request for Stage 4 investigation. The aim of the Appeal Panel hearing is to impartially resolve the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. All parties will be notified of the Panel's decision in writing within three working days after the date of the hearing. The letter will also contain details of how to progress if the complainant wishes to take matters further, although it should be noted that the decision of the Governance

F Raising a Complaint Using Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The Trust wants to hear about complainants' concerns in their own words and encourages clear, respectful, and human-led communication rather than automated or highly formal AI-generated text. While AI tools (such as ChatGPT) can be helpful when drafting forms, AI-generated documentation may make reference to inaccurate information and make complaints more complex than necessary.

This may increase the time it takes to review a complaint, or the Trust may ask for it to be resubmitted in the complainant's own words. Staff will not spend a disproportionate amount of time attempting to interpret and respond to communications with characteristics of AI text (such as complaints that are unclear, unduly lengthy, overly legalistic, or misstate the law). In those circumstances, the process will be paused until the required clarification or human-led summary is received. Complainants are also reminded that publicly available AI platforms and chatbots are not confidential. Complaints, particularly those containing the personal data of students, staff, and other individuals, must not be uploaded to or processed via such platforms.

G Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school 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 Department for Education after they have completed Stage 4.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by a school in our Trust. They will consider whether that school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education 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.

NOTE

Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher, the complainant should send their complaint directly to the PA to the Chief Executive Officer.
In such a case, where the matter concerns the conduct of the Headteacher, the Headteacher and Chief Executive Officer will be informed of the complaint. The Chief Executive Officer will arrange for the matter to be investigated.
In cases where the matter concerns the conduct of a member of the Governing Body, the member will be informed of the complaint and the complaint will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer.

Findings and recommendations following the investigation of a formal complaint are filed and kept available for inspection on the school premises by the Trust Board and the Headteacher.

Review

The Trust Board will review this policy at least every two years and assess its implementation and effectiveness. The policy will be promoted and implemented throughout the school.

Exceptions

In the case of a complaint that is subject to statutory procedures, the Headteacher will follow the statutory regulations and not the complaints procedure.
This includes:

- Exclusions
- SEND
- Staff[KE1] professional competence, discipline and grievance

H

Appendix 1

Guidance for Staff Investigating Complaints

It is suggested that at each stage, the person investigating the complaint, makes sure that they:

- establish **what** has happened so far, and **who** has been involved;
- make a note of the complaint
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of the interview.
- Be alert to the characteristics of AI-generated text. If a complaint is overly legalistic, introduces inaccurate information, or is exceptionally complex due to automation, discuss with the Headteacher whether to pause the timeline until the complainant provides a clear, human-led summary.

The person investigating the complaint should normally offer an appointment to discuss the issue as quickly as possible, as this will give both parties time to talk about it calmly and politely without being interrupted. This can allow parties to remain calm. It will also show a commitment to resolving issues. Complaints need to be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible (see procedure). However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

At each stage in the procedure the staff member handling the complaint will want to keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

It is useful if complainants are encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence. An effective procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Appendix 2

Appeal Panel Hearing

The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school 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. The letter will also contain what you need to do if you wish to take the matter further.

It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. Recordings are not permitted at hearings. Electronic audio or video recordings will not be accepted as evidence due to the high potential for alteration or falsification, both with and without the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). No governor or Trustee 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 protected characteristics.

An effective panel 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 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.

The Role of the Clerk

The clerk (Governance Professional) is the contact point for the complainant and will be required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;

- notify all parties of the panel's decision.

The Role of the Chair of the Governing Body or the Nominated Governor of the Trust

The nominated governor will:

- check that the correct procedure has been followed;
- if a hearing is appropriate, notify the clerk to arrange the panel.

The Role of the Chair of the Panel

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

- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- parents/carers 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 panel is open minded and acting independently;
- no member of the panel 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.

Before the meeting:

- The formal complaints letter should be passed to the Vice-Chair if the Chair will be unable to receive the letter within 5 days.
- Members of the Governance Complaints Panel should have no prior knowledge of the complaint and it is, therefore, unlikely that staff governors will be members of the panel.
- The letter inviting the parent / carer to attend should indicate that they may be accompanied by a friend.

At the meeting:

- The Complaints Panel must be made up of at least three members and a clerk.
- One member of the panel must be completely independent from the school (a Governor from another school in the Trust or a Trustee is appropriate).
- Although this is a formal meeting, every effort should be made to make it as informal as possible for all concerned and parent / carer put at ease.
- Everyone attending should be in the room at the same time.
- The clerk should take notes of the meeting, listing who is present and make everyone aware of the confidential nature of the process.
- The Chair of the Governance Complaints Panel should open the meeting stating the purpose and the format of the meeting to clarify this to all in attendance.

- People present should introduce themselves stating their reason for being at the meeting.
- The Chair of the Governance Complaints Panel should request a verbal statement from the complainant in support of his or her written letter of complaint and why s/he feels the issue has not been resolved. The Governance Complaints Panel members can ask questions to make sure they understand the issue from the parent/carer's point of view.
- The Chair of the Governance Complaints Panel should request a verbal statement from the Headteacher (or their representative) in support of his/her written account of the complaint and the steps taken to resolve the issue. The Governance Complaints Panel members can ask questions to make sure they understand the issue from the Headteacher's point of view.
- Members of the Governance Complaints Panel should make sure they fully understand the issues and ask any further questions to clarify any points that are still not clear to them.
- The Chair of the Governance Complaints Panel must ask the complainant and the Headteacher (or their representative) if they are satisfied that they have provided all the information they wanted or if there is something they wish to add and if they feel they have had a fair hearing.
- When the Governance Complaints Panel members understand all the issues, the Chair will ask all parties to leave except the panel members and the clerk.

After the meeting:

- The Panel members will need to consider the information, come to a decision and suggest a way to resolve the issue taking into account the best interests of the child or children.
- The Governance Complaints Panel members discuss the issues in private and the clerk remains to record the decision. 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 school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.
- When the Panel have reached a decision the Clerk will inform everyone concerned in writing as soon as possible, but in any event, within three working days of the panel meeting. The letter will also contain what the complainant need to do if they wish to take the matter further, although it should be noted that if the correct procedure has been followed, the decision of the Governor's Complaints Panel is final.
- A record should be kept of the outcome of the hearing.
- Written records of complaints will be kept and reported on an annual basis to Governors.

Vexatious Complaints

If properly followed, a good complaints procedure will limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of the Governing Body is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

Summary of Procedure and Agenda

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

J Guidance Notes for Clerk to Complaints Panel Hearing

Invitations:

- Parent / Carer (who may be accompanied)
- Chair of Governance Complaints Panel (TBC)
- Vice-Chair in absence
- An additional Governor
- Chief Executive Officer (Headteacher complaints)
- Headteacher (or Deputy Headteacher in case of absence)
- Independent member of the panel

NB. Letters should indicate date and time of the hearing, indicate that the proceedings will be entirely confidential, and that the decision of the panel will be final.

Procedure of Hearing – General

NB. Chair to put attendees at their ease.

- Chair to introduce members and ask for all parties to be introduced
- Note that the procedure will be minuted
- Note that the outcome will be final
- Indicate that a record will be kept of complaint and its outcome, and forwarded to governors
- Follow agenda as per policy