South Pennine Academies

An excellent education for everyone

# Complaints Policy

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## 1. Policy statement

South Pennine Academies aims to resolve complaints at the earliest possible stage and, where possible, informally, and is dedicated to continuing to provide the highest quality of education possible in all of its academies throughout the procedure. This policy has been created to handle complaints relating to any aspects of the provision of facilities or services against:

- Any member of staff
- Any academy within the trust
- Any local academy board of the trust
- Any individual Trustee
- The trust as a whole

It is designed to ensure that the trusts complaints procedure is straightforward, impartial, non-adversarial, allows for a full and fair investigation, respects confidentiality and delivers an effective response and appropriate redress.

This policy outlines the procedure that the complainant, the trust and its academies will follow. Once a complaint has been made, it can be resolved or withdrawn at any stage.

This policy is reviewed every 2 years unless there are significant changes in legislation or law.

## 2. Scope & purpose

Under Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, parents/carers have a right to raise a concern or make a complaint and will be directed to this procedure. Complaints from members of the public about facilities or services provided are not covered by the same regulations however will also be handled swiftly and professionally using the principles of this policy.

This procedure covers complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by the school, except complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including the exceptions listed below. Complaints in relation to third party, e.g., lettings may need to be referred to the supplier for resolution under their own complaints' procedure.

| Exceptions | Who to contact |
|---|---|
| Admissions | Concerns regarding admissions are handled by the local authority. Further detail can be found on the websites below:<br>Admissions \| Calderdale Council<br>Schools and education \| Kirklees Council<br>Apply for a school place \| Oldham Council |
| Child protection (matters likely to require investigations) | Complaints about child protection matters are handled under the safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.<br><br>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the Children's Initial Contact Point or out of hours Emergency Duty Team |
| Exclusion of students from academies* | Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.<br><br>*Complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the Trust's complaints procedure. |
| Staff grievance | Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the Trust grievance procedures |
| Staff conduct | Where appropriate, complaints about staff conduct will be dealt with under the Trust's disciplinary procedures. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under the disciplinary procedure, but outcomes will not be shared with them. |
| Statutory assessment of SEND | Concerns should be raised directly with the local authority. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Whistleblowing | The Trust has a whistleblowing procedure for all employees, including temporary staff, contractors and volunteers. Link to policy and details with details of Protect /NSPCC<br><br>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. |

It is recognised that on occasion, a child/young person may wish to complain, and their views will be given equal consideration to those of adults. However, their age and ability to understand the process they are engaging in will be taken into consideration when dealing with the complaint, and the welfare of the child/young person will be paramount throughout. If the complaint of a child/young person progresses to Stage 4, extra care will be taken, with careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings throughout the hearing, to ensure they do not feel intimidated. The parents/carers will have the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing they feel the child/young person should attend, if any, but it may be that the panel feel it is not in the child/young person's best interests to be present during all or part of the hearing.

If other public bodies are investigating aspects of a complaint, for example the Police, Local Authority (LA) Safeguarding Teams or Tribunal Officers, this may impact on the Trust's ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, the complainant will be informed of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against the Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

## 3. Overarching principles

### 3.1 The difference between a concern or complaint

A concern is defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

A complaint is defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

A complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the concern in full as early as possible and allow opportunity for a response in line with the procedure
- co-operate in seeking a solution, responding promptly to requests for information, meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect and courtesy
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

### 3.2 Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, our aim is always 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 policies and procedures in light of the complaint
- an apology.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns, and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaint's procedure. However, it is understood that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, we will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, these views will be respected. In these cases, you will be referred to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Principal will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important

### 3.3 Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Principal or CEO, will determine whether the complaint warrants investigation.

### 3.4 Timescales

The complaint must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this timeframe if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints need to be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible using time limits published in this procedure. However, where further investigations are necessary, or the complaint is complex, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

### 3.5 Complaints received outside of term time

Complaints made outside of term time will be considered to have been received on the first day after the holiday or closure period. The reference "school days" within this policy excludes weekends, holidays and periods of partial or full academy closure.

### 3.6 Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, this should be done in writing.

### 3.7 Records & monitoring

All complaints will be recorded, including informal complaints. The Principal is

responsible ensuring that staff record all complaints and their outcomes in schools. The Trust Data & Compliance Manager is responsible for recording Trust complaints and will oversee a consistent logging process for our schools.

Records relating to individual complaints are confidential, except where:

- access is requested by the Secretary of State
- disclosure is required during a school inspection
- an individual has a legal right to access their own personal data within such documentation; or
- under other legal authority.

The Local Academy Board Governors and Trust Board will monitor the level and the subject matter of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis through the mechanism of performance and data reporting.

The complaints procedure is available in hard copy from the school office on each site. It will also be published on school websites and the Trust website.

## 4. Responsibilities & arrangements

### 4.1 How to raise or make a complaint

A concern can be raised in person or by telephone to the appropriate person which may include the Class Teacher, Head of Subject, Tutor or Head of Year in school. Published contact details are available on the school / Trust website. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant if they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complaints should be made in writing and marked as Private and Confidential. For ease, an optional template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure (Appendix 2). Help can be provided by the Complaints Co-ordinator to complete the form, or you can also ask a third-party organisation, for example, the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, reasonable adjustments will be considered, if required, to enable 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.

Complaints should be made in the first instance, to the individual below via the contact provided.

| Complaint involving/about | Send FAO | Complaint's co-ordinator |
|---|---|---|
| Academy matter or academy staff | Principal of the Academy | See complaints policy |
| Executive Principal or Principal | CEO | Alison Black c/o office@spacademies.org |
| Governor or Chair of Governors | | |
| Trust matter or central staff | | |
| Chair or Vice Chair of Trustees | | |
| CEO or Trustee | Interim Chair of Trust Board | James Annetts jannetts@spacademies.org |
| Subject Access Requests (SARs) or Freedom of Information Requests (FOIs) | Trust Data & Compliance Manager | Becca Szefer bszefer@spacademies.org |

The CEO has responsibility for ensuring that this procedure is implemented in Trust schools. Principals may refer complaints received to the CEO for consideration because they consider the matter is one of such a nature that it should be investigated independently of the academy. Likewise, complaints may be retrieved and dealt with by the central team of the Trust for the same reason. Where a complaint is made directly to the central team of the Trust, it will be logged by the Trust Data & Compliance Manager and forwarded to the appropriate person/school to follow the stages outlined in the procedure.

### 4.2 Stage 1 – informal complaints

Concerns should be raised with the appropriate person which may include the Class Teacher, Head of Subject, Tutor, or Head of Year. Complainants should not approach individual Local Academy Board Governors or Trustees of the Board to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints in the later stages of the procedure

It is hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis. If, through day- to-day discussions, the concern cannot be resolved, the complainant should be informed that the complaint will now need to be dealt with informally, this will be acknowledged in 3 school days and a meeting offered.

At the conclusion, a written response will be provided within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint, within 10 school days of receipt of the informal written response

### 4.3 Stage 2 – formal complaints

In most cases, complaints will be dealt with via the informal stage before progressing to the formal stage. It is acknowledged however, that on occasion, dependent on the nature of the complaint, it may be appropriate to proceed straight to the formal stage, in agreement with the school and the complainant.

All complaints must be submitted in writing to the Complaints Coordinator (The Trust Data & Compliance Manager for trust complaints, or the designated member of academy staff for academy complaints) will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days after notifying the Principal or Trust Senior Officer responsible for Stage 2 (see table below) who will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. It should be considered whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this, or whether a telephone conversation is sufficient before an investigation commences.

| Complaint involving/about | Stage 2 complaint owner |
|---|---|
| Academy matter or academy staff | Principal (or other appropriate senior staff member) |
| Principal or Executive Principal | CEO |
| Governor | CEO |
| Trust matter or central staff | CEO |
| CEO or Trustee | Chair of Trustees |
| Chair or Vice Chair of Trustees | CEO |
| SARs or FOIs | Operations Director |

The complaint owner will appoint an investigator, if appropriate.

During an investigation, the investigator will:

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

At the conclusion of the investigation, a face-to-face meeting will be held with the complainant, followed by written correspondence within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If this deadline cannot be met, the complainant will be provided 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 taken/will be taken to resolve the complaint. The complainant will be advised how to escalate their complaint, should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

### 4.4 Stage 3 – formal complaints

If the complaint is not resolved through Stages 1 and 2, either the school or the complainant can ask for additional assessment of the complaint by a member of senior staff. This may be a member of the central executive team or a member of senior staff from a different academy in the trust.. It will not be the same person who has had any prior involvement or will have future involvement with the complaint.

This is another opportunity to resolve the complaint without the need for a formal panel hearing.

The Trust will endeavour to provide a written response within 10 school days of receipt of the complaint.

If a complaint should remain unhappy at stage 3 where a complaint relates to a subject access request or freedom of information request, your complaint should be directed to the ICO (Information Commissioners Office) either online at www.ico.org.uk or by writing to:

ICO
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

### 4.5 Stage 4 – panel hearings

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 3 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 4. Stage 4 will involve the Trust representative from stage 3 to present findings and attempts to resolve to the panel. This is the final stage of the Trust complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 4 must be made to the Trust Data & Compliance Manager within 10 school days of receipt of a Stage 3 response. This can be emailed to bszefer@spacademies.org or sent by post to South Pennine Academies, The Gateway, Lowfields Close, Lowfields Business Park, HX5 9DX, marking it Private and Confidential, and for the attention of the Trust Data & Compliance Manager.

Requests to progress to Stage 4 received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Trust Data & Compliance Manager will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days. The complainant will also be asked to provide copies of any further written material they wish to submit, within 5 school days of the date of the acknowledgement letter.

The Trust Data & Compliance Manager will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the panel hearing. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 4 request. If this is not possible, they will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

A panel will be convened taking into account the matter complained about as follows:

| Complaint about/involving | Stage 4 hearing |
|---|---|
| • Academy matter/staff<br>• Principal or Executive Principal<br>• A governor | Three people who are not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint, with one panel member who is independent of management and the running of the academy |
| • Trust matter/staff<br>• CEO<br>• Trustees | 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 Trust |

| | |
|---|---|
| • Chair of the Trust Board<br>• Vice Chair of Trust Board | Three people who are completely independent of the Trust and not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint |

At least 10 school days before the panel hearing, the Trust Data & Compliance Manager will confirm and notify the complainant of 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.

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

If a complainant rejects the offer of two arranged dates, without good reason, the Trust Data & Compliance Manager will decide when to hold the hearing. It will proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel hearing to provide support, not represent. This can be a relative, friend or interpreter and must be notified in advance. The panel hearing is an internal proceeding, it is not a legal proceeding and therefore legal representation is not permitted. If a complainant is accompanied by a legally qualified person, that person will not be permitted to act as an advocate or to address the hearing unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Panel.

There may be occasions when representation is appropriate, and this must be approved in advance. For example, a school employee called as a witness may wish to be supported by union representation.

The panel shall be under no obligation to hear evidence at the panel hearing from witnesses about the matter but may do so and /or may take written statements into account. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

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

The panel hearing 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 recordings of meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken and recordings will be managed and retained by the Trust.

The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel can decide to uphold the complaint in whole or in part or not uphold.

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

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to processes or procedures to prevent

similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Panel will provide the complainant and the school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days of the panel hearing. The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and where appropriate, it will include details of actions the Trust will take to resolve the complaint. The letter will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the premises by the Trustees and the Principal.

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.

### 4.6 Complaints about the Trust, CEO or a Trustee

If a complainant wishes to complain directly about the Trust, CEO or a Trustee, the complaint should be sent to the Operations Director to be investigated.

The nominated senior officer will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 3 school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will be addressed using the appropriate stage in this procedure and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

Dependent on the nature of the complaint, the CEO (as Accounting Officer) may have a statutory duty to report the complaint to external agencies.

Note: Where the Chair of the Trust Board has investigated the complaint, they will write the outcome letter to the complainant and provide a copy to the Chief Executive Officer.

### 4.7 Serial & persistent complaints

This procedure aims to resolve all complaints. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, a senior representative of the Trust is able, under this procedure, to inform them in writing that the Trust procedure has been exhausted and the matter closed.

This may also be the case for a complaint that is considered 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' in the following circumstances:

- complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious
- insistence upon pursuing complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes
- insistence upon pursuing the complaint in an unreasonable manner
- complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value.

Complainants may have strong grievances but are expected to behave in a respectful and courteous manner towards staff whilst their complaint is being resolved.

A complainant will be notified if behaviour is considered unreasonable or unacceptable may put restrictions in place on communication and/or attending the school site

### 4.8 Managing unreasonable complaints

The Trust is committed to dealing with all 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 the Trust itself or any of its academies; however, the Trust does not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

For the purposes of this policy, **"unreasonable complaints"** include:

- Vexatious complaints, which:
  - Are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, or repetitious.
  - Insist upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.
  - Insist upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.
  - Are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
  - Demand for redress which lacks any serious purpose or value.
- Serial or persistent complaints, which:
  - Are duplicated, sent by the same complainant once the initial complaint has been closed.
  - Are new complaints that are submitted additionally, as part of an existing open complaint, by the same complainant.

A complaint may also be regarded as unreasonable when the complainant:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process 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 adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect 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 and to their own timescales.
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced.
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed.
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the Trust's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the ESFA.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on school 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.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the complainant:

- Acts maliciously or aggressively.
- Uses threats, intimidation or violence.
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language.
- Knows the complaint to be false.
- Uses falsified information.
- Publishes unacceptable information in media such as social media websites and newspapers.

The above applies regardless of the method the complaint is made, e.g. face-to-face, by telephone, in writing or electronically.

Complainants should limit the number of communications with the Trust 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. Whenever possible, the member of staff, local governor or Trustee leading the response to a complaint will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

Serial or persistent complaints will only be marked as 'serial' once the complainant has completed the complaints procedure. It is the complaint that will be marked as 'serial', meaning the complainant can complain about a separate issue if necessary. If the behaviour continues, the individual handling the complaint will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the Trust or any of its academies causing a significant level of disruption, the Trust may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after six months.

- A decision to stop responding will only be considered in circumstances where the following statements are true:
- Every reasonable step has been taken to address the complainant's concerns
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the Trust's position and their options
- The complainant contacts the Trust or any of its academies repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

If the above criteria are met, in making a decision to stop responding, the Trust will also consider if the complainant is often abusive or aggressive in their communication, makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff, or if the Trust believes their intent is to disrupt or inconvenience the Trust or its academies.

The Trust will not stop responding to a complainant on the basis that they are difficult to deal with or they ask complex questions.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from the premises.

### 4.9 Complaint campaigns

For the purpose of this procedure, a complaint campaign is defined as a complaint from three or more separate individuals (whether or not connected with an academy of the Trust) which are all based on the same subject.

Depending on the subject in question, we may deviate from this procedure and instead:

- send a template response to all complainants and/or
- publish a single response on the school/Trust's website (as applicable).

### 4.10 Next steps

If the complainant believes the 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 4.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the Trust. They will consider whether the Trust 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:

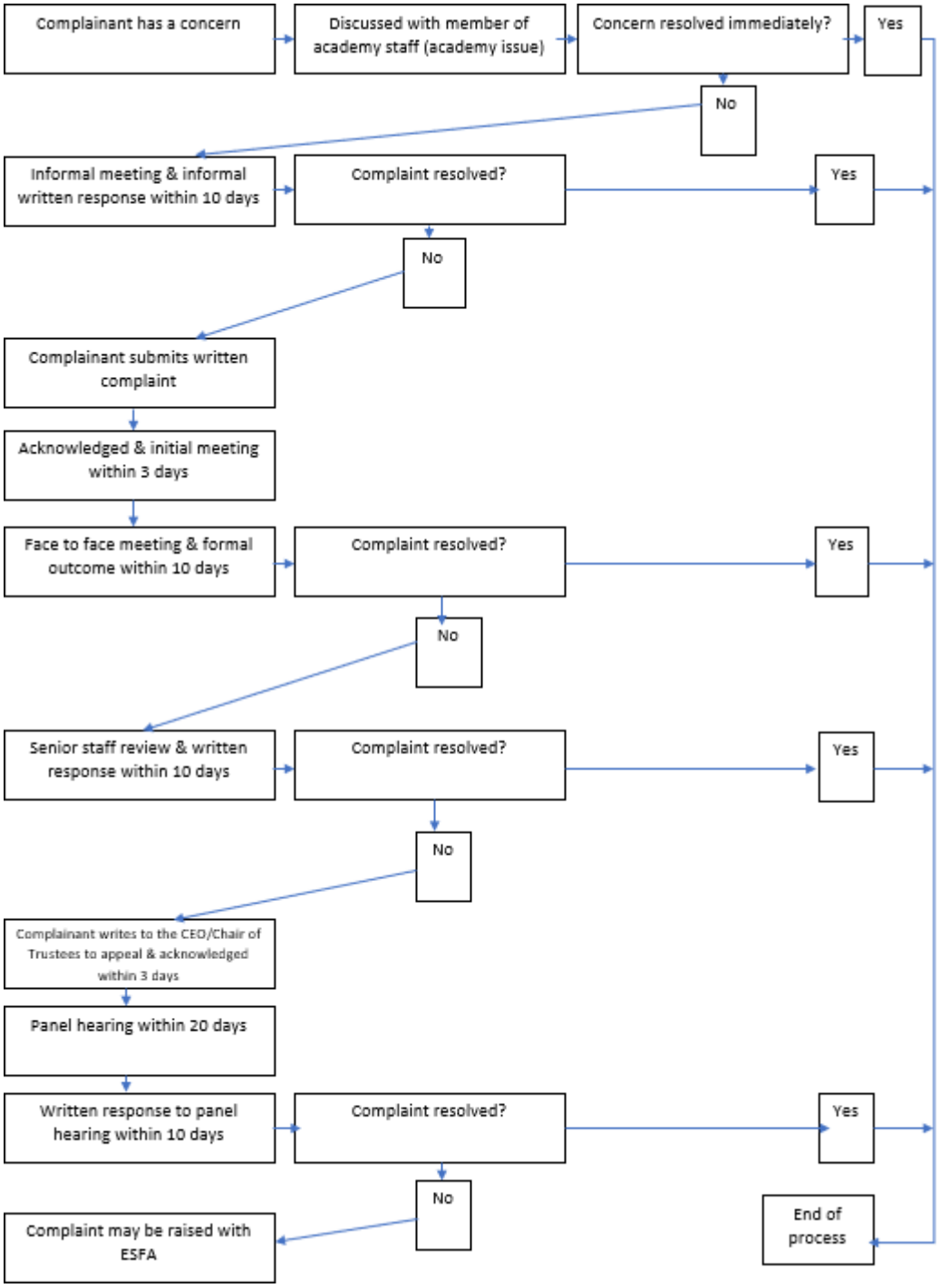
Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit Education and Skills Funding Agency Cheylesmore House,
5 Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

If a complaint relates to a subject access request or freedom of information request, and the complainant should remain unhappy at stage 3 , your complaint should be directed to the ICO (Information Commissioners Office) either online at www.ico.org.uk or by writing to:

ICO
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

# 5. Appendices

## 5.1 Complaints procedure flowchart



### 5.2 Complaints form

Please complete this form with details and return to the academy/trust

| | |
|---|---|
| Your name: | Relationship to student: |
| Student's name: | |
| Academy name: | |
| Details of your complaint/concern, including whether you have spoke to anybody at the academy about it and actions taken to resolve: | |
| What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage? | |
| Signature: | Date: |

### 5.3 Procedure for a panel hearing

The Chair will proceed through the following stages in a panel hearing allowing each person to speak in full and ensuring that everyone is treated with respect and courtesy. A break in the hearing can be called if it is felt appropriate for the welfare of those present.

- Welcome all parties and explain the format for the hearing, remit of the panel and ensure all present are prepared and clear.
- Parties usually present for a hearing are the complainant, representatives involved at stage 3 to present findings and attempts to resolve, panel members and minute taker.
- The complainant will be invited to explain their complaint and refer to/be followed by any agreed witnesses to the panel.
- The Principal (for academies) or Executive team (Trust) may ask for clarification or question the complainant and the witnesses if present at this stage.
- Panel members are invited to ask questions of the complainant.
- The Principal (for academies) or Executive team (Trust) will be invited to explain their actions, attempts to resolve and refer to/be followed by any witnesses if present.
- The complainant may question the Principal/Executive team member and any witnesses at this stage.
- Panel members are invited to ask questions of the Principal/Executive team member
- The complainant is invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Principal/Executive team member is then invited to sum up the actions and response to the complaint.

The Chair informs both parties regarding the timescale for a response. Both parties leave the hearing at the same time whilst the panel consider the issues and decides on key findings and a response.