Complaints Policy and Procedure

Effective from 1st July 2026

Version 6.0

Leverhulme Academy Trust Document Control Table			
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Document History		
Version	**Date**	**Notes on Revisions**
6.0	**July 2026**	• Clarification of the Aims & Applications • Section 3 'Raising Matters Effectively' added to policy including clarification of the use of Artificial Intelligence when raising written complaints • Clarification of the process if complainant is late or does not attend the meeting • Clarification of EYFS complaints • Clarification of what may be considered "vexatious" complaints or complaints pursued in an unreasonable manner and how these may be treated. • Clarification of matters excluded from this policy • Reference to EFSA updated to DfE throughout the document
5.0	March 2025	Clarification "informal stage" represents stage 1 of complaints process Additional contact details provided for Clerk and CFO
4.0	December 2023	• Clarification of treatment of complaints from parents / complaints from other bodies • Clarification of what may be considered "vexatious" complaints or complaints pursued in an unreasonable manner and how these may be treated. • Clarification of matters excluded from this policy

3.0	November 2021	Review – Finance and Personnel Committee – no changes Updated Trust brand and template
2.1	November 2021	Subject to review – no proposed changes Updated Trust brand and template
2.0	November 2019	Policy reviewed and updated to reflect changes in personnel.
		Policy updated to comply with Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014
1.0	November 2017	New policy – approved by Trust Board

1 Aims and application

1.1 Before using this procedure, we encourage parents to read the 'Parent Guide to School Complaints' published by Parentkind, the Department for Education, Ofsted and the Improving Education Together Board, which provides helpful guidance on how to provide feedback, resolve concerns and raise complaints. A copy of this guide is available via the link below and on the school and trust websites.

https://www.parentkind.org.uk/assets/parents-resources/Parent-Guide-to-School-Complaints.pdf.

1.2 The aims of the procedure are to deal with complaints and concerns:

- about an academy, the academy trust ("trust") or any individual connected with it by following the correct procedure;
- thoroughly; and
- in an open, honest and fair manner.

1.3 This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children who are registered at one of the academies within the trust. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to an individual academy within the trust, or the trust itself, about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Part 1 of this policy outlines how parents/carers of registered pupils currently attending academies within the trust can raise a concern or complaint. Concerns or complaints from other persons will be dealt with in accordance with Part 2 of this policy.

1.4 This procedure does not apply to concerns and complaints relating to the matters listed in Annex 1.

1.5 Anonymous concerns or complaints will not normally be investigated under this procedure. The Headteacher or Head of School or Chair of the Local Governing Committee, or the Chief Executive Officer (as appropriate), will determine whether there are exceptional circumstances to justify conducting an investigation into the issues raised.

1.6 All staff will be made aware of this complaints procedure and are expected to review this policy regularly in order that they are familiar with our process of dealing with complaints and can be of assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

1.7 In this procedure:

- 'complaint' means an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action;
- 'concern' means an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought;
- 'meeting' means an in person or virtual meeting (i.e. telephone or video conference where all parties can participate verbally), virtual meetings will only be held in the event that all parties have access to appropriate equipment to attend and are happy to do so;
- 'parent' means a parent, carer or anyone with legal responsibility for a child;
- 'school days' excludes weekends and academy holidays and periods of partial or total academy closure;
- 'trust' means the academy trust.

1.8 The timeframes referred to in this policy are our usual timeframes and the academy will seek to adhere to these timeframes where possible.

1.9 Reasonable adjustments will be made to this procedure where required to ensure that all complainants can access and complete this complaints procedure. For example, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

2 Key principles

2.1 The trust expects all complainants to make reasonable attempts to seek a speedy and informal resolution.

2.2 The trust encourages parents and others to approach the academy with any concerns and refrain from airing concerns about the academy and its staff on social media sites. Posting negative comments on social media can cause damage and upset and is often counter-productive to pupil education.

2.3 To investigate your complaint properly and fairly, we have implemented a staged approach. We anticipate that almost all complaints that arise will be resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2 outlined below.

2.4 We expect our members of staff to be addressed in a respectful manner and for communication to remain calm at all times. The procedure under Part 3 will only be used on very rare occasions to deal with repetitious and/or vexatious complaints or complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner.

2.5 Concerns or complaints should be brought to our attention as soon as possible. Any matter raised more than 3 months after the incident being complained of (or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 3 months of the last of these incidents) will not be considered unless the Headteacher or Head of School / Chair of the Local Governing Committee accepts that there are good reasons to explain the delay or the complaint is about a particularly serious matter.

2.6 Where a complaint is received outside of term time, we will consider it to have been received on the first school day following the holiday period.

2.7 On rare occasions an academy or the trust may receive complaints from a number of individuals relating to the same issue. In order to deal with these complaints efficiently the academy/trust will follow the procedure set out in Part 4.

2.8 If it becomes necessary to alter the time limits and deadlines set out within this procedure, you will be advised accordingly and given an explanation as to why this has been the case and provided with revised timescales. If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority safeguarding teams or tribunals/courts, 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. Where a complaint is raised but we do not have clarity from the complainant on the issues and/or desired outcomes, we will inform the complainant what information we need to progress the complaint and pause this procedure until reasonable clarity is achieved.

2.9 Complainants should not approach individual governors or trustees to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis, and it may prevent them from considering complaints at later stages.

2.10 If a complainant commences legal action against the trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether it would be appropriate to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

2.11 You may withdraw your concern or complaint at any stage of this procedure by notifying us in writing. Your written notification should be sent to the person who is currently dealing with your concern or complaint or, if you are unsure, send this to the Clerk to the Trust at the address at the end of this document.

3. Raising Matters Effectively

3.1 When raising concerns or complaints, it is very important that you explain clearly:

- What your concern/complaint is;
- What has already been done to try and resolve it;
- Names of any witnesses, dates and times of what happened and copies of any relevant documents; and
- What you would like us to do about it to put things right.

3.2 We encourage you to:

- Focus on the relevant facts - what happened, when and who was involved;
- Remain objective and direct your concern towards processes or decisions rather than target individuals; and
- Suggest clear and realistic outcomes so that we can see what is possible and we can try to resolve the matter constructively.

3.3 For the avoidance of doubt, certain outcomes are not available under this procedure. These include but are not limited to:

- outcomes relating to staff disciplinary action — any disciplinary matters will be handled confidentially under our internal staff procedures, and you will not be informed of any action taken; and
- financial compensation or payments of any kind.

3.4 We ask that you keep your complaint and any supporting documents short and focused on the issues that matter. If what you send us is too long, repeats the same points or includes information that is not relevant, it may take us longer to look into and respond to your concerns. As a guide, we would not expect your written complaint to be longer than two sides of A4 (about 1,000 words). If you send us more than we need, we may ask you to tell us which issues and documents are most important and put the timescales in this procedure on hold until you do.

3.5 If you choose to use artificial intelligence (AI) tools to help you draft or structure your concern or complaint, you are responsible for the accuracy and content of anything you submit to us, regardless of whether AI was used to help prepare it.

3.6 Put 'complaint' in the subject line of your email or clearly on any correspondence so we can deal with it quickly.

4. Records of Complaints

A record will be kept of all written formal complaints, including at what stage they were resolved and action taken by us as a result of those complaints regardless of whether they were upheld. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where:

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

We will make the findings and recommendations of the Complaints Committee available for inspection on the academy premises by the trust and the Headteacher/Head of School.

Part 1: Complaints procedure for parents

Stage 1: Heard by staff member

Taking concerns and complaints seriously at the earliest stage will ensure a speedy resolution for the parent / carer.

The policy deals with the process of complaints but the underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need to contact any other person or invoke formal procedures. The requirement to have a complaints procedure need not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern at the initial point it is raised.

In most cases the member of staff involved will receive the first approach. It would be helpful if staff were able to resolve issues on the spot. In the first instance please direct your concern / complaint to the relevant member of staff, if you are unsure who to contact, please direct your concern / complaint to the relevant headteacher who will be able to contact the relevant member of staff.

Stage 2:

2.1 If the parent / carer is dissatisfied with the outcome of their initial complaint at Stage 1 the complaint can be escalated to Stage 2 by completing the claim form proforma at Annex 2 of this document. Complaints may also be raised by a third party acting on behalf of a parent, as long as they have appropriate authority to do so. Most enquiries / concerns / complaints can be dealt with satisfactorily by the class / form teacher, the head of year or other members of staff without the need to escalate the process further. We value meetings and discussions and encourage parents to approach staff with any concerns they may have and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding.

2.2 Before raising a formal complaint, please refer to section 3 of the procedure 'Raising Matters Effectively'.

2.3 It is always helpful if you can fully explain the nature of the complaint and identify the outcome you are looking for. Where appropriate, you may be invited to a meeting with the member of staff most appropriate for dealing with that concern. The member of staff dealing with the concern will make sure that you are clear on what action (if any) has been agreed. This may be put in writing if appropriate.

2.4 If the matter is brought to the attention of the Headteacher / Head of School they may decide to deal with your complaint directly at this stage, or they will direct the complaint to the relevant member of senior staff. If the complaints are specifically about the Headteacher / Head of School, these should be referred directly to the Clerk to the Trust using the proforma form at Annex 2 of this document.

2.5 Staff members should log all complaints on the school management information system and inform the Headteacher/Head of School of any serious concerns.

2.6 The academy will respect the views of a parent who indicates that they would have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff. In this case, the Deputy Headteacher / Headteacher will refer the parent to another designated member of staff. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved in the circumstances leading to the concern feels too

compromised to deal with it, the Deputy Headteacher may consider referring the parent to another member of staff. The member of staff may be more senior, but this is not essential.

2.7 There is no suggested timescale for resolution at this stage given the importance of dialogue through discussion, although it would be expected that most issues will be resolved within 15 school days. Where no satisfactory solution has been found, you will be advised that if you wish your concerns to be considered further you should write to the Headteacher (c/o Clerk to the Trust) under Stage 3 of this procedure within 15 school days.

Stage 3:

3.1 If your concerns are not resolved under Stage 2, you are entitled to put your complaint in writing, using the Complaint Form provided at Annex 2, and send this to the Head Teacher (c/o Clerk to the Trust) using the contact details provided at the end of this document.

3.2 It is very important that you include a clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint. We strongly encourage you to use the Complaint Form provided at Annex 2 of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, or require a blank hard copy of the form, please contact the Clerk to the Trust. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you. In all cases your written complaint must include:

- the nature of the complaint;
- details of how the matter has been dealt with so far;
- the names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events and copies of all relevant documents; and
- a clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint.

3.3 Your complaint will normally be acknowledged in writing within five school days of receipt. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the trust's complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This will normally be within 15 school days of receipt.

3.4 If appropriate, the Headteacher (or someone appointed by them) may invite you to a meeting to clarify your complaints and to explore possible resolutions. If you accept that invitation, you may be accompanied by one other person, such as a friend, relative or interpreter, to assist you. Where possible, this meeting will take place within 10 school days of receipt of the written complaint.

3.5 If necessary, witnesses will be interviewed and statements taken from those involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, the pupil will usually be interviewed by an appropriate member of staff. Pupils will normally be interviewed with their parent present, but if this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint or if the pupil has specifically said that they would prefer that their parents were not involved, another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable will be present. If the matter includes a complaint relating to a member of staff, the member of staff will have the opportunity to respond to the complaint.

3.6 Once the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, you will be provided with a written response to the complaint, including an explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. This will include what action will be taken to resolve the complaint (if any). You will be

advised that if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, you may request that your complaint be heard by referral to a complaint committee under Stage 4 of this procedure.

3.7 The trust may engage an independent, external person to carry out the investigation into the Stage 3 complaint or to review the investigation and response at Stage 3. This may be appropriate where the complaint is particularly complex or involves legal issues.

3.8 Please be aware that where your complaint relates to an employee a copy of the complaint may be shared with them in order to investigate the issues raised.

The table below sets out who you should send your complaint to and who will usually investigate and respond to your complaint:

Who is the complaint about?	**Who should the complaint be sent to?**	**Who will usually investigate?**
Deputy Head Teacher or the Deputy Head Teacher has already considered the complaint under Stage 2	The Head Teacher at the academy's address	A different member of staff will carry out the Stage 3 procedure
Head Teacher / Head of School or the Head Teacher / Head of School has already considered the complaint under Stage 2	Clerk to the Trust at the address at the end of this	A different member of staff will carry out the Stage 3 procedure
A Local Governor or the Chair of the Local Governing Committee	Clerk to the Trust at the address at the end of this document	Another Local Governor or Trustee (as applicable) will investigate the concerns in accordance with Stage 3
The Clerk to the Local Governing Committee or the Local Governing Committee as a whole	Chief Finance Officer (CFO) at the address at the end of this document	The CFO will determine the most appropriate action with regards to Stage 3 and Stage 4
Chief Executive Officer or if they have been closely involved at Stage 2	Clerk to the Trust at the address at the end of this document	A Trustee will carry out all the Stage 3 procedure
A Trustee or a Member of the Trust	Clerk to the Trust at the address at the end of this document	Another Trustee will investigate the concerns in accordance with Stage 3
Clerk to the Trust	Chief Finance Officer at the address at the end of this document	The CFO will determine the most appropriate action with regards to Stage 3 & 4
The Trust Board as a whole	Clerk to the Trust at the address at the end of this document	Arrangements will be made for the complaint to be independently investigated

If you are not sure who to send your complaint to, please contact the Clerk to the Trust who can advise you.

Stage 4: Referral to the Complaints Committee

4.1 If you are dissatisfied with the decision under Stage 3, you may request that a Complaints Committee be convened to consider your complaint. The Complaints Committee will principally consider how the complaint was handled at the previous stages but has discretion to review other aspects of the complaint as it sees fit. The Complaints Committee will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

4.2 To request a hearing before the Complaints Committee, you should write to the Chief Finance Officer (CFO), using the email address given at the end of this document, or in writing c/o Rivington and Blackrod High School, within 15 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 3. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. You should ensure that you provide copies of all relevant documents and state all the grounds for your complaint and the outcome that you are looking for.

4.3 Your written request will be acknowledged within five school days of receipt.

4.4 The CFO will arrange for a Complaints Committee to be convened, made up of at least three committee members, including:

- governors of a local governing body and/or trustees of the trust with no prior involvement in the matter; and,
- one person who is independent of the management and running of the academy.
- the Clerk shall appoint one of these committee members to be the Chair of the Committee.

4.5 Every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within 20 school days of the receipt of your request. As soon as reasonably practicable and in any event at least five school days before the hearing, you will be sent written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the committee members who will be present. Fair consideration will be given to any bona fide objection to a particular member of the committee. You will also be informed of the name of the person who will be presenting the case on behalf of the academy/trust (referred to in this policy as the 'academy representative'). This may be the person who is the subject of the complaint, the person who undertook the investigation at Stage 3 and/or another person with sufficient knowledge of the matter.

4.6 If, despite best efforts, it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date and time for a hearing within a reasonable timeframe, the CFO may determine that the hearing proceeds on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

4.7 You have the right to be accompanied to the hearing by a friend, relative or interpreter. You should notify the CFO in advance if you intend to bring anyone to the hearing. We do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the Complaints Committee meeting. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend. The Complaints Committee itself may take legal advice and/or be supported by a legal advisor at the hearing on matters of law and procedure.

4.8 A copy of the complaint and any other documents provided by you in support of your complaint, or by the academy representative in defence of the complaint, will be provided to the Complaints Committee as soon as practicable upon receipt. Copies of these documents shall also be provided to you or academy representative (as applicable) at least 3 school days before the hearing. The Complaints Committee reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented by either

party less than 3 school days prior to the hearing. The Complaints Committee is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. The committee will not normally accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

4.9 The hearing will be conducted to ensure that each party has the opportunity to address the Complaints Committee. The procedure to be followed during the hearing will be explained to the parties by letter in advance of the hearing. The CFO will ensure that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken or actions agreed. Electronic recordings of the hearing will not normally be permitted and, in any event, would require the consent of all those present.

4.10 Unless otherwise stated, the procedure for the Stage 4 hearing is as follows:

- the parent and academy representative will enter the hearing together;
- the Chair of the Committee will introduce the committee members and outline the process;
- the parent will explain the complaint;
- the academy representative and committee members will question the parent;
- the academy representative will explain the academy/trust's actions;
- the parent and the committee members will question the academy representative;
- the parent will sum up their complaint;
- the academy representative will sum up the academy/trust's actions;
- the Chair of the Committee will explain that both parties will hear from the committee within five school days;
- both parties will leave together while the committee decides;
- the CFO / Clerk, and any legal advisor assisting the committee (if applicable), will stay to assist the committee with its decision making.

4.11 The CFO and or Complaints Committee reserves the right to modify the above procedure at their sole discretion, for example requiring the parent and the academy representative to present their complaint/actions separately to the Complaints Committee in the absence of the other party.

4.12 A Complaints Committee may be adjourned if the Complaints Committee require further evidence or in exceptional circumstances (for example, if clarification sought by the Complaints Committee is essential to the proceedings). The adjourned date must be as soon as possible.

4.13 If you are going to be late for the hearing, then let the Clerk to the Trust or CFO know as soon as possible. If you have not arrived within 15 minutes *of* the scheduled start time, of if you tell the Clerk or CFO that you are not attending, the Chair of the Complaints Committee will decide if:

- The hearing will be adjourned or re-scheduled; or
- The hearing will proceed in your absence – findings and recommendations of the committee will be based on any representations made by the academy/Trust representative(s) at the hearing and the documents provided in advance by both parties.

4.14 After the hearing, the Complaints Committee will consider their decision and inform you and, where relevant, the person complained about of their decision in writing within 5 school days.

The letter will set out the decision of the committee together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The committee can (by a majority if necessary):

- 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 or trust systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

Stage 5: Referral of complaint to the Department for Education

5.1 If you are not happy with the complaints committee's decision, you can refer your complaint to the Department for Education (DfE) which has limited powers to consider complaints about academies. The DfE cannot change our decision about your complaint but can review whether the complaint was handled properly.

5.2 Details about the DfE procedure and the DfE complaints form are available at Complain about a school to the Department for Education - GOV.UK

Complaints about the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

5.3 To comply with the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage ("EYFS"), written concerns or complaints about whether an academy is meeting the EYFS requirements will be dealt with as follows:

- We will acknowledge the written concern or complaint within **5 school days**.
- The Head of School will investigate the concern or complaint, which may include meeting with you and the early years lead. We will send you a written response with the outcome of the investigation within **28 school day**s of receiving the complaint.
- If you are not happy with the outcome, you can ask for your complaint to be reviewed by a complaints committee at a hearing, as set out in Stage 4 onwards of this procedure.

5.4 We will keep a record of all written complaints about EYFS requirements and their outcomes and will make this available to Ofsted on request. If you have concerns about whether an academy is meeting EYFS requirements, you can also contact Ofsted at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or 0300 123 4666.

Roles and Responsibilities

5.5 The role of the Chief Finance Officer (CFO)

The CFO is the contact point for the complainant and the Complaints Committee, and should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure;
- liaise with staff, Headteacher/Head of School, the Chief Executive Officer, Chair of the Local Governing Committee and Chair of the trustee board (as applicable) to ensure the smooth running of the complaint's procedure;
- be mindful of the timescales to respond to complaints;
- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR);
- ensure that the Complaints Committee has access to legal advice, where appropriate;
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, taking reasonable steps to find a date that is convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale;
- ensure the meeting is minuted
- notify all parties of the Complaint Committee's decision;
- assist the academy/trust in issuing a summary letter to the complainant.

5.6 The role of the Headteacher/Head of School (or other party investigating as applicable in accordance with the procedure) at Stage 3

- to ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure;
- to ensure that the correct procedure has been followed;
- to ensure that an investigation is carried out, and a report compiled;
- to meet the complainant, if appropriate;

5.7 The role of the Chair of the Complaints Committee

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

- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy;
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child;
- the remit of the Complaints Committee is explained to the complainant;
- the written material is seen by everyone in attendance (provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR);
- key findings of fact are made, and that any issues not previously mentioned in writing should not be raised at the meeting and, if they are mentioned at the meeting, these should not be noted or considered by the Complaints Committee;
- both the complainant and the academy/trust are given the opportunity to make their case, and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting, or verbally in the meeting itself;

- the Complaints Committee is open-minded, acts independently and no committee member has an external interest in the outcome or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- the meeting is minuted.

Part 2: Concerns or complaints from other persons

Part 1 of this complaints policy applies only to complaints made by parents or carers of current registered pupils of the trust. However, the trust wishes to work closely with other members of the local community and will deal with their concerns and complaints as follows:

1 **Stage 1 -** a concern regarding an academy or its operations may be made to any member of staff. That member of staff will attempt to resolve the matter immediately or may, if appropriate, refer the matter to their line manager or member of the senior leadership team (SLT) who is best placed to deal with the concern. It is expected that most concerns will be responded to orally or in writing within five school days. If a longer period is required, you will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation.

2 **Stage 2** - where a concern is not resolved at Stage 1, or you wish your concerns to be dealt with immediately as a complaint, you should contact the Headteacher of the relevant academy to investigate. The Headteacher may delegate the task of investigation and/or responding to the complaint to a member of senior leadership or may escalate the complaint straight to Stage 3. It is expected that most concerns will be responded to orally or in writing within five school days. If a longer period is required, you will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation

3 **Stage 3- i**f your concerns are not resolved under Stage 2, you are entitled to put your complaint in writing and send this to the Headteacher/Head of School of the relevant academy. It is very important that you include a clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint. We strongly encourage you to use the Complaint Form provided at Annex 2 of this procedure. A formal response to the complaint will usually be provided within 15 school days of receipt of the letter of complaint although if a longer period is required to respond, you will be kept updated.

4 **Stage 4** - if you are not satisfied with the response at Stage 3, you may request a review by writing to the Clerk to the Trust. You should write to the Clerk to the Trust within 15 school days of receipt of the letter at Stage 3. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk to the Trust will usually arrange for a governor to consider the complaint alone or may refer the matter to the CFO to convene a Complaints Committee on the same terms as set out in Part 1 of this complaints policy. The decision at this stage will usually be sent to you within 15 school days of receipt of the request for a review or within 15 school days of the Complaints Committee hearing (as applicable).

5 **Stage 5** - if you are dissatisfied with the decision at Stage 3, you are entitled to refer your complaint to the Department for Education as outlined in Part 1 of this complaints policy.

Concerns or complaints regarding the Headteacher/Head of School or the trust should be referred direct to the Clerk to the Trust using the email address at the end of this document, or in writing, c/o Rivington and Blackrod High School who will arrange for the stages above to be considered by an appropriate person.

Part 3: Repetitious and vexatious complaints and complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

There are rare circumstances where we will deviate from the Complaints Procedure set out in Parts 1 and 2. These include, but are not necessarily limited to:

1 Repetitious, including serial and/or persistent, complaints

Where the complainant's complaint is the same, similar to or based on the same facts of a complaint which has already been considered in full and we have:

- taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns; and
- given the complainant a clear statement of our position and their options,

we will write to the complainant to advise that the complaints procedure has been exhausted and that we will not be responding to any further correspondence in relation to these matters. We will tell you how to contact the Department for Education if you wish to take things further.

2 Vexatious complaints

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator defines the characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint as:

- complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or 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; and
- demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- refusal to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refusal to co-operate with the complaints investigation process;
- refusal to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure;
- insistence on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introducing trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on;
- raising large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- seeking an unrealistic outcome, such as the inappropriate dismissal of staff;
- making excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;

- knowingly providing falsified information;
- posting information about your concern or complaint on social media or other public forums – sharing your complaint on social media can be harmful to those involved, is unlikely to lead to a quicker resolution and may be considered unreasonable behaviour.
- Encouraging or coordinating with other parents to submit multiple complaints about the same issue – your complaint should be specific to you and your child, and organising others to raise the same matter may be treated as a complaint campaign under Part 4 of this procedure and may not be dealt with under the usual complaint process
- Using artificial intelligence (AI) tools to draft complaints or the cite laws, regulations or guidance, where the AI-generated content is inaccurate, misleading or makes the complaint more complex than necessary.

3 Complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

Where the complainant's behaviour or language towards staff, governors, trustees, members, pupils or parents of pupils is aggressive, abusive, offensive, discriminatory or threatening or insulting personal comments are made about, or threats are made towards, staff, governors, trustees, members, pupils or parents of pupils.

In the circumstances outlined in (2) and (3) above, we may:

- inform the complainant that we consider their complaint to be vexatious or the manner in which they are pursuing their complaint to be unreasonable and why, and ask them to desist;
- conduct the Complaints Committee on the papers only i.e. not hold a hearing;
- refuse to consider the complaint any further and direct you to the Department for Education

We may also restrict the complainant's access to the academy, e.g. requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only), requiring contact to take place with a named person only, restricting telephone calls to specified days and times or number of contacts or banning the complainant from the academy's premises in line with our Parental Conduct Policy.

Where the complainant's behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, governors, trustees, members, parents or parents of pupils we will consider other options - for example, reporting the matter to the police or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

Part 4: Complaint campaigns

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint campaign is defined as a complaint from three or more separate individuals (whether or not connected with the academy) which are all based on the same subject. Depending on the subject in question, we may deviate from the procedure set out in this policy and instead:

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

Annex 1

Matters excluded from the scope of this policy

Excluded Matters	**Signposting**
Admissions	The process for challenging admissions decisions is set out in our admissions policy in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.
Collective Worship	Complaints about the content of the daily act of collective worship should be directed to the local authority or the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). Complaints about the handling of a request to withdraw your child from religious education or the daily act of collective worship can be raised under this procedure
Safeguarding and Child protection matters	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. 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 Team.
Exclusions	The process for challenging exclusions decisions is set out in the DfE's statutory guidance and information can be found at: School suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
National Curriculum content	Complaints about the content of the national curriculum should be directed to the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk/contactus. However, complaints about the delivery of the curriculum, including the delivery of religious education (RE) and sex and relationships education, can be raised under this procedure.
Data protection matters	Complaints about data protection matters are handled under our **data protection policy** and in accordance with relevant guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the ICO directly, but the ICO will usually expect you to have raised your concerns with our Data Protection Officer in the first instance.
Freedom of information matters	Complaints about our compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 are handled under our **freedom of information policy** and in accordance with relevant guidance from the ICO. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the ICO directly, but the ICO will usually expect you to have raised your concerns with us in the first instance.

Local Governor / Trustee grievances	Complaints from Local Governors or Trustees will be dealt with under the Trust's internal governance procedures. This does not prevent Local Governors or Trustees from raising complaints in their capacity as a parent.
School re-organisation proposals	Where concerns are not adequately addressed by the academy, complaints can be raised directly with the Department for Education.
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.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Staff, Local Governor/Trustee or Member conduct	Certain complaints about staff, local governors/trustees or members may need to be dealt with under the academy's internal disciplinary and governance procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member, local governor/trustee or member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with the local authority.
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 whistleblowers 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 should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of the complaint

Annex 2

Complaints Form

Your name:
Pupil's name:
Your relationship to pupils:
Your address and postcode:
Your daytime telephone number:
Your evening telephone number:
Your email address:
Your complaint is: (if you have more than one complaint, please number these)
What action have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint(s) in accordance with Stage 1/ Stage 2/ Stage 3 of the academy's complaints procedure? (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)

What would you like as an outcome from your complaint(s)?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, give details here:

Your signature…… Date ……

All functions of the complaints procedure must adhere to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Please complete and return to the academy in a sealed envelope addressed to the Headteacher / Head of School, or Clerk to the Trust or Chief Finance Officer (as appropriate).

Office use

Date received ……

Date acknowledgement sent ……

Responsible member of staff ……

Annex 3

Summary of Complaints Procedure for Parents & Carers (Part 1)

Stage 1:	Parent brings complaint to attention of member of staff
	Issue to be resolved as speedily as possible
	Where no satisfactory solution has been found, parent to be advised that they should proceed to Stage 2
Stage 2:	Parent to put complaint in writing using Complaint Form
	Issue to be resolved (guide: within 15 school days)
	Where no satisfactory solution has been found, parent to be advised that they should proceed to Stage 3
Stage 3:	Parent to put complaint in writing using Complaint Form within 15 school days
	Complaint to be acknowledged within five school days
	Meeting with parents within 10 school days (where appropriate)
	Response to the complaint sent within 15 school days
Stage 4: Referral to Complaints Committee	Parent to request hearing within 15 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 3
	Request to be acknowledged within five school days
	Hearing to take place within 20 school days of receipt of request
	Notification of date, time and place of the hearing and details of the committee members present sent at least five school days before the hearing
	Academy representative and parents to submit evidence in support of their case to Clerk of the trustees at least 3 school days before the hearing
	Complaints Committee decision sent not more than five school days after the hearing

Contact details:

Clerk to Trustees: E Stoddard – email: clerk@lcect.co.uk

Chief Finance Officer (CF0): C Davies – email: cfo@lcect.co.uk

Postal Address

c/o Rivington and Blackrod High School,

Rivington Lane

Rivington

Bolton

BL6 7RU