

Concerns and complaints policy and procedure

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1 Policy statement

1.1 Vision, mission and values

We aim to be fair, open, and honest when dealing with any concern or complaint. All concerns or complaints will be given careful consideration and we will deal with them as swiftly as possible and in accordance with this policy.

We aim to solve any concern through dialogue and mutual understanding, and, in all cases, we put the interests of the student above all other issues. We will provide sufficient opportunity for any concern to be fully discussed, and then resolved. Underpinning this policy is our commitment to empowerment, respect and care for all students and staff.

1.2 Purpose and intent

The aims of the policy is to deal with complaints and concerns:

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

This policy 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 one of this policy outlines how parents/carers of registered students 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 two of this policy.

This policy does not apply to concerns and complaints relating to the matters listed in appendix one.

Anonymous concerns or complaints will not normally be investigated under this policy. The academy principal or the chair of the local academy committee or the chief executive officer (as appropriate), will determine whether there are exceptional circumstances to justify conducting an investigation into the issues raised.

All staff will be made aware of this complaints policy and procedure and are expected to review these 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.

In the following 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' and 'complaints committee meeting' means an in person or virtual meeting (i.e. phone or video call where all parties can participate verbally), virtual meetings/complaints committee meetings will only be held if all parties have access to appropriate equipment to attend and are happy to do so;
- 'parent' means a biological parent, carer or anyone who has parental responsibility or care for a child;
- 'school days' excludes weekends and academy holidays and periods of partial or total academy closure; and
- 'Trust' means the multi-academy trust i.e. Diverse Academies Trust.

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

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

1.3 Key policy principles

1.3.1 We acknowledge that raising concerns or complaints can be a difficult, emotional and a stressful time, particularly for parents and carers. We expect our staff to always be respectful and courteous when dealing with you. We also expect you to treat our staff with the same respect and courtesy. We will not accept abusive and threatening behaviour towards our staff from anybody at any time. In circumstances where this happens, we will take the action outlined in part three of this policy.

1.3.2 We expect all complainants to make reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution. This will usually be the most effective way to swiftly resolve any concerns.

1.3.3 We encourage parents and others to approach the Trust and/or academy with any concerns and refrain from airing concerns about the Trust and/or 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 student education.

1.3.4 To investigate your complaint properly and fairly, we have implemented a staged approach. We anticipate that almost all concerns and complaints that arise will be resolved at stage one or stage two outlined in this document.

1.3.5 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 three will only be used on very rare occasions to deal with repetitious and/or vexatious complaints or complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner.

1.3.6 Concerns or complaints should be brought to our attention as soon as possible. Any matter raised more than three months after the incident being complained of (or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three calendar months of the last of these incidents) will not be considered unless the principal or chair of the local academy committee accepts that there are exceptional circumstances to justify accepting the complaint out of time.

1.3.7 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.

1.3.8 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 we will follow the procedure set out in part four.

1.3.9 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.

1.3.10 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.

1.3.11 Any trustee or governor who is approached directly should refer complainants to the policy.

1.3.12 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.

1.3.13 If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

1.4 Roles and responsibilities

1.4.1 The role of the principal (and/or other party investigating as applicable in accordance with the procedure) at stage two is to:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated throughout the stage two procedure;
- ensure that the correct procedure has been followed;
- ensure that an investigation is carried out and a report compiled;
- meet the complainant; and
- if a satisfactory resolution is not reached at stage two and the complainant wishes to proceed to stage three, advise the complainant on how to proceed to the next stage of the process and they shall notify the governance professional.

1.4.2 The role of the appropriate person investigator

The role of the appropriate person (investigator) is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by providing a comprehensive, independent, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:

- sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved;
- reviewing the actions that have been taken to try and resolve the issue;
- interviewing staff and students and other people relevant to the complaint;
- giving due consideration to records and other relevant information – this may include reviewing unredacted student records to ensure a balanced view of the issue can be gained;
- analysing information and completing a report; and
- liaising with the complainant and the principal/stage two investigator (as appropriate) to clarify what the complainant feels would resolve the complaint.

1.4.3 The role of the academy business manager and/or governance professional

The academy business manager should have oversight of all stage one concerns. The governance professional is the contact point for the complainant in stages two to four. These roles should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure;
- liaise with staff, principal, executive leader(s), chair of the local academy committee and chair of the trustee board (as applicable) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure;

- be mindful of the timescales to respond to complaints;
- ensure that all people involved in the complaints process 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 meetings, 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 one, two and three paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the complaints committee meeting within an agreed timescale;
- minute the complaint committee meeting and any other meetings by request;
- notify all parties of the complaint committee's decision; and
- assist the academy/Trust in issuing a summary letter to the complainant.

1.4.4 The role of the chair of the complaints committee

The chair of the complaints committee has a key role, ensuring that:

- the complaints committee 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 complaints committee meeting are put at ease;
- 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 Data Protection Act 2018 or GDPR);
- key findings of fact are made, and that any issues not previously mentioned in writing should not be raised at the complaints committee meeting and, if they are mentioned at the complaints committee 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 complaints committee meeting, or verbally in the complaints committee 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; and
- the complaints committee meeting is minuted.

1.5 Records of complaints

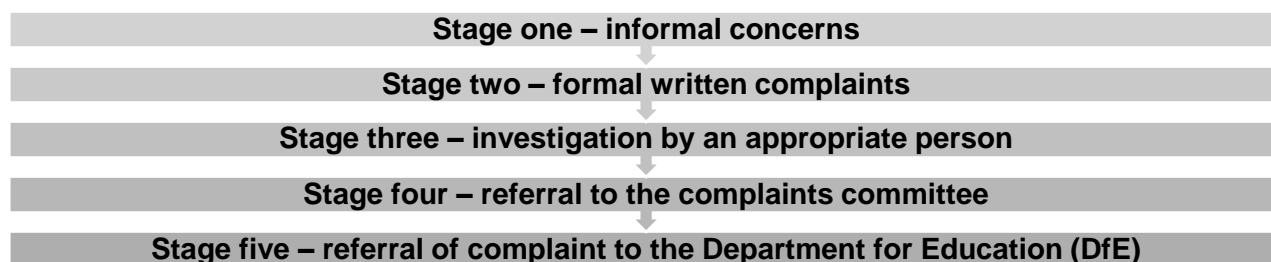
A record will be kept of all written formal complaints i.e. those from stage two onwards, including at what stage they were resolved and action taken by us as a result of those complaints regardless of whether they were upheld. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints 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 principal.

2 Policy and procedure

2.1 Part one – complaints from parents



Stage one – informal concerns

2.1.1 An informal concern can be raised in person, by email or by phone. Concerns may also be raised by a third party acting on behalf of a parent if they have appropriate authority to do so. Most enquiries and concerns can be dealt with satisfactorily by the tutor, head of year, class teacher, key stage lead or a senior leader, or other members of staff, without the need to resort to the formal procedure. We value informal 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.

2.1.2 It is always helpful if you can fully explain the nature of the concern and identify the outcome you are looking for. Where appropriate, you may be invited to an informal 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.

2.1.3 If the matter is brought to the attention of the principal, they may decide to deal with your concerns directly at this stage. If the concerns are about the principal, these should be referred directly to the governance professional of the local academy committee under stage two.

2.1.4 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 principal 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 the same, the principal may consider referring the parent to another member of staff.

2.1.5 Staff members should log all informal concerns which are considered to have the potential to become a formal complaint and should inform the principal of any serious concerns.

2.1.6 There is no suggested timescale for resolution at this stage given the importance of informal 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 principal under stage two of this procedure within 10 school days.

Stage two – formal written complaints

2.1.7 If your concerns are not resolved under stage one, you are entitled to put your complaint in writing to the relevant academy.

2.1.8 In order to ensure that your correspondence gets the priority it deserves, please complete the [stage two complaints form](#), which is our preferred method of recording your complaint. It is very important that you describe your complaint clearly and include a clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the academy office. 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
- a clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint.

2.1.9 Your complaint will normally be acknowledged in writing within five school days of receipt and, at this point, we will ask you for copies of any relevant documents associated with this complaint. The acknowledgement will also give a brief explanation of our complaints procedure.

2.1.10 The principal (or someone appointed by them) will 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.

2.1.11 If necessary, witnesses will be interviewed and statements taken from those involved. If the complaint centres on a student, the student will usually be interviewed by a member of staff. 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.

2.1.12 Once the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, you will be provided with a written response to the complaint within 10 school days of the meeting (see 2.1.10). This will include an explanation of the decision and the reasons for it, and 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 considered by an appropriate investigator under stage three of this procedure.

Stage three – appropriate person investigation

2.1.14 If your concerns are not resolved under stage two, you are entitled to request that an appropriate person carries out an investigation. Please email the governance professional you have already been corresponding with to request this within 10 school days, otherwise the complaint shall be determined to be satisfied at stage two. An appropriate person is someone who is appointed for their specialist knowledge related to the subject matter of the complaint or who is independent of the academy, for instance where the complaint is particularly complex or involves legal issues.

2.1.15 On receipt of the request to escalate to stage three, the governance professional will liaise with the complainant and the investigating appropriate person to agree a mutually convenient time, date and location to review the complaint. This meeting will take place within 10 school days, unless by mutual agreement due to exceptional circumstances.

2.1.16 The person who has been appointed to conduct an investigation will:

- review all previous documentation as detailed in the written complaint completed at stage two;
- arrange and conduct interviews without fear or favour;
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent notetaker to document the meeting(s);
- prepare a comprehensive report that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems; and
- send the completed report to both the complainant and the principal/stage two investigator within 10 school days after the stage three meeting.

2.1.17 If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, you may request that your complaint be heard by a complaints committee under stage four of this procedure. The complaints committee will refer to the report when they are determining whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint.

Stage four – referral to the complaints committee

2.1.18 If you are dissatisfied with the decision under stage three, 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 one of the procedure.

2.1.19 To request a meeting with the complaints committee, please email the governance professional you have been corresponding with within 10 school days of receiving the stage three outcome. 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.

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

2.1.21 The governance professional will arrange for a complaints committee to be convened, made up of at least three committee members, including:

- governors of a local academy committee 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 (for example, this might be a governor from another academy within the Trust, a governor from another local school/college or an educational professional who has no link to the academy).

The governance professional shall appoint one of these committee members to be the chair of the complaints committee.

2.1.22 Every effort will be made to enable the complaints committee meeting to take place within 15 school days of the receipt of your request. As soon as reasonably practicable and in any event at least five school days before the complaints committee meeting, you will be sent written notification of the date, time and place of the complaints committee meeting, 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 complaints 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').

2.1.23 The complaints committee meeting shall take place within the school day. If, despite best efforts, the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates and times for a complaints committee meeting, the governance professional will determine that the complaints committee meeting proceeds on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

2.1.24 You have the right to be accompanied to the complaints committee meeting by a friend, relative or interpreter. You should notify the governance professional in advance if you intend to bring anyone to the complaints committee meeting. 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 complaints committee meeting on matters of law and procedure.

2.1.25 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 three school days before the complaints committee meeting. The complaints committee reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented by either party less than five school days prior to the complaints committee meeting. The complaints committee is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from those other than the parties (e.g. witnesses) but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. The complaints committee will not accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

2.1.26 The complaints committee meeting will be conducted to ensure that each party has the opportunity to address the complaints committee. The procedure to be followed during the complaints committee meeting will be explained to the parties by letter in advance of the complaints committee meeting. The governance professional 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 complaints committee meeting will not normally be permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it, and, in any event, would require the consent of all those present.

2.1.27 Unless otherwise stated, the procedure for the stage four complaints committee meeting is as follows:

- the parent and academy representative will enter the complaints committee meeting together;
- the chair of the complaints 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 complaints committee will explain that both parties will hear from the committee within five school days;
- both parties will leave together while the complaints committee decides; and
- the governance professional, and any legal advisor assisting the complaints committee (if applicable), will stay to assist the complaints committee with its decision making.

2.1.28 The governance professional and or complaints committee reserves the right to modify the above procedure at their sole discretion.

2.1.29 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 reconvened date must be as soon as possible.

2.1.30 After the complaints committee meeting, the complaints committee will consider their decision and inform the complainant of their decision in writing within five school days. The letter will set out the decision of the complaints committee together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The complaints 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; or
- recommend changes to systems or procedures, where practicable for the academy or Trust to implement, to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

Stage five – referral of complaint to the Department for Education (DfE)

2.1.31 If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the complaints committee, you are entitled to refer your complaint to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will only investigate the complaint in limited circumstances.

2.1.32 You can visit the DfE's website for more information on their [remit in relation to academy complaints](#).

2.1.33 You can contact the DfE for general assistance on complaint handling by:

- calling the national helpline on 0370 000 2288;
- using the DfE's [contact form](#); or

- writing to:
Department for Education
School complaints compliance unit
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

2.2 Frequently asked questions

2.2.1 What if the concern or complaint is about the principal?

In these cases, your complaint should be sent to the governance professional of the local academy committee via the [stage two complaints form](#), who will arrange for an appropriate person to carry out an investigation under stage three of the complaints procedure. Depending upon the nature of the complaint, it may be investigated by Trust internal disciplinary procedures.

2.2.2 What if the complaint is about a governor and/or the whole local academy committee?

Complaints about the chair of the local academy committee, any individual governor or the whole academy committee should be sent to the governance professional of the local academy committee via the [stage two complaints form](#). The governance professional will arrange for another governor or trustee (as applicable) with no connection to the complaint to investigate the concerns in accordance with stage three.

If the complaint is about the governance professional of the local academy committee or the local academy committee as a whole, you should send your complaint to the governance professional for the trustees via the [stage two complaints form](#), who will then determine the most appropriate action.

2.2.3 What if the complaint is about the chief executive officer?

If the complaint is about the chief executive officer of the Trust, or if they have been closely involved at any stage, your complaint should be sent to the governance professional for the trustees via the [stage two complaints form](#), who will arrange for a trustee to carry out an investigation under stage three of the policy.

2.2.4 What if the complaint is about a trustee or a member of the Trust, or the whole Trust board?

If the complaint is about a trustee or member of the Trust, you should contact the governance professional for the trustees via the [stage two complaints form](#), who will arrange for another trustee to investigate.

If your complaint is about the Trust board as a whole, you should send your complaint to the governance professional of the trustees via the [stage two complaints form](#), who will arrange for the matter to be independently investigated.

2.2.5 What if your complaint is about the governance professional for the trustees?

If the complaint is about the governance professional for the trustees, your complaint should be sent to the chair of the trustees via the head of governance – email aelway@diverse-ac.org.uk.

2.2.6 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.

2.3 Part two – concerns or complaints from other persons

Part one of this complaints policy applies only to complaints made by parents or carers of current registered students 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.

Stage one

2.3.1 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.

Stage two

2.3.2 Where a concern is not resolved at stage one, you should put your complaint in writing to the principal of the relevant academy to investigate via the [stage two complaints form](#). The principal may delegate the task of investigation and/or responding to the complaint to a member of the senior leadership team (SLT). A formal response to the complaint will usually be provided within 10 school days of receipt of the complaint of complaint, although if a longer period is required to respond, you will be kept updated.

Stage three

2.3.3 If you are not satisfied with the response at stage two, you may request a governor level review through the governance professional you have been corresponding with. To do so, please email them within 10 school days of receiving the stage two outcome. If no request is made within this timeframe, the complaint will be considered resolved at stage two. Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. The governance professional will usually arrange for a governor or an appropriate person to consider the complaint

alone or may convene a complaints committee on the same terms as set out in part one of this complaints policy. The decision at this stage will usually be sent to you within 10 school days of receipt of the request for a review or within five school days of the complaints committee meeting (as applicable).

Stage four

2.3.4 If you are dissatisfied with the decision at stage three, you are entitled to refer your complaint to the Department for Education as outlined in part one of this complaints policy.

Concerns or complaints regarding the principal or the Trust should be referred direct to the governance professional of the trustees who will arrange for the stages above to be considered by an appropriate person.

2.4 Part three – 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 one and two. These include but are not necessarily limited to the following.

2.4.1 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. The complainant will be referred to stage five.

2.4.2 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 on pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
- insistence on pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance; or
- 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 or by phone while the complaint is being dealt with;
- knowingly providing falsified information; or
- publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

2.4.3 Complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

Where the complainant's behaviour or language towards staff, governors, trustees or members is aggressive, abusive, offensive, discriminatory or threatening or insulting personal comments are made about, or threats are made towards, staff, and in the circumstances outlined in 2.4.2 above and in this section 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 complaints committee meeting; or
- refuse to consider the complaint any further and refer the complainant directly to stage four.

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

Where the complainant's behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, governors, trustees or members 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.

2.5 Part four – 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).

Appendix one – 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.
Child protection matters	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our safeguarding, child protection and low level concerns 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 Hub (MASH). Nottinghamshire County Council MASH Lincolnshire County Council MASH
Exclusions	The process for challenging exclusions decisions is set out in the Department for Education's statutory guidance and information .
National curriculum content	Please contact the Department for Education .
Academy 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 directly.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the Trust's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Certain complaints about staff may need to be dealt with under the Trust's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
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 a whistleblowing policy 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 to the Department for Education directly. Volunteer staff who have concerns should complain through the Trust's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the Department for Education , depending on the substance of the complaint

Appendix two – summary of complaints procedure for parents (part one only)

