

# Complaints Policy 2025

## EKC Schools Trust

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## Purpose

EKC Schools Trust welcomes suggestions for improving our work. This policy provides a clear framework for working together to resolve a complaint and is divided into two parts:

- **Part A:** Covers complaints received by individual academies.
- **Part B:** Covers complaints made against the Trust itself or central staff.

In all cases the following steps are applied to complaints received:



**Please note:** This policy does not apply to complaints relating to:

- Admissions
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Staff grievances or disciplinary issues
- Whistleblowing
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN), which are managed by the Local Authority

For these matters, please refer to the relevant separate policies.

**Please be aware that complaints will only be accepted if submitted on the complaints proforma on page 12 of this policy.**

## Part A – Complaints Received by Individuals Academies

From time to time, concerns or complaints may arise, often due to misunderstandings that can be quickly resolved. In most cases, these can be addressed informally by speaking with your child's class teacher, form tutor, or subject teacher.

When parents and staff work together with mutual respect, it sets a positive example for our children, and we want to reassure you that raising a concern will not affect the support or respect we show to your child or family in any way.

We encourage you to raise concerns as soon as possible—ideally within three months of the issue occurring. Delays can make it more difficult to investigate and resolve matters effectively.

### **Stage 1: Informal Action**

Complainants are encouraged to raise initial concerns directly with the relevant member of staff. All academies welcome these early conversations and take them seriously.

- In most cases, issues can be resolved promptly. However, if the member of staff is unable to address the matter immediately—for example, where they need to consult with colleagues to explore possible solutions—they will make a clear note of the concern, including the complainant's name, contact details, and the date.
- The staff member will contact the complainant once the matter has been investigated—normally within 10 working days—to explain what action has been agreed and/or how the situation will be monitored.
- If the matter cannot be resolved at this stage, the complainant will be advised that their ongoing concerns may be submitted in writing to the Headteacher (Stage 2) using the Trust Complaints Form (see Appendix 1: Complaints Form) and outlining what actions they believe would resolve the issue. The Headteacher will investigate the issue and discuss their findings with you to find a constructive way forward.

### **Stage 2: Referral to the Headteacher**

If the concern cannot be resolved informally, complainants may refer the matter to the Headteacher. The following steps will then be taken:

- The Headteacher will acknowledge the complaint—either orally or in writing—within 5 working days.
- A meeting or telephone call will be arranged with the complainant to clarify and supplement any information provided.
- The Headteacher or Deputy may invite another member of staff (not previously involved) to be present during discussions.
- The Headteacher, or a delegated senior leader, will arrange any necessary fact-finding interviews at a suitable time during the school day.
- A written record will be kept of all meetings, telephone conversations, and relevant documentation.
- Once all relevant facts have been gathered, the Headteacher or senior leader will provide a response.
- If the complaint was submitted in writing, a written response will also be provided.
- If the matter cannot be resolved at this stage, the complainant will be advised that their ongoing concerns may be submitted in writing to Local Governing Body (Stage 3) using the Trust Complaints Form (see Appendix 1: Complaints Form) and outlining what actions they believe would

resolve the issue.

- If the complaint is about the Headteacher, it should bypass this stage and proceed directly to Stage 3, to be handled by the Chair of the Local Governing Body.

### **Stage 3: Review by the Local Governing Body**

- The Chair of the Local Governing Body (LGB) will acknowledge the complaint in writing within 5 working days.
- The Chair will confirm that Stages 1 and 2 have been completed.
  - If the complaint has not been formally investigated, the Chair may request a full investigation before proceeding. This may involve the Headteacher or an independent investigator.
- If the complaint is not upheld following review, the Chair will issue written confirmation to the complainant.
- If the complaint is upheld, the Chair will convene a Complaints Panel of three LGB members within 20 working days.

Panel members will have had no prior involvement in the complaint and will elect a Chair from among themselves. All relevant documentation will be shared with panel members as early as possible.

The Chair of the panel will notify all parties of the date, time, and location of the meeting at least five working days in advance. The complainant will be informed of their right to:

- Be accompanied by a friend or representative.
- Submit additional written evidence in advance of the meeting.
- The Chair of the Complaints Panel will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted.
- After the meeting, the panel will consider the evidence and issue a written decision to the Chair of Governors or Headteacher and the complainant within 15 working days.
- If the academy-based complaints procedure has been completed and the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they may request a review by the Trust. This request must be submitted in writing using the Trust Complaints Form (see Appendix 1: Complaints Form) and outlining what actions they believe would resolve the issue.

### **Stage 4: Review by the Multi Academy Trust**

If the academy-based complaints procedure has been completed and the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they may request a review by the Trust. This request must be submitted in writing using the Trust Complaints Form (see Appendix 2: Complaints Form).

The Trust will only look into complaints about academies that fall into the following two areas:

- The academy did not follow its published complaints procedure when

handling the complaint. If this is confirmed, the Trust will request that the complaint be reconsidered within 30 days.

- The academy has failed to comply with a duty imposed under its funding agreement with the Secretary of State or any other legal obligation. If deficiencies are identified, the Trust will take appropriate action.

Please note:

- The Trust will not usually investigate complaints raised more than six months after the original decision or action, unless there is a valid reason for the delay.
- The Trust reserves the right not to investigate complaints it considers to be vexatious, malicious, or where it is satisfied that the academy has already taken, or plans to take, appropriate action to resolve the issue.

Once a complaint is escalated to the Trust, the following steps will be followed:

- Written complaints will be acknowledged within five working days. The complainant will be informed of the name of the Investigating Officer assigned by the Trust.
- The complainant will be asked to provide a written summary of the complaint using the Trust Complaints Form (see Appendix 2: Complaints Form).
- The academy will be asked to submit a written response within 10 working days, outlining:
  - How each stage of the complaints process has been followed.
  - How the complaint was considered.
  - Any supporting documentation.
  - Any confidential information that cannot be shared with the complainant (e.g. data relating to individuals not involved in the complaint).
- The Investigating Officer will respond to the complainant in writing, usually within 15 working days. If the investigation requires more time due to complexity, the complainant will be informed of the revised timescale.

### **The Role of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)**

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after the Trust has considered the matter, they may refer the complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). This can be done via the online complaints form available on the Department for Education website: [Contact the Department for Education - Contact type - GOV.UK](#)

The ESFA will ensure that the complaint has been dealt with properly by the Trust and will consider complaints about the Trust or academies that fall into any of the following three areas:

- 1) Where there is an undue delay or the Trust or Academy did not comply with its own complaints procedure when considering the complaint.
- 2) Where the Trust or Academy is in breach of its funding agreement with the Secretary of State.
- 3) Where the Trust or an academy has failed to comply with any other legal obligation.

The ESFA will not overturn an academy's decision. However, if it finds that the complaint was not handled properly, it may request that the complaint be reconsidered and that procedures be amended to meet regulatory requirements.

Further information about the role of the ESFA in dealing with complaints can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complain-about-an-academy/complain-about-an-academy>

## **Part B - Procedure for Complaints Against the Multi Academy Trust or Central Staff**

### **Stage 1: Informal Action**

Concerns or issues may occasionally arise, and when addressed promptly and considerately, they can often be resolved without the need for a formal complaint.

- Any concern should be raised as soon as possible with the member of staff responsible for the relevant area.
- All staff will make every effort to resolve concerns promptly and informally at this stage.
- The staff member will contact the complainant once the matter has been investigated—normally within 10 working days—to explain what action has been agreed and/or how the situation will be monitored.
- If no satisfactory solution has been found, complainants will be asked whether they wish their concern to be considered further.
- If the matter cannot be resolved at this stage, the complainant will be advised that their ongoing concerns may be submitted in writing to the CEO or Chair of Trustees (Stage 2) using the Trust Complaints Form (see Appendix 1: Complaints Form) and outlining what actions they believe would resolve the issue.
- In most cases, it is the complainant's decision whether to proceed formally. However, the Trust reserves the right to initiate the formal procedure if informal methods have been exhausted and the complainant remains dissatisfied. All details of a complaint will be kept confidential except in so far as they need to be shared with people who might contribute to their resolution.

## Stage 2: Referral to the CEO

If the concern cannot be resolved informally, and is referred to Stage 2, the following steps will then be taken:

- The CEO\* will acknowledge the complaint—either orally or in writing—within five working days.
  - \* If the complaint relates to the CEO, the complaint will be referred to the Chair of Trustees or the Governance Professional if relating to the Chair.
- The CEO or delegated representative will investigate the complaint and seek to resolve the matter. This may involve arranging a meeting or discussion with the complainant.
- The Trust will aim to provide a written response to a Stage 2 complaint within 14 working days of receipt.
- It should be noted that some outcomes of a complaint may lead to action being initiated under other formal procedures, such as safeguarding or disciplinary matters. Where this is the case, the complainant will be informed of the procedures that are to be followed. It should be noted, however, that due to data protection or other legal considerations, the Trust may not be able to share the outcome of those procedures.
- If the matter cannot be resolved at this stage, the complainant will be advised that their ongoing concerns may be submitted in writing to the Complaints Panel (Stage 3) using the Trust Complaints Form (see Appendix 1: Complaints Form) and outlining what actions they believe would resolve the issue.

## Stage 3: Complaints Panel

If a complaint is referred to the Complaints Panel, the following steps will then be taken:

- The complainant will be invited to attend a meeting with the panel to make representations and will have the right to be accompanied. The panel will arrange the meeting at a time and venue that is convenient for all parties. If the complainant chooses not to attend, the panel will proceed and make a decision in their absence.
- If further investigation is required, this will be arranged.
- The Complaints Panel aim to review the complaint and provide a written response within 14 working days, outlining a clear explanation of how the conclusion was reached alongside information on the next steps.
- The aim is always to resolve the complaint and promote reconciliation between the complainant and the Trust. However, it is acknowledged that not all outcomes may align with the complainant's expectations.

## The Role of the Secretary of State for Education (the Department for Education)

Should a complainant remain dissatisfied and believe that the Trust has acted



unreasonably or failed to fulfil a statutory duty, they may refer the complaint to the Secretary of State for Education.

Further information can be found on the government website: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

Please note that the Local Authority does not have a statutory duty to consider complaints about academies or multi-academy trusts. Therefore, there is no right of appeal to the Local Authority.

## **Persistent or Unreasonable Complainants**

While every effort is made to resolve complaints fairly and respectfully, there may be occasions where a complainant remains dissatisfied despite all procedures being followed and reasonable responses provided. In such cases, it may be appropriate to acknowledge that not all concerns can be resolved and to agree to disagree.

If a complainant continues to raise the same issues or persistently contacts the Trust or its academies without presenting new information, the Trust reserves the right to inform them in writing that:

- All appropriate procedures have been followed,
- Reasonable actions have been taken to resolve the matter, and
- The complaint is now considered closed.

EKC Schools Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and to providing a high-quality service. While we do not normally limit contact with complainants, we expect all interactions to be respectful. We will take action to protect staff from behaviour that is abusive, offensive, or threatening.

### **Definition of Unreasonable Complainants**

EKC Schools Trust defines unreasonable complainants as those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contact, hinder the Trust's ability to consider their own or others' complaints effectively.

A complaint may be considered unreasonable if the complainant:

- Refuses to clearly articulate the complaint or desired outcomes, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints process while expecting resolution.
- Insists on outcomes or processes that are inconsistent with the Trust's procedures or good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information, or raises excessive, detailed questions that must be answered immediately and to their own timescales.
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff and seeks to have them replaced.

- Changes the basis of the complaint during the investigation.
- Repeats the same complaint despite previous investigations concluding it has been addressed.
- Refuses to accept the outcome of a complaint where the procedure has been fully and properly completed (including those referred to the Department for Education).
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes.
- Makes excessive demands on staff time through frequent, lengthy, or complex contact, frustrating the complaints process.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:-

- a) Maliciously;
- b) Aggressively;
- c) Using threats, intimidation or violence;
- d) Using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- e) Knowing it to be false;
- f) Using falsified information;
- g) Publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as on social media websites or newspapers

Complainants are asked to limit the number of communications while a complaint is being processed, as repeated contact may delay resolution.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss concerns with the complainant informally before applying an “unreasonable” designation.

If the behaviour continues, the complainant will be informed in writing that their behaviour is considered unreasonable and asked to modify it. In cases of persistent disruption, the Trust may implement a communication plan, limiting the method and frequency of contact. This plan will typically be reviewed after six months.

In response to serious incidents of aggression or violence, the Trust will document the incident and inform the police. This may include banning the individual from Trust premises.

### **Dealing with Persistent or Unreasonable Complaints**

A persistent complainant is not someone who raises legitimate concerns or criticisms of the complaints process—for example, regarding timescales. Nor are they someone who is unhappy with the outcome of a complaint and are therefore seeking to challenge it.

However, there may be occasions where the Trust has taken all reasonable steps to resolve the matter, and it becomes appropriate to consider closing the complaint. This may be the case where:

- The complaint has been ongoing for a significant period of time.

- Continued correspondence is detracting from the Trust's ability to fulfil its responsibilities to pupils and staff.
- There is a valid reason not to follow the full complaints process in exceptional circumstances.

In such cases, the Trust reserves the right to close the complaint if the behaviour is deemed vexatious.

Before closing a complaint, the complainant will be given the opportunity to modify their behaviour. If the behaviour continues, the Trust may cease correspondence. Any further communications received after closure will be retained on file indefinitely, as will notes of any related telephone or in-person contact referring to the matter.

In cases where a complainant's behaviour is deemed to be anti-social, harassing, or significantly disruptive, the Trust reserves the right to refer the matter to the relevant authority for consideration of a Community Protection Warning under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

The Trust will only consider this step in exceptional circumstances, and in consultation with the appropriate authorities, to ensure that any action taken is proportionate and legally compliant.

## Complaints Form

### Your Details

Parent/Carer Name:	
Preferred Email:	
Contact Number:	
How would you like to receive a response:	

### Child Details

Child Name:	
Year Group:	
School Name:	

### Complaint Details

What is your concern and how has it affected you?

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Have you discussed this matter with a member of staff before filling in this form?

yes ☐ no ☐

If yes, who did you speak to and what was the response?

--

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

## Official Use

Date Received:

Date Acknowledgement Sent:

Complaint Stage:

Referred to:

Resolution reached:

Date outcome confirmed and complaint resolved: