

Complaints policy

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1. December 2018	Policy Committee	Full Review
2. August 2020	Head of G&C	Clarity around working days being school term dates only.
3. 13.10.2022	ALET Board	Review extended.
4. 30.03.2023	Head of C&G/CEO/ALET Board	Full Review
5. 25.03.2025	Head of G&C/CEO/ALET Board	Full Review
6. 09.02.2026	Head of G&C/CEO/ALET Board	Full Review Clarified stage 4 appeal is external. Changed wording to match current Strategic Plan Removed duplication in relation to approach to complaints at Trust and CEO level. Included templates for written complaints. Strengthened criteria/clarity around moving from stage 2 to stage 3.

Complaints policy

Our mission is “to transform lives through learning by igniting confidence, expanding opportunities, energizing the community, and generating prosperity. Through our Learning Philosophy and our core values of empowerment, enterprise, connectedness, and transformation we will provide our students and staff with a safe and supportive environment to thrive and become independent learners”.

We recognise the critical role of our Attributes (professional, confident, aware, resilient, enterprising) in advancing our mission and embedding a strong organizational culture.

Policy Statement

This policy sets out the Trusts' expectations regarding the handling of complaints to ensure that complaints, concerns, and issues raised by parents of pupils at the trust and others are properly investigated in an unbiased, non-judgmental, transparent, and timely and appropriate manner.

Principles

Complaints and concerns will be investigated to try to clarify what has happened, who was involved and what the complainant feels would put things right. We also intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits will be set for each action within each stage

Contents

- Principles2
 - 1. Aims3
 - 2. Legislation and guidance3
 - 3. Scope3
 - 4. Roles and responsibilities.....3
 - 4.1 The complainant3
 - 4.2 The investigator4
 - 4.3 The complaints co-ordinator4
 - 4.4 Governance Support to the local governing committee/Clerk to the Board of Trustees4
 - 4.5 Committee chair4
 - 5. Principles for investigation4
 - 5.1 Timescales.....5
 - 6. Stages of complaint We have adopted a 4-stage process for dealing with complaints.....5
 - 6.1 Stage 1: informal stage.....5
 - 6.2 Stage 2: formal stage5
 - 6.3 Stage 3: formal appeal stage7
 - 6.4 Stage 4: External stage.....8
 - 7. Unreasonable and persistent complaints9
 - 7.1 Unreasonable complaints9
 - 7.2 Serial/persistent complaints.....10
 - 7.3 Duplicate complaints10
 - 7.4 Complaint campaigns10
 - 8. Record-keeping and confidentiality.....11
 - 9. Learning lessons.....11
 - 10. Monitoring arrangements.....11
 - 11. Links with other policies.....12

1. Aims

Our trust aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents/carers of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial.
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response.
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Make sure any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair, and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law.
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process.
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school and trust improvement evaluation processes.

We try to resolve complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The trust will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on our website, and on the websites of our schools.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of schedule 1, to the [Education \(Independent School Standards\)\(England\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents/carers of pupils in our trust.

It is also based on [best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures](#) published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

3. Scope

This policy does **not** cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline
- Withdrawal from the curriculum (parents and carers can withdraw their child from any aspect of religious education, including the daily act of collective worship. They do not have to explain why)

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use trust premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures.
- Co-operate with the school or trust throughout the process and respond to deadlines and communication promptly.
- Ask for assistance as needed.
- Treat all those involved with respect.
- Do not approach individual governors about the complaint.
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media.

4.2 The investigator

An individual will be appointed to investigate the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes.
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely.
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the CEO/headteacher or complaints committee, which includes the facts and potential solutions.

4.3 The complaints co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator is the Head of Governance and

Compliance. The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure.
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the headteacher, chair of governors/trustees, clerk and CEO and chair of trustees.
- Be aware of issues relating to:
 - Sharing third-party information
 - Additional support needed by complainants; for example, interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person.
- Keep records.

4.4 Governance Support to the local governing committee/Clerk to the Board of Trustees

The governance support/clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings.
- Arrange the complaints hearing.
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing.

4.5 Committee chair

The committee chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout.
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case.

5. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened.
- Who was involved.
- What the complainant feels would put things right.

5.1 Timescales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant.
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay.

6. Stages of complaint We have adopted a 4-stage process for dealing with complaints:

- Stage 1 – informal resolution
- Stage 2 – formal investigation
- Stage 3 – panel hearing
- Stage 4 – review by the trust board

6.1 Stage 1: informal stage

We make every effort to address any concerns or complaints early through informal measures. The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible within the timescales set out in section 5.1.

The complaint should be addressed to the relevant member of school staff or the headteacher, either in person or by letter, telephone, or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact their school office, please refer to the individual school website for contact details.

The trust will acknowledge informal complaints within 5 school days, which will confirm how the trust intends to proceed, including an indication of the anticipated timescale.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the most appropriate member of staff – this may be the headteacher/the assistant headteacher and/or the subject of the complaint, if appropriate. A written response will be provided within 15 school days following the informal meeting and on the receipt of any further information required.

If the complaint involves the headteacher or a member of the local governing body, stage 1 will be completed by the Headteachers line manager or chair of the local governing committee if this relates to a governor.

If the complaint involves the chair of the local governing body, stage 1 will be completed either by another chair of a different local governing body, a member of the Executive Team or a member of the Board of Trustees or the Clerk of the Trust.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint (Stage 2).

6.2 Stage 2: formal stage

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint to the headteacher and/or the subject of the complaint in writing using form A provided for this in Appendix I:

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office please refer to the school website for contact details.

The headteacher (or other person appointed by the headteacher for this purpose) will acknowledge the complaint within 5 school days and request any further information as required by this procedure. Once we have received all the information required, an investigating officer will then be appointed and will initially contact the complainant, the investigating officer will provide a response within 15 school days of the receipt of any further information required to fulfil the investigation.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the clerk of the governing committee in writing within 10 school days.

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint in writing (unless the complainant has a sufficient reason to request a reasonable adjustment be made to amend this). This letter should provide details such as:

- Relevant dates and times
- The names of witnesses of events
- What the complainant feels would resolve the complaint

The letter should be submitted alongside copies of any relevant documents.

Addressing the complaint

Complaints not involving the headteacher or a member of the local governing body should be directed to the headteacher:

- Email: please refer to the school website.
- Letter addressed to the headteacher, delivered to the school office.
- Complaints involving the headteacher or a member of the local governing body should be directed to the CEO of the Trust. This can be done by:
Email: Sarah.Dawson@alet.org.uk
Letter addressed to ALET Head Office, Crescent Road, Reading RG1 5RQ
- Complaints involving the chair of the local governing body should be directed to the Head of Governance and Compliance:
Email: Clerk@alet.org.uk
- Letter: Head of Governance and Compliance, Activate Learning Education Trust, Crescent Road, Reading RG1 5RQ
- If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the Head of Governance and Compliance.

Investigation

The complainant will receive written acknowledgement of their complaint within 5 school days. An Investigating Officer will be appointed.

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the chair and vice-chair or
- The entire local governing body or
- The majority of the local governing body

The CEO or trust board will assign an investigator.

The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 15 school days of the receipt of any further information required to fulfil the investigation.

If for any reason the deadline may be missed, the complainant will receive an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions to be taken to resolve the complaint.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the way in which we reached our conclusions, they may wish to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the clerk to the governing board in writing within 10 school days.

6.3 Stage 3: formal appeal stage

If the complaint has been through Stage 2 and you are dissatisfied with the outcome and wish to take the matter further, you can escalate to Stage 3 – a meeting with the Trust’s Complaints panel. It is important to note that a Stage 3 panel is only likely to come to a different conclusion to that reached at Stage 2 if one or more of the following is the case:

- The procedures outlined in the Stage 2 formal stage were not correctly followed.
- Evidence was available at the time of the Stage 2 formal stage, but it was not fully or appropriately considered.
- The relevant school or other policies and procedures were not appropriately considered as part of the Stage 2 formal stage.
- The Stage 2 formal stage decision was so perverse that it could not have been reached by any reasonable person.

We request that Stage 3 Formal Appeal Stage requests are put in writing with the reasons for the appeal. A form for this at (Appendix 2) is provided for you to fill in.

Convening the panel

Complaints will be escalated to the formal appeal stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal stage.

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the trust and must consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school. The panel cannot be made up solely of local governing body members, as they are not independent of the management and running of the school.

If the complaint is about the CEO or a member of the Trustee Board a panel will be appointed by the trust and will consist of 3 members of the board not involved in investigating the complaint at stage 2.

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the chair and vice-chair or
- The entire trust board or
- The majority of the trust board
- The panel will be entirely made up of independent members.

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the chair and vice-chair or
- The entire local governing body or
- The majority of the local governing body

The panel will be made up of trustees and an independent panel member.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The clerk will aim to find a date within 25 school days of the request, where possible.

If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties. Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The board will ensure that minutes are taken of the hearing.

At the meeting

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless required as part of reasonable adjustments. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

At the review panel meeting, the complainant, and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish. We don't encourage either party to bring legal representation but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the trust and headteacher.

The outcome

The committee can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part.
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part. If the complaint is upheld, the committee will
- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint.
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 school days.

6.4 Stage 4: External stage

Where you have been through all the internal stages of the school's complaints procedure and are still unhappy with the outcome, you can contact the Department of Education. You are entitled to do this if you feel that the school has not handled your complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or has acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of its duties under education law.

The DfE will not normally investigate the substance of complaints but will consider whether the Trust has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

If the DfE upholds a complaint, then it will not overturn the decision taken by the Trust. It may do one or both of the following:

- Ask the school to reconsider the complaint from an appropriate stage; and or
- Ask the school to change its complaints procedure so that it complies with legal requirements.

Please use the following link to find further information on how to make a complaint to DfE How DfE handles complaints about academies – Gov.UK
Complaints need to be made via the online form. Please enclose with your submission to the DfE a copy of the complaint outcome.

7 Unreasonable and persistent complaints

7.1 Unreasonable complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced.
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the ESFA.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- Uses threats to intimidate.
- Uses abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language or violence.
- Knowingly provides falsified information.
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Please note: the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It is at the discretion of the trust what is deemed to be unreasonable.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school/trust while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email, or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's comments and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

Whenever possible, the school/trust will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues, the school/trust will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via email address.
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term.
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#)
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from school premises and ensuring appropriate measures of support are provided to staff where they are the subject of aggression and/or violence.

7.2 Serial/persistent complaints

If the complainant contacts the school/trust again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent.' We may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:

- We have taken every reasonable step to address the complaints' concerns.
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options.
- The complainant contacts the school/trust repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.

The case to stop responding is stronger if:

- The complaints' communications are often or always abusive or aggressive.
- The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff.
- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school/trust with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience
- Where we decide to stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will consider any new complaints they make provided the concerns raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern.

7.3 Duplicate complaints

If the school/trust has resolved a complaint under this procedure and received a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, the school/trust will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information that needs to be taken into account.

If the school/trust is satisfied that there are no new aspects, it will:

- Tell the new complainant that the issue has already been investigated and responded to, and that the local process is complete.
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the original handling of the complaint.
- If a duplicate complaint is raised which in the view of the school warrants further consideration, the procedure outlined in section 6 or 7 (as appropriate) will be repeated.

7.4 Complaint campaigns

Where the school/trust receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject,

especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school/trust may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school/trust website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's/trust's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

8. Record-keeping and confidentiality

The school/trust will record the progress of all complaints, including information about:

- Actions taken at all stages.
- The stage at which the complaint was resolved.
- The outcome

The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes related to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and stored securely and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

In the case of complaints about the trust or central staff, these records will be managed by the clerk to the board of trustees / head of governance and will be stored securely in the trust's offices under restricted access.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and records management policy / record retention schedule. The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole local governing body of the school (or the entire trust board) in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the local governing body is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the local governing body, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

9. Learning lessons

The trust board / CEO / other relevant trust leaders will receive regular reports on the types of complaints received in each school to support the development of appropriate support structures, and to inform any improvements to procedures or practice.

10. Monitoring arrangements

The CEO will monitor the effectiveness of the complaint's procedure Trust wide. This policy will be reviewed by ALET trust board each year.

At each review, the policy will be approved by the ALET board of Trustees.

11. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Suspension and permanent exclusion policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- Special educational needs policy and information report
- Privacy notices

Appendix 1 Complaint Form – Stages 1 and 2

Please complete and return to Headteacher/Governance professional to Trustees who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. For further information on how to make a complaint, please refer to:

[How DfE handles complaints about academies - GOV.UK](#)

• Your name:
• Pupil's name (if relevant):
• Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
• Address: • • • • Postcode: Contact Number:
• Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.
• What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Date and signature:
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Date:

Appendix 2 Complaint Form – Stage 3

Please complete and return to Governance professional to Trustees who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. For further information on how to make a complaint, please refer to: [How DfE handles complaints about academies - GOV.UK](#)

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address:
Postcode: Contact Number:
Please give details of why you wish to take this complaint to Stage 3

Which of the following do you think apply? Please briefly explain:

- The procedures outlined in the Stage 2 formal stage above were not correctly followed.
- Evidence was available at the time of the Stage 2 formal stage, but it was not fully or appropriately considered.
- The relevant school or other policies and procedures were not appropriately considered as part of the Stage 2 formal stage.
- The Stage 2 formal stage decision was so perverse that it could not have been reached by any reasonable person.

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Date and signature:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date: