Connect Academy Trust
Complaints Policy

Approved by the Board of
Connect Academy Trust, September 2026

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8	September 2024	No Change
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10	September 2026	Updated in line with DfE, ParentKind and Confederation of School Trusts (CST) Guidance on Complaints Policies (June 2026), including strengthened early resolution, partnership working, AI guidance, SEND responsibilities and complaints learning. Response times updated and renamed as Complaints Policy.

For Next Review and Approval by the Board of Connect Academy Trust, September 2027

Complaints Policy

If you have complaint, we would like you to let us know.

Who can make a complaint?
This procedure is available to parents and carers of current pupils. Anonymous complaints will generally not be investigated unless there are exceptional circumstances or safeguarding concerns. From this point onwards 'parent' refers to parents and carers.

Working Together with Parents
A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'. A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'. At Connect Academy Trust, we believe that children achieve their best when schools and families work together in a positive and respectful partnership. We value the important role that parents play in their child's education and are committed to maintaining open, honest and supportive communication. We understand that, from time to time, questions, concerns or misunderstandings may arise. We encourage parents to share these with us in person, as early as possible so that we can listen, understand the issue and work together to find a solution. Raising a concern or complaint will not affect the way your child is treated or supported within any Connect Academy Trust school. We are committed to considering all concerns fairly, objectively and without prejudice. We view feedback, concerns and complaints as opportunities to strengthen relationships, improve our practice and ensure we continue to provide the best possible education and support for every child. If you require this policy or complaint form in an alternative format, require an interpreter, or need any reasonable adjustment to access this procedure, please contact the school office or Trust.

Early Resolution
Most concerns can be resolved quickly through open and constructive discussion without the need for a formal complaints process. We therefore encourage parents to speak with the relevant member of staff as soon as a concern arises. Where appropriate, we will usually offer a face-to-face meeting or telephone conversation as the first step in resolving a concern. Experience shows that talking through concerns together often leads to a quicker, clearer and more positive outcome than lengthy written correspondence.

During these conversations we will:

- listen carefully to your concerns;
- seek to understand your perspective;
- explain any relevant information or decisions;
- discuss possible solutions; and
- agree any appropriate next steps.

If, after these discussions, the concern remains unresolved, parents may progress to the Trust's formal complaints procedure below. Throughout the process, we will continue to work collaboratively and respectfully to achieve a fair and timely resolution wherever possible.

We ask parents to carefully consider issues and follow ParentKind guidance, before making a formal complaint.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Communications and Complaints

We recognise that parents may choose to use artificial intelligence (AI) tools to help draft correspondence or organise their thoughts when raising a concern or complaint. AI can be a helpful tool to improve clarity and structure, particularly where parents may find written communication challenging. Where AI has been used, all correspondence must reflect the parent's genuine concerns and experiences, is accurate and relevant to the matter being raised and has been reviewed before being submitted. Parents remain responsible for the accuracy of the content of any communication sent to the Trust or school. AI-generated content can sometimes include factual inaccuracies, references to legislation or guidance that are not relevant to the circumstances, or unnecessary levels of detail. Where correspondence is unclear or contains information that does not relate directly to the complaint, we may seek clarification or arrange a telephone or face-to-face meeting to ensure we have a shared understanding of the issues before beginning our investigation. This helps us provide a fair, thorough and timely response. Parents must also take care not to enter confidential or sensitive personal information about children, staff or other individuals into publicly available AI tools, as information entered into these services may be processed or retained outside the Trust's control. Our aim is always to understand the concerns being raised and work collaboratively with families to achieve an early and appropriate resolution, regardless of how correspondence has been prepared.

Concerns Relating to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

We recognise that concerns relating to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) can be particularly important and, at times, complex. We are committed to working in partnership with parents to ensure that children receive the support they need and that concerns are listened to carefully, considered fairly and addressed as early as possible. Many SEND concerns can be resolved through open discussion with the class teacher, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENDCo) or Headteacher, following the flow chart in Appendix A. We encourage parents and carers to raise concerns at the earliest opportunity so that we can work together to understand the issues and identify appropriate solutions. The school is responsible for identifying and supporting pupils with SEND, delivering provision that is within its responsibility, reviewing support arrangements and making reasonable adjustments where appropriate. However, some aspects of SEND provision are the responsibility of the Local Authority, including some decisions relating to assessments, the issuing and maintenance of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and certain statutory decisions. Where a concern relates to a Local Authority decision or statutory SEND process, we will explain the appropriate route for raising that concern and, wherever possible, support parents in accessing the correct information or service. Where concerns relate to the support or provision delivered by the school, these will be considered in accordance with this Concerns and Complaints Policy. Our aim is to work collaboratively with families, external agencies and the Local Authority to achieve the best possible outcomes for every child and to resolve concerns through positive and constructive partnership wherever possible.

Respectful Communication and Unreasonable Behaviour

At Connect Academy Trust, we are committed to working in partnership with parents and recognise that concerns or complaints may arise during difficult or emotional situations. We will always seek to respond with professionalism, courtesy and respect, and we expect that all communication with our staff and volunteers is conducted in the same manner. We expect parents and other members of our school community to communicate in accordance with the Trust's Parent Code of Conduct, which sets out the standards of behaviour and respectful communication expected when engaging with our schools and Trust. In most cases, concerns can be resolved through constructive dialogue. However, where behaviour

becomes unreasonable, persistent or abusive, or places unreasonable demands on staff, volunteers or Trust resources, we may take proportionate steps to manage communication whilst continuing to consider the concern wherever possible.

Examples of unreasonable behaviour may include, but are not limited to:

- the use of abusive, offensive, threatening or discriminatory language;
- attempting to bypass complaints processes;
- sending excessive, repetitive or lengthy emails that do not introduce any significant new information or continue to raise issues that have already been fully considered;
- repeatedly making the same complaint after the Trust's complaints procedure has been completed, without presenting new evidence or information that would materially affect the outcome;
- submitting multiple complaints about the same issue through different routes or to different members of staff or volunteers simultaneously;
- making unreasonable demands on staff time or expecting immediate responses outside of the published timescales;
- refusing to engage with reasonable attempts to resolve concerns through discussion or meetings;
- recording meetings or conversations without the knowledge and consent of those present;
- behaviour or communication that causes staff to feel intimidated, harassed or unsafe
- refusing to articulate the complaint or desired outcome despite reasonable assistance being offered"; "refusing to cooperate with a reasonable investigation process;
- changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation progresses
- knowingly providing false information; or
- publishing unacceptable, abusive or defamatory material about staff or pupils on social media or other public forums.

Examples of steps we may take include requiring future communication to be in writing, providing a single nominated point of contact, limiting correspondence to a reasonable frequency or ending telephone calls or meetings where behaviour is abusive or threatening.

Where a complaint has been fully investigated and the Trust has provided its final response, we will not normally enter into further correspondence about the same issues unless significant new evidence or relevant information is provided that could reasonably affect the outcome. Where repeated correspondence continues without new information, the Trust may acknowledge receipt without providing a substantive response or may advise that the matter is considered closed.

Wherever possible, concerns about communication or conduct will be discussed informally with the individual first so that expectations can be clarified and unnecessary restrictions avoided. Where it becomes necessary to manage unreasonable behaviour, the Trust will normally write to explain the reasons for its decision, any restrictions that may be put in place, how long they will remain in place and how the individual may ask for the decision to be reviewed. Any restrictions placed on communication will be reasonable, proportionate and reviewed periodically. Any restrictions will not prevent genuine concerns, new complaints or matters relating to the welfare or safeguarding of a child from being considered fairly and impartially.

Where the Trust receives a large volume of substantially similar complaints relating to the same issue, it may publish a single response or issue a standard response. This will not prevent individual complaints relating to a pupil's own circumstances being considered separately where appropriate.

Confidentiality

The Trust will treat all concerns and complaints with appropriate confidentiality and in accordance with the requirements of UK data protection legislation. Information relating to a complaint will only be shared with those who need it in order to investigate, respond to or resolve the matter. Throughout the complaints process, we will seek to protect the privacy of children, families and members of staff. There may be occasions where we are unable to share specific information with a complainant. This may be because it relates to another child, member of staff or third party, or because disclosure would breach legal or confidentiality obligations. Similarly, where a complaint results in staff disciplinary, capability or safeguarding procedures, the Trust may confirm that appropriate action has been taken where appropriate but will not share details of any confidential employment or safeguarding processes. We ask that all parties involved in the complaints process respect the confidential nature of the information shared and refrain from sharing correspondence or documentation more widely unless there is a lawful reason to do so. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access is requested by the Secretary of State or by a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, or where disclosure is otherwise required by law.

Record Keeping and Learning from Complaints

The Trust will maintain a written record of all formal complaints received, including the nature of the complaint, the stage reached, actions taken, outcomes and far the complaint progressed through the formal complaints procedure. Complaint records will be retained in accordance with the Trust's Data Retention Schedule and Data Protection Policy. The Trust recognises complaints as an important source of feedback and learning. Information from complaints will be reviewed periodically to identify themes, trends and opportunities to improve our policies, procedures, communication and the experiences of pupils, parents and carers. Where appropriate, anonymised information may be reported to senior leaders, Local Governing Bodies and the Board of Trustees to support continuous improvement across the Trust.

Timescales

The Trust is committed to resolving concerns and complaints as promptly as possible, recognising that early resolution is in the best interests of everyone involved. We will always aim to investigate concerns thoroughly, communicate openly and keep complainants informed throughout the process.

The Trust will normally work to the following timescales:

- Stage 1 – Informal Concerns: We encourage concerns to be raised as soon as possible and will seek to resolve them through discussion with the appropriate member of staff, wherever possible within 10 school days.
- Stage 2 – Formal Complaint: The Trust will acknowledge receipt of a formal complaint within 5 school days. A full written response will normally be provided within 15 school days of the acknowledgement.
- Stage 3 – Review by a member of Executive Leadership Team (or nominated representative): Where a complaint is escalated to the Trust, receipt will be acknowledged within 5 school days. Following a review of the complaint, a full written response will normally be provided within 15 school days of the acknowledgement.
- Stage 4 – Complaint Review Panel: Where a complainant has not been resolved at Stage 3, a Complaint Review Panel will usually be arranged. The Governance Professional will normally arrange the panel hearing within 15 school days of receiving the request (excluding school holidays). The panel's decision will normally be communicated in writing within 15 school days of the hearing.

Whilst every effort will be made to meet these timescales, some complaints are more complex and may require additional time to ensure that they are investigated fairly and thoroughly. Delays may occur where additional information is required, key individuals are unavailable, the complaint is particularly complex, or during school holiday periods. Where it is not possible to meet the published timescales, we will contact the complainant as soon as reasonably practicable to explain the reason for the delay, provide an update on the progress of the investigation and confirm a revised timescale for our response. We ask complainants to support the process by responding promptly to requests for information and engaging with meetings or discussions where appropriate. This helps us to investigate concerns efficiently and work towards an early and fair resolution. The Trust will make every effort to progress complaints without unnecessary delay whilst ensuring that each concern is considered carefully, impartially and proportionately.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, 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. If this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

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

This policy does not cover the following types of complaints for which there are statutory or formalised procedures in place:

Procedure dealing with:	Further information available from:
Appeals with respect to admissions	See Trust Admissions Policy or contact the Local Authority's School Admissions Team
Appeals with respect to suspension or exclusion of pupils	See Trust Behaviour/Exclusions Policy or contact the Local Authority's Inclusion and Attendance Manager
Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP)	Local Authority's 0-25 SEND Statutory Assessment Team
National Curriculum and Religious Education	Local Authority's Education and Learning team
Matters likely to require a Child Protection	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 Hub (MASH).
Whistleblowing	The Trust has an internal Whistleblowing Policy for employees and voluntary staff which is available from the Trust Website.
Staff Grievances and Disciplinary procedures	The Trust has internal Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures for employees which are available from the Trust office.
Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information requests	See the Trust's Freedom of Information and Data Protection Policies
Services provided by other external organisations who use the Trust premises or facilities	External providers should have their own complaints procedures and should be contacted directly.

Complaints about staff conduct

- *complaints against staff are dealt with by the headteacher or someone they designate too, such as a deputy, then follow the complaints procedure including a panel hearing if applicable.*
- *complaints against the head teacher are dealt with by the chair of governors and then a panel hearing, if applicable*

5. What To Do First If You Have Any Concerns (Stage 1)

Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the incident or, where there is a series of related incidents, within three months of the last incident. The Trust will consider complaints made outside that period where there are exceptional circumstances. Complaints submitted outside term time will be treated as received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Most concerns can be sorted out quickly by speaking with your child's class teacher, or another member of staff.

We encourage face-to-face conversations wherever possible, as these often enable concerns to be resolved more quickly than lengthy written correspondence. You can take a friend or relation to the appointment with you if you want to, although they will be present as moral support only and are not able to take an active part in the meeting. All staff will make every effort to respond to your concerns informally. They will make sure that they understand what you feel went wrong, and they will explain their own actions to you. They will ask what you would like the school to do to put things right. Of course, this does not mean that in every case they will come round to your point of view but it will help both you and the school to understand both sides of the issue. It may also help to prevent a similar problem arising again.

6. What To Do Next (Stage 2)

If you are dissatisfied with the response to your concern at Stage 1, you can make a formal complaint to the Headteacher. This can be done by completing the attached complaint form. Completion of the Complaints Form is not mandatory but we ask that formal complaints are submitted using the Complaint Form to ensure all relevant information is included. Where a complaint is received by another method, the Trust may ask the complainant to complete the form before the investigation begins. The Headteacher will arrange an investigation of the complaint as required and may interview any members of staff or pupils involved. The Headteacher may ask to meet you for a discussion of your complaint and the outcome of the investigation. Again, you may take a friend or relation with you if you wish. Media, legal or other representatives are not permitted to attend. You will receive a written response to your complaint.

If your complaint is about the headteacher, the CEO will arrange an investigation of the issue at this stage, this can involve the Governing body of the school. See 'If You Are Still Unhappy' below. If your complaint is about the CEO or a member of the Board of Trustees, then you should refer your complaint to the Governance Professional of the Trust, via admin@connectacademytrust.co.uk

7. If you are still unhappy (Stage 3)

Nearly all complaints are resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2. However, if you are dissatisfied with the response you may wish to contact the CEO or Governance Professional at Connect Academy Trust, via admin@connectacademytrust.co.uk

The complaint will be reviewed by a Trust representative who has not been directly involved with the complaint or its earlier determination. The Trust representative will respond to the complainant at this stage. The Trust representative will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days. Where appropriate, the Trust representative may summarise the complaint into a number of agreed areas of investigation to ensure all parties have a shared understanding of the issues to be considered. The Trust representative can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this. Media, legal or other representatives are not permitted to attend meetings.

The Trust representative will consider the complaint, the Stage 2 investigation and response, the information submitted by the complainant and any further enquiries reasonably required. The Trust representative may uphold, partially uphold or not uphold the complaint and may require further action where appropriate. If the Trust representative consider further enquiries are required, they will:

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

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Trust representative will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If we are unable to meet this deadline, we will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date. The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of the actions the school will take to resolve the complaint. The response will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 3. Complaints about the CEO, a member of the Trust Board, or local governing body of the school, must be made in the first instance to the Trust Governance Professional via the Trust's central office, who will refer the matter to the Executive Leadership Team or Trustees as appropriate.

8. Stage 4 – Formal Complaint Panel

If the complaint is not resolved at Stage 3 and the complainant wishes to take the matter further, they can request the complaint is escalated to Stage 4. This involves a panel hearing consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the Trust and School. The panel will only consider matters raised during the earlier stages of the complaints procedure and may make findings and recommendations. New complaints should normally be considered separately through Stage 1. The role of the Complaint Review Panel is not to reinvestigate the complaint, but to consider whether the complaint has been investigated fairly, whether the correct procedure has been followed and whether the conclusions reached were reasonable in light of the evidence available.

This is the final stage of the Trust complaints procedure.

The aim of the panel hearing will be:

- reconciliation
- to put right the things that may have gone wrong

A request to escalate to Stage 4 must be made to the Trust Governance Professional, via admin@connectacademytrust.co.uk, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 response. Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. The Trust Governance Professional will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days. The Trust Governance Professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date, time and location of the panel hearing at least 5 working days in advance. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 days of receipt of the Stage 4 request. If this is not possible, the Trust Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed. The Governance Professional will make reasonable efforts to agree a date convenient to the parties. If the complainant rejects three reasonable proposed dates without good reason, or is unable or unwilling to attend, the Governance Professional may arrange the hearing to proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of the written material A complainant may bring someone along to provide support, this can be a relative or friend. Media, legal or other representatives are not permitted to attend complaint meetings.

At least 5 school days before the meeting, the Trust Governance Professional will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting

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

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

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The Panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The Panel can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part

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

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the Trust's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The Chair of the Panel will provide the complainant and school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 15 school days of the panel hearing. The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school. 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 the Trust and/or school will take to resolve the complaint. The Panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person about which a complaint was made. A written record will be kept of all complaints and of whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or proceeded to a panel hearing. Following the meeting the Governance Professional will issue a letter confirming the panel's decision.

If, after completing the Trust's complaints procedure, you believe the Trust has not followed its published complaints procedure or has acted unlawfully or unreasonably, you may refer your complaint to the Department for Education. The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of the complaint. Complaints can be online or by post to: Department for Education, School Complaints Compliance Unit, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD.

9. Complaints escalated to or about the Trust, CEO or a Trustee

If a complaint is escalated to the Trust or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the Trust, then the complaint should be sent to the Trust Governance Professional to be investigated. The Trust Governance Professional will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 5 school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will be investigated under Stage 3 or 4 of this Complaints Policy and confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant. Following the investigation, the relevant person will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 15 school days of the date that the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the relevant person will write to the Complainant within 5 school days of the date that the letter was received, explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a Trustee, the complaint should be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board or another Trustee. If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair or Members of the Trust for investigation. Where the Chair of the Trust Board has investigated the complaint, they will write the letter of outcome to the complainant and provide a copy to the CEO. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Trust Governance Professional asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel, within 10 school days. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Trust Governance Professional will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days. The Trust Governance Professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date, time and location of the meeting at least 5 working days in advance. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 4 request. If this is not possible, the Trust Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed. However, the Complaint Panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Trust Governance Professional will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence based on written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Trust Board or
- the majority of the Trust Board

This will be heard by a completely independent Complaint Panel.

The Complaint Panel will consist of three members. None of the three members of the Complaint Panel will have been involved in the incidents or events which led to the complaint or dealing with the complaint in the previous stages or have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint. One of the Complaint Panel members will be independent of the management and running of the school/Trust. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will neither be a Trustee or an employee of the Trust. A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Media, legal or other representatives are not permitted to join complaints processes.

At least 5 school days before the meeting, the Trust Governance Professional will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.

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

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

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The Panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The Panel can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part

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

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school or Trust's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The Chair of the Panel will provide the complainant and CEO with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 15 school days of the panel meeting.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the Trust. 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 the Trust will take to resolve the complaint. The Panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. A written record will be kept of all complaints and of whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or proceeded to a panel hearing.

Appendix A –Complaints flow chart

Stage 1 – Early Resolution of Concern (Telephone call, meeting or discussion) with your child's class teacher (or headteacher in some cases)

Issue Resolved	**Issue not resolved**
No further action required	Consider submitting a formal complaint

Stage 2 – Formal complaint to the Headteacher

The Headteacher will:

- Acknowledge receipt of complaint within 5 school days
- Investigate the complaint
- If the complaint is about the headteacher, the CEO will arrange an investigation at this stage, which may involve the governing body of the school.
- Acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 school days and provide a full written response within 15 school days of the acknowledgement, in accordance with Section 6 of this policy. Where appropriate, a meeting may be arranged as part of the investigation.
- Written response issued to complainant setting out the outcome of the investigation, reasons for the decision and details of any further right of escalation.

Issue Resolved	**Issue not resolved**
No further action required	Consider submitting a formal complaint to the Trust Governance Professional for the CEO

Stage 3 – Formal complaint to the Trust

- Governance Professional will acknowledge receipt of complaint within 5 school days
- The Trust representative/member of the Executive Leadership Team will review the complaint and provide a full written response within 15 school days of the acknowledgement.
- CEO will respond to the complainant at this stage

Issue Resolved	**Issue not resolved**
No further action required	Request a Stage 4 Complaint Review Panel by writing to the Trust Governance Professional within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 response

Stage 4 – Formal complaint panel

- The Governance Professional will normally arrange the Complaint Review Panel hearing within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 4 request (excluding school holidays), in accordance with Section 8 of this policy.
- The panel will hear evidence from both the complainant and school/Trust and make a decision on the complaint

The panel's decision and reasons will be communicated in writing within 15 school days of the panel hearing, in accordance with Section 8 of this policy.

Issue Resolved

No further action required

Issue not resolved

Consider submitting a formal complaint to the Secretary of State, Department of Education

Stage 5: Escalation to the Department for Education (DfE)

- The DfE will consider complaint on behalf of the Secretary of State
- The DfE will look at whether the Trust followed its own procedures and will not normally reinvestigate the substance of the complaint
- The Secretary of State will only intervene where the Board of Directors has acted unlawfully or unreasonably and where it is expedient or practical to do so

If, after completing the Trust's complaints procedure, you believe the Trust has not followed its published complaints procedure or has acted unlawfully or unreasonably, you may refer your complaint to the Department for Education. The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of the complaint.