



RPT Complaints Policy

Approved	
Review date	

With Reference to Keeping Children Safe in Education – September 2026
DfE Guidance Schools complaint procedures
Parentkind

Contents of policy

1. Purpose	Page 3
2. Guiding principles	Page 3
3. Who can make a complaint	Page 3
4. How to raise a complaint	Page 3
5. Anonymous complaints	Page 3
6. Timescales	Page 3
7. Complaints received outside of term time	Page 4
8. Scope of the complaints procedure	Page 4
9. Stage 1: Informal Resolution	Page 5
10. Stage 2: Formal Complaint following Stage 1 complaints procedure	Page 5
11. Stage 3: Review Panel	Page 5
12. Writing an effective complaint	Page 5
13. Use of AI Tools in Drafting Complaints	Page 6
14. Unreasonable complaints	Page 6
15. Monitoring and Review	Page 7
16. Key Message	Page 7
17. What the DfE says that schools can do	Page 7
18. Actions a school is allowed to take	Page 7
19. What schools are not allowed to do	Page 8
20. Working together	Page 8
 Appendix 1 – Formal Complaint Form	 Page 10
Appendix 2 – Unreasonable or vexatious complaints policy statement	Page 12
 Complaints Toolkit	 Page 15

RPT Complaints Policy

1. Purpose

This policy sets out the procedure for raising and resolving concerns or complaints in a constructive, timely, and respectful manner. RPT schools are committed to resolving issues at the earliest possible stage, with strong emphasis on face-to-face communication and clarity of concern.

2. Guiding Principles

- Most concerns can be resolved quickly through direct, informal discussion.
- Complaints should be concise, specific, and focused on the issue at hand.
- All parties should act in good faith, with respect and openness.
- The school will prioritise early resolution, avoiding unnecessary escalation.

3. Who can make a complaint

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at any RPT school. You may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

4. How to raise a complaint

- Complaints against school staff (except the headteacher) or about school practices should be made in the first instance, to the headteacher via the school office.
- Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to the CEO, via the school office.
- Complaints about the Chair of Trust, or any individual Local Academy Board (LAB) Governor, or the whole LAB or Trust governing board should be addressed to Deepti Bal (Governance professional to the Trust and LABs) via the school office or via complaints@therisepartnershiptrust.co.uk. Please mark them as 'Private and Confidential'.
- Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a trustee of the Trust, should be addressed to Christine Jackson, Chair of Trustees, via complaints@therisepartnershiptrust.co.uk or the school office. Please mark correspondence as 'Private and Confidential – for the attention of the Chair' when delivering to the school office

5. Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the headteacher or CEO or Chair of the Local Academy Board (LAB), if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

6. Timescales

Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame only if exceptional circumstances apply.

7. Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

8. Scope of the complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by The Rise Partnership, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	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).
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)	Complaints about the content of an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan, decisions not to carry out an EHC needs assessment, decisions not to issue an EHC Plan, decisions to cease an EHC Plan, or the educational placement named within an EHC Plan are subject to separate statutory appeal rights and should be pursued through the relevant local authority's SEND processes and, where applicable, the First-tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability). Concerns regarding the day-to-day provision, implementation of SEND support, reasonable adjustments, communication, or the delivery of provision by the school should initially be raised with the class teacher, SENCO or Headteacher and, if unresolved, may be considered under this complaints procedure. Parents, carers and young people may also seek impartial advice and support from their local SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS).
Exclusion of children from school	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions .

Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors (see Whistle Blowing Policy). The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's workplace resolution policy.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school'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.

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 Rise Partnership in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

9. Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Initial Concern

Parents/carers are encouraged to:

- Raise concerns as soon as possible
- Speak directly with the relevant member of staff

Escalation to Headteacher

If the issue is not resolved:

- A face-to-face meeting with the Headteacher will be arranged promptly
- This meeting is extremely important to reach resolution and should:
 - Be focused on the specific issue
 - Allow all parties to clarify concerns
 - Seek a mutually agreed outcome

Expectation:

Most complaints should be resolved at this stage without the need for formal procedures.

10. Stage 2: Formal Complaint following Stage 1 complaint procedure

If the matter remains unresolved after the Headteacher meeting:

- A written complaint may be submitted

- The complaint must:
 - Clearly state the issue
 - Outline what resolution is being sought

The school will:

- Acknowledge receipt within 5 school days
- Investigate the matter
- Provide a written response within a reasonable timeframe

If the complaint remains unresolved, the complainant may escalate to Stage 3

11. Stage 3: Review Panel

If the complaint remains unresolved:

- A complaints panel may be convened
- This is the final stage within the school's process

12. Writing an Effective Complaint

To support efficient resolution, complaints should:

- Focus on specific events or concerns
- Avoid including unrelated issues
- Be written in a clear and concise manner
- State the desired outcome

13. Use of AI Tools (e.g. ChatGPT) in drafting complaints

The school recognises that some individuals may use AI tools to help draft complaints. When doing so, the following guidance should be followed:

Appropriate Use

- Use AI to:
 - Improve clarity and structure
 - Summarise key points
 - Keep the complaint concise

Important Expectations

Complaints must:

- Be accurate and reflect the genuine concern
- Be specific to the situation at the school
- Avoid generic or overly broad language

Content Guidelines

When using AI tools, complaints should:

- Focus strictly on the issue being raised
- Avoid referencing:
 - Broad legal frameworks or legislation unless directly relevant (any references should be checked to ensure that they apply within the UK)
 - Generalised statements not linked to the specific concern
 - Matters not included for investigation using the Complaints Policy eg Safeguarding/ SEND

In particular, complaints should not include unnecessary references to:

- The Human Rights Act
- The Children Act
- The SEND Code of Practice
- The Public Sector Equality Duty

unless these are directly and clearly applicable to the specific issue being raised.

Rationale

Including broad or unrelated legal references can:

- Delay resolution
- Obscure the core issue
- Make it harder to reach a prompt and fair outcome

14. Unreasonable Complaints (Vexatious Complaints) - See Appendix 2

The school may take action where complaints:

- Are persistently repetitive
- Include multiple unrelated issues
- Are excessively long or unfocused

In such cases, the school may:

- Request the complaint be resubmitted in a concise format
- Limit correspondence to key issues only

Where complaints become unreasonable, repetitive, or excessively frequent, the school reserves the right to limit communication to a single point of contact, require correspondence in writing only, and decline to re-investigate matters that have already been fully considered. This will only be applied where the complaint has been properly addressed and a final response has been issued, and the school will continue to consider any new concerns raised in a reasonable manner.

15. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed regularly to ensure it supports:

- Efficient resolution of concerns
- Positive relationships between school and families

16. Key Message

The school strongly believes that most concerns can be resolved quickly and effectively through a face-to-face meeting with the Headteacher, where clear, focused discussion leads to practical solutions.

17. What the DfE says schools can do

The official guidance [School complaints procedures \(DfE guidance\)](#) and the related [Best practice advice for school complaints procedures 2020](#) both make it clear that schools:

- should try to resolve concerns early
- may adopt a specific policy for “serial or unreasonable complaints” (vexatious)
- can take action where complaints are repetitive, excessive, or harassing

This DfE guidance lists the characteristics of an unreasonable complaint, for example:

- persistent, repetitive contact

- refusal to accept a reasonable decision
- demands for unrealistic outcomes
- behaviour intended to cause disruption or annoyance

18. Actions a school is allowed to take (DfE)

RPT schools cannot simply ignore complaints, but they can limit how they are handled once the complaint has been properly investigated.

Typical actions allowed under DfE guidance include:

A. Limiting communication

The school may:

- require all communication to be in writing only
- require contact to be made through the Headteacher only
- limit the number of emails or phone calls
- stop responding to repeated correspondence about the same issue once it has been fully addressed

B. Refusing to re-investigate the same complaint

If a complaint has:

- already been investigated properly
- and a final response has been issued

the school is allowed to:

- state that the matter is closed
- confirm that no further correspondence will be entered into about the same issue

C. Managing unreasonable behaviour

Where behaviour becomes excessive or disruptive, a school may:

- insist on scheduled appointments only
- refuse unscheduled meetings
- require the complainant to bring a representative if communication becomes confrontational
- in serious cases, restrict access to the school site (while still allowing the parent to raise legitimate concerns through an agreed channel)

D. Using a separate “unreasonable complaints” statement (vexatious complaints)

The DfE specifically recommends that schools publish a policy for this situation (often called a *serial or unreasonable complaints policy*)

RPT schools use a short policy that:

- defines unreasonable complaints

- explains the limits the school may place
- confirms that reasonable complaints will still be considered

19. What schools are not allowed to do

Even where complaints are unreasonable, schools must still:

- act fairly and proportionately
- not ban someone from complaining altogether
- consider new complaints if they relate to a new issue rather than the same one
- ensure decisions are lawful and reasonable

20. Working Together

We value positive relationships with our families. By working together and keeping communication respectful, clear and focused we can ensure the best outcomes for all pupils.

Further Support

We use resources published by Parentkind a National Charity to provide advice and guidance to help parents raise concerns constructively and work effectively with schools.

Key Message:

Most concerns can be resolved quickly through a clear, focused conversation—often in a face-to-face meeting with the Headteacher.

RPT will always remain open to genuine new concerns, but reserves the right to manage:

Repeated, excessive, or unfocused complaints in order to protect staff time and ensure that all concerns are handled fairly and efficiently.

Appendix 1

Stage 2: Formal Complaint form

Please complete and return to either headteacher / Governance Professional / CEO who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:	
Pupil's name (if relevant):	
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number:	
Email address:	
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.	
Signature:	
Date:	

Appendix 2

UNREASONABLE OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS POLICY STATEMENT

The Rise Partnership is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

The Rise Partnership defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the trust/school or their conduct more generally. This includes but is not limited to cases in which the complainant:

- 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 peripheral questions, and insists they are fully answered
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- refuses to accept that the complaint will be dealt with in line with the timescales set out in the complaints policy
- makes additional and unjustified complaints about staff, trustees or school governors who are responding to the complaint, 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)
- repeatedly makes complaints that materially overlap with a previous complaint
- 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 Department of Education
- 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.
- Coordinates or directs complaints by others, including by organising or encouraging a number of overlapping or duplicative complaints

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, 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.

Whether or not behaviour meets the unreasonable threshold is a question for the headteacher or CEO/ Chair of Trustees exercising their discretion and taking into account all relevant considerations.

Whenever possible, the headteacher or Chair of Governors/ Trustees will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking of the complaint.

If they have determined that the behaviour is unreasonable, the headteacher, or CEO/ Chair of Trustees will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it.

For complainants who excessively contact The Rise Partnership causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing, without the need to inform the individual first. This may include barring an individual from The Rise Partnership premises.

Serial or Persistent (vexatious) Complaints Procedure

1. Purpose

This procedure outlines how the school will manage complaints that are repeated, excessive, or unreasonable, while ensuring that all genuine concerns continue to be addressed fairly.

The school's priority remains:

- Early resolution
- Clear, concise communication
- Face-to-face discussion with the Headteacher wherever possible

2. Definition of Serial or Persistent Complaints

A complaint (or complainant) may be considered serial or persistent where they:

- Repeatedly raise the same issue after it has been fully addressed
- Make multiple complaints simultaneously about unrelated matters
- Refuse to accept outcomes after the complaints process is complete
- Send excessive volumes of communication (emails, calls, messages)
- Raise concerns that are unclear, unfocused, or continually changing
- Use lengthy or AI-generated submissions that obscure the core issue

3. Stage 1: Early Intervention (Preventative Stage)

Before any formal action is taken, the school will invite the complainant to a face-to-face meeting with the Headteacher to clarify:

- The specific concern(s)
- The desired outcome
- Agree how communication will be managed going forward

Aim:

To resolve the matter quickly and prevent escalation by focusing on a clear and shared understanding of the issue.

4. Stage 2: Formal Identification as Persistent

If concerns continue in a repetitive or unreasonable manner:

- The Headteacher will write to the complainant:
 - Explaining why the behaviour is considered persistent
 - Setting out expectations for future communication
 - Confirming the next steps in the process

This will include a request that all future complaints:

- Are concise
- Relate to one issue at a time
- Clearly state the outcome being sought

5. Stage 3: Managing Communication

If the behaviour continues, the school may implement one or more of the following measures:

Communication Controls

- Limit contact to one named point of contact (usually the Headteacher)
- Require communication to be:
 - In writing only, or
 - Submitted at reasonable intervals
 - Set a maximum length or format for correspondence
 - Decline to respond to:
 - Repeated points already addressed
 - Multiple emails raising the same issue

Meeting Controls

- Meetings will:
 - Be pre-arranged only
 - Have a clear agenda
 - Focus strictly on the agreed issue
- The school may:
 - Limit the number of attendees
 - End meetings where the discussion becomes repetitive or unfocused

6. Stage 4: Closure of Repeated Complaints

Where a complaint has been:

- Fully investigated
- Responded to at all stages

The school may:

- Confirm in writing that the matter is closed
- State that: Further correspondence on the same issue will not be responded to
 - New complaints must relate to new and distinct issues

Appendix 3 - Complaints Toolkit

A. Complaints against Local School Staff and Local Governing Boards

Stage 1

Complaints must be made to the headteacher (unless they are about the headteacher) via the school office. This may be done in person or via email.

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 also prevent them from considering complaints at further stages of the procedure.

The headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 10 school days.

Within this response, the headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The headteacher will consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

During the investigation, the headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, 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 headteacher will provide a response within 20 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they 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 actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome.

If the complaint is about the headteacher or a member of the LAB (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), the whole LAB or a majority of Governors, the CEO will be appointed to complete this stage.

If the complaint is directly related to the work of the Trust then the complaint will be passed to the CEO.

Stage 2 – Formal complaint

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2. The Formal Complaint Form can be found in Appendix 3.

Stage 3 – Panel Review

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3. The school will make contact with the Governance Professional who will convene a panel hearing.

– 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 school. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Governance Professional, via the school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The Governance Professional will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 10 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Governance Professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

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

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from the local school available, the Governance Professional will source any additional, independent governors through another local school, in order to make up the Panel. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 5 days before the meeting, the 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 committee will not accept, as evidence, recordings that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee 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 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 committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee 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 committee will:

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

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and The Rise Partnership with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.

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.

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 that will be undertaken 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 are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

B. Complaints about or escalated to the Trust, CEO or Trustees

A complaint is escalated to The Rise Partnership, if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the trust or the CEO determines that the matter is most appropriate to be dealt with by the Trust (rather than locally).

A Stage 1, 2 and 3 process will apply in all complaints escalated to or concerning the Trust, CEO or Trustees. The CEO will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 10 school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 1 of this Complaints Policy and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

Following the investigation, the CEO will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 20 school days of the date that the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the CEO will write to the Complainant within 10 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.

If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair of Trustees, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair of Trustees for investigation

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Governance Professional of the Trust Board asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel, within 20 school days.

The Governance Professional will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 10 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Governance Professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

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

If the complaint is:

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

Stage 3 will be heard by a completely independent committee panel.

All Complaint Panels 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 have been involved in dealing with the complaint in the previous stages, or have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint.

One of the Complaint committee members will be independent of the management and running of the Academy Trust. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will not 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. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a trust employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

At least 5 school days before the meeting, the 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 committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee 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 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 committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee 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 committee will:

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

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and The Rise Partnership with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days. 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 Rise Partnership will take to resolve the complaint.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision. All

correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the DfE or ESFA after they have completed Stage 3.

The DfE or ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by The Rise Partnership. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD.

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, 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
 - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - consideration of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts,

identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator (this could be the headteacher, CEO, member of the central team / designated complaints governor or trustee or other designated staff member)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, CEO, Chair of Governors, Chair of Trust or the Governance Professional and to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Governance Professional to the Local Academy Boards / Trust Board

The Governance Professional is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Governance Professional) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.
-

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself • the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently

- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Governance Professional (and complaints co-ordinator).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- The meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so
- No LAB governor / trustee may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant
- We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- Many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting
- Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting
- Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.
- The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
- If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.
- However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
- The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.