

# Complaints Policy



## **Statement of Intent**

Our mission is to promote a love of learning in order to maximise the life chances of every child in our Trust. Through nurturing, high expectations and skilled teaching, we will have a lasting and positive impact on our local and wider community.

### **Our Vision**

The TEACH Trust supports our children to become empowered citizens that make a meaningful contribution to society. Our curriculum reflects our locality and all it offers and aims to educate all children in matters which affect humanity in the wider world: these include all matters that relate to the climate and the world around us, such as climate change; the importance of respecting and celebrating the importance of equality and diversity; and being responsible global citizens.

We have the highest aspirations for our children: the broad and balanced curriculum promotes learning, provides cultural capital and supports spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The Rights Respecting Gold awards and Anti Bullying awards reflect some of many ways in which education for character are integral to the work of our schools and highlights our focus on the children's personal development.

We aim to inspire our children to be socially conscious individuals who make a difference to the world. All our children secure the key learning and skills they will need to become lifelong learners and gain employment. Our ultimate aim is to improve all our children's life chances and prepare them to thrive in their future lives.

Under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Act which came into force in April 2011, the Trust has due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

## **Aims**

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parent(s)/carer(s) of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Treat complainants with respect
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation process

## **Principles**

- Each school within the TEACH Trust will attempt to resolve problems informally wherever possible. An effective response and appropriate redress should be provided swiftly and simply.
- An anonymous complaint will not be investigated unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- To allow for a proper investigation complaints should be brought to the attention of the school/Trust as soon as possible. Any matter raised more than three months after the event being complained of will not be considered except in exceptional circumstances
- Vexatious/Unreasonable Complaints. There may be occasions when, despite all stages of the complaints procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If a complainant tries to re-open an issue the Chair of the Trust Board will inform them in writing

that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is now closed. Vexatious complaints can be found later in this policy.

- Complaints delivered to the school outside of term time or school hours will be deemed to have been received on the first day the school returns from its break, or the next school day.

## **Definitions and Scope**

The DFE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint.

A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought.”

**The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.**

A **complaint** is defined as “as expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.”

The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage. There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their complaints formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy covers all informal complaints and formal complaints, other than those set out below. As the complaints policy is based upon [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), it only applies to complaints from parents/carers of pupils at one of the Trust schools or those who recently attended one of the schools, regarding their child. Consideration can be given to complaints made by parent(s)/carer(s) of pupils who no longer attend one of the schools, provided the complaint is received within three months of the child ceasing attendance at the school. For non-parental complainants (no child enrolled at the school / no parental rights) there is no requirement for the policy to cover these complaints, however, we would still handle them respectfully and expediently.

Formal complaints in the following areas will be dealt with under the relevant procedures, some of which are statutory procedures:

- Admissions
- Exclusion
- Statutory assessment of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Safeguarding matters
- Complaints about services provided by other providers, such as contractors
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

## **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

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.

Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set, and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline with an explanation for the delay.

Any decision made by a school, must also be made in line with the principles of administrative law. This means a decision is:

- lawful - it complies with education and other law, including human rights and equality law, such as the [Human Rights Act 1998](#) and the [Equality Act 2010](#)
- rational
- reasonable
- fair
- proportionate

Decision-makers should also be mindful of [The 7 Principles of Public Life](#).

## **Resolving Complaints**

At each stage of the procedure, the TEACH Trust wants to resolve the complaint. We may offer one or more of the following;

- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- An assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- An explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- An undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- An apology

## **Withdrawal of a complaint**

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint at any stage, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

## **Stage One. Informal Complaint Class Teacher/Year Leader.**

Any initial complaint will be heard by your child's class teacher or Year Leader.

Ask or write (**appendix A**) to your child's class teacher or the Year Leader requesting that you speak to them confidentially. This will alert them to the importance of the conversation. They will make contact with you within seven school days, or sooner if possible, either in writing, or, in order to arrange to meet/talk with you privately. Any meeting will be at a time that is mutually convenient.

Note. If you are invited to a meeting, and feel you would have difficulty speaking to either the class

teacher or Year Leader then please make an appointment via the school office to speak to the Deputy Head. Speaking to the Deputy Head does not automatically mean the complaints procedure has moved to stage 2.

At the meeting, the member of staff will make a brief note of the conversation so that important information/details will not be forgotten. You may receive a response at the meeting that will re-assure and remedy your complaint. If this is not the case then the teacher or Year Leader will arrange to respond to your complaint within the next seven to ten school days. This will allow them to pursue/investigate the matter further and seek to resolve it. Additional meetings may be required.

### **Stage Two. Informal Complaint. Deputy Headteacher**

You are dissatisfied with the way your complaint has been handled by the class teacher or Year Leader. The matter needs referral to the Deputy Head within ten school days. **Appendix B**

Either detail your complaint in writing to the Deputy Head or ask the school office for an appointment with the Deputy Head. A response in writing or an appointment should be arranged within seven school days. The Deputy Head will meet with you privately. This meeting will be at a time that is mutually convenient.

If a meeting is arranged, the Deputy will make a brief note of the conversation so that important information/details will not be forgotten. You may receive a response at the meeting that will re-assure and remedy your complaint. If this is not the case then the Deputy Head will arrange to meet with you again within the next seven to ten school days. This will allow them to pursue/investigate the matter, respond to your complaint and seek to resolve it. Additional meetings may be required.

### **Stage Three. Informal Complaint. Headteacher**

You are dissatisfied with the way your complaint has been handled by the Deputy Head. The matter needs referral to the Headteacher within 10 school days. **Appendix C**

Either detail your complaint in writing to the Headteacher or ask the school office for an appointment with the Headteacher. A response in writing or an appointment should be arranged within seven school days. The Headteacher will meet you privately. This meeting will be at a time that is mutually convenient.

If a meeting is arranged, the Headteacher will make a brief note of the conversation so that important information/details will not be forgotten. You may receive a response at the meeting that will re-assure and remedy your complaint. If this is not the case then the Headteacher will arrange to respond to your complaint within the next seven to ten school days. This will allow them to pursue/investigate the matter and seek to resolve it. Additional meetings may be required.

### **Stage Four. Formal Complaint to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO)**

You are dissatisfied with the way your complaint has been handled by the Headteacher. The matter now needs to be managed under the Formal Complaints Procedure. **Appendix D**

Complete appendix D (Formal Complaint Form) giving full details of your complaint etc. Return this form to the school office marked 'CEO, TEACH Trust, Confidential'. This must be done within ten school days of the outcome of stage three. The school office will ensure the complaint is forwarded to

the CEO. The CEO will liaise directly with yourself and they should contact you within the next 14 school days from receipt.

### **Stage Five. Trust Complaints Appeal Panel**

You are dissatisfied with the way your complaint has been handled by the CEO of the Trust.

**Submit appendix E** (Formal Complaint Form) giving full details of your complaint etc within ten school days. Return this form to the school office marked 'Governance Professional to the Trust Board, Confidential.' The school office will ensure the complaint is forwarded to the Governance Professional. The Governance Professional to the Trust Board, will liaise directly with yourself and should contact you within the next fourteen school days.

This will allow time to convene a Trust Complaints Panel and notify you of the date and time that this will take place. This time frame may extend longer if convening a panel proves difficult but the Governance Professional will keep you informed. The panel will be convened at a mutually convenient time for both you and the Trustees. When the meeting date has been agreed between the complainant and panel it is important that the date is kept. Only in exceptional circumstances will a complaints meeting be cancelled. The Governance Professional will arrange for notes/minutes to be taken of the meeting.

The Trust Complaints Appeal Panel usually consists of three Panel members and will ensure that at least one member of the panel is independent of the management and running of the Academy. It is a matter for the Academy to identify suitably independent individuals who can fulfil the role and responsibility of being the independent member. All Panel members will have 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 Appeal Panel. The complainant will be invited to attend the Trust Complaints Panel Meeting, and may be accompanied if they wish but can alternatively decide to submit written representations, if they prefer.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least five 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 five school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least five school days before the date of the meeting. This includes from the complainant.

### **Trust Complaints Appeal Panel Meeting**

The panel meeting will follow the guidance issued by the Department for Education which is as follows;

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's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Trust Complaints Appeal Panel will provide the complainant with a full explanation of their decision and reason(s) for it, in writing, within ten school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the ESFA if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the TEACH Trust.

The Trust Complaints Panel Appeal Meeting is the last school-based stage of the complaints process. **The decision of the appeal panel is final. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.**

### **Complaints against the CEO or a Trustee**

Complaints made against the CEO should be directed to the Chair of the Trust via the Governance Professional.

Where a complaint is against the Chair of the Trust or any Trustee, it should be made in writing to the Governance Professional to the Trust Board, in the first instance.

### **Referring complaints on completion of the school's policy**

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the DFE by following the link <https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe>.

### **Persistent/vexatious/anonymous complaints**

Where a complainant tries to re-open the issue with the school after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the Chair of the Trust (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the Chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*

The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any), *and*

The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time.

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The school will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, and/or

The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, and/or

The individual makes insulting/slandorous personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent/vexatious complaint.

Anonymous complaints, where there is no clear complainant, will not be normally be investigated or responded to, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The school will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the school acts reasonably.

### **Withdrawal of Complaint**

The complainant may ask for his/her complaint to be withdrawn at any stage of the formal process and this will be acknowledged in writing.

Approved by Trustees April 2019

Review date April 2020

Reviewed by Trustees October 2020 (delayed due to Covid 19)

Reviewed December 2021

Reviewed December 2022

Reviewed December 2023

Next review date December 2024

### **Complaints Policy**

#### **Equality Impact Assessment**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Response</b>	
Which relevant groups and stakeholders have been consulted with in relation to this policy?		Please tick
	Pupils	
	Trustees	✓
	Staff	
	Parents/Carers	
	Local Authority	
	Trade Unions	✓

	Other Advisors (give details)	
What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy?	Termly	
	Annually	✓
	When applied	
	If legislation changes	✓
	If a formal complaint	✓

Does the policy affect one group less or more favourably than another on the basis of:	Y/N
Disability	N
Gender reassignment	N
Marriage or civil partnership	N
Pregnancy and maternity	N
Race	N
Religion or belief	N
Sexual orientation	N
Sex (gender)	N
Age	N
SEN	N
Vulnerable	N
Traveller, migrant, refugees and people seeking asylum	N
EAL	N

	Y/N	Comments/Actions
<b>Is there any evidence that some groups are affected differently?</b>	N	
<b>If you have identified potential discrimination, are any exceptions valid, legal and/or justifiable?</b>	N/A	
<b>Is the impact of the policy likely to be negative?</b>	N	
<b>If yes, can the impact be mitigated by taking different action?</b>	N/A	