



Special Partnership Trust



COMPLAINTS POLICY

Date Last Reviewed: January 2026

Review Date: January 2028

COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. Scope

- 1.1. The complaints procedure is based on a principle that concerns expressed by a pupil, parent, carer or any individual or organisation with a concern should be resolved as quickly as possible without the need to escalate to the more formal stages of the procedure. However, where resolution is not achieved quickly and the person raising the complaint remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further, the formal procedure will be invoked.

Complaints will be considered at three levels: informal resolution, formal investigation, and trustee panel appeal. This ensures concerns are addressed promptly and fairly, while avoiding unnecessary duplication.

- **Stage 1** – Informal Resolution
 - **Stage 2** – Formal Complaint Heard by the Headteacher (or CEO/Trust Representative if complaint concerns Headteacher).
 - **Stage 3** – Complaint heard by Trustees Panel.
- 1.2. Handling of complaint referred to the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). The ESFA reviews process compliance, not substantive decision.
- 1.3. Complaints brought by staff should be investigated using the Grievance procedure and not this Complaints Policy.

2. Policy

- 2.1. We will listen to all concerns, complaints, suggestions and compliments and see them as opportunities to improve the quality of the service we provide.
- 2.2. Line Managers or other delegated managers will investigate a complaint about a member of staff. Anonymous complaints will not be considered.
- 2.3. The Trust will retain a written record of all complaints and whether they were resolved at the informal, formal or panel level.
- 2.4. All written records, statements and correspondence relating to an individual complaint will be treated with complete confidentiality. However, the School is required to make these records available to the

Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection if they request access to them.

2.5. Written information sent out to a complainant may be in either electronic format or in 'hard copy' as the School/Trust sees fit.

2.6. The principles applied by all staff and Governors in applying the complaints procedure are that implementation of the procedure will be:

- Impartial
- Non-adversarial
- Timely
- Objective
- Evidence based
- Respects confidentiality
- Fair
- Addresses all of the points at issue
- Provides an effective response
- Provides appropriate redress where necessary
- Is reported to the senior leadership team so that services can be improved where necessary

2.7. It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the School can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To that end, staff will be periodically made aware of the procedures so that they know what to do when they receive a concern or a complaint.

2.8. At each stage of the complaint's procedure the member of staff responsible will consider how the complaint may be resolved. In considering how a complaint may be resolved the member of staff will give due regard to the seriousness of the complaint. It may be appropriate in order to bring the complaint to a resolution for the member of staff to offer:

- An explanation;
- An apology;

- Confirmation of actions taken to prevent the issue happening again; or;
- Reassurance that the School will undertake a review of its policies in light of the complaint.

2.9. Where deadlines are extended due to complexity, the complainant will be notified in writing with reasons.

2.10. The purpose of this procedure is to identify all of the facts that are pertinent to the complaint so that it can be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant. However, there may be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedure being followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant then tries to reopen the same issue, the Trust will inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

2.11. The complaints procedure sets out the time limits for each stage of the complaints processes. However, where a complaint is of a particularly complex nature, or further investigations are required to ascertain facts, new time limits can be set. The complainant will be sent the details of any changes to the deadlines with an explanation for the delay.

2.12. The Complaints Policy & Procedure will be published on the Trust's website.

3. Procedure

The policy position is to try to deal with the complaint, to the satisfaction of the complainant, at the earliest possible level. Only if the complaint cannot be resolved at the informal level would it be escalated to the formal level. Only if the complaint cannot be subsequently resolved at the formal level, should it be escalated to a Trustee Panel.

This policy outlines the different complaints stages that should be followed by any person whenever an issue arises that cause them concern.

This policy does not apply to complaints about:

- Pupil admissions;

- Pupil exclusions;
- Statutory assessments of Special Education Need (SEN);
- Matters likely to require a Child Protections Investigation;
- Staff Grievance and disciplinary procedures;
- Whistleblowing.

Each of these follows its own process of complaints and appeals which are outlined in their relevant policies.

3.1. Who can Make a Complaint

This complaints procedure applies to parents or carers of children that are currently registered at the school.

3.2. Principles of Investigating a Complaint

The principles that will form the basis for all investigations of complaints will be that the investigation:

- Clarifies the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- Establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved
- Clarifies what the complainant feels would put things right
- Interviews those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Conducts the interview with an open mind
- Keeps a written record of the interview

3.3. Stages of the Complaints Procedure

3.3.1. Stage 1 – Informal Procedure

All staff can deal with concerns or complaints without the need to resort to a formal procedure. Most concerns and complaints can be satisfactorily resolved at this stage and the school values informal meetings and discussions to facilitate an early resolution.

It is expected that most issues will be resolved within **10 school days**. If more time is required, the School will inform the complainant in writing as soon as this is known.

If the complaint is about a member of staff, the complainant should first raise this with the Headteacher either in person or in writing, and a meeting can be arranged with the Headteacher to discuss the issue.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher or a Governor, the CEO/Trust representative will consider the complaint at the informal stage. If the complaint is about the CEO, the Chair of the Trust Board will consider it informally.

Where the first approach is made to a governor, the next step would be to refer the complainant to a member of staff or the Headteacher. Governors should not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure as they may be required to sit on a panel at a later stage.

If initial discussions do not resolve the matter, either party may initiate a move to the next stage of the procedure. At this point, a copy of the school's Complaints Policy will be provided to the complainant and their complaint will need to be submitted.

The Trust is committed to ensuring that the complaints process is accessible to all. Complaints may be submitted in multiple formats, including written (via a formal Complaints Form, see Appendix 1), verbal, or assisted formats such as diagrams and mind maps. This approach is designed to support neurodiverse staff, parents, and pupils, and to ensure that all individuals are able to communicate their concerns in a way that best suits their needs.

Complainants may also indicate their preferred communication method when raising a complaint, and the Trust will make reasonable adjustments to accommodate these preferences. This commitment reflects our values of inclusion, fairness, and psychological safety, and ensures that the complaints procedure is accessible to everyone.

Informal Meeting

Complainants may be invited to attend an informal meeting with a member of staff, the Headteacher, or the Chair of the Trust Board to discuss their concerns.

They may bring a friend, partner or, if the concern has been raised by a pupil, a parent or carer. It may be appropriate for the pupil to attend, depending on the nature of the issue.

Staff will make every effort to ensure concerns are addressed promptly and fairly at this stage. If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the informal meeting, they may submit a formal complaint in writing to the Headteacher.

Written Response

The written response should:

- Provide a brief outline of the complaint.
- Summarise the investigation and the decision reached, including the reasons for that decision.
- Where appropriate, explain what action the School has taken to resolve the complaint (for example, steps taken under the Disciplinary Procedure).

If the complainant does not reply within 10 working days of receiving the written response, the complaint will be considered resolved and the case closed.

3.3.2. Stage 2 – Formal Complaint Heard by the Headteacher (or CEO/Trust Team representative if complaint concerns Headteacher)

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1, they may proceed to Stage 2 by submitting a formal complaint in writing. The complaint will normally be investigated by the Headteacher. If the complaint concerns the Headteacher, the CEO/Trust representative will carry out the investigation.

- A written acknowledgement will be sent within **5 school days** of receiving the complaint.
- The acknowledgement will confirm the target date for a full response, which should normally be within **10 school days**. If this timescale cannot be met, the complainant will be notified in writing with the reason for the delay and a revised target date.

- The Headteacher or CEO/Trust representative will ensure the complainant understands any agreed actions and will keep a written record of the discussion, outcomes, and next steps.

If the complainant does not accept the findings at Stage 2, they may appeal by escalating the complaint to **Stage 3 – Trustee Panel Appeal**. Appeals must be submitted in writing within **10 school days** of receiving the Stage 2 decision.

3.3.3. Stage 3 – Complaint Heard by Trustee Panel

If the complainant wishes to appeal the outcome of a formal complaint (Stage 2), they must write to the Clerk to the Trust Board within **10 school days** of receiving the decision.

- The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of the appeal within **5 school days** and confirm arrangements for a hearing within **20 school days**.
- If a mutually convenient date cannot be found within this timescale, a revised date will be agreed with the complainant.
- The complainant must provide any written information or evidence to support their appeal in advance.
- The Clerk will ensure all parties have access to the same documentation and will set out a timetable for circulation.
- The complainant has the right to be accompanied at the hearing.

The Appeals Panel will consist of three members of the Trust Board and one independent member (for example, from another Educational Trust, a Parent Support Service, or a relevant professional background). No panel member will have had prior involvement in the complaint.

Appeal hearing procedure

1. The complainant and Headteacher will attend together.
2. The Chair will introduce the panel members and explain the process.
3. The complainant will present their case.
4. The Headteacher and panel may question the complainant.
5. The Headteacher will explain the Trust's actions.
6. The complainant and panel may question the Headteacher.
7. The complainant will sum up their case.
8. The Headteacher will sum up the Trust's actions.
9. The Chair will explain that both parties will receive the panel's decision within **10 working days**.
10. Both parties will leave while the panel deliberates.

11. The Clerk will remain to assist the panel with its decision-making.

Panel outcomes

The Appeals Panel may:

- Dismiss all or part of the complaint.
- Uphold all or part of the complaint.
- Decide on appropriate action to resolve the complaint.
- Recommend changes to Trust systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in future.

The Clerk will send the panel's formal written decision, including reasons, to the complainant within **10 working days** of the hearing. The findings of the Appeals Panel are final within the Trust's complaints procedure.

Additional Considerations

Where parallel investigations are being conducted by external agencies (e.g. Police or social services), timescales may vary. Any variation will be notified to the complainant.

4. Record Keeping

The School/Trust will keep a clear record of all complaints, including:

- Actions taken at each stage.
- The stage at which the complaint was resolved.
- The final outcome.
- Copies of relevant letters, emails, meeting notes, and telephone records.

The Trust is committed to ensuring that all complaint records are managed in compliance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Records of complaints will be stored securely, retained only for as long as necessary, and accessed strictly on a need-to-know basis.

Complainants have the right to request access to records relating to their complaint through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request or a Subject Access Request (SAR). Where such requests are made, the Trust will respond in line with statutory timescales and its Data Protection Policy.

All staff involved in handling complaints must ensure that correspondence, notes, and evidence are recorded accurately and stored in accordance with the Trust's privacy notices and record retention schedule. Malicious or unfounded complaints will not be retained on personnel files, but anonymised data may be used for monitoring and reporting purposes.

5. Procedure Referred to Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)

If a complaint has been through all the stages of the Trust's complaints procedure but the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may ask the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to review how the complaint was handled.

The ESFA considers complaints about academies and free schools in the following circumstances:

- There has been undue delay or non compliance with the academy's own complaints procedure.
- The academy has failed to meet a duty under its funding agreement with the Secretary of State.
- The academy has failed to meet another legal obligation, unless another organisation is better placed to consider the matter.

The ESFA will not overturn the Trust's decision. However, if they find that the complaint was not dealt with properly, they may require the Trust to review the matter again and ensure procedures meet regulatory requirements.

Further information is available on the Department for Education website: [ESFA complaints procedure](#).

Alternatively, complaints can be submitted in writing to:

Complaints Team
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

The ESFA should only be contacted once the Trust's internal complaints procedure has been fully exhausted.

6. Vexatious Complaints

Where the complaints procedure has been exhausted, the Trust will confirm in writing that the matter is closed. Further correspondence on the same issue may be treated as vexatious.

7. Wellbeing Safeguards

The Trust recognises that being the subject of a complaint can be stressful for staff. Complaints will therefore be handled sensitively, with appropriate wellbeing support offered throughout the process. Staff subject to complaints will be provided with a named contact for ongoing communication and may be signposted to counselling or Occupational Health services where appropriate.

The purpose of these safeguards is to ensure that staff wellbeing is protected while maintaining the integrity of the complaints process. Support measures will be reviewed regularly during the handling of the complaint, and staff will be reminded that suspension, where applied, is a neutral act and not a disciplinary sanction.

8. Monitoring of the Policy

The Executive Leadership Team at the Trust will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. This includes tracking the number and nature of complaints and reviewing underlying issues with the Senior Leadership Team as necessary. This policy will be reviewed every two years and approved by Trustees.

Appendix 1: Complaint Form

Please complete and return to: Headteacher / Chair of Governors / 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: |
| 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:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date: