

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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MEMBER OF STAFF WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR REVIEW:	HEAD OF GOVERNANCE COMPLIANCE AND RISK
THIS POLICY WAS CONSULTED WITH	EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM
THIS POLICY WAS DISTRIBUTED TO:	HEADTEACHERS, ACADEMY GOVERNANCE PROFESSIONALS

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Anglian Learning is committed to developing a strong partnership with pupils, parents / carers and other stakeholders. This provides a good basis for mutual understanding and for preventing and resolving complaints.
- 1.2. We hope that the adoption of a clear complaints procedure will help to ensure that most complaints are resolved quickly and smoothly and as close to the source of the misunderstanding or problem as possible. In this way complainants can feel assured from the outset of a fair hearing, in line with a defined procedure for dealing with issues that have not immediately been resolved.
- 1.3. This policy explains the process for handling complaints about the Trust, including its academies and those relating to the central team
- 1.4. The timeframes referred to in this policy are our usual timeframes and the Trust will seek to adhere to these timeframes where possible.
- 1.5. Reasonable adjustments will be made to this procedure where required to ensure that all complainants can access and complete this complaints procedure.
- 1.6. We encourage parents to read the '**Parent guide to school complaints**' published by Parentkind, the Department for Education, Ofsted and the Improving Education Together board, which provides helpful guidance on how to provide feedback, resolve concerns and raise complaints. A copy of this guide is available at <https://www.parentkind.org.uk/assets/parents-resources/Parent-Guide-to-School-Complaints.pdf>

2. Policy Scope

- 2.1. This policy applies to concerns and complaints relating to Schools, School Staff and School Governors, the Trust's central operations, central staff and Trustees.
- 2.2. It does not apply to the following topics of complaints which have specific policies and procedures for dealing with them (see Appendix A)
 - Pupil admissions
 - Pupil exclusions and suspensions
 - Staff grievance, capability or disciplinary.
 - Whistleblowing complaints (eg a criminal offence, fraud, someone's health and safety are in danger, risk or actual damage to the environment, a miscarriage of justice, the Trust is breaking the law, someone is covering up wrongdoing).
- 2.3. The Trust will not investigate complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities. These organisations will have their own complaints procedures and should be contacted directly.
- 2.4. Anonymous concerns or complaints will not be investigated under this procedure.
- 2.5. The Trust may suspend the complaints procedure if legal action is commenced or threatened.

3. What is meant by certain words in this procedure?

- 3.1. A *'meeting'* or *'hearing'* can be in person, by telephone or by video call, as long as everyone can take part and is happy to do so. In exceptional circumstances, including where there are concerns about the safety or wellbeing of any participant, we reserve the right to determine the format of the meeting or hearing without the agreement of all parties, and will notify those involved of the reasons for doing so.
- 3.2. A *'parent'* includes biological parents, carers, and anyone with parental responsibility or care for a child.
- 3.3. *'School days'* means days when our schools are open to pupils. It does not include weekends, school holidays or days when our schools are closed to pupils.
- 3.4. *'Trust'* means the academy trust.

4. What is a Complaint?

- 4.1. The Trust takes very seriously any concern or complaint about the education of pupils or other services we provide or about the conduct of our staff. We believe that by tackling concerns at the earliest possible stage it allows us to improve relationships, enhance learning, prevent issues escalating and reduce the number of formal complaints we receive.
- 4.2. A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”. It is expected that concerns will be addressed via the informal process outlined in this policy.
- 4.3. A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”.
- 4.4. The Trust intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

5. Raising matters effectively

- 5.1. When raising concerns or complaints, it is very important that complainants explain clearly:
 - What the concern/complaint is;
 - What has already been done to try and resolve it;
 - Names of any witnesses, dates and times of what happened and copies of any relevant documents; and
 - What we could do about it to put things right.
- 5.2. We encourage complainants to:
 - Focus on the relevant facts - what happened, when and who was involved;
 - Remain objective and direct concerns towards processes or decisions rather than target individuals; and

- Suggest clear and realistic outcomes so that we can see what is possible and we can try to resolve the matter constructively.
- 5.3. For the avoidance of doubt, certain outcomes are not available under this procedure. These include but are not limited to:
- Outcomes relating to staff disciplinary action — any disciplinary matters will be handled confidentially under our internal staff procedures and complainants will not be informed of any action taken; and
 - Financial compensation or payments of any kind.
- 5.4. We ask that complaints and any supporting documents are concise and focused on the issues that matter. If what is sent to us is too long, repeats the same points or includes information that is not relevant, it may take us longer to look into and respond to concerns. As a guide, we would not expect a letter or email to be longer than two sides of A4 (about 1,000 words). If we are sent more than we need, we may ask complainants to tell us which issues and documents are most important and put the timescales in this procedure on hold until then. If we think a concern or complaint is being pursued in a way that is unreasonable, we may deal with it under **Part 3** of this procedure.
- 5.5. If complainants choose to use artificial intelligence (AI) tools (such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini or similar) to help draft or structure a concern or complaint, they should read the guidance set out in **Appendix B** of this procedure before doing so. AI tools can be helpful in organising thoughts and presenting a concern or complaint clearly, but they must be used carefully. Complainants are responsible for the accuracy and content of anything submitted to us, regardless of whether AI was used to help prepare it.

6. Social Media

- 6.1. In order for complaints to be resolved as quickly and fairly as possible the Trust requests that complainants do not discuss complaints publicly via social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook and X. Complaints will be dealt with confidentially for those involved, and we expect complainants to observe confidentiality also.

7. Complaints that result in staff capability or disciplinary or Police investigation

- 7.1. If at any formal stage of the complaint it is determined that staff disciplinary or capability proceedings are necessary in order to resolve the issue, the details of this action will remain confidential to the Trust. The complainant is not entitled to participate in the proceedings or receive any detail about them.
- 7.2. If the subject of the complaint is a matter being referred to the police, the complaints procedure will be suspended pending the outcome of that investigation and the complainant will be informed about the delay as appropriate. Once the outcome is known the complaint may continue if relevant.

8. Key Principles

- 8.1. We believe that most complaints can be resolved satisfactorily by informal discussion either over the telephone or through a meeting involving the key people involved.
- 8.2. Complainants must make reasonable attempts to resolve their complaint informally via Stage One before the formal Stage Two process may be invoked.
- 8.3. Concerns or complaints should be brought to our attention as soon as possible. Any matter raised more than 3 months after the incident being complained of (or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 3 months of the last of these incidents) will not be considered unless the Principal / Chair of Governors accepts that there are good reasons to explain the delay or the complaint is about a particularly serious matter.
- 8.4. We expect our members of staff to be addressed in a respectful manner and for all forms of communication to be appropriate in tone, manner and content at all times. The procedure under Part 3 will only be used on very rare occasions to deal with unreasonably persistent complainants or unreasonable complainant behaviour.
- 8.5. All complaints will be acknowledged via email within 5 school days of receipt during term time and dealt with as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- 8.6. Where a complaint is received outside of term time, we will consider it to have been received on the first school day following the holiday period.
- 8.7. All formal complaints will be investigated fully, fairly and carefully and complainants will be kept informed of progress.
- 8.8. Complainants may have communication preferences due to disability; learning difficulties; difficulties using English. The school or shared services team will support alternative methods of contact in such circumstances.
- 8.9. The school and Trust shared services team will refuse to accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without informed consent of all parties being recorded.
- 8.10. 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 prevent them from considering complaints at later stages.
- 8.11. On rare occasions a school may receive complaints from a number of parents relating to the same issue. In order to deal with these complaints efficiently the school will follow the procedure set out in Part 4.
- 8.12. Complainants may withdraw a concern or complaint at any stage of this procedure by notifying us in writing. Written notification should be sent to the person who is currently dealing with the concern or complaint or, if unsure, to the Head of Governance, Compliance and Risk.

9. Records of complaints

- 9.1. A record will be kept of informal complaints whether this be as an email trail, notes of meetings/phone calls or written responses.
- 9.2. A record will be kept of all written formal complaints, including at what stage they were resolved and action taken by us as a result of those complaints regardless of whether they were upheld. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where:
- access is requested by the Secretary of State;
 - disclosure is required in the course of a school inspection;
 - an individual has a legal right to access their own personal data contained within such documentation; or
 - under other legal authority.
- 9.3. We will make the findings and recommendations of the panel available for inspection by the Trust and the Principal.

10. Representation

- 10.1. Someone else can raise a concern or complaint on behalf of a complainant if we are informed in writing that they have permission to do so. If you want to raise a concern on behalf of someone else, then you will need to give us their full name and ask them to confirm to us in writing that they consent to you doing so.
- 10.2. At any stage, the complainant may be accompanied by a friend, colleague or other representative. In this case, the complainant should make their own arrangements for such representation. Any representative is there to provide moral support and not to ask or answer questions on the complainant's behalf, except where such assistance is required by virtue of disability or a language barrier. Legal representation is neither appropriate nor permitted.

Part 1: Complaints procedure for parents

1. Stage One: Informal

- 1.1. Wherever possible an attempt to resolve the complaint informally should be made. Informal complaints or concerns should be raised with the relevant member of staff directly, for example class teacher, tutor, curriculum or pastoral leader. Where an informal complaint is raised with the Headteacher (or CEO for central team complaints), it will normally be passed to the most appropriate member of staff to respond informally. If the complainant indicates that they would have difficulty discussing the complaint with this member of staff, the Headteacher may direct them to another member of staff. Similarly, if the most appropriate member of staff feels they would have difficulty in dealing with the complaint objectively, the Headteacher may direct the complainant to another member of staff.
- 1.2. In certain circumstances, the Headteacher may instead choose to deal with the complaint informally in person, or the relevant member of staff may ask the Headteacher to deal with it informally in person.
- 1.3. If the complaint has been made to the Chair of Governors (or Chair of Trustees for central team complaints), the CEO or a member of the Trust Central Leadership Team in the first instance, he or she will refer the complaint to the Headteacher (or CEO for Trust central team complaints). However, if the complaint concerns the Headteacher and has already been taken up with the Headteacher without being resolved, the complaint must be made in writing, either electronically or on paper, to the Chair of Governors using the Complaint Form (Appendix C). The Chair will then invoke the formal procedure.
- 1.4. The member of staff to whom the complaint is referred will carry out an investigation and decide on any appropriate action. It is always helpful if the complainant can fully explain the nature of the concern and identify the outcome sought. Where appropriate, the complainant may be invited to an informal meeting with the member of staff most appropriate for dealing with that concern.
- 1.5. The complainant and the Headteacher will be informed of the conclusions drawn from the investigation and action to be taken. This may be put in writing if appropriate. The complainant will be given details of how to make a formal complaint if they remain dissatisfied.
- 1.6. It is a precondition to the operation of this policy that the complainant shall have made reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution and shall have acted in relation to the matter in a reasonable and measured way. The Chair of Governors (Chair of Trustees for central team complaints) shall have discretion, which will be exercised reasonably, not to allow a complaint to be pursued where this precondition has not been met.
- 1.7. Every effort will be made to resolve the problem to the satisfaction of the complainant at this informal stage.
- 1.8. There is no suggested timescale for resolution at this stage given the importance of dialogue through informal discussion, although it would be expected that most issues will be resolved within 15 school days. Where no satisfactory solution has

been found, complainants will be advised that if they wish their concerns to be considered further they should write to the Headteacher/Principal] under Stage 2 of this procedure within 15 school days.

2. Stage Two: Written Formal complaints

- 2.1. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the informal process, they should outline their concerns by completing the Trust Complaint Form (Appendix C), either electronically or on paper and send it to the Headteacher (CEO for Trust central team complaints).
- 2.2. Complaints will only be considered at Stage Two if the complainant has made all reasonable efforts to resolve the complaint informally via Stage One.
- 2.3. Your complaint will normally be acknowledged in writing within 5 school days of receipt. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the school's complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This will normally be within 15 school days of receipt.
- 2.4. The Headteacher/Principal (CEO for Trust complaints) will ensure the complaint is investigated fully. They may delegate responsibility for conducting the investigation to another member of staff.
- 2.5. If appropriate, the Headteacher/Principal (or CEO) (or someone appointed by them) may invite the complainant to a meeting to clarify the complaint and to explore possible resolutions. If the complainant accepts that invitation, they may be accompanied by one other person, such as a friend, relative, advocate or interpreter. Any representative is there to provide moral support and not to ask or answer questions on the complainant's behalf, except where such assistance is required by virtue of disability or a language barrier. Legal representation is neither appropriate nor permitted. Where possible, this meeting will take place within 10 school days of receipt of the written complaint.
- 2.6. Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher/Principal (or CEO), or the Headteacher/Principal has already considered the complaint at Stage 1, Complaint Form (Appendix C should be sent to the Local Governing Body Governance Professional (or Head of Governance) who will arrange for a governor or external investigator to carry out the Stage 2 procedure.
- 2.7. The Trust may engage an independent, external person to carry out the investigation into the Stage 2 complaint or to review the investigation and response at Stage 2. This may be appropriate where the complaint is particularly complex or involves legal issues.
- 2.8. The investigator will aim to complete the investigation and respond within 15 school days of receipt of the complaint form. The investigation report and outcome letter will be shared with the Director of Secondary/Primary Education in the first instance. The complainant will then be informed of the decision and the reasons for it. This will include what action will be taken to resolve the complaint (if any). If they cannot provide a full response within that time, they will write to the complainant explaining this and give a date by which a full response will be provided.
- 2.9. You will be advised that if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint,

you may request that your complaint be heard by the Complaints Panel under Stage 3 of this procedure. Such requests must be received within 10 days of receipt of the Stage 2 outcome.

3. Stage 3: Referral to the Appeal Panel

- 3.1. If you are dissatisfied with the decision under Stage 2, you may request that a Complaints Panel be convened to consider your complaint. The Complaints Panel will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.
- 3.2. The request should be made by completing the form at Appendix D and sending to the Head of Governance (rjames@anglianlearning.org) within 10 school days of the complainant receiving the outcome of Stage 2. The complainant should concisely and with clarity state why they are dissatisfied with the Stage 2 outcome and what would constitute a satisfactory resolution to their complaint. No additional documentation should be submitted unless at the discretion of the panel Chair.
- 3.3. The written request will be acknowledged within 5 school days of receipt.
- 3.4. The Head of Governance or assigned Academy Governance Professional will arrange for a Complaints Panel to be convened, made up of at least three members, including:
 - members of a local governing body and/or trustees of the academy trust (as appropriate) with no prior involvement in the matter; and,
 - one person who is independent of the management and running of the school
- 3.5. The Head of Governance/ Academy Governance Professional shall appoint one of these members to be the Chair of the Committee.
- 3.6. Every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within 20 school days of the receipt of the request. The Head of Governance will liaise with all members of the Complaints Panel to propose and agree a date, time and venue for the meeting. This is most likely to be at the relevant school. The Trust Board is mindful of the challenges that volunteer Governors and Trustees can encounter in finding time to prepare and attend a hearing.
- 3.7. If, despite best efforts, it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date and time for a hearing within a reasonable timeframe, the Head of Governance/ Academy Governance Professional may determine that the hearing proceeds on the basis of written submissions from both parties.
- 3.8. Circumstances may dictate that a hearing meet virtually.
- 3.9. The complainant will be notified in writing of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the panel members who will be present. Fair consideration will be given to any bona fide objection to a particular member of the panel. You will also be informed of the name of the person who will be

presenting the case on behalf of the school (referred to in this policy as the 'school representative'). This may be the person who undertook the investigation at Stage 2 or another person with sufficient knowledge of the matter.

- 3.10. A copy of the complaint and any other relevant documents will be provided to the Complaints Panel as soon as practicable upon receipt. Copies of these documents shall also be provided to all those attending the panel hearing 5 days before the meeting.
- 3.11. The Complaints Panel reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented by either party less than 3 school days prior to the hearing. The Complaints Panel is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.
- 3.12. The committee will not accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.
- 3.13. If the complainant fails to attend on the day without compelling reasons, the Complaints Panel Hearing will proceed in their absence.
- 3.14. Complainants may be accompanied to the hearing by a friend, relative, or other representative. Any representative is there to provide moral support and not to ask or answer questions on the complainant's behalf, except where such assistance is required by virtue of disability or a language barrier. Neither the school, Trust nor complainant can bring legal representation. The complainant should inform the Head of Governance of the details of any representative who will be accompanying them in good time before the meeting.
- 3.15. The meeting is not a court case, it will be held in private, and will be as informal as circumstances allow, ensuring that each party has the opportunity to address the Complaints Panel. The procedure to be followed will be explained to the parties in writing in advance of the hearing.
- 3.16. The meeting will usually be clerked by an Academy Governance Professional; where this is not possible, the Head of Governance will ensure that an alternative suitable person is appointed to fulfil the clerking function. The Clerk will ensure that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken or actions agreed. Electronic recordings of the hearing will not normally be permitted and, in any event, would require the consent of all those present.
- 3.17. A typical agenda for the panel hearing is set out in Appendix F. The complainant will have the opportunity to put their reasons for dissatisfaction and to enlarge on them but may not introduce reasons that were not previously put in writing and / or were not part of the initial complaint. The school (or Trust shared services team) representative will have the opportunity to respond. Each side, as well as the Panel members, will be able to ask questions. The complainant will have the opportunity to make final comments to the Panel.
- 3.18. The Head of Governance and/or Complaints Panel reserve the right to modify the above procedure at their sole discretion, for example requiring the parent and the school representative to present their complaint/actions separately to the Complaints Panel in the absence of the other party.

3.19. After the hearing, the Complaints Panel will consider their decision and inform the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, of their decision in writing, within 10 school days. The letter will set out the decision of the committee together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The panel can (by a majority if necessary):

- (i) dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- (ii) uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- (iii) decide on any further action to be taken;
- (iv) if appropriate, recommend changes to the school's / Trust's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

4. Conclusion of Process

4.1. The decision of the Complaints Panel Hearing is binding and concludes the Anglian Learning Complaints procedure. If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they can contact the ESFA via this link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complain-about-an-academy/complain-about-an-academy> or by post to this address:

Department for Education
School Complaints compliance unit
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD.

5. Complaint against a member of the Local Governing Body / Chair of the Local Governing Body or against a Trustee

- 5.1. Where a complaint is brought against a member of the Local Governing Body, the Chair of the Local Governing Body will investigate the complaint (or appoint another member of the Local Governing Body to do so) in the same way as in the first stage of the formal process at Stage 2.
- 5.2. If the complaint is against the Chair of the Local Governing Body, then the Vice Chair of the Local Governing Body will investigate the complaint (or appoint another member of the Local Governing Body to do so) in the same way as in the first stage of the formal process at Stage 2.
- 5.3. If the complaint is against a member of the board of Trustees, then the Chair of Trustees, (or in the case of a complaint against the Chair the Vice Chair) will investigate the complaint (or appoint another member of the board to do so) in the same way as in the first stage of the formal process at Stage 2.
- 5.4. In exceptional circumstances the Chair of Trustees may at his or her absolute discretion determine that a complaint against a Headteacher/Principal, Executive Principal, or member of the Local Governing Body should be dealt with at Board level and if so determined by the Chair of Trustees begin at Stage 2.

6. Complaints about the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

6.1. To comply with the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage ("EYFS"), written concerns or complaints about whether a school is meeting the EYFS requirements will be dealt with as follows:

- 6.1.1. We will acknowledge the written concern or complaint within **5 school days**.
- 6.1.2. The Headteacher will investigate the concern or complaint, which may include meeting with the complainant and the early years lead. We will send a written response with the outcome of the investigation within **28 school days** of receiving the complaint.
- 6.1.3. If the complainant is not happy with the outcome, they can ask for their complaint to be reviewed by a complaints committee at a hearing, as set out in Section 3 of this procedure.
- 6.2. We will keep a record of all written complaints about EYFS requirements and their outcomes and will make this available to Ofsted on request. Any concerns about whether a school is meeting EYFS requirements, can be reported to Ofsted at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or 0300 123 4666.

Part 2: Concerns or complaints from other persons

Part 1 of this complaints policy applies only to complaints made by parents or carers of current registered pupils of academies within the trust. However, the Trust wishes to work closely with other members of the local community and will deal with their concerns and complaints as follows:

- 1 **Stage 1** - a concern regarding a school or its operations may be made to any member of staff. That member of staff will attempt to resolve the matter immediately or may, if appropriate, refer the matter to their line manager or member of the senior leadership team (SLT) who is best placed to deal with the concern. It is expected that most concerns will be responded to orally or in writing within 5 school days. If a longer period is required, you will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation.
- 2 **Stage 2** - where a concern is not resolved at Stage 1, or you wish your concerns to be dealt with immediately as a formal complaint, you should put your complaint in writing and send this to the Headteacher/Principal of the relevant school to investigate. The Headteacher/Principal may delegate the task of investigation and/or responding to the complaint to a member of SLT or may escalate the **complaint** straight to Stage 3. A formal response to the complaint will usually be provided within 10 school days of receipt of the letter of complaint although if a longer period is required to respond, you will be kept updated.
- 3 **Stage 3** - if you are not satisfied with the response at Stage 2, you may request a review by writing to the Head of Governance. You should write to the Clerk within 10 school days of receipt of the letter at Stage 2. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if **exceptional** circumstances apply. The Clerk will arrange for a governor to consider the complaint alone or may convene a complaints committee on the same terms as set out in Part 1 of this complaints policy. The decision at this stage will usually be sent to you within 20 school days of receipt of the request for a review. The decision at Stage 3 exhausts the school's complaints procedure.

Concerns or complaints regarding the Headteacher/Principal or the Trust as a whole should be referred directly to the Head of Governance who will arrange for the stages above to be considered by an appropriate person.

Part 3: Unreasonably persistent complainants and unreasonable complainant behaviour

There are rare circumstances where we will deviate from the Complaints Procedure set out in Parts 1 and 2. These include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- where the complainant's behaviour or language towards staff, members of the local governing body or trustees is abusive, offensive, discriminatory or threatening either face-to-face, by telephone, in writing or electronically;
- where the complaint's behaviour is hindering our consideration of complaints and/or the proper running of the school because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact, such as, if 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 unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
 - makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
 - changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
 - repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
 - refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the Trust's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education;
 - seeks an unrealistic outcome, such as the inappropriate dismissal of staff
 - 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
 - knowingly provides falsified information
 - publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

- where the complainant's complaint is clearly frivolous, vexatious and/or has patently insufficient grounds. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator defines the characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint as:
 - complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious
 - insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason
 - insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner
 - complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
 - demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a 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. Whenever possible, the Headteacher/Principal or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' judgment.

In these circumstances, we may:

- inform the complainant that their behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent and ask them to change it;
- In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from the school site.
- conduct the Complaints Panel on the papers only i.e. not hold a hearing;
- refuse to consider the complaint and, where Part 1 of this procedure applies, refer the complainant directly to the ESFA

In all cases we will write to tell the complainant why we believe his or her behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, what action we are taking and the duration of that action.

We may take the decision not to respond to any further correspondence where:

- we have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
- the complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options and
- the complainant contacts us repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

The case for ceasing further correspondence is stronger where:

- letters, emails, or telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive or make insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff

- we have reason to believe the complainant is contacting us with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, members of the local governing body or Trustees, we will consider other options, for example reporting the matter to the police or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

Part 4: Complaints campaigns

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint campaign is defined as a complaint from three or more separate individuals (whether or not connected with a school or the Trust) which are all based on the same subject.

Depending on the subject in question, we may deviate from the procedure set out in this policy and instead:

- send a template response to all complainants and/or
- publish a single response on the school/trust's website (as applicable)

Appendix A

Matters excluded from scope of this policy

Excluded Matters	Signposting
Admissions	The process for challenging admissions decisions is set out in our admissions policy in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.
Child protection matters	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 which you feel cannot or should not be raised directly with the school, you should contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
Exclusions and suspensions	The process for challenging exclusion/suspension decisions is set out in the DfE's statutory guidance and information can be found at https://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions
National Curriculum content	Please contact the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk/contactus
School re-organisation proposals	Where concerns are not adequately addressed by the trust, complaints can be raised direct with the Department for Education.
Data protection matters	Complaints about data protection matters are handled under our data protection policy and in accordance with relevant guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Serious concerns, can be reported to the ICO directly, but the ICO will usually expect concerns to have been raised with our Data Protection Officer in the first instance
Freedom of information matters	Complaints about our compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 are handled under our freedom of information policy and in accordance with relevant guidance from the ICO. Serious concerns, can be reported to the ICO directly, but the ICO will usually expect concerns to have been raised with our Data Protection Officer in the first instance
[Governor][trustee] grievances	Complaints from local governors or trustees will be dealt with under the Trust's internal governance procedures. This does not prevent local governors or trustees from raising complaints in their capacity as a parent.
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Certain complaints about staff may need to 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.
Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with the local authority.
Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of the complaint
Home-to-school transport	Complaints regarding home-to-school transport (including eligibility, routes, timetabling, or provision) are the responsibility of the relevant local authority and are not dealt with under this policy. Parents/carers should raise concerns directly with the local authority's school transport team in accordance with its published procedures.

Appendix B

Guidance on using AI tools to raise concerns or complaints

Introduction

AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini and similar large language model applications) can help you organise your thoughts, structure your concern or complaint clearly, and express yourself effectively. However, these tools have significant limitations and must be used with care. This Annex provides practical guidance on how to use AI tools effectively when raising a concern or complaint under this procedure, and what to avoid.

How AI tools can help you

AI tools can be useful for:

- (a) Organising your thoughts and structuring your concern or complaint in a clear and logical way;
- (b) Helping you express what happened in plain, clear language if you find writing difficult;
- (c) Summarising a timeline of events based on information you provide;
- (d) Suggesting what outcome you might want to ask for; and
- (e) Checking your draft for clarity, tone and spelling before you submit it.

Important limitations and risks

You should be aware of the following limitations and risks when using AI tools:

- (a) AI tools do not know what happened – they can only work with the information you give them, and they may fill gaps with invented details that sound convincing but are untrue (this is sometimes called 'hallucination');
- (b) AI tools may generate references to laws, regulations, policies or legal rights that do not exist, are out of date, or do not apply to your situation;
- (c) AI tools may produce language that is overly formal, legalistic or aggressive, which may not reflect your genuine concern and may make it harder for us to resolve the matter constructively;
- (d) any personal data (including names, dates of birth, or other identifying information about your child, other children, staff or other individuals) that you enter into an AI tool may be stored, processed or used by the AI provider in ways that are outside your control and may breach data protection law;
- (e) AI-generated complaints that do not accurately reflect your experience may cause delays in resolving your concern, as we may need to spend time clarifying what actually happened; and

- (f) AI tools work by predicting the most likely answer based on the information they have been trained on. They do not check whether their output is accurate or relevant to your particular situation, and the most likely-sounding answer is not always the correct one. AI tools are also designed to make you feel helped and understood, which means they may agree with your point of view, use an overly sympathetic tone, or present your complaint in a one-sided way rather than giving a balanced account of what happened. This can wrongly reinforce your point of view and make you more fixed in your position, which may make it harder for us to work together to resolve the matter.

What to do and what to avoid

Do	Don't
Write down the key facts yourself first (what happened, when, who was involved, and what you would like us to do) before using an AI tool.	Copy and paste AI-generated text without reading and checking it thoroughly.
Use AI to help you structure and clarify what you have already written, rather than to generate the complaint from scratch.	Submit a complaint that contains facts, events or details that you have not personally verified as accurate.
Read everything the AI produces carefully and remove or correct anything that is inaccurate, exaggerated or that you did not experience.	Rely on any legal advice, references to legislation or statements about your rights generated by an AI tool without checking them independently.
Use your own words where possible – your complaint should sound like you.	Enter the names or personal data of your child, other children, staff members or any other individuals into an AI tool.
Remove all personal data (names, dates of birth and other identifying information about individuals) before entering any information into an AI tool – you can use placeholders such as 'my child', 'the class teacher' or 'Teacher A' instead.	Use AI to generate multiple or repetitive complaints about the same issue.

Example prompts for using AI tools effectively

The following example prompts illustrate how AI tools can be used effectively to help you prepare a concern or complaint.

In each case, you should replace the descriptions in square brackets with your own details, taking care not to include any personal data or names.

Example 1 Organising your thoughts:

"I want to raise a concern with my child's school about [describe the issue in general terms, e.g. 'how a bullying incident was handled']. The key things that happened are: [list the main events in the order they happened, using descriptions such as 'my child', 'the class teacher' etc. instead of names]. Can you help me organise these into a clear, chronological summary that I can use when speaking to the school?"

Why this helps: Before writing a formal complaint, it can be difficult to know where to start, particularly if a number of things have happened over a period of time. This prompt helps you to present the key events in a logical order, making it easier for us to understand your concern and for you to feel confident that nothing important has been left out.

Example 2 – Structuring a written complaint:

"I need to write a formal complaint to my child's school. The issue is [describe the issue]. I have already tried to resolve this informally by [describe what you did]. The key facts are [list the facts]. The outcome I am looking for is [describe what you want to happen]. Can you help me structure this into a clear letter, using plain language and a respectful tone? Do not add any facts or details that I have not provided."

Why this helps: A well-structured complaint is more likely to be understood and dealt with effectively. This prompt helps you to set out the issue, the steps you have already taken, the relevant facts, and the outcome you are seeking in a clear and logical way, without the AI tool adding anything you have not told it.

Example 3 – Checking tone and clarity:

"I have drafted the following complaint to my child's school: [paste your draft, with names removed]. Can you suggest how I could make this clearer and more constructive in tone, without changing the facts or adding anything new?"

Why this helps: When raising a concern or complaint, it is natural to feel frustrated or upset. This prompt allows you to check that your draft communicates your concern clearly and constructively, which is more likely to lead to a productive response, without altering the substance of what you have written.

Example 4 – Identifying what outcome to request:

"I am raising a complaint with my child's school about [describe the issue]. I am not sure what outcome to ask for. Based on the facts I have described, can you suggest some realistic outcomes I could request? Please do not suggest legal remedies or refer to specific laws."

Why this helps: It is not always easy to know what to ask for when raising a complaint. This prompt can help you to think through realistic and proportionate outcomes, whilst ensuring that the AI tool does not stray into providing legal advice, which it is not equipped to give.

Section A – Your Details	
Title: Mr / Mrs / Ms / Other	
Surname	
Forename	
Home Telephone Number	
Mobile Telephone Number	
Email Address	
Address and Postcode	
How would you prefer for us to contact you?	

(Please use a continuation sheet if required).

Date:

What would constitute a satisfactory resolution of your complaint?

Anglian Learning Complaint Review Request Form Stage 3



Section A – Your Details	
Title: Mr / Mrs / Ms / Other	
Surname	
Forename	
Home Telephone Number	
Mobile Telephone Number	
Email Address	
Address and Postcode	
How would you prefer for us to contact you?	

Section B - Please give reasons why you consider the response to your complaint from the Headteacher/Principal/Chair of Governors/CEO at Stage 2 should be reviewed by a Complaints Panel.	
Date:	
What would constitute a satisfactory resolution of your complaint?	

Appendix E

Complaint Procedure Summary

Complainants should contact the Head of Governance for clarification if they are unsure what constitutes a complaint about the Trust as opposed to a complaint about an individual school,

STAGE 1: Informal Complaints

School/ Trust shared services staff seek to resolve the complaint informally through discussion with the complainant. A formal complaint will not be considered unless the complainant has made reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution.

STAGE 2: Formal Resolution: Investigation by a member of the School Leadership Team, Trust Leadership Team or nominated Governor / Trustee

Written complaint via Complaint Form (Appendix B)

Action		Timescale
Academy complaint	Trust central team Complaint	
Received by Headteacher / Principal /Chair of Governors*	Received by CEO / Chair of Trustees*	Within 15 school days of the Stage 1 outcome.
Investigation and formal response from the Headteacher / Principal / Chair of Governors*	Investigation and formal Response from the CEO / Chair of Trustees	Within 15 school days of complaint being received if possible

*If the complaint is about the Headteacher/Principal/CEO then the complaint will be directed to the Chair of Governors/Chair of Trustees.

STAGE 3: Appeals Hearing

Written complaint via Complaint Review Form (Appendix C) requesting review of Stage 2 decision by Complaint Panel.

Action	Timescale
Received by Head of Governance	Within 10 school days of complainant receiving Stage 2 response
Complaints Panel Meeting	Within 20 school days of school response where possible
Formal Response from the Panel via the Head of Governance	Within 10 school days where possible of the Complaints Panel meeting

The conclusion of Stage 3 brings to an end the Anglian Learning complaints procedure. Complainants who remain dissatisfied may wish to contact the Department for Education via this link: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-academy/state-academys> or by post to this address: Ministerial and Public Communications Division, Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD.

Appendix F

Sample Agenda for Stage 3 Complaint Panel meeting

1	Introductions by the Panel Chair.
2	Parent to explain why they are unhappy with the Stage 2 response. <i>Questions to the Parent by the Panel and School / Trust Representative</i>
3	School/ Trust Representative to explain the Academy/Trust's response. <i>Questions to School / Trust Representative by the Panel and Parent</i>
4	Closing remarks by the Parent.
5	Closing remarks by the School/ Trust Representative.
6	Meeting closes and all parties leave whilst the Panel considers and makes its decision.