



# COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

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**May 2026** Updates since previous edition:

- Plain-English “Making a complaint” section added
- Over use of AI-generated complaints addressed
- Stronger emphasis on early informal resolution
- Post-Stage 3 signposting updated from ESFA to DfE
- Minor wording, layout and accessibility improvements (no procedural or timescale changes)

**January 2025** Updates since previous edition:

- Reference to Local governors changed to Local Advisory Committee throughout.
- Change of who investigates complaints about Local Advisory Committee members from CEO to Trust.
- Addition of email address [governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk](mailto:governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk) throughout.

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## Guide to Making a Complaint

We want to hear from parents and carers and to sort out problems as early as possible. Most issues can be resolved quickly by talking to us. This section explains, in simple terms, how to raise a concern or complaint. The rest of this policy contains more detailed information about the formal process we must follow.

**First – talk to us** If something is worrying you, please talk to:

- your child’s teacher, or
- the headteacher or head of school.

Many concerns can be sorted out at this stage. If you find it difficult to speak to a particular person, let us know and we will arrange for someone else to help.

**If you still need to complain** Write it down

If the issue is not resolved, you can make a formal complaint. Please complete our complaint form. This helps us understand your concern clearly and make sure it is dealt with properly.

If you prefer we can:

- help you fill in the form,
- take the details over the phone, or
- arrange a meeting where someone can write it down for you.

We ask that complaints are written in your own words rather than using AI (such as chatGPT), so we can clearly understand what matters to you.

- Complaints about school staff should be sent via the school office.
- Complaints about the headteacher, governance or the Trust should be emailed to: [governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk](mailto:governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk)

If you’re unsure, the school office can help direct your complaint to the right place.

We will:

- let you know that we have received your complaint,
- look carefully into what happened,
- write to you with our response, usually within 15 school days.

If we need more time, we will tell you why.

If you are not satisfied with the response, you can ask for your complaint to be reviewed by an independent complaints panel. Email [governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk](mailto:governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk) within 10 days of receiving the outcome.

This is the final stage of the process.

***Sometimes it helps to talk things through. If needed, we may offer to arrange a meeting during or at the conclusion of Stage 2 so that, if possible, a resolution can be reached at this stage.***

### **Important things to know**

- This complaints process is for parents and carers of pupils.
- Some issues (such as admissions, exclusions or safeguarding) follow different processes.
- We expect communication to be respectful.
- We are committed to listening and learning from concerns raised.

Where to find more detail

If you're not sure what to do next, please contact the school office.

***The detailed complaints procedure below sets out the formal stages the school and Trust must follow to ensure complaints are considered fully, fairly and in line with statutory guidance.***

# HOPE LEARNING COMMUNITY COMPLAINTS POLICY.

## THE PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY

Hope Learning Community aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes
- We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.
- The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school and trust website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

## Who can make a complaint?

Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure for parents or carers of children that are registered with our schools.

We will handle complaints from members of the public respectfully and expediently, although we are not obliged to follow this complaints procedure.

## The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. We take concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the head teacher/head of school will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the head teacher/ head of school will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

### How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

**Complaints against school staff** (except the head teacher) should be made in the first instance, to the head teacher/head of school via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

**Complaints that involve or are about a head teacher/head of school** should be addressed to the CEO via : [governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk](mailto:governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk) Please mark as Private and Confidential.

**Complaints about the Chair of the Local advisory committee (LAC)** [formerly Local governing body], any individual committee member (ambassador) or the whole LAC should be addressed to the Chair of trustees via the Director of Governance and Compliance at [governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk](mailto:governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk) .Please mark as Private and Confidential.

**Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a trustee of the Trust**, should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees, via the [Director of Governance and Compliance](#). Please mark as Private and Confidential.

**Complaints about the whole trust board** should be addressed to the [Director of Governance and Compliance](#).

*Complaints about services by other providers who use trust premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.*

### Complaint form

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask a third-party organisation for example like the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

### **Anonymous complaints**

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the school/trust will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

### **Complaint campaigns**

If we receive what we consider to be a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject and possibly from complainants not connected to the school, then we will treat these complaints as being part of a campaign and respond in one of the following two ways, depending upon the nature and scale of the complaint:

- send the same response to all complainants; or
- publish a single response on the school's website.

### **Time scales**

You must raise the complaint 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 if exceptional circumstances apply.

### **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.

### **Scope of this complaints procedure**

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by our schools/the trust other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Admissions to schools</li> </ul>	<p>Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation</li> </ul>	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the <a href="#">Essex Safeguarding children board</a></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exclusion of children from school*</li> </ul>	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</a>.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whistleblowing</li> </ul>	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>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: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff grievances</li> </ul>	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff conduct</li> </ul>	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>

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

### **Resolving complaints**

At each stage in the procedure, we want to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, 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, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

## The three stages of our complaints procedure

### Stage 1 – Informal complaints

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or head teacher. Complainants should not approach individual local ambassadors 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 Stage 3 of the procedure.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will aim to provide an informal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

### Stage 2 – Formal complaints

Formal complaints must be made to the head teacher (unless they are about the head teacher), via the school office. This may be done in person or in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form).

The head teacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

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

***Note: The head teacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.***

During the investigation, the head teacher (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 head teacher will usually provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the head teacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

## Formal complaint response

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 head teacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

***Sometimes it helps to talk things through. If needed, the head may offer to arrange a meeting during or at the conclusion of Stage 2 so that, if possible, a resolution can be reached at this stage.***

## Complaints about the head teacher/head of school

Complaints about the head teacher/head of school must be addressed to the Director of Governance and Compliance: [governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk](mailto:governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk)

If the complaint is:

- about the headteacher

stage 2 will be escalated to the CEO of the Trust.

***Note: The CEO may delegate the investigation to an independent investigator but not the decision to be taken.***

## Complaints about the Local advisory panel

If the complaint is:

- about the Chair or Vice Chair of the local advisory panel
- about the entire local advisory panel
- the majority of the local advisory panel

stage 2 will be escalated to the board.

***Note: The board may delegate the investigation to an independent investigator but not the decision to be taken.***

## Complaints about the trust board

If the complaint is:

- about the Chair or Vice Chair of the trust board
- about the entire board
- an individual trustee

Complaints should be directed to the Director of Governance and Compliance who will advise on how to proceed.

## How to appeal

### Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

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 – 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.

The complainant should write to the Director of Governance and Compliance (who acts as Clerk to the trustees) within 10 school days, asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel and including a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow the procedure and/or the reasons for dissatisfaction. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

The Clerk 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 Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates without good reason, the Clerk 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.

Stage 3 will be heard by the 2 trustees and an independent panel member.

If the complaint is:

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

an entirely independent panel may be convened.

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 panel 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.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

**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 (Human Resources) staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.**

The Clerk 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 panel at least 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

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

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. If a recording is made to support creation of the minutes, consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. The minutes are the record of the meeting. The electronic recording will not be shared or retained.

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 panel will provide the complainant with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, usually within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education (DfE) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Hope Learning Community.

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 Hope Learning Community will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection by the proprietor and the head teacher.

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.

### **Complaints escalated to / about the Trust, CEO or Trustee**

If a complaint is escalated to Hope Learning Community, or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the trust, then the complaint should be sent to the Director of Governance and compliance: [governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk](mailto:governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk)

We will usually write acknowledging the complaint within 5 school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 2 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 15 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 15 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, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation

**. Note: The chair/vice chair may delegate the investigation to an independent investigator but not the decision to be taken.**

Where the Chair of the Trust Board has investigated the complaint, they will write the letter of outcome to the Complainant and provide a copy to the CEO.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Director of Governance (who is clerk to the trustees) within 10 school days, asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel and including a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow the procedure and/or the reasons for dissatisfaction. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

The Clerk 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 Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk 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 or
- the entire trust board or
- the majority of the trust board

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

The Complaint Panel will consist of three members. None of the three members of the Complaint Panel will have been involved in the incidents or events which led to the complaint, or 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 Panel 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 panel 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.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

***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.***

The Clerk 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 panel at least 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

**The review may be conducted through a consideration of written submissions or oral representations, as deemed appropriate by the panel.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Chair of the panel will provide the complainant and Hope Learning Community with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, usually within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education (DfE) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Hope Learning Community.

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 Hope Learning Community will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection by the proprietor and the head teacher.

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.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### Complainant

We will be able to respond more effectively to a complaint if you:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- complain in your own words and not rely heavily on artificial intelligence (AI) tools.
- 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 head teacher or complaints panel that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The head teacher or complaints panel 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 head teacher, CEO or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, head teacher, CEO, Chair of Governors, Chair of Trust or the Clerk 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.

### **Clerk to the Trust Board**

The Director of Governance and Compliance, acting as clerk, is the contact point for the complainant and the panel 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-UK)
- 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 panel's decision.

### **Panel Chair**

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

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) 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 panel 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 UK

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 panel is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the panel 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 Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

### **Panel Member**

Panel members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so

No one may sit on the panel 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 panel 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 panel 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 panel 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 panel considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

## Policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints

See also our *Managing Unreasonable Communication and Behaviour Policy*.

Hope Learning Community 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.

We do not, however, 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.

Hope Learning Community defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school/trust 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 cooperate 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 that are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice;

- introduces trivial or irrelevant information that 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 school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the DfE;
- 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; and/or
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

If staff feel that a piece of communication has been largely AI generated, to the point at which it is inaccurate, excessively long, or difficult to understand, parents may be asked to resubmit their communication in a new form, or invited into school to discuss their concerns in person.

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.

Whenever possible, the headteacher will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the head teacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the school/trust 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. This may include barring an individual from school premises.

### **Persistent correspondence**

If complainants frequently contact the school, causing a significant level of disruption, but refuse to engage with the complaints procedure, we can:

- restrict the complainant to a single point of contact via an email address; and/or
- limit the number of times the complainant can make contact.

This restriction will be limited to the complainant's capacity to complain.

For all other issues the complainant can contact the school as normal.

***See also our [Managing Unreasonable Communication and Behaviour policy](#)***

### **Next Steps**

If the complainant believes the school / 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 after they have completed Stage 3.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Hope Learning Community. They will consider whether the school/trust 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 DfE online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe>

## Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the headteacher/head of school or to the trust via email: [governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk](mailto:governance@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk) We will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

<b>This complaint relates to</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>School</b></span> <b>OR Hope Learning Community trust (complete or delete as appropriate.)</b>
<b>Your name:</b>
<b>Pupil's name :</b>
<b>Your relationship to the pupil :</b>
<b>Address:</b>          <b>Postcode:</b>  <b>Day time telephone number:</b>  <b>Evening telephone number:</b>    <b>Email address:</b>

**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?**

<p><b>Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.</b> Detailed letter of complaint.</p>
<p><b>Signature:</b></p> <p><b>Date:</b></p>
<b>Official use</b>
<b>Date acknowledgement sent:</b>
<b>By who:</b>
<b>Complaint referred to:</b>
<b>Action taken:</b>
<b>Date:</b>

