



**PYRAMID**  
SCHOOLS TRUST

Working in partnership, so future generations achieve, belong and contribute

# Complaints Policy

## Edition 5: March 2026

<b>Document Control</b>		
Edition	Issued	Changes from previous
1	01/04/2020	<p>New policy.</p> <p>Approved by the Board of Trustees.</p>
2	14/06/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy re-write.</li> </ul> <p>Approved by the Board of Trustees.</p>
3	14/07/2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy re-write.</li> </ul> <p>Approved by the Board of Trustees</p>
4	20/03/2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stage 1: Complaints will be heard by the Headteacher, or a person delegated to hear the complaint on their behalf e.g. the Subject Leader, Head of Year, or Faculty Leader.</li> <li>Change of LG Board to LG Committee</li> </ul> <p>Approved by the Board of Trustees</p>
5	18/03/2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New "Resolution-Based Framework" Section</li> <li>Strengthened Stages 1–4 Wording</li> <li>Improved Clarity on Unreasonable Complaints</li> </ul> <p>Approved By Board of Trustees</p>

**Review Cycle: Annually**

**Review Date: March 2027**

## **Statement of Intent**

The Pyramid Schools Trust Complaints Policy aims to resolve complaints at the earliest possible time. It is designed to ensure that the procedure is straightforward, impartial, non-adversarial, and allows full and fair investigation, respects confidentiality and delivers an effective response and appropriate redress.

This policy outlines the procedure that the complainant and academies within the Trust must follow. Many issues can be resolved informally without the need to invoke formal procedures.

The Headteacher of the relevant academy will be the first point of contact, when following the procedure.

The Trust will not normally investigate anonymous complaints.

## **Resolution-Based Approach and Scope Limitations**

The Trust operates a resolution-based complaints procedure. At every stage, the focus is on identifying reasonable and achievable solutions. The Trust may decide not to investigate or may discontinue an investigation where:

- the matter is outside the scope of this procedure;
- a resolution cannot realistically be achieved;
- the complainant does not engage with reasonable steps required to progress or resolve the complaint;
- the complainant refuses to specify the outcome sought despite being asked to do so;
- the complaint is unreasonable, vexatious or repetitious;
- statutory or alternative procedures apply.

Where the Trust decides not to investigate or to discontinue an investigation, the complainant will receive written notification explaining the reasons.

A copy of this policy will be made available on request. It will also be available on the Trust website, and the websites of individual academies within the Trust, as recommended by the Department for Education.

## **Definitions for the Purposes of this Policy:**

A complaint can be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction' towards the actions taken or a perceived lack of action taken.

A concern is an 'expression of worry or doubt' where reassurance is required. A concern can be resolved informally at school level.

A grievance is an issue raised by a member of staff, where they feel that the academy where they work has not implemented a policy or process fairly or properly. Grievances should be dealt with in line with the Trust's Grievance Policy.<sup>i</sup>

Unreasonable complaints include:

Vexatious complaints:

- Are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious.
- Insist upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.
- Insist upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.
- Are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
- Demand for redress which lacks any serious purpose or value.

Serial or persistent complaints:

Are duplicated, sent by the same complainant once the initial complaint has been closed.

For the purpose of this policy, “duplicate complaints” are identical complaints received from a complainant’s spouse, partner, grandparent or child. These complaints will not be addressed again, the individual making the second complaint will be informed that the complaint has been dealt with on a local level and if they are dissatisfied with the result, they can appeal to the Department for Education.

Any new details provided by a complainant’s spouse, partner, grandparent or child, will be investigated and dealt with in line with this policy.

### **Timeline**

Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident, or if the complaint relates to associated incidents, then within three months of the last incident. Consideration will only be given to complaints that fall outside of these timescales in exceptional circumstances.

Complaints received outside of term time will be treated as being received on the first school day after the holiday period.

### **Stages of Complaint**

The procedure consists of four stages:



**Stage 1 Informal** – which will usually be resolved at school level between an individual academy and the complainant or a representative of the Trust if the complaint is in direct reference to the Trust or Trustees.

**Stage 2 Formal** – if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at the informal stage and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to the formal stage.

**Stage 3 Chair of the Local Governing Committee** - if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at the formal stage and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to the Chair to the Governors of the Local Governing Committee.

**Stage 4 Governor Panel Hearing** – if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint at stage 3 and wishes to take the matter further, they can request to progress to a Governor Panel Hearing. The complainant should identify what aspects of their complaint remain unresolved and why, and what steps would resolve this. This panel includes at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and one person who is independent of the management and running of the Trust.

Once a complaint has been made, it can be resolved or withdrawn at any stage.

### Stage 1 – Informal Complaint

An informal complaint may be made in person, by telephone or in writing.

Complaints will be heard by the Headteacher, or a person delegated to hear the complaint on their behalf e.g. the Subject Leader, Head of Year, or Faculty Leader.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, the Chair of the Local Governing Committee should be informed and will need to handle the complaint.

Where a complaint is made initially to a Governor or a Trustee, the complainant will be referred back to the appropriate person, indicated in this policy. No member of staff or Trustee will act alone on a complaint outside of the procedure.

Within 5 school days of notification of the complaint, the complainant and the relevant member of staff should discuss the issue in a respectful and informal manner to seek a mutual resolution.

At this initial communication stage of the complaint, the complainant will be asked for their input as to what they believe may resolve the issue about which the complaint has been made to avoid further escalation where possible.

## **Stage 2 – Formal Complaint**

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2.

Formal complaints must be made in writing to the Headteacher. If the complaint is against the Headteacher, the complainant should write, in confidence, to the Chair of the academy's Local Governing Committee (via the Clerk to the Governors). The Chair will seek to resolve the issue informally. If this is not possible, the procedure will move to Stage 4.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

Stage 2 of the process will be completed within 15 school days. Where the situation is recognised as complex, and it is deemed to be unable to be resolved within this timescale, the Headteacher or a senior member of staff of the relevant academy will contact the complainant to inform them of the revised target date via a written notification.

Where the Headteacher or a senior member of staff has made reasonable attempts to accommodate the complainant with dates for a complaint meeting and they refuse or are unable to attend, the meeting will be convened in their absence and a conclusion will be reached in the interests of drawing the complaint to a close.

Once all facts are established, the person handling the complaint shall contact the complainant in writing with the outcome.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, they can request to progress to Stage 3. A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk to the Governors, within 10 school days of the receipt of the Stage 2 response.

Note: If a complaint is relating to a member of staff and is investigated and upheld, then the complainant will be advised it will be considered under the staff disciplinary procedures policy, if appropriate. The outcome will not be shared with them.

### **Stage 3 – Complaint to Chair of the Local Governing Committee**

Where the complaint progresses to Stage 3, the complainant should write, in confidence, to the Chair of the academy's Local Governing Committee (via the Clerk to the Governors). The Chair will consider the complaint and respond within 15 school days.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, they can request to progress to Stage 4.

### **Stage 4 – Appeal - Local Governing Committee Panel Hearing**

A request to escalate to Stage 4 will be made to the Clerk to the Governors, within 10 school days of the receipt of the Stage 3 response. At the time of requesting the panel hearing, the complainant should provide the Clerk with a written summary of their case and any supporting documentation they wish to be considered.

The panel will consist of at least three individuals who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint **with at least one of those being an independent panel member**. Where possible, this independent panel member will not have an association with the Trust; however, where this is not possible and the complaint concerns an individual academy, a local governor serving on the local governing board of a different academy within the Trust may occupy this role as they will be sufficiently separate from the academy being complained about.

The Clerk to the Governors will record the date the escalation request was received, acknowledge receipt of the complaint, and inform the complainant of the scheduled time and date of the panel hearing in writing. The meeting will be convened within 15 school days of the receipt of the escalation request where possible. Where this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and ensure the complainant is kept up-to-date.

Five school days' notice will be given to all parties attending the panel hearing, including the complainant.

Neither the complainant nor the Trust will bring legal representation to this hearing, unless in exceptional circumstances, where this will be agreed beforehand. The purpose of the hearing will be reconciliation and ensuring that things that may have gone wrong are corrected. At the hearing, all participants will be given the opportunity to put their case across and discuss any issues.

The meeting will allow for:

- The complainant to be present and accompanied at the hearing if they wish.
- The complainant to present their case.
- Members of the panel to question both the complainant and the school.
- Final statements to be made by both parties involved.

The complainant will receive a written response explaining the panel's decision within 15 school days. They will also receive a copy of the minutes, subject to any necessary redactions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR.

If the complainant cannot attend the panel hearing, they must inform the clerk promptly. One alternative day may be offered. If the complainant cannot attend the rescheduled hearing, declines the offer or fails to attend without notice the panel may proceed in their absence and determine the complaint based on written evidence unless exception circumstances apply.



If a complainant remains dissatisfied once the complaint procedure has been completed, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Department for Education. If they believe the school didn't handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure, or they acted unlawfully in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the DfE, after they have completed Stage 4. A complaint can be submitted to the ESFA online or in writing to: Department for Education, School Complaints Compliance Unit, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD.

The DfE will not overturn the panel's decision or re-investigate the original complaint, and will only intervene where the academy has not followed the process correctly.

## Complaints Procedure

This policy is implemented on a Trust-wide level; however, complaints will be dealt with by individual academies.

The Trust will ensure that the complaints procedure is:

- Easily accessible and publicised on its website.
- Simple to understand and put into practice.
- Impartial and fair to all parties involved.
- Respectful of confidentiality duties.
- Regularly reviewed.

## Resolving Complaints

At each stage of the procedure, the Trust is committed to resolving the complaint. If the complaint is upheld in **whole or in part, it may offer** one of the following:

- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been handled better
- An assurance that the Trust will try and ensure the incident will not occur again
- An outline 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 changes will be made
- An undertaking to review Trust policies in light of the complaint
- An apology.

## Withdrawal of a Complaint

Where a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, the Trust will ask them to confirm this in writing.

The Trust will not under any exceptional circumstances ask, or pressure an individual, to withdraw a complaint.

## Record keeping

A written record will be kept of all complaints that are made at Stage 2 or beyond.

## Making a Complaint

Complaints can be made by any person, including members of the public, about any provision of facilities or services that the Trust provides.

### Complaints that will not be considered under this policy.

Usually complaints relating to the matters set out in the table below will not be considered under this policy as they have their own appeal or complaint processes. Where necessary the Trust will exercise its discretion.

Complaints may be raised under this policy about staff conduct, however such complaints will be dealt with under the Trust's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, and complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken as a result.

Exceptions	Policy/Who to contact
Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the Local Authority.
School reorganisation proposals	Contact the Local Authority in the first instance and then escalate to the Trust if dissatisfied.
Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEND)	Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with local authorities.
Whistleblowing	The Trust has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all its employees, including temporary staff and contractors. 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> Volunteer staff who have concerns about a 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
National curriculum content	This is the responsibility of the Department for Education at <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>
Exclusion of children from school*	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>  *Complaints about the application of the Behaviour & Exclusion policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the Trust's Disciplinary Policy. 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.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters should be escalated to the Local Authority rather than the school. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding, or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

	Central Bedfordshire LADO – 0300 300 4833 Children’s Services – 0300 300 8585
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the Trust’s Grievance Policy. Note that where complaints relate to staff conduct, these may be dealt with under both this Complaints Policy and the Staff Grievance & Disciplinary Policy. In such circumstance’s complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any Staff disciplinary investigation or processes.
Data protection / FOIA	<a href="#">Information Commissioner’s Office</a>
Third party contractors / suppliers	Third party complaints process

All other complaints will be directed towards the procedures laid out in this policy.

Complainants may make complaints in person, in writing or by telephone at Stage 1. They may also be made by a third party on behalf of a complainant, contingent on appropriate consent having been obtained to do so.

### Complaints about Trust Staff or Trustees

Complaints about local Governors will be made in writing to the Clerk to the Governors, who will arrange for them to be considered by the Chair of Governors.

Complaints about the Chair of the Local Governing Committee, the CEO or Trustees will be dealt with by the Chair of Trustees.

### Recording a Complaint

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 any recording of meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

### Managing Unreasonable Requests

The Trust 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 the Trust or any of its academies; however, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour, including harassment, and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- 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 investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.

- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or 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 complaints 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, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
- A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:
  - Maliciously.
  - Aggressively.
  - Using threats, intimidation or violence.
  - Using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language.
  - Knowing it to be false.
  - Using falsified information.
  - By publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

Complainants should limit the number of communications with the Trust 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.

A decision to stop responding will only be considered in circumstances where the following statements are true:

- Every reasonable step has been taken to address the complainant's concerns.
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the Trust's position and their options.
- The complainant contacts the Trust or any of its academies repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.

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 premises.

### **Barring from the Premises**

School premises are private property and therefore any individual may be barred from entering the premises.

If an individual's behaviour is cause for concern, the Headteacher of the relevant academy will ask the individual to leave the premises.

The Headteacher will notify the individual in writing if a decision has been taken to bar them from the school site.

### **Complaints Campaigns**

For the purposes of this policy, “complaints campaigns” are where the Trust, or an academy within the Trust, receives large volumes of complaints that are all based on the same subject.

Where the Trust becomes the subject of a complaints campaign from complainants who are not connected with the Trust, the Trust is not obliged to respond.

If the Trust receives a large number of complaints about the same subject from complainants who are connected to the Trust, e.g. parents, one response will be issued.

### **Exceptional Circumstances**

The DfE expects complainants to have completed the Trust’s complaints procedure before directing a complaint to them. The exceptions to this include when:

- Pupils are at risk of harm.
- Pupils are missing education.
- A complainant is being prevented from having their complaint progress through the Trust’s complaints procedure.

If a social services authority decides to investigate a situation, the board of Trustees may postpone the complaints procedure.

---

<sup>i</sup> Within this policy, references to ‘The Trust’ include actions undertaken by individual academies on behalf of the Trust, in accordance with the Trust’s scheme of delegation. Unless otherwise specified, operational responsibility for managing complaints rests with the relevant academy.