



Complaints Policy and Procedures

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1.0	09/07/2026	Policy reviewed and re-approved
1.1	13/07/2026	Technical update to give effect to legislative requirements

Policy Purpose and Summary:

This policy sets out E-ACT's approach to managing complaints. Its purpose is to ensure that concerns are addressed fairly, consistently and in line with statutory requirements. The policy provides a transparent process for raising and resolving issues in a timely manner, while promoting respect for all parties and using learning from complaints to support continuous improvement.

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SECTION 1: COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. Aims

1.1 When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial, respectful and non-adversarial
- Carry out fair and proportionate investigations
- Address all points raised and provide timely, clear responses
- Respect confidentiality where appropriate
- Ensure decisions are lawful, reasonable and fair
- Keep complainants informed of progress throughout
- Use learning from complaints to inform continuous improvement
- Promote constructive engagement and early resolution through open dialogue with complainants

We will seek to resolve concerns informally wherever possible, but where this is not achievable, the formal procedures set out in this policy will apply.

2. Legislation and guidance

2.1 This policy:

- Meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the [Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents/carers of pupils at the school.
- Is also based on [best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures](#) published by the Department for Education.
- Meets the requirements of section 35 of the schedule to the [Education \(Non-Maintained Special Schools\) \(England\) Regulations 2011](#), which states that non-maintained special schools must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints relating to their school.
- Addresses duties set out in the [Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework](#) with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements.
- Complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

3. Who can make a complaint

3.1 E-ACT meets its statutory obligations by considering complaints made by parents and carers of pupils at our academies. This policy is primarily intended for parents and carers, but we also recognise the importance of considering complaints from others with a legitimate interest. Separate procedures are in place for such complaints.

Parents and carers

3.2 Unless covered by separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions – see *Scope of this complaints policy*), complaints made by parents or carers of pupils registered at an E-ACT Academy will be considered under the three-stage procedure detailed in Section 2.

Other persons

3.3 Any person with a legitimate interest- including members of the public- may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services provided by our academies.

3.4 While there is no statutory requirement to consider such complaints this policy, E-ACT will handle them respectfully and in a timely manner in accordance with the separate process set out in Section 2.

Complainants not covered by this policy

- 3.5 This policy does not apply to staff, whose concerns should be raised under the relevant HR policies (e.g. grievance or whistleblowing procedures).
- 3.6 Complaints raised directly by pupils are addressed through academy pastoral and behaviour systems, not via this complaints policy.

Complaints about other providers

- 3.7 Complaints relating to services provided by third-party organisations using academy premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

4. The difference between a concern and a complaint

- 4.1 A **concern** may be defined as *‘an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought’*.
- 4.2 A **complaint** may be defined as *‘an expression of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action’*.
- 4.3 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. E-ACT takes concerns and complaints seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.
- 4.4 Concerns should initially be discussed directly with the relevant member of staff, as this is often the most effective way to achieve a timely and satisfactory resolution. If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Headteacher of the Academy, will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher 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.

5. How to raise a concern or make a complaint

- 5.1 Concerns may be raised in person, in writing (marked “private and confidential”), or by telephone. In many cases, concerns can be resolved informally through discussion with the appropriate member of staff.
- 5.2 Where a matter cannot be resolved informally and the complainant wishes to make a formal complaint, this should normally be submitted in writing, preferably using the E-ACT Complaint Form. Formal complaints may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, if they have appropriate consent to do so. Written confirmation of consent will be required, and concerns and complaints will be treated as formally received on the date such confirmation is received.
- 5.3 Complaints should be made to the Academy Headteacher, unless the complaint is about:
- The Headteacher or Education Director
 - The E-ACT Chief Executive Officer, a member of the E-ACT Executive Leadership Team or central staff
 - Trustees or Ambassadors
- 5.4 In these cases, the complaint should be sent directly to the Governance Team at Governance.Team@E-ACT.org.uk (marked “private and confidential”).
- 5.5 For ease of use, template complaint forms are included at Appendix A (Stage 1), Appendix B (Stage 2) and Appendix C (Stage 3) of this policy. If you require help in completing the form, please

contact the Academy office. You can also seek independent support, for example the Citizens Advice Bureau.

- 5.6 If you need assistance to access this procedure, please see the Accessibility and Support section of this policy.
- 5.7 Please note that Subject Access Requests must be made separately from any complaint via DPO@E-ACT.org.uk.
- 5.8 To support a fair and timely investigation, complaints should be clear, specific and focused on the key issues. Where submissions are lengthy or complex, the complainant may be asked to provide a summary of the main points to be considered.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in complaints

- 5.9 The Trust recognises that complainants may use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to prepare written communications. To ensure complaints can be considered fairly, proportionately and in line with Department for Education (DfE) best practice guidance, the following expectations apply:
 - Complaints must clearly reflect the complainant's own concerns, experiences and the impact on them or their child.
 - Complainants are responsible for ensuring that the information submitted is accurate. Where complaints include incorrect, misleading or generic references (including to legislation or guidance), the Trust will focus on the substance of the concern and may disregard content that is not relevant or accurate.
 - AI-generated content should support, but not replace, the complainant's own account. Where a complaint is excessively lengthy, unclear or generic such that the issues cannot reasonably be identified or investigated, the Trust may request clarification or a summary of the key points before proceeding.
 - Complainants are encouraged, but not required, to indicate where AI tools have been used, particularly where this supports accessibility.
 - The use of AI to generate content that is abusive, misleading, or intended to disrupt the process may be considered under Section 3: Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints.
- 5.10 The Trust will always seek to focus on resolving concerns and will support complainants to present their complaint in a clear and manageable way.

6. Accessibility and support

- 6.1 E-ACT is committed to ensuring that all complainants can access and complete this procedure.
- 6.2 We recognise that not all complainants are able to set out their concerns in writing. In such cases, reasonable adjustments will be made, for example:
 - Providing information in alternative formats
 - Arranging interpretation or translation support
 - Recording a complaint on behalf of someone who cannot put it in writing
- 6.3 Where meetings are required, holding these in accessible locations and making reasonable adjustments to support participation.
- 6.4 Complainants may also seek independent support (for example, from the Citizens Advice Bureau).
- 6.5 Anyone requiring assistance should contact the academy office or the Governance Team, who will work with them to ensure their complaint can be progressed fairly.

7. Anonymous complaints

- 7.1 We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or Education Director, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

8. Timescales to raise a complaint

- 8.1 We ask for all complaints to be raised as soon as possible, ideally within ten school days. Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. In all cases, the child concerned must still be on roll as a registered pupil at one of our academies at the date the complaint is submitted. We will only consider complaints made outside of this timeframe if exceptional circumstances apply. Exceptional circumstances might include (but are not limited to):
- Where the complainant was unable to raise the matter within the timeframe due to serious illness, bereavement, or another significant personal circumstance.
 - Where new and relevant information has come to light after the usual timeframe.
 - Where the complaint concerns ongoing safeguarding, discrimination or equality matters that could not reasonably have been raised sooner.
 - Where the delay was the result of factors outside the complainant's control (e.g. lack of access to necessary information).

9. Complaints received when the academy is closed

- 9.1 Complaints received when the academy is closed to pupils will be considered as received on the next school day.

10. Scope of this complaints policy

- 10.1 This policy covers complaints about whether the Trust has acted reasonably, fairly and in line with their policies, procedures and relevant guidance.
- 10.2 It is not the role of the complaints process to:
- Determine breaches of law or make legal findings
 - Act as a tribunal or substitute for courts, regulators or statutory appeal processes
 - Provide detailed legal interpretation of legislation or statutory guidance
- 10.3 Where complaints include references to legislation or statutory guidance, the Trust will have regard to relevant frameworks where appropriate. However, the focus of the process will remain on the actions taken, the decision-making process followed, and whether these were reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances.
- 10.4 Where submissions include extensive, complex or inaccurate material (including content generated using AI tools), the Trust may summarise the issues and respond to the substantive concerns rather than addressing each point individually. This reflects Department for Education guidance that complaints procedures should be accessible, proportionate and focused on resolution.
- 10.5 This policy covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by the Academy other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those below:

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to academies	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	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, you may wish to contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) – information available on the Local Authority website.
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. <i>*complaints about the application of the Pupil Behaviour policy can be made through the Complaints Policy and Procedures.</i>
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)	Concerns about day-to-day SEND support provided by an academy can be raised under this policy. However, disputes about Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments, the content of EHC plans, or the local authority's duty to deliver provision must be referred to the local authority and, where appropriate, appealed to the SEND Tribunal.
Incidents outside of the Academy	Where incidents take place outside of the academy premises and involve our pupils, the Academy will consider what action, if any, is appropriate in line with its Behaviour Policy. Serious incidents should also be referred to the police or other relevant agencies. While we will keep parents informed as appropriate, we cannot share personal information or records relating to other pupils, as this is protected under data protection and confidentiality requirements.
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 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: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about the Academy should complain through the Complaints Policy and Procedures. You may also be able to complain direct to the Local Authority or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under E-ACT's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under E-ACT's internal disciplinary policy/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.

- 10.6 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 may 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.

- 10.7 If a complainant commences legal action against E-ACT or the Academy in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.
- 10.8 Please note that we are unable to engage in dialogue or give feedback on personnel, safeguarding and/or confidential matters. 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.

11. Resolving complaints

- 11.1 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 apology
 - An explanation
 - An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
 - An assurance that the event complained of will not reoccur
 - An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
 - An undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint

Approach to resolution

- 11.2 The Trust will prioritise practical and timely resolution of concerns. This may include discussion, clarification and agreed actions.
- 11.3 Participation in meetings or discussions may be necessary to fully understand and resolve a complaint. While written communication will always be considered, the Trust will determine the most appropriate method for progressing the complaint.

Financial Compensation

- 11.4 Please note that complaints will not result in the award of financial compensation. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that concerns are addressed fairly, transparently and in a timely manner, and that any necessary improvements are made.

12. Withdrawal of a complaint

- 12.1 If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing. If assistance is required, please see the Accessibility and Support section of this policy.

13. Record keeping and confidentiality

- 13.1 E-ACT will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of correspondence.
- 13.2 This material will be treated as confidential and stored securely and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.
- 13.3 This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or through a subject access request under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

- 13.4 Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices.
- 13.5 13.5 Where a complaint proceeds to a Stage 3 panel hearing, a copy of the panel's findings and recommendations will be retained by the Trust and made available for inspection by the proprietor and Headteacher in accordance with Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

SECTION 2: COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES

A. Informal resolution

Before moving to a formal complaint, both parents/carers and other persons with a legitimate interest are expected to seek informal resolution in the first instance.

E-ACT believes that, in most cases, concerns can be resolved quickly and effectively through informal discussion. We encourage anyone with a concern to raise it at the earliest opportunity with the relevant member of staff (for example, a class teacher, subject lead, year head or a member of the senior leadership team). Wherever possible, the academy will work in partnership with the individual to agree a way forward and resolve the matter without the need for a formal complaint.

Some issues – such as allegations of discrimination, harassment or victimisation – will be treated more formally from the outset and should be raised under the appropriate process.

When raising a concern, we ask that all complainants:

- Treat staff, pupils, parents and other members of the academy community with courtesy and respect.
- Avoid the use of aggressive, abusive or intimidating behaviour or language.
- Allow a reasonable timeframe for the academy to respond.
- Recognise that some issues may take time to investigate and resolve.

If a concern cannot be resolved informally, or if the nature of the issue requires a formal approach, it should be raised under the appropriate process set out below.

Engagement with the complaints process

The complaints process is most effective where there is constructive engagement between all parties. Complainants are expected to:

- Engage reasonably with the process, including responding to requests for information
- Clarify their concerns and the outcome they are seeking
- Participate in meetings, discussions or calls where these are a reasonable and proportionate way to resolve the issue

The Trust will always consider any request for written communication or reasonable adjustments. However, it will determine the most appropriate method for handling a complaint.

Where a complainant declines to engage in appropriate meetings, refuses to clarify their complaint, or otherwise prevents meaningful progress, the Trust may:

- Proceed based on the information available
- Determine that the complaint cannot be fully investigated
- Close the complaint where resolution is not possible

Any such decision will be proportionate and confirmed in writing.

B. Complaints from parent/carers of a pupil registered at an E-ACT Academy

STAGE ONE – FORMAL COMPLAINT (ACADEMY LEVEL)

Who to complain to

Formal complaints should be made to the Academy Headteacher and submitted via the Academy office, unless the complaint is about:

- the Headteacher or Education Director
- the E-ACT Chief Executive Officer, a member of the E-ACT Executive Leadership Team or central staff
- Trustees or Ambassadors

In these cases, the complaint should be sent directly to the Governance Team at Governance.Team@E-ACT.org.uk (marked private and confidential).

How to make the complaint

Complaints should be made in writing, preferably using the E-ACT Stage 1 Complaint Form (Appendix A). If you do not use the form, please ensure your written complaint includes:

- Your name and contact details.
- Your child's name and your relationship to them (if relevant).
- Details of your complaint, including whether you have already raised it with a member of staff.
- What outcome you are seeking
- Any supporting documents you wish to provide.

If you need support to make a written complaint, please see the Accessibility and Support section of this policy.

What happens next

- The complaint will be logged and acknowledged in writing (by email or letter) within two school days. Complaints received outside term time or when the academy is closed will be considered as received on the next school day.
- An investigator will be appointed, usually a senior leader. The Headteacher may delegate the investigation but will remain responsible for the final decision.
- The investigator may meet with the complainant, interview those involved, and gather evidence before reporting to the Headteacher.
- Where necessary, the investigator may seek clarification of the issues raised or request a meeting to ensure the complaint is fully understood and can be investigated effectively.

Response and possible outcomes

The complainant will receive a written outcome letter within 10 school days of the date the complaint was acknowledged (or an updated timescale if this cannot be met). This letter will confirm whether the complaint has been:

- Upheld in full
- Upheld in part
- Not upheld (dismissed)

Where the complaint is upheld in full or in part, the letter may also include:

- An apology
- An explanation
- An acknowledgement that matters could have been handled differently
- Assurance that the issue will not reoccur
- Confirmation of steps taken to prevent recurrence

- A commitment to review relevant policies.
- Details of any specific actions or recommendations arising from the complaint.

Please note: financial compensation is not available under the complaints process.

Next steps if not satisfied

If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome, they may escalate the complaint to Stage 2 -Formal Complaint (Trust Level) within 10 school days of receiving the Stage 1 response.

Important notes

- Complainants should not approach individual Ambassadors or Trustees, as this may prevent them from being involved impartially at Stage Three.
- The process may be paused if a police investigation or Subject Access Request is underway.

STAGE 2 – FORMAL COMPLAINT (TRUST LEVEL)

Who to complain to

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1, they may escalate their complaint to the Education Director, via the academy office.

If the Stage 1 complaint concerned an Education Director, escalation at Stage 2 will be considered by the Chief Education Officer (or another senior leader not previously involved) and so the escalation must be sent to Governance.Team@E-ACT.org.uk.

If the Stage 1 complaint concerned the Chief Executive Officer, Executive Leadership Team, Trustees or Ambassadors, the next step will be a Stage 3 panel hearing and so the escalation must be sent to Governance.Team@E-ACT.org.uk.

How to escalate your complaint

Stage 2 complaints should be made in writing, preferably using the E-ACT Stage 2 Complaint Form (Appendix B). If you do not use the form, please make sure your written complaint includes:

- Your name and contact details.
- Your child's name and your relationship to them (if relevant).
- Why you remain dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response.
- What further action you believe is needed to resolve the complaint.
- Any supporting documents you wish to provide.

If you need support to make a written complaint, please see the Accessibility and Support section of this policy.

What happens next

- The complaint escalation will be logged and acknowledged in writing (by email or letter) within two school days. Complaints received outside term time or when the academy is closed will be considered as received on the next school day.
- An investigator will be appointed. The Education Director/Chief Executive Officer may delegate the investigation but will remain responsible for the final decision.
- The investigator will clarify the issues and what remains unresolved and may arrange a meeting with the complainant.
- The investigator may meet with the complainant, interview those involved, and gather evidence before reaching a final decision.

Response and possible outcomes

The complainant will receive a written outcome letter within 15 school days of the date the complaint was acknowledged (or an updated timescale if this cannot be met). This letter will confirm whether the complaint has been:

- Upheld in full
- Upheld in part
- Not upheld (dismissed)

Where the complaint is upheld in full or in part, the letter may also include:

- An apology
- An explanation
- An acknowledgement that matters could have been handled differently
- Assurance that the issue will not reoccur
- Confirmation of steps taken to prevent recurrence
- A commitment to review relevant policies.
- Details of any specific actions or recommendations arising from the complaint.

Please note: financial compensation is not available under the complaints process.

Next steps if not satisfied

If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome, they may escalate the complaint to Stage 3 within 10 school days of receiving the Stage 2 response.

Important notes

- In some instances, the Governance Team may escalate a complaint directly from the informal stage to Stage 2.
- The process may be paused if a police investigation or Subject Access Request is underway.

STAGE THREE – PANEL HEARING

Who to complain to

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2, they may escalate their complaint to Stage 3 – the final stage of this procedure. Requests must be made in writing and sent to Governance.Team@E-ACT.org.uk within 10 school days of receiving the Stage 2 outcome.

How to escalate your complaint

Stage 3 complaints should be made in writing, preferably using the E-ACT Stage 3 Complaint Form (Appendix C). If you do not use the form, please make sure your written complaint includes:

- Your name and contact details
- Your child's name and your relationship to them (if relevant)
- Which parts of your complaint remain unresolved
- Why you are dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response
- What outcome you are seeking
- Any supporting documents you wish to provide

If you need support to make a written complaint, please see the Accessibility and Support section of this policy.

What happens next

- The Governance Team will acknowledge the request within two school days and appoint a clerk to administer the process.
- A panel hearing will normally be convened within 20 school days of the escalation request.

- The panel will consist of three impartial members, at least one of whom will be independent of the management and running of the Trust*
- The complainant will be invited to attend and may be accompanied by a relative or friend for support. Legal representatives are not normally appropriate.

** In a multi-academy trust, the independent member may be an Ambassador from another E-ACT academy, provided they are not a Trustee, have no conflict of interest, and have had no prior involvement in the complaint. All panel members must be impartial, meaning they must not have been involved at earlier stages and must consider the case fairly and objectively.*

The panel's role is to provide an independent check on the integrity of the complaints process. It will review how the complaint was handled at earlier stages but it is not a rehearing of the original complaint.

The panel will not:

- Reinvestigate the underlying events in full
- Substitute its own judgment for that of earlier decision-makers simply because it might have reached a different conclusion
- Consider new complaints or matters not previously raised

Instead, the panel will consider whether:

- The complaints procedure was followed correctly and fairly
- The investigation was reasonable and proportionate
- The conclusions reached were reasonable in light of the information available at the time
- Any procedural learning or recommendations arise

Response and outcomes

Following the hearing, the complainant will receive a written outcome letter within ten school days of the date of the hearing.

The letter will confirm the panel's findings in relation to the handling of the complaint, including whether:

- The complaint was handled appropriately
- The complaint was handled appropriately in part, but some aspects fell short of the required standard
- The complaint was not handled appropriately

Where appropriate, the panel may express its findings by determining that the complaint is not upheld, upheld in part, or upheld in full in relation to the handling of the complaint.

The panel will make findings and recommendations on the complaint. A copy of the panel's findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. A copy of the panel's findings and recommendations will be made available for inspection on the academy premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher.

Where the complaint is upheld in full or in part, the letter may also include:

- An apology
- An explanation
- An acknowledgement that matters could have been handled differently
- Assurance that the issue will not reoccur
- Confirmation of steps taken to prevent recurrence
- A commitment to review relevant policies
- Details of any specific actions or recommendations arising from the complaint

Please note: financial compensation is not available under the complaints process.

Next steps if not satisfied

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 3, they may contact the Department for Education. Contact details will be provided in the outcome letter.

Important notes

- The Governance Team's role is to administer the process and gather information; they cannot comment on the substance of the complaint or individual staff/academies.
- Further guidance on the panel hearing process (including documentation, submissions and attendance) will be provided by the Governance Team at the point of escalation.
- Detailed guidance on the roles and responsibilities of panel members, the conduct of hearings, and meeting protocols is provided separately by the Governance Team to all participants when a complaint is escalated to Stage 3.

REFERRAL TO THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION

If the complainant believes the Academy / 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 Department for Education (DfE) after completing Stage 3 of this procedure.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn decisions made by the Academy/Trust. They will consider whether the Academy/Trust has followed its published complaints procedure, adhered to statutory policies connected to the complaint and whether they have complied with Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

A complaint can be referred to the DfE using their online service at: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe> or in writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

C. Complaints from other persons with a legitimate interest (non-parental)

E-ACT will consider complaints raised by people who are not parents or carers of pupils at our academies (for example, members of the public or other stakeholders). While such complaints are not covered by the statutory procedure in Part 7 of the *Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014*, the Department for Education expects academies to handle them respectfully and expediently.

Legitimate interest

For the purposes of this procedure, a *legitimate interest* means that the complainant is directly affected by, or has a genuine stake in, the matter being raised. Examples may include:

- A member of the local community raising a concern about the use of academy facilities
- A neighbour raising concerns about behaviour or noise affecting the local area
- A service user or partner organisation raising concerns about provision

Complaints will not normally be considered where:

- The complainant has no clear link to the academy or Trust
- The complaint is anonymous, vexatious, or part of a campaign
- The complainant is misrepresenting their identity (for example, posing as a parent)

Verification of complainant identity

Where a complaint is received from a person who is not a parent, the Trust will take reasonable steps to confirm the complainant's identity and their connection to the matter being raised. This is to ensure the complaint is genuine and to safeguard against vexatious or anonymous approaches, including those made by individuals misrepresenting themselves (for example, members of the press posing as parents). Complaints will not be progressed where the identity of the complainant cannot be established.

Process

To ensure fairness and proportionality, E-ACT will follow an abridged two-stage process for non-parental complaints:

Stage 1 – Formal decision

- The complaint will be acknowledged in writing within 5 school days.
- The complaint will be investigated by an appropriate senior leader or central team member who has not been directly involved in the matter complained of.
- A written response will normally be provided within 20 school days, setting out the outcome and any actions to be taken.

Stage 2 – Review

- If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may request a review within 10 school days of the Stage 1 response.
- The review will be conducted on paper by a Trustee (or another senior leader not previously involved). The purpose of the review is to determine whether the complaint was considered fairly and reasonably at Stage 1, not to reinvestigate the original matter.
- A written outcome will be provided within 20 school days of the request.

This process does not include a panel hearing. The decision at Stage 2 is final.

Important notes

- Complaints about the conduct of staff will be considered under internal HR/disciplinary procedures where appropriate, but outcomes of such processes will not be shared with the complainant.
- Serious allegations (for example, relating to discrimination or safeguarding) will also be considered internally through due diligence processes, but this aspect will not be communicated to the complainant.
- Complaints will always be handled in accordance with the principles of administrative law: decisions must be lawful, reasonable, fair, and proportionate.

SECTION 3: MANAGING SERIAL AND UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS**A. Aims**

E-ACT is committed to dealing with all concerns and complaints fairly, impartially, and in a timely manner. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our academies or the Trust. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive, threatening, or persistent to the point of being unreasonable.

B. Unreasonable behaviour

Unreasonable behaviour may include (but is not limited to):

- Refusing to articulate a complaint or specify the grounds or desired outcome.
- Refusing to co-operate with the investigation process.

- Making excessive demands on staff time (for example, frequent, lengthy, or complicated contact).
- Refusing to accept a complaint has been dealt with despite the procedure being exhausted.
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Raising trivial, irrelevant or repeated issues that have already been addressed.
- Making unjustified complaints about staff and seeking their replacement.
- Seeking unrealistic outcomes.
- Using abusive, discriminatory, or threatening language or behaviour.
- Knowingly providing false information.
- Publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

C. Managing persistent contact

Where behaviour is unreasonable or persistent, the academy or Trust may implement a communication strategy, which could include:

- Restricting the complainant to a single point of contact (e.g. a dedicated email address).
- Limiting the number or length of contacts within a set period

Such arrangements will be proportionate, reviewed after six months, and communicated in writing to the complainant.

D. Complaint campaigns

If the academy or Trust becomes the focus of a campaign with multiple complaints on the same issue, particularly from unconnected individuals, we may respond with a standard reply or publish a statement on our website. Each complaint will be reviewed, but individual correspondence may not be provided in every case.

E. Closing down a complaint

Where the complaints procedure has been exhausted, and the complainant persists in raising the same issue, the CEO (or their delegate) will write to confirm that the process is complete, and the matter is closed.

F. Serious incidents

In response to any incident of aggression, violence, or harassment, the academy or Trust will immediately inform the police and, where relevant, the Department for Education. Legal advice may also be sought, and individuals may be barred from academy premises.

APPENDIX 1: Stage 1 Complaint Form

COMPLAINANT DETAILS			
Your Name:			
Pupil's Name:			
Your relationship to the pupil:			
Your address:			
Your contact telephone number:			
Your email address:			
INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR COMPLAINT			
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the Academy about it:			
Please explain what actions you feel might resolve the problem:			
Please list any documents you are submitting with this form:			
Signed:		Date:	
FOR OFFICE USE			
Date received:		Date acknowledged:	
Received by:		Date Logged:	
S1 Investigating Officer:			

APPENDIX 2: Stage 2 Complaint Form

COMPLAINANT DETAILS			
Your Name:			
Pupil's Name:			
Your relationship to the pupil:			
Your address:			
Your contact telephone number:			
Your email address:			
INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR COMPLAINT			
Complaint Reference Number:			
Please give an overview of your complaint:			
Please explain why the response was not satisfactory or why you feel any aspects were not fully addressed:			
Please explain what actions you feel are needed to resolve your complaint:			
Please list any documents you are submitting with this form:			
Signed:		Date:	
FOR OFFICE USE			
Date received:		Date acknowledged:	
Received by:		Date Logged:	
S2 Investigating Officer:			

APPENDIX 3: Stage 3 Complaint Form

COMPLAINANT DETAILS			
Your Name:			
Pupil's Name:			
Your relationship to the pupil:			
Your address:			
Your contact telephone number:			
Your email address:			
INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR COMPLAINT			
Complaint Reference Number:			
Please give an overview of your complaint:			
Please explain why the response was not satisfactory or why you feel any aspects were not fully addressed:			
Please set out the outcome you are seeking from the Stage 3 panel hearing:			
Please list any documents you are submitting with this form:			
Signed:		Date:	
FOR OFFICE USE			
Date received:		Date acknowledged:	
Received by:		Date Logged:	