



Solent Academies Trust Complaints Procedure

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Solent Academies Trust is dedicated to providing the best possible education and support for its pupils. This means having a clear, fair and efficient procedure for dealing with any complaints to or against the Trust or any academies in the Trust, so that any issues that arise can be dealt with as swiftly and effectively as possible.
- 1.2. This policy explains the steps that will be followed whenever an issue arises that causes concern. Any person, including members of the general public, may make a complaint about provision of facilities or services that our Trust provides, unless separate statutory procedures apply.
- 1.3. This procedure does not apply to complaints about:
 - Admissions to school
 - Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)
 - Academy re-organisation proposals
 - Matters likely to require a Child Protection investigation
 - Exclusion of children
 - Whistleblowing
 - Staff grievance and disciplinary procedures
 - Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use the Trust's premises or facilities
- 1.4. In these cases, there are other separate and statutory procedures.
- 1.5. The academies will not respond to anonymous complaints under this policy, however, the Executive Headteacher and/or the Chair of the Trust Board will consider whether the issue and fear of identification are genuine or the issue is one of child protection.
- 1.6. For more information on our academies' provision for protecting our pupils, please refer to our safeguarding policy which is available on the academy website.
- 1.7. Any concern or complaint should be brought to the attention of the Trust or the academy concerned at the earliest opportunity; any matter raised more than three months after the event will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.
- 1.8. All conversations and correspondence will be treated in confidence; however, it is important that all parties involved should be aware that some information may have to be shared with others as part of the handling of the complaint in accordance with this procedure.



- 1.9. If we cannot meet the timescales set out in our policy, we will provide a clear explanation of the reason for this along with details of the indicative timescales.
- 1.10. 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.

2. **Timescales**

- 2.1. 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. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

3. **Complaints received outside of term time**

- 3.1. We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

4. **When an issue or concern first arises**

- 4.1. If you have a concern that you would like to take up with the academy you should initially inform a member of staff either in person, over the telephone or in writing. You may wish to approach your child's class teacher first as they will be best placed to help you directly or by letting you know which other member of staff you should be speaking to.
- 4.2. We encourage parents to approach staff with any concerns they may have, and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding. We will take your concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.
- 4.3. The Chair of Governors and/or the Chair of the Trust Board reserves the right to refer complaints that are taken straight to them back to the appropriate member of staff if it does not warrant the governing body's involvement at that point.
- 4.4. If your complaint is about the Head of School at an academy you should contact the Executive Headteacher via the academy. If your complaint is about the Executive Headteacher you should contact the Chair of the Trust Board via the academy. Please mark your complaint 'Private and Confidential'.
- 4.5. If your complaint is about the Chair of Governors or a member of the academy governing body, you should contact the Clerk to the governing body via the school. If



your complaint is about the Chair of the Trust Board, you should contact the Company Secretary via the academy. Please mark your complaint 'Private and Confidential'.

5. **Initial Informal Meeting**

- 5.1. When a concern has been received, you may receive either a telephone call from the member of staff or Head of School or you may be invited to attend a meeting with a member of staff or the Head of School to discuss your concerns.
- 5.2. If invited to a meeting, you are welcome to bring a friend or partner. It may be appropriate for a pupil to attend the meeting if their parent has raised a concern, depending on the nature of the issue. If a pupil has raised a concern, they are welcome to bring a parent along for support.
- 5.3. Staff have a responsibility to ensure that you understand any future points of action that have been agreed and will make a record of what has been discussed, as well as any outcomes and a plan of action, if one has been agreed.
- 5.4. All staff will do their best to ensure your concerns are dealt with appropriately and efficiently, but if an agreement cannot be reached, or if you are dissatisfied with the outcome, you can make a formal complaint to the Head of School.
- 5.5. There is no prescribed timescale for resolution at this stage given the importance of dialogue and informal discussion, although we expect to resolve most issues within 10 school days.

6. **Formal Complaints**

- 6.1. In order to ensure complaints are dealt with efficiently and effectively, Solent Academies Trust deals with formal complaints in two stages.
- 6.2. **Stage 1 – Complaint heard by the Head of School**
- 6.3. If you feel that your concern has not been dealt with as you would like, are unhappy with the outcome of your informal meeting or feel that the issue is serious enough that it warrants it, you can make a formal complaint to the Head of School.
- 6.4. If your complaint is about the Head of School at an academy you should contact the Executive Headteacher via the academy who will deal with your complaint at this stage of the procedure.
- 6.5. If your complaint is about the Executive Headteacher, you should contact the Chair of the Trust who will deal with your complaint at this stage of the procedure.
- 6.6. The complaint can be made in person, in writing (preferably using the complaint form included as appendix 1) or by telephone. If you require help in completing the form,



please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

- 6.7. The Head of School will acknowledge your complaint in writing or offer a full response within 5 school days. If further investigation is required, the Head of School will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 5 school days and will advise you that a full response will be provided within 20 school days.
- 6.8. The Head of School may invite you to attend a meeting to discuss your complaint and possible solutions, or to explain what has happened or will happen as a result of your complaint.
- 6.9. The Head of School will keep a record of all interactions with you and other staff, meetings and decisions made in reference to your complaint.
- 6.10. The Head of School will respond to you in writing within 20 school days of receiving your complaint outlining their full response to your concern, and any action that has or will be taken. If the Head of School has decided not to take any further action, they will explain what they have decided and how they reached the decision. You will also be advised of your right to take the matter further if you are not satisfied with the response.
- 6.11. If your complaint is about a member of staff, the Head of School will talk to that employee and invoke the relevant procedure if required. It will not be appropriate to inform you of the outcome of any investigation in relation to an individual member of staff.
- 6.12. **Stage 2 – Complaint heard by the Complaints Panel**
- 6.13. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you should write to the Clerk to Governors within 10 school days¹ of the outcome of stage 1, explaining your concern and the steps that have resulted in you taking this course of action.
- 6.14. The Clerk to Governors will acknowledge receipt of your request within 5 school days.
- 6.15. The Complaints Panel will usually be convened within 20 school days of receiving the request for your complaint to be heard by the Complaints Panel. Where it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date within that timescale, all reasonable steps will be taken to agree a time and date mutually convenient to all parties.
- 6.16. The main function of the Complaints Panel will be to:
 - Ensure the complaint has been properly handled by the Head of School Ensure that a sufficient comprehensive investigation was carried out.

¹ Exceptions to this time frame may be considered on a case by case basis



- Ensure that the correct procedure / policies were followed.
- 6.17. The panel will also review whether the Head of School acted reasonably.
- 6.18. The Clerk to Governors will arrange and facilitate the meeting of the Complaints Panel.
- 6.19. You are entitled to an independent panel to hear your complaint. The Complaints Panel will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and may include members from the following categories:
- The academy governing body of the academy where the complaint was initially made.
 - An academy governing body from another academy within Solent Academies Trust.
 - the Board of Trustees of Solent Academies Trust.
- 6.20. At least one member of the panel will be independent of the management and running of the academy.
- 6.21. The chair of the panel will be nominated from within the group of panel members. All panel members will have access to, and will be familiar with, this complaints policy.
- 6.22. The Clerk to Governors will confirm to all parties in writing, the date, time and venue for the meeting at least 10 school days in advance.
- 6.23. The Clerk to Governors will request that you supply any paperwork you feel the panel will require to consider your complaint fully. The Head of School (and Chair of Governors) will also be requested to supply copies of their responses to the previous stages of the procedure, and any further paperwork they consider the panel will require to consider the complaint fully. Copies of all paperwork will be distributed to all parties by the Clerk to Governors at least 3 school days in advance of the meeting.
- 6.24. You will be invited to the meeting and you are welcome to bring a friend or partner for support to the meeting and the chair of the panel will ensure the meeting is conducted within a relaxed atmosphere whilst keeping to the formal agenda. The Head of School (and Chair of Governors if attending) is also invited to bring a representative or member of staff for support.
- 6.25. No previously undisclosed evidence relating to the complaint should be introduced during the meeting.
- 6.26. The panel may make findings and, in some cases, may make recommendations.
- 6.27. The Clerk will inform you, the Head of School, Chair of Governors and, where relevant, the person complained about, in writing of the panel's decision within 5 school days of the meeting. The letter will include a summary of the issues, an outline of the main



points of discussion, the reasons for the decision and the proposed actions or outcome. The letter may set out recommendations which will be made to the governing body.

6.28. The findings and recommendations will be available for inspection on the academy premises by the proprietor and the Head of School/Headteacher.

6.29. The decision of the panel is final. Where you who have exhausted the stages of the complaints procedure but are still dissatisfied then if you feel that it is appropriate to do so then you may wish to complain to the Education Funding Agency.

6.30. **Raising a Complaint with the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)**

6.31. The ESFA will consider complaints about academies that fall into any of the three following areas:

- Where there is undue delay or the academy did not comply with its own complaints procedure when considering a complaint;
- Where the academy is in breach of its funding agreement with the Secretary of State;
- Where an academy has failed to comply with any other legal obligation.

6.32. The ESFA will not overturn an academy's decision about a complaint. However, if they find an academy did not deal with a complaint properly, they will request the complaint is looked at again and procedures meet the requirements set out in the regulations.

6.33. Complaints to the ESFA should be sent via the schools' complaints form which is available on their website.

7. **Unreasonable Complaints**

7.1. Solent Academies 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 school. Operating from a position of mutual respect, 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 or threatening.

7.2. Solent Academies Trust defines unreasonable complaints as "those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints".

7.3. 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 co-operate with the complaints 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 academy's 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 comments 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 a complaint where the academy's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on academy 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.

7.4. 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
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers

7.5. Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with an academy 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.

7.6. Whenever possible, the Head of School or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.



7.7. If the behaviour continues the Head of School will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the academy causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

7.8. 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 academy.

8. Review and Monitoring of Complaints

8.1. The Head of School will keep a written record of all complaints that were made under the formal stages of the complaints' procedure. This will include whether they were resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing and action taken by the academy as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

8.2. The Head of School will report annually to the governing body on the number of formal complaints received and the levels at which they have been resolved. No details identifying the complaint or any member of staff will be published.

8.3. The governing body will review and evaluate all complaints no matter how far they are taken or what the outcome to ensure that similar problems are avoided in the future or to see if they could have been managed any more efficiently.

8.4. The Chair of the Trust Board will make a decision about when to inform the Board about complaints on a case by case basis.

9. Staff Complaints

9.1. Staff who have a concern about a colleague or volunteer in the academy should refer to the whistleblowing policy which is available on the academy's website.

9.2. The procedure for dealing with any other staff complaint or employment grievance is set out in the trust's staff discipline, conduct and grievance policies which are available from the academy.

10. Complaints Policy Review

10.1. The Solent Academies Trust board of trustees will review this policy every 2 years, or sooner if there are any legislative changes. The governing body of an academy will also review this policy following a complaint panel meeting to ensure that it met the



requirement to provide a clear, fair and efficient complaints procedure and make recommendations to the board of trustees where necessary.

11. **Confidentiality**

- 11.1. Any correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to 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 Form

Name of complainant:	
Contact details:	Address:
	Telephone:
	Email:
Outline of your complaint and how it has affected you (the complainant) / pupil:	
Have you discussed the matter already with a member of staff, if so, who? What was the outcome?	
What would you like to happen as a result of your complaint?	
Signature:	
Date:	



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For academy use:

Date received:	
Date acknowledged and by whom:	
Summary of action taken:	