

# **Excellence in Education Trust**

## **Complaints Policy**

January 2017  
Review date: January 2020

---

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Furness and Oakington Manor Academies, which constitute the Excellence in Education Trust (from now on referred to as the **Trust**), are dedicated to providing the best possible education and support for all their pupils. This means having a clear, fair, and efficient procedure for dealing with any complaints to or against the academies, so that any issues that arise can be dealt with as swiftly and effectively as possible.
- 1.2. The EiE Trust welcomes feedback on the services they provide. Should anyone be unhappy with any aspect of the academies, it is important that the Trust learns about this. The Trust recognises there is a difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage reduces the numbers that develop into formal complaints. The Trust aims to ensure that concerns are handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. The Trust's formal complaints procedure is only necessary if efforts to resolve the concern informally are unsuccessful. Where an individual may feel that an issue has not been dealt with appropriately it is important, for all involved, that there is a clear and transparent process for a complaint to be looked into and followed up.
- 1.3. This policy outlines how complaints will be dealt with by the Trust in accordance with the requirements of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, as amended.
- 1.4. This policy will be followed in respect of all complaints by parents/carers against the academies except in the following areas (where separate policies exist):
  - (a) child protection allegations;
  - (b) exclusions;
  - (c) admissions;
  - (d) complaints about statements of Special Education Needs (SEN)/ Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans;
  - (e) disciplinary issues relating to members of staff; and
  - (f) allegations of abuse.
- 1.5. Should a complaint, informal or formal, reveal an issue for which other procedures exist (for example, child protection) then it will be dealt with under those procedures rather than as a complaint.
- 1.6. Please note that anonymous complaints will not be examined under this or any other complaints procedure and all complaints should be brought within three months of the date of the incident to which the complaint relates.
- 1.7. All staff members of the academies will be made aware of the Trust's complaints policy and expected to review this policy regularly in order that they are familiar with our process of dealing with complaints and can be of the most assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

## 2. Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

- 2.1. Many enquiries and concerns can be dealt with satisfactorily by the class teacher, the head of year or other members of staff without the need to resort to a formal procedure. The Trust values informal meetings and discussions and encourages parents to approach staff with any concerns they may have, and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding. If an individual has a concern that they would like to take up with the school they should initially inform a member of staff either in person, over the telephone or in writing. The individual will then be invited to an informal meeting with the member of staff

most appropriate for dealing with that concern.

- 2.2. There is no suggested time-scale for resolution at this stage given the importance of dialogue through informal discussion although it would be expected that most issues would be resolved within 10 school days.
- 2.3. Should face-to-face discussions appear unlikely to resolve matters, either party may initiate a move to the formal procedure at stage 2 onwards.

### **3. Stage 2 - Formal Written Complaints**

- 3.1. If a complainant does not feel that her/his concern has been dealt with as s/he would like, is unhappy with the outcome of the informal meeting or feels that the issue is serious enough that it warrants it, the complainant should set out the precise nature of the complaint on the form at the end of this policy and return this to the Executive Headteacher (or the Chair of the Trust if the complaint is about the Executive Headteacher). The complainant should keep a copy of this form and all other relevant correspondence.
- 3.2. The Executive Headteacher (or the Chair of the Trust if the complaint is about the Executive Headteacher) will acknowledge the complaint in writing within five working days of receipt of the form. The Executive Headteacher or the Chair of the Trust (as applicable) will investigate the concerns and outline her/his decision if there is one to be made, and any action to be taken as a result of the complaint.
- 3.3. The Executive Headteacher or the Chair of the Trust (as applicable) may call the complainant in for a meeting to discuss the issue outcome, possible solutions, or to explain what has or will happen as a result of the complaint.
- 3.4. The Executive Headteacher or the Chair of the Trust (as applicable) will keep a record of all interactions with the complainant and other staff, meetings and decisions made with reference to the complaint.
- 3.5. If the complaint is an allegation of abuse, a formal investigation may be instigated by the Trust or external child welfare authorities to whom the Trust reports. Please refer to the Trust allegations of abuse against staff policy for an outline of this procedure.
- 3.6. The Executive Headteacher or the Chair of the Trust (as applicable) will aim to respond to the complainant in writing within 15 school days from acknowledgement of the complaint, outlining her/his response to the complaint, and any action that has or will be taken. If this timescale is not possible, e.g. where further investigations are necessary, the Trust will keep the complainant informed of progress, details of new deadlines and an explanation for the delay.
- 3.7. If the Executive Headteacher or the Chair of Governors (as applicable) has decided not to take any further action on the issue, s/he will explain what s/he has decided, how s/he reached this decision, and will outline the complainant's right to take the matter further and the steps to be taken.
- 3.8. If in the early stages of the investigation, the Executive Headteacher/Head of School considers that the complaint is best dealt with at Stage 3, it will be passed to the Chair of the Trust (or to the Clerk to the Trust) for the Chair's attention and the complainant will be informed of this action without delay.
- 3.9. The complainant has 15 school days to consider the outcome of their complaint at stage 2 and instigate stage 3. If no request for a complaints panel hearing is received within 15 school days, it will be deemed that the decision is accepted and the complaint will be closed.

## 4. Stage 3 - Complaints Panel

- 4.1. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint at stage 2, s/he may lodge the complaint with the Chair of Trust (or to the Clerk to Trust) in writing, explaining the concern and the steps that have lead up to taking this course of action.
- 4.2. If the Chair of the Trust is the subject of a complaint, or has reviewed the complaint under stage 2, the complainant should send the form directly to the Vice-Chair of Trust (or to the Clerk to the Trust for the Vice-Chair's attention) c/o the appropriate academy (Furness/Oakington Manor) marking the envelope 'private and confidential'.
- 4.3. The Chair of the Trust will convene a panel of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. This will comprise of at least one person independent of the management and running of the school. The panel will hear the complaint within 15 school days of the request for a panel hearing.
- 4.4. The Trust shall take reasonable steps to convene a panel hearing at a time and date mutually convenient to all parties.
- 4.5. Any supporting documentation relevant to the complaint must be submitted to the panel by both parties at least five days before the panel hearing.
- 4.6. The complainant is entitled to attend the panel hearing, and be accompanied. The complainant should notify the Clerk to Trust in advance if s/he intends to bring anyone to the hearing.
- 4.7. The procedure for an appeal is usually as follows:
  - (a) The complainant and Executive Headteacher/Head of School will enter the hearing together.
  - (b) The chair will introduce the panel members and outline the process.
  - (c) The complainant will explain the complaint.
  - (d) The Executive Headteacher/Head of School and panel will question the complainant.
  - (e) The Executive Headteacher/Head of School will explain the appropriate academy's actions.
  - (f) The complainant and panel will question the Executive Headteacher/Head of School.
  - (g) The complainant will sum up her/his complaint.
  - (h) The Executive Headteacher/Head of School will sum up the appropriate academy's actions.
  - (i) The Chair will explain that both parties will hear from the panel within five working days.
  - (j) Both parties will leave together while the panel decides.
  - (k) The Clerk will stay to assist the panel with its decision-making.
- 4.8. The Chair of the Panel/Clerk to the Trust will notify the complainant of the Panel's decision in writing within five working days of the Panel hearing. The letter will set out the decision of the Panel together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The letter may set out recommendations which will be made to the Trust and will set out any further rights of appeal.

## 5. Stage 4 - Complaint to Secretary of State

- 5.1. If the complainant is dissatisfied with how the complaint has been handled after exhausting stages 1-3 of this policy, the complainant can write to the Secretary of State for Education via the Education Funding Agency (EFA).
- 5.2. The EFA will consider complaints that fall into any of the following three categories:
  1. where there is undue delay or the Trust did not comply with its own complaints

- procedures when considering a complaint;
- 2. where the Trust is in breach of its funding agreement with the Secretary of State; or
- 3. where the Trust has failed to comply with any other legal obligation.

5.3. The EFA will normally only consider complaints when every stage of the above process has been completed.

5.4. Further details can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>.

## 6. Record of complaints

6.1. A written record of all complaints and documentation relating to the handling of the complaint will be kept confidentially by the Trust but may be inspected where appropriate by the Secretary of State or any inspection body.

## 7. Vexatious and persistent complaints and harassment

7.1. Whilst it is hoped that this policy will reduce any dissatisfaction with the academies, it is acknowledged that there may be rare occasions where a complainant continues to be dissatisfied and the outcomes achieved under the complaints policy.

7.2. Where a complainant attempts to re-open an issue which has already been dealt with under the complaints policy, the Chair of the Trust will contact her/him to inform her/him that the matter has already been dealt with and that either that stage of the policy has been exhausted or that the complaints policy has been exhausted and the matter is considered closed. Where further correspondence is received on the same matter, this may be considered vexatious and the Trust will be under no obligation to respond to that correspondence.

7.3. A persistent complainant is a parent/carer or member of the public who complains about issues, either formally or informally, or frequently raises issues that the complainant considers to be within the remit of the academies, and whose behaviour is unreasonable. Such behaviour may be characterised by:

- (a) actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
- (b) prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail or telephone contact about a concern or complaint;
- (c) uses Freedom of Information requests excessively and unreasonably;
- (d) an insistence upon pursuing unsubstantial complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes;
- (e) an insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- (f) an insistence on only dealing with the Executive Headteacher/Head of School on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the Trust to deal with such matters;
- (g) an insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but cannot be changed, for example, if the desired outcome is beyond the remit of the Trust because it is unlawful.

7.4. For the purpose of this policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions as in 7.3 (a) to (g) above in such a way that it

- (a) appears to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff and/or
- (b) causes ongoing distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or
- (c) has a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community and/or
- (d) is pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient.

This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health.

- 7.5. In the case of persistent or vexatious complaints and/or harassment, the Trust will verbally inform the complainant that his/her behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable/unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this policy. This will be confirmed in writing.
- 7.6. If the complainant's behaviour is not modified, the Trust will take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:
- (a) inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered by the Trust to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this;
  - (b) inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties;
  - (c) inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the Trust should be by letter only;
  - (d) in the case of physical, or verbal aggression warn the complainant about being banned from the academies' sites or proceed straight to a ban;
  - (e) consider informing the police who may seek to take further action under anti-harassment / malicious communication legislation;
  - (f) consider putting in place a specific procedure for dealing with complaints from the complainant, i.e. the complainant will not be able to deal directly with the Executive Headteacher but only with a third person to be identified by the Trust, who will investigate, determine whether or not the concern / complaint is reasonable or vexatious and then advise the Head teacher accordingly.

Signed .....  ..... (Chair of Excellence in Education Trust) Date...10/01/2017

Signed .....  ..... (Executive Headteacher) Date...10/01/2017

**Complaints Form**

<b>Your name:</b>
<b>Pupil's name:</b>
<b>Your relationship to pupil:</b>
<b>Your address and postcode:</b>
<b>Your daytime telephone number:</b>
<b>Your evening telephone number:</b>
<b>Your email address:</b>
<b>Your complaint is...</b> (Include details of actions already taken by the appropriate academy to try to resolve the situation)
<b>What action have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint?</b> (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)
<b>What would you like as an outcome from your complaint?</b>

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, give details here:

Your signature..... Date .....

All functions of the complaints procedure must adhere to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Please complete and return to the school office in a sealed envelope addressed to the Executive Headteacher/Head of School, Chair of Trustee's or Clerk to the Trust (as appropriate).

*Office use*

Date received .....

Date acknowledgement sent .....

Responsible member of staff .....

## Excellence in Education Trust

### Telephone Numbers

Furness Academy: 020 8965 5977 and 020 8965 4426

Oakington Manor Academy: 020 8902 2871