Complaints Policy

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 This policy will be used by ConNEct Multi Academy Trust to investigate and respond to any complaints raised. The policy will be reviewed by Trustees every three years to assess its implementation and effectiveness. In considering the effectiveness of this procedure consultation will be undertaken with staff, school leaders and other key stakeholders to assist in the review and monitoring of the procedure. The Trust recognises that changes to legislation/statutory guidance may prompt a review of the procedure before the three year timeframe.

1.2 A copy of the Complaints Procedure is available from the ConNEct Multi Academy Trust Website as well as the individual academies/schools across the trust, as follows:

- Connect Multi Academy Trust
- Beamish Primary School
- Catchgate Primary School
- Castleside Primary School
- Consett Academy
- North Durham Academy
- Pelton Community Primary School
- Wingate Primary School
- Wellfield School

1.3 The Trust aims to provide the best education for all children and young people and staff work very hard to build positive relationships with all parents/carers, the local community and other stakeholders. However, there is a statutory obligation to have in place a complaints procedure and that any such complaints will be dealt with in accordance the guidance set out by the Department for Education (DfE), The Education Funding Agency (EFA) and the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, Schedule 1, Part 7.

1.4 The Trust aims to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint When considering a complaint, we endeavour to deal with them as swiftly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding, and in all cases, we put the interests of the child above all other issues. Our procedure provides sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed and then resolved.

1.5 This aim of this policy is to:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- Be easily accessible and publicised;

- Be simple to understand and use;
- Be impartial;
- Be non-adversarial;
- Allow swift handling by adhering to time frames for action and keeping people informed of the progress. Delays within the process will be communicated to all parties.
- Ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- Respect people's desire for confidentiality;
- Address all the points at issue and provide effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
- Provide information to the Trust and the academy/school Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to enable services to be improved.

1.6 The policy will ensure that we are clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. We will take concerns seriously at the earliest stage to reduce the numbers that develop into complaints.

1.7 To be effective, the application of the procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

1.8 All policies are subject to Equality Impact Assessments. Equality Impact Assessments are carried out to see whether the policy has, or is likely to have, a different impact on grounds of race, gender, disability, age, religion or sexual orientation.

1.9 If you require this document in an alternative format and/or language, please contact the Administration Manager of the Academy/School your child attends.

2.0 Who can make a complaint?

2.1 As the complaints policy is based upon Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, it only applies to complaints from parents/carers of pupils at a school in the Trust, regarding their child.

3.0 Scope

3.1 This policy covers complaints about any provision of services provided by the Trust, including community facilities or services, but excludes complaints that are dealt with under other policies or statutory procedures, including those listed below which fall outside of this complaints policy.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be raised with the appropriate Local Authority admissions team.
• Statutory assessments of special education needs	Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with the relevant local authority.

• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled in accordance with the Trust's Safeguarding Policy and relevant statutory guidance. Any complaints about child protection or safeguarding should be raised with individual academy/school's Designated Safeguarding Lead. Concerns about a child can also be made to Durham County Council First Contact service on 03000 267979 or by email to firstcontact@durham.gov.uk

• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: http://www.gov.uk/schooldiscipline-exclusions/exclusions **Complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through* this policy.
• Whistleblowing	The Whistleblowing Policy is available to all employees, including temporary staff, contractors, and volunteers to enable them to raise a concern. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for whistle-blowers in education who feel unable to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff relating to their employment may be raised under the Trust's Grievance Policy.
• Staff conduct	Issues relating to staff conduct and performance will be dealt with in accordance with the Trust's HR policies and procedures, if appropriate. If a matter is raised under the Complaints Policy which indicates an issue relating to staff conduct or performance then an appropriate process will be instigated. Complainants will not be informed of any action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint due to confidentiality and data protection restrictions. However, the complainant will receive one notification that the matter is being addressed.
• Complaints around Organisations or individuals using school premises (e.g., community groups, sports associations or service providers that run extracurricular activities.	Complaints about the service provided should be directed to these organisations. Complaints relating to staff employed by the trust who support community activities or which arise due to concerns about the school buildings, should be raised under this policy.

Provision of services provided under a formal contract.	Complaints relating to services provided under formal contracts will be dealt with by the service provider in accordance with the agreed contract.

3.2 If other bodies or agencies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the Police, Local Authority (LA), teaching regulation agency, DBS, other regulatory body or Tribunal, this may impact on the Trust's 'ability to adhere to the timeframes within this policy or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, the complainant will be informed of the proposed new timeframe for response.

3.3 If a complainant commences legal action against the Trust and/or any of its academies/schools in relation to their complaint, the Trust will consider whether to suspend the complaints process in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

4.0 The difference between a concern and a complaint

4.1 This policy defines the differences between concerns and complaints. The Trust will take concerns seriously at the earliest stage to reduce the numbers that develop into complaints.

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

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

4.4 The Trust acknowledges that 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 Complaint's Policy. The Trust takes concerns very seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

4.5 The majority of concerns will be resolved through early discussion and information sharing without reference to this Complaints Policy. However, if a concern cannot be resolved in this way or through informal stage of this Complaints Policy then it will be considered a complaint which will be dealt with under the formal stages.

4.6 If the person has difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect their views. In such a case, the Headteacher/Head of School will refer you to another member of staff. Similarly, if the member of staff with whom the concern has been raised has insufficient authority or feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher/Head of School will refer the issue to another senior member of staff.

4.7 When a concern or complaint is raised the Trust will determine the appropriate stage within the policy for it to be considered. Generally, attempts will be made to resolve the issue informally in the first instance. However, in some serious or complex situations it may be necessary to start at stage 2.

5.0 How to raise a concern or make a complaint

5.1 A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent from the complainant to do so. In such cases, the Trust may ask for written evidence of consent from the complainant before processing a complaint from a third party.

5.2 Concerns/complaints raised in person, in writing (including email) and/or by telephone with staff including, teaching staff, pastoral or support staff. Such issues will be treated as informal complaints (Stage 1). If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint (Stage 2) All formal complaints must be made in writing, using the complaint form (Appendix 1).

5.3 Advice and support on completing the form, is available from the Head of Governance. Independent advice and support is also available from third party organisations, for example, Citizens Advice.

5.4 In accordance with equality law, reasonable adjustments to the process will be considered 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 hearings in accessible locations.

5.5 All complaints must be marked 'Private & Confidential' and directed as follows:

Issue	**Decision maker**
Formal complaints (Stage 2) about an incident in school and/or a member of staff	Headteacher of relevant school Email: relevant school FAO Headteacher. Contact details available on school websites.
Formal complaints (Stage 2) about a service provided by the Trust Central Team including community facilities	Chief Operating Officer ConNEct Multi Academy Trust Head Office, High Street, Stanley, Co Durham. DH9 0TW Email: s.dawson@connectmat.org.uk
Formal complaints (Stage 2) that involve or are about the Headteacher/ Head of School/ Executive Headteacher	Chief Executive Officer c/o Head of Governance, ConNEct Multi Academy Trust Head Office, High Street, Stanley, Co Durham. DH9 0TW Email: s.dawson@connectmat.org.uk
Formal complaints (Stage 2) that involve or are about the Chair of the Academy Committee, any individual governor or Trustee or the whole Academy Committee	Chair of the Academy Trust Board c/o Head of Governance, ConNEct Multi Academy Trust Head Office, High Street, Stanley, Co Durham. DH9 0TW Email: s.dawson@connectmat.org.uk
Formal complaints (Stage 2) against the Chief Executive Officer	Chair of the Academy Trust Board c/o Head of Governance, ConNEct Multi Academy Trust Head Office, High Street, Stanley, Co Durham. DH9 0TW Email: s.dawson@connectmat.org.uk

5.6 Concerns and/or complaints must not be made to individual Governors and/or Trustees. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 and/or Stage 3 of the policy.

6.0 Anonymous complaints

6.1 Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated. Anonymous complaints received by an individual academy/school will be shared with the Head of Governance who will pass the complaint to the CEO or relevant Trustee who will then determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation on a case by case basis.

7.0 Timeframes

7.1 All concerns and complaints must be raised within 60 school days of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 60 school days of the last of these incidents. Complaints made outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

8.0 Complaints received outside of term time

8.1 Complaints made outside of term time (during academy school holiday periods) may be considered on the basis that it was received on the first school day after the holiday/closure period.

9.0 Resolving complaints

9.1 At each stage in the policy, the aim is to resolve the complaint, where possible. If appropriate, it may be acknowledged that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, one or more of the following may be offered:

- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better. An admission that we could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.
- An assurance that the Trust will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur.
- An explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made.
- An undertaking to review Trust or academy/schools policies in light of the complaint.
- An apology.

10.0 Withdrawal of a complaint

10.1 If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, this must be confirmed in writing, an email to the relevant Headteacher or Head of Governance (s.dawson@connectmat.org.uk) will suffice. This will end the complaint process. The complainant would not normally be permitted to resurrect the complaint, unless exceptional circumstances apply.

11.0 Process for dealing with complaints

Informal complaints – Stage 1

11.1 In the majority of cases, concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis. Where a concern is raised directly with the relevant member of Trust staff, it will usually be treated as an informal complaint and dealt with under stage 1.

11.2 In such cases, the member of staff will make a written record of the concern/complaint and will forward to the Headteacher or designated SLT contact who will allocate the relevant member of staff to respond to the matter.

11.3 The concern/complaint will be investigated and the person making the informal complaint will be asked how they believe the complaint may be resolved. On conclusion of the investigation, the person investigating the matter will provide an informal written response (either by letter or email) usually within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the informal complaint.

11.4 If no further correspondence is received by the complainant (or their representative) within 15 school days of the written informal response being sent out, the complaint will be closed and the complainant would not normally be permitted to resurrect the complaint, unless exceptional circumstances apply.

Formal complaints – Stage 2

11.5 If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at the informal Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to a Formal Complaint (Stage 2). A request to escalate a complaint to a Formal Complaint must be made in writing by completing the complaints form and sending it to the relevant decision maker detailed in 5.5 above, within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. The request should include clear reasons as to why the complainant believes the complaint is unresolved and confirmation of any possible outcome that would resolve the issues.

11.6 On receiving the formal complaint, the Headteacher or the Head of Governance will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) usually within 5 school days.

11.7 Within the acknowledgement, the Headteacher or Head of Governance will confirm the process to be followed in responding to the complaint along with the deadline date for a response. They may also, where appropriate, seek to clarify the content of the complaint, including what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant may wish to see.

11.8 The decision maker may choose to delegate the investigation of the complaint to another senior leader or an independent investigator, however the relevant decision maker will make the final decision regarding the outcome of the complaint.

11.9 The Investigating Officer will consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this. If the Investigating Officer arranges such a meeting, another member of staff will attend the meeting to take notes.

11.10 Where the investigating officer is not the decision maker, they will, on conclusion of their investigation relay their findings to the decision maker who will make the final decision regarding the outcome of the complaint. The decision maker will provide a formal written response usually within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

11.11 If the Investigator envisages delays, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

11.12 The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide an explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions that the Trust, academy or school will take to resolve the complaint.

11.13 The letter will also include how to escalate the complaint to Stage 3 should the complainant remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

11.14 If no response or further correspondence is received from the complainant (or their representative) within 15 school days of the formal written response being sent out, the complaint will be closed and the complainant would not normally be permitted to resurrect the complaint, unless exceptional circumstances apply.

Panel Hearing - Stage 3

11.15 If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to a Panel Hearing (Stage 3).

11.16 A request to escalate a complaint to a Panel Hearing (Stage 3) must be made in writing using the complaints form (appendix 1) and sent to the Head of Governance, within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response. The request should include clear reasons as to why the complainant believes the complaint is unresolved and confirmation of any possible outcome that would resolve the issues.

11.17 Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

11.18 The Head of Governance will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 - 5 school days.

11.19 In the acknowledgement, the Head of Governance will write to the complainant to confirm that the Trust will aim to convene a hearing within 15 school days of receipt of the request to escalate to a Panel Hearing (Stage 3). If this is not possible, the Head of Governance will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

11.20 Only those not previously involved or connected to a complaint can sit on a hearing panel. The panel will consist of four members as follows:

Basis of complaint	**Panel constitution**
Formal complaint (Stage 3) about an incident in school and/or a member of staff	The CEO, two members of the relevant Academy Committee and an independent panel member
Formal complaints (Stage 3) about a service provided by the Trust Central Team including community facilities	The CEO, two Trustees or members of any Academy Committee and an independent panel member
Formal complaints (Stage 3) that involve or are about the Headteacher/ Head of School/ Executive Headteacher	A Trustee, two members of the relevant Academy Committee and an independent panel member

Formal complaints (Stage 3) that involve or are about the Chair of the Academy Committee, any individual governor or the whole Academy Committee	Three Trustees and an independent panel member
Formal complaints (Stage 3) against the Chief Executive Officer	Three Trustees and an independent panel member
Formal complaints (Stage 3) against the Chair of the ATB	Three Trustees and an independent panel member
Regarding a number of members of the ATB so that a panel cannot be formed	A panel of four independent panel members

11.21 One of the panel members will be independent of the management and running of the Trust. This means that the independent panel member will not be a member, Trustee or an employee of the Trust. The DfE also recommend that the independent panel member should not have any clear connection with the academy/school

11.22 A complainant may bring someone along to the Panel Hearing to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the hearing because the panel is not a form of legal proceedings. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate and this will be considered on a case by case basis. Any request by the complainant for legal representation must be made prior to the hearing and, where it is agreed, the hearing panel may also be advised by a legal representative. Where it is agreed that legal representatives will be present all parties and attendees will be notified before the hearing.

11.23 The decision maker from Stage 2 of the policy will attend the hearing to present the Trust's case. They may call other employees as a witness who may be accompanied by a work colleague or union representative.

11.24 Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

11.25 At least 10 school days before the hearing, the Head of Governance will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date and time of the hearing and whether it is to be held either in person or via Microsoft Teams, ensuring that, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
- request copies of any additional information to be submitted to the Head of Governance for circulation at least 7 school days before the hearing.

11.26 Any additional written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the hearing. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

11.27 If the complainant rejects the offer of two proposed hearing dates, without good reason, the Chair of the Panel may decide when to hold the hearing. The hearing will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

11.28 The panel will not usually review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be considered. New complaints would normally be dealt with from Stage 1 of the policy.

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

11.30 Further information about the Panel Hearing is included in Appendix 2 The procedure that will be followed at panel hearings is included in Appendix 3.

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

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

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

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

11.33 The Chair of the Panel will provide the complainant and the relevant Trust senior leader with the decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, usually within 5 school days of the date of the hearing.

11.34 The response will provide an explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions to be taken to resolve the complaint.

11.35 The response will include details of how to contact the Department for Education (DfE) if the complainant is dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled. The DfE cannot overturn the decision about a complaint. Their role is to make sure the complaint is handled properly by following a published procedure that complies with part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

11.36 A written record will be kept of all complaints, and whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a Panel Hearing.

12.0 Next steps

12.1 If the complainant believes the Trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the DfE after they have completed Stage 3.

12.2 The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the Trust and/or its Academies/Schools. They will consider whether education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 has been adhered to.

12.3 The DfE are not able to:

- overturn the panel's decision;
- re-investigate the original complaint;
- review the accuracy of minutes taken or documents provided;
- order that compensation is paid;
- direct the academy /school to discipline / exclude pupils;
- force the Trust/academy/school to discipline / dismiss staff; or
- instruct the Trust/academy/school to apologise.

12.4

Ministerial and Public Communication Division
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

13.0 Record Keeping

13.1 The Trust 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. Records will include copies of letters, emails and notes relating to meetings and phone calls. The written records will be retained in accordance with Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, sub-paragraph [e] with details of whether they were resolved following a formal procedure, or progression to a Panel Hearing.

13.2 This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or members of the Hearing Panel. A record of the findings and recommendations of the panel will be held by the Head of governance on behalf of the Trust.

13.3 The exception to this is where the Secretary of State (or someone acting on his/her behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request or under the terms of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), or where material must be made available during a school inspection where access is requested.

13.4 Records of complaints will be held for three years from the completion of a particular complaint. Where the complaint involves a child/young person, the complaint will be kept on file in accordance with the statutory requirements.

13.5 Details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with other Trustees in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later date.

14.0 Complaint Campaigns

14.1 In the unfortunate circumstance that an academy/school within the Trust, or the trust itself receives large volumes of complaints that are all based on the same subject and/or/are from complainants not connected to the Trust the following actions may be taken:

- A template response will be sent to all complainants;
- A single response will be published on the academy/school website.

14.2 Complainants who remain dissatisfied with the response will be directed to the DfE.

15.0 Managing serial and unreasonable complaints

15.1 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 our academies/schools. However, the Trust will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will act to protect staff from this, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

15.2 The Trust defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders the consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the academy/school, such as, if the complainant:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaint's investigation process.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the Complaint's Policy.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the Complaint's Policy or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be considered and commented on.
- Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced.
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed).
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the Trust's Complaint's Policy has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the DfE.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on staff time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
- Uses threats to intimidate.
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence.
- Knowingly provides falsified information.
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

- Is insistent on pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.

15.3 On rare occasions a complaint may be considered to be 'frivolous' or 'vexatious'. Such complaints are:

- Those which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious
- Insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.
- Insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.
- Complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
- Demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value.

15.4 Complainants should try to limit their communication with the Trust relating to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

15.5 Where is identified by the Trust that a complainant may be acting in an unreasonable manner or making complaints which are frivolous or vexatious, the matter will be passed to the Chief Executive Officer.

15.6 Whenever possible, the Chief Executive Officer will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally to try to resolve the situation.

15.7 If the behaviour continues, the Chief Executive Officer will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the Trust or an academy/school causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

15.8 In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from all Trust premises.

16.0 Communication strategy for persistent correspondents

16.1 Where an individual's behaviour is causing a significant level of disruption, the Trust will:

- Restrict the individual to a single point of contact via an email address.
- Limit the number of times that contact can be made, e.g., a fixed number of contacts per term.

16.2 The Trust acknowledges that regardless of the application of any communication strategy, parents and carers will receive the information they are legally entitled to within statutory timeframes.

16.3 Should an individual persist to the point that their behaviour may constitute harassment, the Trust will seek legal advice.

17.0 The decision to stop responding

17.1 The decision to stop responding to an individual will never be taken lightly and will not be made until the Trust are confident that:

- 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 continues to contact the Trust and/or Academy/School repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.

17.2 The Trust will also take into consideration the following when making the decision to stop responding to a complaint:

- The individual's letters, emails or telephone calls are often and/or always abusive or aggressive.
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff.
- The Trust have reason to believe the individual is intent on causing disruption or inconvenience through their excessive contact.

17.3 Where the Trust decides to stop responding the individual will be informed in writing.

Appendix 1 – Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Academy/School
(Via the relevant decision maker as outlined in the Complaints Policy)

Your name:	
Student's name (if applicable):	
Your relationship to the student (if applicable):	
Academy your child attends (if applicable):	
Your address including postcode:	
Name of Academy/School your complaint is against:	
Daytime telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
E-mail address:	

Details of your complaint

Please provide full details of your complaint, including relevant dates and persons concerned where possible in the box below. *(Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)*

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint *(Please include details of who you spoke with and their response).*
How do you feel the problem could be resolved at this stage?

Please attach any paperwork you feel is relevant to your complaint. You may wish to provide details of any attachments.

Signature:	
Date:	

***** Please return the completed form to the relevant person as confirmed in the Trust's Complaints Policy *****

Appendix 2 – Panel Hearing

1 The panel will consist of at least 4 members, who have had no prior connection with the complaint and at least one of these must be an independent panel member. This will ensure that the panel has the benefit of an external source of scrutiny and challenge when considering the complaint. The independent panel member should not be a member, Trustee or employee of the Trust. The Trust will not use any person who has a clear connection with the Trust and its Academies and Schools (e.g., a solicitor who routinely handles legal matters for the Trust) as an independent panel member.

2 Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the Trustees who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

3 The person escalating their complaint to a panel may be accompanied at the hearing. The DFE guidance and the regulations recommend that neither the complainant nor the Academy bring legal representation as these hearings are not a form of legal proceedings.

4 In cases where the person making the complaint is a child/young person the Trust will ask in advance if any support is needed to assist them in the presentation of their complaint. Where the parent/carer is the complainant, the Trust will allow the parent/carer to decide if the child/young person should attend. However, parents/carers need to be aware that this may not always be possible should the panel consider it is not in the child/young person's best interests.

5 The panel will also ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated by the atmosphere and proceedings during the hearing.

6 The panel will respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

7 The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

8 The aim of the Panel Hearing will be:

- reconciliation
- to put things right that may have gone wrong

9 The panel will make findings and recommendations, a copy of which will be provided to the person making the complaint and relevant senior leader. A copy of the letter may be shared with the individual who are the subject of the complaint.

10 The outcome letter will also include the conclusions and reasons for any decisions and any further rights of appeal.

Appendix 3 - Procedure for the Panel Hearing in respect of a complaint

1 The Chair of the panel will welcome all parties to the Hearing and following introductions will confirm the purpose of the hearing and the procedure to be followed.

2 The Complainant will be invited to present their reasons as to why they believe the complaint remains unresolved and what outcome they are seeking that would potentially resolve their complaint. This may also include calling any witnesses.

3 If witnesses are called the process will be:

- Witness called into the hearing
- Questions from the Complainant to the witness
- Questions from the Stage 2 Decision Maker to the witness
- Questions from the Panel to the witness
- Points of clarification from the Complainant
- Witness dismissed from the hearing

4 The Stage 2 Decision maker will be offered the opportunity to ask questions of the Complainant.

5 Members of the Panel will be offered the opportunity to ask questions of the Complainant.

6 The Stage 2 Decision Maker is then invited to confirm the actions taken by the Trust/Academy/School to resolve the complaint.

7 If witnesses are called the process will be:

- Witness called into the hearing
- Questions from the Stage 2 Decision Maker to the witness
- Questions from the Complainant to the witness
- Questions from the Panel to the witness
- Points of clarification from the Stage 2 Decision Maker
- Witness dismissed from the hearing

8 The Complainant will be given the opportunity to ask questions of the Stage 2 Decision Maker

9 Members of the panel will be offered the opportunity to ask questions of the Stage 2 Decision Maker.

10 The Stage 2 Decision Maker is then invited to sum up the Trust's/ Academy's/school's actions and response to the complaint.

11 The Complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.

12 At this stage both the Complainant and the Stage 2 Decision Maker will leave the hearing allowing members of the Panel to deliberate. A written response will be agreed and sent by the Head of Governance to the Complainant within 5 school days. The Headteacher/Head of School will also receive a copy of the outcome letter.