COMPLAINTS POLICY

Document Control:

Document Owner:	**Chris Barns**		
Approval Body:	Board of Trustees		
Version Number:	7		
Version Issue Date:	24 September 2026	**Effective Date:**	24 September 2026
Review Frequency:	Annually by Trustees		
Method of Dissemination:	Electronic publication via website		
For Use By:	Membership and all staff where applicable		

Version History:

Version	Date	Author	Reason
V1	29/09/2020	Trustees & Governance Professional	Based on ESFA 'Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures 2020' (updated 15/9/2020) and to include policy for managing serial, repetitive and unreasonable complaints.
V2	31/03/2022	Governance Professional	New Trust logo. Clerk to Trustees changed to Governance Professional. MASH changed to CADS. Note: MASH is still used by Suffolk schools
V3	12/09/2022	Governance Professional	Removal of references to Local Governing Body and Governors. Email addresses changed to xx@setrust.co.uk format
V4	22/09/2022	Governance Professional	Page 11 template form – added section: 'Please explain what steps you have taken to try and resolve this informally.'
V5	23/11/2023	Governance Professional	Annual review. Page 7 – added ' All correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will 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.'
V6	16/05/2025	Clerk	Removal of references to ESFA following its merger into the Department for Education (DfE) on 1st April 2025.
V7	10/06/2026	Governance Professional	Paragraph added regarding use of AI. Updated links on Page 11. Updated records management and retention arrangements. Review to document structure, escalation route, response from complainants.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency closed on 31 March 2025. All activity has moved to the Department for Education (DfE).

This policy has been developed with reference to the Department for Education's Best Practice Guidance for Academies Complaints Procedures (March 2021). The school complies with the requirements of Part 7 of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. The remainder of the DfE guidance is followed as best practice.

Contents of this Policy:

- **Complaints Policy**
- **Appendix A - Complaint Form**
- **Appendix B – Roles and Responsibilities**
- **Appendix C – Policy for managing serial, repetitive and unreasonable complaints**

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure applies to complaints from parents and carers of pupils at the school concerning their child. We will also deal respectfully and appropriately with concerns raised by other members of the public, although <school name> is not required to follow this procedure in those cases. Complaints which fall within another statutory procedure, including admissions and suspensions or permanent exclusions, will be dealt with under that procedure.

We recognise that AI tools can be helpful in consolidating and presenting concerns. To enable us to consider and respond to all aspects of a complaint effectively, complaints should be concise and clearly identify the specific concerns and the outcome sought. Where clarification is needed, we will contact the complainant to confirm the matters to be considered.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

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

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

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. Our School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, Mr Barns will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, Mr Barns 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.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Beccles High School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern can be raised in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so. Complaints should be made in writing.

Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Headteacher must be sent to the Trust CEO at ea@setrust.co.uk. The CEO, or another suitably skilled and impartial person appointed by the CEO, will oversee the investigation.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask a third-party organisation for example like the Citizens Advice to help you.

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.

Anonymous complaints

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

Time scales

You must raise the complaint 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.

Complaints received outside of term time

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

Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Beccles High School other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	A complaint that raises a safeguarding concern, or an allegation of harm or risk to a child, the matter will be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and managed in accordance with the school's Child

	Protection and Safeguarding Policy. Where appropriate, a referral will be made to children's social care, the Local Authority Designated Officer or another relevant agency.
• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. **complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.* Beccles-High-School-Behaviour-Policy-2025-26-v2.pdf
• 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 our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures. The Trust HR Team act as a point of contact for employees/volunteers seeking to raise a grievance.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. The complainant will be informed of the outcome of their complaint as far as possible but will not be provided with confidential employment information or details of any disciplinary action.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams, Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or 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.

If a complainant commences legal action against Beccles High School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Beccles High School wants 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 explanation
- an acknowledgment that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we 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 school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Stage One – Informal complaints

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, tutor, year head / or subject head

Complainants should not approach individual Trustees or Members of the Trust to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis, and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage Three of the procedure.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide a response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the issue remains unresolved, the complainant may wish to proceed to Stage Two

Stage Two – Formal complaints

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the school office. This should be made in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form).

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

Within this response, the Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team, or the senior leadership team of another Trust school, but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish

- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

To ensure complaints are progressed in a timely manner, complainants are expected to respond to reasonable requests for information, clarification, evidence or confirmation of availability.

Where a complainant does not respond to such requests within 10 school days, despite reasonable attempts to make contact, and unless there are exceptional circumstances that warrant additional time, the school may either:

- proceed to determine the complaint on the basis of the information already available; or
- determine that the complaint has been withdrawn and close the matter.

The complainant will be informed in writing if either decision is taken.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Beccles High School will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage Two.

Complaints about the Headteacher must be sent to the Trust CEO at ea@setrust.co.uk. The CEO, or another suitably skilled and impartial person appointed by the CEO, will oversee the investigation.

Stage Three – Panel Hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage Two and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage Three – a panel hearing consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint with at least one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the academy and Trust body. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage Three must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage Two response. It should explain the reason(s) as to why the complainant is not satisfied with the response at Stage Two.

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

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

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage Three request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

To ensure complaints are progressed in a timely manner, complainants are expected to respond to reasonable requests for information, clarification, evidence or confirmation of availability.

Where a complainant does not respond to such requests within 10 school days, despite reasonable attempts to make contact, and unless there are exceptional circumstances that warrant additional time the school may either:

- proceed to determine the complaint on the basis of the information already available; or
- determine that the complaint has been withdrawn and close the matter.

The complainant will be informed in writing if either decision is taken.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that the complaint will be investigated as far as possible under this complaints procedure, while any employment or disciplinary action arising from it will be dealt with separately and remain confidential.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 7 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. If a recording made without consent is submitted as evidence, the panel will decide whether it is relevant, lawful and fair to consider it, taking account of privacy, safeguarding and data-protection requirements.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage One of the procedure.

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

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

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

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

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

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Beccles High School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 15 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education (DfE) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Beccles High School

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Beccles High School will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher.

Records relating to complaints, including complaint forms, correspondence, investigation records, hearing papers, findings and outcomes, will be retained in accordance with the Trust's Records Retention Schedule and the Information and Records Management Society (IRMS) guidance for schools and academies. Complaint records will normally be retained for ten years after closure of the complaint, after which they will be securely destroyed unless a legal, safeguarding or regulatory reason requires longer retention.

The records will include but are not limited to the progress of the complaint and the final outcomes.

All correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will 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 escalated to / about the Trust, CEO or Trustee

If a complaint is escalated to the Trust, e.g. concerning a Headteacher, or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the Trust or Trust Central team employee, then the complaint should be sent to the CEO to be investigated, at ea@setrust.co.uk. The CEO may appoint a suitably skilled person to oversee the process. The CEO will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 5 school days of the date that the written request was received.

Following the investigation, the CEO will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 15 school days of the date that the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the CEO will write to the Complainant within 15 school days of the date that the letter was received**,** explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a Trustee, the complaint should be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board: c/o the clerk to the Trust or other appropriate person as required (the Governance Professional), SET Central Team, Wymondham College, Golf Links Road, Morley, Wymondham, Norfolk, NR18 9SZ or clerk@setrust.co.uk. Please mark as Private and Confidential. If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation

NB. Where the Chair of the Trust Board has investigated the complaint, they will write the letter of outcome to the Complainant and provide a copy to the CEO.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write within 5 school days to the Clerk at clerk@setrust.co.uk asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel. The complainant should explain the reason(s) as to why they were not satisfied with the response at the previous stage.

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

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

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage Three request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Trust Board or
- the majority of the Trust Board

Stage Three will be heard by a completely independent committee panel.

The Complaint Panel will consist of three members. None of the three members of the Complaint Panel will have been involved in the incidents or events which led to the complaint or have been involved in dealing with the complaint in the previous stages, of have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint.

One of the Complaint Panel members will be independent of the management and running of the Academy and the Trust body.

To ensure complaints are progressed in a timely manner, complainants are expected to respond to reasonable requests for information, clarification, evidence or confirmation of availability.

Where a complainant does not respond to such requests within 10 school days, despite reasonable attempts to make contact, and unless there are exceptional circumstances that warrant additional time the school may either:

- proceed to determine the complaint on the basis of the information already available; or
- determine that the complaint has been withdrawn and close the matter.

The complainant will be informed in writing if either decision is taken.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a Trust employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that the complaint will be investigated as far as possible under this complaints procedure, while any employment or disciplinary action arising from it will be dealt with separately and remain confidential.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 7 school days before the meeting.

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

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage One of the procedure.

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

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

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

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

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

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and the Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 15 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education (DfE) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the Trust.

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

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Headteacher.

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are 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 or when access is required due to other legal processes or to enable trustees and the Trust's executive team to undertake their statutory responsibilities.

Complaint records will normally be retained for ten years following closure of the complaint in accordance with the Trust's Records Retention Schedule and IRMS guidance. Records will then be securely disposed of unless there is a statutory or operational requirement to retain them for longer.

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

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school/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 they have completed Stage Three.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Beccles High School They will consider whether Beccles High School has adhered to 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.

Complaints about schools should now be raised through the Customer Help Portal to the Department for Education. Here is the link: Home - Customer Help Portal

Appendix A

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Mrs Poll on s.poll@beccleshighschool.org who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: **Postcode:** **Day time telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:** **Email address:**
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.
Please explain what steps you have taken to try and resolve this informally.
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature: **Date:**
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Action taken:
Date:

Appendix B

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
  - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
  - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
  - consideration of records and other relevant information
  - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The Headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator

(This could be the Headteacher or CEO, Trustee or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, Headteacher, CEO, Chair of Trust or the Clerk and to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
  - sharing third party information
  - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Clerk / Governance Professional

The Clerk/Governance Professional is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: Stage One paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality

or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so

  No Trustee may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

  We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting

  Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.

- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

  Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

  The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

  If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

  However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

Appendix C

Sapientia Education Trust Schools

Policy for managing serial, repetitive and unreasonable complaints

Our schools are 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 schools. 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, or is perceived to be, abusive, offensive or threatening.

We define unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the 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 complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account 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
- submits a vexatious complaint (which includes a complaint brought without sufficient grounds, to cause annoyance or distress to the subject of the complaint)
- 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 school's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school 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.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates 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.

If such inappropriate behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who (in the opinion of the Trust) excessively contact the school or Trust 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.

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 school or Trust premises.

Where a complainant raises an issue that has already been dealt with via the school's complaints procedure, and that procedure has been exhausted, the school will not reinvestigate the complaint.

If a complainant persists in raising the same issue, the Headteacher will write to them explaining that the matter has been dealt with fully in line with the school complaints procedure, and therefore the case is now closed. The complainant will be provided with the contact details for the Department for Education if they wish to take the matter further.