

COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

for adoption by all CDAT schools

This policy is informed by the Christian values which are the basis for all of CDAT's work and any actions taken under this policy will reflect this.

'*Blessed are those who act justly, who always do what is right*'

Psalm 106:3

Approved by	Date	Review Schedule	Date of next review
CDAT Finance & Operations Committee	September 2026	Annually	September 2027

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1. Introduction

The Chester Diocesan Academies Trust (the 'Trust') takes concerns and complaints seriously and are keen that they are resolved at the earliest possible stage. We are committed to providing the highest standards of education and care for our pupils and their families. We recognise, however, that concerns or complaints may occasionally arise. If you feel something has gone wrong, we want you to work with us to review the situation and, where necessary, make improvements.

The Department for Education (DfE) describes concerns and complaints in this way:

- 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 quickly and satisfactorily. We encourage concerns to be raised as soon as possible and expect that most will be resolved informally.

The Trust is committed to handling concerns and complaints in a way that:

- Is accessible and easy to understand
- Supports constructive dialogue and resolutions
- Takes account of the needs of children and families

- Protects the confidentiality of all parties
- Complies with equality, safeguarding and data protection legislation.

Many issues of concern can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure - this is outlined as ‘Stage 1 - Informal concerns & complaints’. In the event that these initial approaches fail to resolve a complaint, this policy lays out the clear formal procedures that should be followed to allay any concerns about a particular issue.

The use of “Trust” relates to either a school or central trust function.

Before using this policy and procedure we encourage parents to read the “Parent Guide to School Complaints" published by Parentkind, the Department for Education, Ofsted and the Education Together Board. It provides helpful guidance on how to provide feedback, resolve concerns and raise complaints. A copy of the guide is available at Parentkind Parent Complaint Guide

2. Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This policy and procedure applies to:

- Parents and carers of current pupils attending a Trust school
- Members of the public affected by Trust services
- Former parents where the complaint arose while the pupil attended a school in the Trust
- Individuals acting with the written consent of the complainant

The Trust will not typically investigate anonymous complaints.

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by the Trust , 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	• Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. • If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). You can find LADO contact details via your local authority’s website.

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 directly 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 directly to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
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.*
Staff grievances	• Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	• Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. • Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.

3. Timescales

You must raise a complaint within three months of any specific 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 only if exceptional circumstances apply.

School days mean days when pupils are in attendance and exclude weekends, holidays and INSET days. Where correspondence is received during school holidays, it will be deemed received on the first school day after the holiday period.

At each stage of this procedure, timescales are identified for various actions. Our school (and the trust) will make every effort to keep within these timescales but where there are genuine and unavoidable reasons for delay (such as prolonged periods of staff absence), complainants will be informed of the delay and an amended deadline for the completion of actions.

Multiple Complaints and Timescales

We have a duty to use our staff time and resources proportionately and in the best interests of all pupils, and we will take this into account when deciding how to manage multiple concerns or complaints raised at the same time. Where you raise more than one concern or complaint at the same time or raise a new concern or complaint while an existing matter is still being considered under this procedure, we may combine these and deal with them together. Where you raise a new concern or complaint while a

complaints committee hearing or review in respect of an earlier complaint is pending, we may at our discretion pause the complaints committee hearing or review until the new matter has been investigated and responded to under this procedure.

4. Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure, we want to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation of actions taken

- Clarification of information or school procedures
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not reoccur
- 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
- agreement of actions to resolve the concern
- an apology
- Referral to another process where the matter falls outside of the scope of this policy

5. Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

If at any point we haven't heard from you for four weeks after our reply, we will write to you to close your enquiry.

6. Summary Overview of the Stages Within the Trust Complaint Process

The process will follow the following stages:

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

Stage 3 – Complaints Review Panel

Detailed information relating to each stage of the complaint process is provided in sections 7 to 9 of this policy.

7. Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

The Trust believes that the majority of concerns can be resolved quickly and effectively through informal discussion. We therefore encourage all parents, carers and other stakeholders to raise concerns as soon as possible with the member of staff best placed to address the issue. Early resolution is generally in the best interests of the pupil and often prevents misunderstandings or concerns from escalating unnecessarily.

The informal stage is an important part of the complaints process and should be used wherever appropriate before a formal complaint is submitted.

Parents/carers should raise the concern initially with the Class Teacher or the Headteacher as appropriate. This can be done in person, by telephone, or by email. The Trust expects concerns to be raised calmly, respectfully and with sufficient information to enable the matter to be properly understood and addressed.

To explore the concern and seek a resolution the school may suggest:

- A face-to-face meeting with a suitable person
- An online meeting
- A telephone discussion or
- An exchange of correspondence

Where appropriate the school may involve other members of staff who have knowledge of the circumstances or who are able to assist in resolving the matter. The Trust encourages open and constructive dialogue during these discussions and expects all participants to treat one another with courtesy and respect.

The school will respond to you within three school days and make every effort to ensure that informal complaints are resolved within 15 school days of being raised. Where this is not possible the individual raising the concern will be informed of the reasons for the delay and provided with an indication of when a response can be expected.

In the case of concerns raised under Stage 1 of this procedure, the only record of the concern and its resolution will be file notes by the person dealing with the complaint and/or file correspondence between the person raising the concern and the respondent.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after informal discussions have concluded, they may submit a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure. Equally, a concern which has not been resolved by informal means within 15 school days from the receipt of the complaint can be notified as a formal complaint in accordance with Stage 2 below.

8. Stage 2 - Formal Complaints

An unresolved concern under Stage 1, or a complaint which needs investigation, or a more serious dissatisfaction with some aspect of the school's policies, procedures, management or administration should be set out in writing with full details and sent with all relevant documents and full contact details for the attention of the Headteacher of the school concerned or the Chair of the Local Governance Committee (LGC) if it is a complaint regarding the Headteacher.

Formal complaints should normally be made in writing using the Trust's Formal Complaint Form (Appendix A). Complaints should be submitted:

- Within 15 school days of the outcome of the informal stage
- By email or in writing to the person identified within this policy
- Clearly and concisely and
- With sufficient information to enable the complaint to be investigated.

Who Should Receive the Complaint?

Formal complaints should normally be addressed as follows:

Complaint Relates To:	**Complaint Should Be Sent To:**
School operations or decisions	Headteacher

Trust operations or decisions	CEO
Headteacher	Chair of LGC
CEO	Chair of Trustees via the Governance Professional
Trustee	Chair of Trustees via the Governance Professional
Chair of Trustees	Members via the Governance Professional
Local Governance Committee (LGC)	Chair of Local Governance Committee via the Governance Professional
LGC Chair	Chair of Trustees via the Governance Professional

Correspondence for the Trust's Governance Professional should be sent to office@cdat.co.uk

If a complainant is unsure who should receive their complaint, they should contact the Trust central office (office@cdat.co.uk) for guidance.

Should a formal written complaint be received by another member of the school's staff or LGC, this should be immediately passed to the Headteacher, or Chair of the LGC.

Acknowledgement and Clarification of the Complaint

The complaint will be acknowledged in writing normally within ten school days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable during the holidays. The acknowledgement will indicate the action that is being taken, the likely timescale for resolution, and will request any additional information required at that point.

Where the complaint is unclear, overly broad or contains multiple issues, the Trust may:

- Request clarification in writing;
- Provide a summary of the issues understood to form the complaint; or
- Arrange a meeting or telephone discussion to ensure the complaint is correctly understood.

Appointment of an Investigator

The complaint will be investigated by an appropriately senior person who has not been directly involved in the matters complained of wherever possible.

Depending upon the nature of the complaint, the investigator may be:

- A senior leader
- A Trust leader
- A governor
- A trustee; or
- An independent external investigator.

The Trust reserves the right to appoint an external investigator where:

- The complaint is complex;
- The complaint raises significant governance issues;

- There is a potential conflict of interest; or
- Specialist expertise is required.

For school investigations, the Headteacher may deal with the matter personally or delegate a senior member of staff to act as 'investigating officer'.

The 'investigating officer' may request additional information from the complainant and will fully investigate the issue.

Meeting with the Complainant

The investigating officer will normally offer the complainant an opportunity to discuss the complaint through:

- A face-to-face meeting
- An online meeting or
- A telephone discussion.

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- Clarify the issues
- Understand the complainant's concerns
- Explore potential solutions; and
- Ensure the desired outcome is fully understood.

A complainant may be accompanied by:

- A friend
- A family member
- An interpreter; or
- An advocate.

The Trust may object to a companion where there is a legitimate reason, including safeguarding, conflict of interest or disruption concerns.

CDAT's CEO will be informed of any formal complaints received and their outcome.

Outcomes that are Not Available

Certain outcomes cannot be achieved through this procedure, including:

- Dismissal of a member of staff
- Specific disciplinary action against staff
- Disclosure of confidential employment matters
- Financial compensation or
- Outcomes beyond the Trust's legal powers.

Where staff conduct is relevant to a complaint, any internal disciplinary action that may be taken will remain confidential. The Trust may confirm that appropriate action has been taken but will not disclose employment-related details.

Investigation Outcomes

The Trust will normally provide a written outcome within 20 school days of the complaint being received or of the investigation meeting, whichever is later. The outcome letter will normally include:

- A summary of the complaint
- Details of the investigation undertaken
- Findings and conclusions
- Whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld

- Any actions that will be taken and
- Details of how to request a Stage 3 Review Panel.

The aim is to inform any complainant of the outcome of an investigation and the resolution to the complaint within 20 school days from the receipt of the complaint. Please note that any complaint received during a school/school holiday or within 20 school days of the end of term or half term may take longer to resolve.

Written records will be kept of any formal, written complaints that are received. These written records will include:

- records of meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint
- a record of whether a complaint is resolved at Stage 2 or proceed to Stage 3
- a record of any actions taken by the school as a result of a complaint (regardless of whether a complaint is upheld or not)

Where the complainant is not satisfied with the school's response to their complaint they may have their complaint considered by an Independent Complaints Panel.

9. Stage 3 - Complaints Review Panel

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the Stage 2 outcome, they may request a review by a Complaints Review Panel under Stage 3. A request for a complaint to be heard by a Complaints Review Panel must be made in writing, using the form provided at Appendix B, and within 15 school days of the date of the school decision made at Stage 2. The request must also explain why the complainant remains dissatisfied and state the outcome they are seeking.

The Review Panel is the final stage of the Trust's internal complaints procedure. Its purpose is not to reinvestigate the complaint, but to review:

- Whether the complaint was handled fairly and in accordance with this policy;
- Whether the conclusions reached at Stage 2 were reasonable based upon the evidence available;
- Whether any further recommendations should be made to resolve the complaint and improve future practice.

The Review Panel provides an independent and objective consideration of the complaint and the Trust's response. A Parent Guide to Complaint Panels (Appendix C) is available to explain what to expect at a panel meeting.

Where a Stage 3 complaint is received, the school will within 5 school days refer the matter to the Clerk of the Governors or other person appointed to act as Clerk to the Complaints Panel. Unless the complaint is about the Chair of the LGC, the Clerk will inform the Chair and will acknowledge, in writing, receipt of the appeal within 5 school days and inform the complainant of the steps involved in the process. The Clerk will be the contact point for the complainant and will keep the Chair of the LGC informed of the process

The Clerk will, in discussion with the Chair of the LGC, aim to convene a Review Panel hearing as soon as possible, normally no later than 20 school days after receipt of the Stage 3 request.

10. Complaints Review Panel: Roles and Responsibilities

<u>Scope of the Review</u>
The Review Panel will consider:
• The original complaint
• The Stage 2 investigation process
• The Stage 2 findings and outcome
• The reasons given by the complainant for requesting a review.

The Review Panel will not normally:
• Reinvestigate the complaint from the beginning
• Consider new complaints
• Consider issues unrelated to the original complaint
• Consider new evidence or information that could reasonably have been provided during the Stage 2 investigation.

Where significant new evidence becomes available that could not reasonably have been provided during the Stage 2 investigation, the Panel may determine that further investigation is required before considering the complaint.

Composition of the Panel
The Review Panel shall consist of:
• At least three individuals, none of whom have had any involvement in the previous stages of the complaints process
• At least one of the panel members will be independent of the management and running of the school (this can include a governor from another school's Local Governance Committee).
• The other panel members, of which there will be at least two, may be:

- The school's own governors
- Governors from other CDAT schools
- Governors or trustees from other academy trusts
- Governors from other maintained schools
- Staff from the Trust central team
- Independent educational professionals

The role of the Clerk
All panels considering complaints must be clerked. The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and will be required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing
- Provide procedural advice
- record the proceedings
- notify all parties of the panel's decisions

The role of the Chair of the LGC

- check that the correct procedure has been followed
- if a hearing is appropriate, notify the clerk to arrange the panel

The role of the Chair of the Panel
The Chair of the Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- parents or others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy
- the panel is open minded and acting independently;

- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- written material is seen by all parties.
- if a new issue arises all parties are given the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

11. The Panel Hearing

Practical Arrangements
The hearing may take place:

- In person
- Via video conference or
- Through a hybrid arrangement where appropriate.

In addition, the panel may consider whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

The clerk will confirm at least 10 school days before the hearing wherever practicable:

- The date
- Time
- Venue or online arrangements
- Names of Panel members and
- Documentation deadlines.

Documentation
All parties will be given the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Panel in support of their position including:

- documents
- chronology and key dates
- written statements setting out further detail

The evidence will be considered by the Panel along with the initial submission but information should not include anything that could reasonably have been provided during the Stage 2 investigation

All written evidence must be received by the Clerk no later than 5 school days in advance of the Panel Hearing. The Panel may decline to consider late evidence unless there are exceptional reasons to do so. The Clerk will distribute the evidence to all parties no later than 3 school days in advance of the Panel Hearing.

Attendance
Where the panel takes place in person, via video conference, or via a hybrid arrangement, the complainant may attend the hearing and may be accompanied by:

- A friend
- A relative
- An interpreter
- An advocate or
- Another support person.

The Trust may also be represented by individuals involved in the Stage 2 investigation.

Legal representatives will not normally be permitted except where exceptional circumstances exist. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and is intended to remain accessible and proportionate.

Media representatives are not permitted

Non-Attendance
If the complainant is unable to attend, they should notify the clerk as soon as possible. The Chair may decide to:
• Rearrange the hearing
• Consider the complaint through written submissions alone or
• Proceed in the complainant's absence where appropriate.

Panel Deliberations
Following the hearing the Panel will meet in private.

The Panel may:
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- make findings and recommendations, a written copy of which will be available for inspection on the school premises by the trust and headteacher

12. Decision

The Panel will reach a decision, and make any recommendations within 15 school days of the hearing. The decision reached is final.

The Panel's findings will be sent, in writing, by the Clerk, to the parents/carers, the LGC, Trust CEO and the Headteacher and where relevant, to the person complained about. The letter will state the reasons for the decision reached and any recommendations made by the Panel.

The School will keep a record of all appeals, decisions and recommendations of the Complaints Panel and inform CDAT's CEO.

If the complainant feels that their complaint has not been managed within the procedures set out here they may appeal to CDAT's CEO in writing. At this stage, the CEO will review whether the complaint has been dealt with in line with trust policy: the substance of the complaint itself will not be reviewed.

The Review Panel represents the final stage of the Trust's internal complaints process. Once the Panel has issued its findings and recommendations, the complaint will be considered closed. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may refer concerns regarding the handling of the complaint to the Department for Education at Complaints procedure - Department for Education - GOV.UK

The DfE does not normally reinvestigate the complaint itself but may consider whether the Trust followed its published complaints procedure appropriately.

13. Unacceptable Behaviour

CDAT recognises the importance of its role in dealing with complaints. The Trust also has a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of pupils, parents and staff.

CDAT is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and to providing a high-quality service to those who make them. As part of this service it would not normally limit the contact complainants have. However, they do not expect the school's staff to tolerate behaviour by complainants, which is abusive, offensive, or threatening, and it will take action to protect staff from that behaviour. This applies to unacceptable behaviour on any part of the school/school premises, including the playground, or via online media.

If the Headteacher considers that a complainant's behaviour is unacceptable, the complainant will be told why their behaviour is deemed to be unreasonable and will be asked to change it. If the unacceptable behaviour continues the Headteacher will take action to restrict the complainant's contact with school.

Unacceptable actions and behaviours may include:

- foul and abusive language towards staff, other parents and pupils
- behaviour that staff consider to be harassing and intimidating, including in person, over the telephone, or any other type of communication
- undermining school/school policies by actively encouraging pupils to ignore staff requests
- making unnecessarily excessive demands on the time and resources of staff, by for example excessive telephoning or sending emails to numerous staff, writing lengthy complex letters every few days and expecting immediate responses
- combinations of some or all of these.

The decision to restrict access to any of our schools will be taken by the Headteacher.

Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. The options most likely to be considered are:

- requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only);
- requiring contact to take place with a named member of staff;
- restricting telephone calls to specified days and times; and/or
- asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their conduct.

In all cases the Headteacher will write to tell the complainant why it believes his or her behaviour is unacceptable, what action is being taken and the duration of that action.

Where a complainant continues to behave in a way which is unacceptable, the school may decide to terminate contact with that complainant and discontinue any investigation into their complaint. However the LGC will seek to limit any detriment to any pupils who attend the school, as far as is reasonable within these circumstances e.g. access to parents evenings, newsletters, and any other correspondence.

Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of the school's staff, other options will be considered, for example reporting the matter to the police or taking legal action.

14. Vexatious Complainants

There are a small number of complainants who, because of their frequent contact with the school, hinder consideration of their or other people's complaints. Such complainants are referred to as 'unreasonably persistent complainants' and, exceptionally, the Headteacher will take action to limit their contact.

Actions and behaviours of unreasonable and unreasonably persistent (vexatious) complainants may include:

- refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint, despite offers of assistance with this from the school's staff.
- refusing to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- refusing to accept that issues are not within the remit of a complaints procedure despite having been provided with information about the procedure's scope.
- insisting on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- making what appear to be groundless complaints about the staff dealing with the complaints, and seeking to have them replaced.
- changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds and/or denying statements he or she made at an earlier stage.
- introducing new information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raising large numbers of detailed questions which are particularly time consuming and costly to respond to and insisting they are all fully answered.
- electronically recording meetings and conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of the other persons involved.

- adopting a disproportionate, 'scattergun' approach: pursuing a complaint or complaints with the school and, at the same time, with multiple other organisations, thus giving the school no opportunity to respond to the complaint
- making unnecessarily excessive demands on the time and resources of staff whilst a complaint is being looked into, by for example excessive telephoning or sending emails to numerous school staff, writing lengthy complex letters every few days and expecting immediate responses.
- submitting repeat complaints, after complaints processes have been completed, essentially about the same issues, with additions/variations which the complainant insists make these 'new' complaints which should be put through the full complaints procedure.
- refusing to accept the decision – repeatedly arguing the point and complaining about the decision.
- combinations of some or all of these.

The decision to restrict access to the school will be taken by the Headteacher and will normally follow a prior warning to the complainant. Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. The options most likely are:

- requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only);
- requiring contact to take place with a named member of staff;
- restricting telephone calls to specified days and times; and/or
- asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their future contacts with us.

In all cases, the Headteacher will write to tell the complainant why his or her behaviour falls into that category, what action is being taken and the duration of that action. They will also tell them how they can challenge the decision if they disagree with it. If the school decides to carry on treating someone as an unreasonably persistent complainant and they are still investigating their complaint six months later, they will carry out a review and decide if restrictions will continue.

Where a complainant whose case is closed persists in communicating with the school about it, they may decide to terminate contact with that complainant. In such cases, the Headteacher or Chair of the LGC will read all correspondence from that complainant, but unless there is fresh evidence which affects the decision on the complaint they will simply acknowledge it or place it on the file with no acknowledgement.

New complaints from people who have come under the unreasonably persistent complainant's policy will be treated on their merits.

15. Confidentiality

Review Panel hearings are private and confidential. Those attending the hearing must:

- Respect the confidentiality of proceedings
- Refrain from sharing documentation externally
- Avoid publication of hearing details, including on social media.

Electronic recording of the hearing will not normally be permitted unless approved in advance as a reasonable adjustment or in other exceptional circumstances.

The Trust will maintain records of:

- Formal complaints
- Investigations
- Panel Hearings
- Actions arising from complaints

Records will be retained securely and managed in accordance with data protection legislation and Trust retention schedules. Complaint information will remain confidential except where:

- Disclosure is required by law
- Inspection bodies require access
- The Secretary of State requests records
- Disclosure is necessary for complaint investigations

16. Matters Outside of this Procedure

The following are usually dealt with under separate procedures:

- Admissions
- Suspensions and exclusions
- Safeguarding and child protection
- Staff grievances
- Staff disciplinary matters
- Whistleblowing
- Data protection complaints
- Freedom of information requests
- SEND Tribunal matters
- Employment matters
- Third party contractors and service providers.

Where a complaint is received under the wrong procedure, we will signpost the complainant to the correct route (policy or statutory process) wherever possible.

Please also note that a complaint and a Subject Access Request (SAR) are separate processes. Individuals have the right to request access to their personal data under data protection legislation. Such requests will be handled in accordance with the Trust's Data Protection Policy. The existence of a complaint does not automatically entitle a complainant to receive information relating to other individuals.

17. Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI tools such as Microsoft Copilot, ChatGPT and Gemini may help complainants organise their thoughts. However:

- AI can generate inaccurate information
- AI may cite incorrect legislation
- AI is not confidential
- Personal data should not be uploaded to public AI systems.

Complainants remain responsible for the accuracy of their submissions. If unclear AI-generated material is received the Trust may request clarification before continuing the process.

If a complaint appears to have been wholly or substantially generated using artificial intelligence (AI) and further clarification or confirmation is required from the complainant, the complaint handling timescales outlined in this Policy will be paused until a satisfactory response is received. The complainant will be notified when the timescales have been suspended and when they resume.

If we are finding it difficult to clearly identify the key concerns from what you have shared, we may suggest a meeting or call to help us focus on what matters most and respond as accurately and helpfully as possible.

Appendix A - Complaints Form (Stage 2)

Your name:	Pupil name:
School attended:	
Your relationship to the pupil:	Pupil date of birth:
Address:	Phone number:
What are you concerned about? Include the names of any people involved and the dates and times of relevant events.	
Who have you spoken to about your concerns?	
What can we do to put things right?	
Signature:	Date:

Appendix B - Request for a Complaints Review Panel (Stage 3)

Your name:	Pupil name:
School attended:	
Your relationship to the pupil:	Pupil date of birth:
Date of Stage 2 response:	
Reason for dissatisfaction:	
Outcome requested:	
Additional evidence (if applicable):	
Signature:	Date: