Connect Alliance Trust

Excellence - Collaboration - Respect

Complaints Policy and Procedure

Adopted by

Brookburn Community Primary School

Approved by:	Connect Alliance Trust Board	Date: 22.09.26
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Version Control Table

Version	Date	Author	Rationale/Summary of changes	Ratified Date
V1.1	09/09/25	Liz Hardy	New CAT policy	23.09.25
V1.2	11/09/26	Liz Hardy	Added 'Head of School role' throughout document. Added wording on p2. Updated website links on p4&5	

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is for parents or carers of children who are registered at our school, which is part of Connect Alliance Trust. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), the school will use this complaints procedure.

Members of the public may make a complaint about the provision of facilities or services that the school provides. Such complaints will not be dealt with under this policy, but will be handled respectfully and expediently.

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 opportunity. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Brookburn Community Primary School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If possible, it's always best to begin by speaking with the most relevant member of staff (such as your child's teacher), letting them know what has happened and what you would like us to do to make it better. If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, the Head of School or Assistant Head of School will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Head of School 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, the Head of 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

<u>Informal Stage</u>
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 to do so.

Concerns should be raised with the most relevant member of staff, such as the class teacher, Assistant Head of School or Head of School in the first instance. Communication and discussion at this stage from school staff regarding the complaint will only be in person or by telephone. If the issue remains unresolved at this stage, the next step is to make a formal complaint. The formal complaints procedure will not be started until the informal stage has been completed.

<u>Formal Stage</u>
Complainants should not approach individual governors 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 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance in writing, to Jennifer Holden (Headteacher) via the school office**.** Please mark them as 'private and confidential'.

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to Dr. Jennifer Barker (the chair of governors), in writing via the school office. Please mark them as 'private and confidential'.

Complaints about the chair of governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to Mrs Alison Knowlson (the governance professional to the trust board) via the school office. Please mark them as 'private and confidential.

Complaints about the Connect Alliance Trust board or trust executive/central team staff should be addressed to Mrs Alison Knowlson (the governance professional to the trust board) via the school office. Please mark them as 'private and confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure which is to be used for your complaint. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations such as 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

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or chair of governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Duplicate complaints

If, after closing a complaint at the end of the complaints procedure, we receive a duplicate complaint from a spouse, a partner, a grandparent or a child not attending this school, we will remind them that we have already considered the complaint and the local process is complete. Complainants will be advised to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our handling of the complaint.

Complaint campaigns

We will only manage complaints on an individual basis. However, if we receive what we consider to be a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject and possibly from complainants not connected to the school, then we will treat these complaints as being part of a campaign and respond in one of the following two ways, depending upon the nature and scale of the complaint:

- send the same response to all complainants; or
- publish a single response on the school's website.

Timescales

Complainants 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 Brookburn Community Primary School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
● Admissions to schools ● Statutory assessments of special educational needs ● School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of special educational needs or school reorganisation proposals should be raised with Manchester City Council.
● 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).
● Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at Suspension and permanent exclusion guidance **complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.*
● 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 https://www.gov.uk/guidance/blowing-the-whistle-to-the-department-for-education 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 local authority or the DfE (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.
● 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.
● Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
● National curriculum - content	Please contact the DfE at https://www.gov.uk/contact-dfe

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams 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 a complainant commences legal action against Brookburn Community Primary School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Brookburn Community Primary 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 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 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.

Formal Complaint Stage 1

- Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher/ Head of School (unless they are about the Headteacher/Head of School), via the school office. This must be done in writing on the complaint form. The Headteacher/Head of School will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge

receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within three working school days. Within this response, the Headteacher/Head of School will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher/Head of School can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Headteacher/Head of School *may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.*

During the investigation, the Headteacher/Head of School (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.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher/Head of School will provide a formal written response within ten working school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the Headteacher/Head of School 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 Brookburn Community Primary School will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher/Head of School will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1. If the complaint is about the Headteacher/Head of School or a member of the governing board (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about a member of the governing body, the trust board or trust executive/central team staff member must be made to the trust governance professional, via the school office.

If the complaint is jointly about the school chair and vice chair, or the entire governing board, or the majority of the governing board, stage 1 will be considered by the trust board or an independent investigator appointed by the trust board. At the conclusion of its investigation, the trust board or independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

If the complaint is about the Connect Alliance Trust board, stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the trust board.

If the complaint is about a trust executive/central team member, stage 1 will be considered by the most appropriate line manager or chair of trustees.

Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to stage 2 – a panel meeting with members of the governing board's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first two impartial governors available and one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to stage 2 must be made to the governing board clerk, via the school office, within ten working school days of receipt of the stage 1 response.

The clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within three working 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 twenty working school days of receipt of the stage 2 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.

The complaints committee will consist of at least two governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint and one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school. Prior to the meeting, they will decide among themselves who will act as the chair of the complaints committee. If there are fewer than two governors from Brookburn Community Primary School available, the clerk will source any additional trustees or independent governors through another local school, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at stage 2.

The committee will deal with the complaint by inviting parties involved to a meeting. However, they will also offer parties the option to present written representations if they choose not to attend. The committee will ensure that the organisation of the meeting will be sensitive to the needs of all involved.

The complainant will be invited to attend the meeting and they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least ten working 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 five working school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least four working school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not 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 the informal stage or stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings 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 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, make findings and recommendations, including possible 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, where relevant, the person complained about at Brookburn Community Primary School or Connect Alliance Trust with a full explanation of their decision, findings and recommendations, in writing, within ten working 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 Brookburn Community Primary School.

If the complaint is jointly about the chair and vice chair or the entire governing board or the majority of the governing board, stage 2 will be heard by a committee of trustees or independent governors.

If the complaint is about the trust board, stage 2 will be heard by an independent committee of trustees appointed by an independent investigator.

If the complaint is about a trust executive/central team member, stage 2 will be heard by a committee of trustees.

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 Brookburn Community Primary School will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Records

Brookburn Community Primary School will keep a written record of all complaints that are made at the Formal Stage. This will include whether they are resolved following the formal stage or proceed to a panel hearing. We will also keep records of action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld)

Confidentiality

The school will ensure that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

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 2 of the formal procedure.
The DFE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Brookburn Community Primary School. They will consider whether Brookburn Community Primary 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.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the DEF online at:
https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe
by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Complaint form

Please complete and return to *either the Headteacher, Head of School, Governance Professional or Chair of Governors v*ia the school office, 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: **Daytime telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:**
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

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:
Date: