

# COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES

Followed by Three Towers AP Academy



**Adopted:** Autumn 2025

**Review:** Annually

**Reviewer:** Director of Governance & Communication

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## 1 Aims & Application

- 1.1 The aims of the procedure are to deal with complaints and concerns:
  - about a school, the academy trust ("Trust"), or any individual connected with it by following the correct procedure.
  - thoroughly.
  - in an open, honest and fair manner.
- 1.2 This RLT Complaints Procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children who are registered at one of the academies within the Trust. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to an individual school within the Trust, or the Trust itself, about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Part 1 of this policy outlines how parents/carers of registered children currently attending academies within the Trust can raise a concern or complaint. Concerns or complaints from other persons will be dealt with in accordance with following the same process. Complaints from registered children should usually be raised by their parents/carers, but in exceptional circumstances older children may raise concerns themselves using this policy.
- 1.3 Anonymous concerns or complaints will not normally be investigated under this procedure. The headteacher of a school, or executive team, will determine whether there are exceptional circumstances to justify conducting an investigation into the issues raised.
- 1.4 All staff will be made aware of this RLT Complaints Procedure and are expected to review this policy regularly in order that they are familiar with our process of dealing with complaints and can be of assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.
- 1.5 In this procedure:
  - 'complaint' means an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.
  - 'concern' means an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important, for which reassurances are sought.
  - 'meeting' and 'hearing' means an in person or virtual meeting or hearing (i.e. telephone or video conference where all parties can participate verbally), virtual meetings/hearings will only be held if all parties have access to appropriate equipment to attend and are happy to do so.
  - 'parent' means a biological parent, carer, or anyone who has parental responsibility or care for a child.
  - 'school days' excludes weekends and school holidays and periods of partial or total school closure.
  - 'Trust' means the academy trust.
- 1.6 The timeframes referred to in this policy are our usual timeframes, and the school will seek to adhere to these timeframes where possible.
- 1.7 Reasonable adjustments will be made to this procedure where required to ensure that all complainants can access and complete this RLT Complaints Procedure. For example, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

## 2 Key principles

- 1.8 The Trust acknowledges that raising concerns or complaints can be a difficult, emotional, and stressful time, particularly for parents and carers. We expect our staff to always be respectful and courteous when dealing with you. We also expect you to treat our staff with the same respect and courtesy. We will not accept abusive and threatening behaviour towards our staff from anybody at any time. In circumstances where this happens the Trust will take the action outlined in Part 3 of this policy.
- 1.9 The Trust expects all complainants to make reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution. This will usually be the most effective way to swiftly resolve any concerns.
- 1.10 The Trust encourages parents and others to approach the school with any concerns and refrain from airing concerns about the school and its staff on social media sites. Posting negative comments on social media can cause damage and upset and is often counterproductive to children's education.
- 1.11 To investigate your complaint properly and fairly, we have implemented a staged approach. We anticipate that almost all complaints that arise will be resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2, as outlined below.
- 1.12 We expect our members of staff to be addressed in a respectful manner, and for communication to remain calm at all times. The procedure under Part 3 will only be used on very rare occasions to deal with repetitious and/or vexatious complaints, or complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner.
- 1.13 Concerns or complaints should be brought to our attention as soon as possible. Any matter raised more than three months after the incident being complained of (or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three calendar months of the last of these incidents) will not be considered unless the headteacher or DCEO / Director of Phase accept that there are exceptional circumstances to justify accepting the complaint out of time.
- 1.14 Where a complaint is received outside of term time, we will consider it to have been received on the first school day following the holiday period.
- 1.15 On rare occasions a school or the Trust may receive complaints from a number of individuals relating to the same issue. In order to deal with these complaints efficiently, the school/Trust will follow the procedure set out in Part 4.
- 1.16 If it becomes necessary to alter the time limits and deadlines set out within this procedure, you will be advised accordingly and given an explanation as to why this has been the case and provided with revised timescales. If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority safeguarding teams, or tribunals/courts, 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. Where a complaint is raised but we do not have clarity from the complainant on the issues and/or desired outcomes, we will inform the complainant what information we need to progress the complaint and pause this procedure until reasonable clarity is achieved.
- 1.17 Complainants should not approach individual governors or trustees to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis, and it may prevent them from considering complaints at later stages.

- 1.18 If a complainant commences legal action against the Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether it would be appropriate to suspend the RLT Complaints Procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.
- 1.19 If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

### 3 Records of Complaints

- 1.20 A record will be kept of all written formal complaints, including at what stage they were resolved, and action taken by us as a result of those complaints regardless of whether they were upheld. Correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where:
- Access is requested by the Secretary of State.
  - Disclosure is required in the course of a school inspection.
  - An individual has a legal right to access their own personal data contained within such documentation; or
  - Under other legal authority.
- 1.21 We will make the findings and recommendations of the complaints committee available for inspection on the school premises by the Trust and the headteacher.

## PART ONE: Complaints Procedures

### Stage 1: Informal Concerns

- 1.22 An informal concern can be raised in person, by email, or by telephone. Concerns may also be raised by a third party acting on behalf of a parent if they have appropriate authority to do so. Most enquiries and concerns can be dealt with satisfactorily by the class teacher/head of year or other members of staff without the need to resort to the formal procedure. We value informal meetings and discussions and encourage parents to approach staff with any concerns they may have and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding.
- 1.23 It is always helpful if you can fully explain the nature of the concern and identify the outcome you are looking for. Where appropriate, you may be invited to an informal meeting with the member of staff most appropriate for dealing with that concern. The member of staff dealing with the concern will make sure that you are clear on what action (if any) has been agreed. This may be put in writing if appropriate.
- 1.24 If the matter is brought to the attention of the headteacher, they may decide to deal with your concerns directly at this stage. If the concerns are about the headteacher the DCEO / Director of Phase will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.
- 1.25 The school will respect the views of a parent who indicates that they would have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff. In this case, the headteacher will refer the parent to another designated member of staff.
- 1.26 There is no suggested timescale for resolution at this stage, given the importance of informal discussion, although it would be expected that most issues will be resolved within 15 school days. Where no satisfactory solution has been found, you will be

advised that if you wish your concerns to be considered further you should write to the headteacher under Stage 2 of this procedure within 15 school days.

## **Stage 2: Formal Written Complaints**

- 1.27 If your concerns are not resolved under Stage 1, you are entitled to put your complaint in writing and send this to the headteacher of the relevant school. Please use 'complaint' as the subject of your email or mark it clearly on your letter. This will ensure that your correspondence gets the priority it deserves from a large volume of communications the school receives each day.
- 1.28 It is very important that you describe your complaint clearly and include a clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint. We strongly encourage you to use the complaint form provided at Annex 1 of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the [Citizens Advice](#) to help you. In all cases your written complaint must include:
- The nature of the complaint.
  - Details of how the matter has been dealt with so far.
  - The names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events and copies of all relevant documents; and
  - A clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint.
- 1.29 Your complaint will normally be acknowledged in writing within 5 school days of receipt. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the RLT Complaints Procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This will normally be within 15 school days of receipt.
- 1.30 If appropriate, the Headteacher (or someone appointed by them) may invite you to a meeting to clarify your complaints and to explore possible resolutions. If you accept that invitation, you may be accompanied by one other person, such as a friend, relative or interpreter, to assist you. Where possible, this meeting will take place within 10 school days of receipt of the written complaint.
- 1.31 If necessary, witnesses will be interviewed, and statements taken from those involved. If the complaint centres on a child, the child will usually be interviewed. Children will normally be interviewed with their parent present, but if this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint or if the child has specifically said that they would prefer that their parents were not involved, another member of staff with whom the child feels comfortable will be present. If the matter includes a complaint relating to a member of staff, the member of staff will have the opportunity to respond to the complaint.
- 1.32 Once the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, you will be provided with a written response to the complaint, including an explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. This will include what action will be taken to resolve the complaint (if any). You will be advised that if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, you may request that your complaint is escalated to Stage 3 of this procedure.

- 1.33 If the complaint is about the trust, a member of the Trust's central team, or a member of the trust board, (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a member of the trust executive team will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.
- 1.34 Complaints about the trust or a member of the trust board, must be made to the Clerk to the board, via the trust office.

### **Stage 3: Escalation of Formal Complaints**

- 1.35 If your concerns are not resolved under Stage 2, you are entitled to put your complaint in writing and send this to the DCEO / Director of Phase. Please use 'complaint' as the subject of your email or mark it clearly on your letter. This will ensure that your correspondence gets the priority it deserves from a large volume of communications the school receives each day.
- 1.36 It is very important that you describe your complaint clearly and include a clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint. We strongly encourage you to use the complaint form provided at Annex 2 of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the [Citizens Advice](#) to help you. In all cases your written complaint must include:
- The nature of the complaint.
  - Details of how the matter has been dealt with so far.
  - The names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events and copies of all relevant documents; and
  - A clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint.
- 1.37 Your complaint will normally be acknowledged in writing within 5 school days of receipt. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the RLT Complaints Procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This will normally be within 15 school days of receipt.
- 1.38 If appropriate, the DCEO / Director of Phase (or someone appointed by them) may invite you to a meeting to clarify your complaints and to explore possible resolutions. If you accept that invitation, you may be accompanied by one other person, such as a friend, relative or interpreter, to assist you. Where possible, this meeting will take place within 10 school days of receipt of the written complaint.
- 1.39 If necessary, witnesses will be interviewed, and statements taken from those involved. If the complaint centres on a child, the child will usually be interviewed. Children will normally be interviewed with their parent present, but if this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint or if the child has specifically said that they would prefer that their parents were not involved, another member of staff with whom the child feels comfortable will be present. If the matter includes a complaint relating to a member of staff, the member of staff will have the opportunity to respond to the complaint.
- 1.40 Once the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, you will be provided with a written response to the complaint, including an explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. This will include what action will be taken to resolve the complaint (if any). You will be advised that if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the

complaint, you may request that your complaint be heard by the complaints committee under Stage 4 of this procedure.

#### **Stage 4: Referral to the Complaints Committee**

- 1.41 If you are dissatisfied with the decision under Stage 3, you may request that a complaints committee be convened to consider your complaint. The complaints committee will principally consider how the complaint was handled at the previous stages but has discretion to review other aspects of the complaint as it sees fit. The complaints committee will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.
- 1.42 To request a hearing before the complaints committee, you should write to the clerk at the school within 15 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 3. Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. You should ensure that you provide copies of all relevant documents and state all the grounds for your complaint and the outcome that you are looking for.
- 1.43 Your written request will be acknowledged within 5 school days of receipt.
- 1.44 The Clerk will arrange for a complaints committee to be convened, made up of at least three committee members, including:
  - Governors of a local governing committee and/or trustees of the Trust (as appropriate) with no prior involvement in the matter; and,
  - One person who is independent of the management and running of the school (for example, this might be [governor] from another school within the Trust, a governor from another local school/college or an educational professional who has no link to the school).
- 1.45 The Clerk shall appoint one of these committee members to be the chair of the complaints committee.
- 1.46 Every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within 20 school days of the receipt of your request. As soon as reasonably practicable and in any event at least five school days before the hearing, you will be sent written notification of the date, time, and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the committee members who will be present. Fair consideration will be given to any bona fide objection to a particular member of the complaints committee. You will also be informed of the name of the person who will be presenting the case on behalf of the school/Trust (referred to in this policy as the 'school representative'). This may be the person who is the subject of the complaint, the person who undertook the investigation at Stage 3 and/or another person with sufficient knowledge of the matter.
- 1.47 If, despite best efforts, it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date and time for a hearing within a reasonable timeframe, the Clerk may determine that the hearing proceeds on the basis of written submissions from both parties.
- 1.48 You have the right to be accompanied to the hearing by a friend, relative or interpreter. You should notify the Clerk in advance if you intend to bring anyone to the hearing. We do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the



complaints committee hearing. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend. The complaints committee itself may take legal advice and/or be supported by a legal advisor at the hearing on matters of law and procedure.

- 1.49 A copy of the complaint and any other documents provided by you in support of your complaint, or by the school representative in defence of the complaint, will be provided to the complaints committee as soon as practicable upon receipt. Copies of these documents shall also be provided to you or school representatives (as applicable) at least three school days before the hearing. The complaints committee reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented by either party less than three school days prior to the hearing. The complaints committee is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from those other than the parties (e.g. witnesses) but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. The complaints committee will not normally accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.
- 1.50 The hearing will be conducted to ensure that each party has the opportunity to address the complaints committee. The procedure to be followed during the hearing will be explained to the parties by letter in advance of the hearing. The Clerk will ensure that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken, or actions agreed. Electronic recordings of the hearing will not normally be permitted and, in any event, would require the consent of all those present.
- 1.51 Unless otherwise stated, the procedure for the Stage 4 hearing is as follows:
- The parent/carer and school representative will enter the hearing together.
  - The chair of the complaints committee will introduce the committee members and outline the process.
  - The parent/carer will explain the complaint.
  - The school representative and committee members will question the parent.
  - The school representative will explain the school/Trust's actions.
  - The parent/carer and the committee members will question the school representative.
  - The parent/carer will sum up their complaint.
  - The school representative will sum up the school/Trust's actions.
  - The chair of the complaints committee will explain that both parties will hear from the committee within 5 school days.
  - Both parties will leave together while the complaints committee decides.
  - The Clerk, and any legal advisor assisting the complaints committee (if applicable), will stay to assist the complaints committee with its decision making.
- 1.52 The Clerk and/or complaints committee reserves the right to modify the above procedure at their sole discretion, for example requiring the parent and the school representative to present their complaint/actions separately to the complaints committee in the absence of the other party.
- 1.53 If the complainant has not arrived by the start of the complaints committee, the Clerk will attempt to contact the complainant via telephone to ascertain if they are delayed,

have chosen not to attend, or wish to withdraw their complaint. If the Clerk is unable to speak with the complainant, or if the complainant confirms that they have chosen not to attend, the hearing will proceed in the complainant's absence 30 minutes after the scheduled start time. Findings and recommendations will be based on the written submissions previously provided by both parties.

- 1.54 A complaints committee may be adjourned if the complaints committee require further evidence, or in exceptional circumstances (for example, if clarification sought by the complaints committee is essential to the proceedings). The adjourned date must be as soon as possible.
- 1.54 After the hearing, the complaints committee will consider their decision and inform you and, where relevant, the person complained about of their decision in writing within 5 school days. The letter will set out the decision of the complaints committee together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The complaints committee can (by a majority if necessary):
- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
  - Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
  - Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
  - Recommend changes to the school or Trust systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

#### **Stage 5: Referral of Complaint to the Department for Education**

- 1.55 If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the complaints committee, you are entitled to refer your complaint to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will only investigate the complaint in limited circumstances.
- 1.56 For more information on the DfE's remit in relation to school complaints, visit:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complain-about-an-academy/complain-about-an-academy>

## **PART 2: Repetitious and Vexatious Complaints and Complaints in an otherwise Unreasonable Manner**

- 1.62 There are rare circumstances where we will deviate from the Complaints Procedure set out in Parts 1 and 2. These include, but are not necessarily limited to:
- 1.63 **Repetitious, including serial and/or persistent, complaints**
- Where the complainant's complaint is the same, similar to, or based on the same facts of a complaint which has already been considered in full and we have:
- Taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns; and
  - Given the complainant a clear statement of our position and their options.
- We will write to the complainant to advise that the RLT Complaints Procedure has been exhausted, and that we will not be responding to any further correspondence in relation to these matters. The complainant will be referred to Stage 4.
- 1.64 **Vexatious complaints**

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator defines the characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint as:

- Complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitious.
- Insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.
- Insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.
- Complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
- Demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value.
- Examples include but are not limited to:
  - Refusal to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
  - Refusal to co-operate with the complaint's investigation process.
  - Refusal to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the RLT Complaints Procedure.
  - Insistence on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint's procedure or with good practice.
  - Introducing trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on.
  - Raising large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insist they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
  - Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced.
  - Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
  - Seeking an unrealistic outcome, such as the inappropriate dismissal of staff.
  - Making 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.
  - Knowingly providing falsified information.
  - Publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

#### **1.65 Complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner**

Where the complainant's behaviour or language towards staff, governors, trustees or members is aggressive, abusive, offensive, discriminatory or threatening or insulting personal comments are made about, or threats are made towards, staff.

In the circumstances outlined in (2) and (3) above, we may:

- Inform the complainant that we consider their complaint to be vexatious or the manner in which they are pursuing their complaint to be unreasonable and why and ask them to desist.
- Conduct the complaints committee on the papers only, i.e. not hold a hearing.
- Refuse to consider the complaint any further and refer the complainant directly to Stage 5.

We may also restrict the complainant's access to the school, e.g. requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only), requiring contact to take place with a

named person only, restricting telephone calls to specified days and times or number of contacts, or banning the complainant from the school's premises.

Where the complainant's behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, governors, trustees, or members, we will consider other options, for example, reporting the matter to the police, or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

## **PART 3: Complaint Campaigns**

- 1.66 For the purposes of this policy, a complaint campaign is defined as a complaint from three or more separate individuals (whether or not connected with the school), which are all based on the same subject.
- 1.67 Depending on the subject in question, we may deviate from the procedure set out in this policy and instead:
- Send a template response to all complainants; and/or
  - Publish a single response on the school's website (as applicable).

## Appendix 1: Complaints form

Please complete and return to the school office in a sealed envelope addressed to the headteacher, Clerk of the local governing committee or Clerk of the trustees (as appropriate).

<b>Your name:</b>
<b>Child's name (if relevant):</b>
<b>Your relationship to the Child (if relevant):</b>
<b>Address:</b>
<b>Postcode:</b>
<b>Day time telephone number:</b>
<b>Evening telephone number:</b>
<b>Email address:</b>
<b>Your complaint is:</b> (if you have more than one complaint, please number them)

**What action have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint(s) in accordance with Stage 1 of the RLT Complaints Procedures? (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)**

**What would you like as an outcome from your complaint(s)?**

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

**Complaint's Signature:**

**Date:**

*All functions of the RLT Complaints Procedure must adhere to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.*

**Official use**

**Date received:**

**Date acknowledgement sent:**

**Responsible member of staff:**

## Appendix 2: Summary of RLT Complaints Procedures (Part 1)

<b>Stage 1: Informal concerns</b>	Parent/carer brings complaint to attention of member of staff.
	Issue to be resolved (guide: within 15 school days).
	Where no satisfactory solution has been found, parent to be advised that they should proceed to Stage 2.
<b>Stage 2: Formal written complaint</b>	Parent/carer to put complaint in writing using Complaint Form within 15 school days
	Complaint to be acknowledged within 5 school days.
	Meeting with parents within 10 school days (where appropriate).
	Response to the complaint sent within 15 school days.
<b>Stage 3: Escalation of formal complaint</b>	Parent/carer to put complaint in writing using Complaint Form within 15 school days to the DCEO / Director of Phase.
	Complaint to be acknowledged within 5 school days.
	Meeting with parents/carers within 10 school days (where appropriate).
	Response to the complaint sent within 15 school days
<b>Stage 4: Referral to complaints committee</b>	Parent/carer to request hearing within 15 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 2.
	Request to be acknowledged within 5 school days.
	Hearing to take place within 20 school days of receipt of request.
	Notification of date, time, and place of the hearing and details of the committee members present sent at least five school days before the hearing.
	School representative and parents to submit evidence in support of their case to Clerk of the trustees at least three school days before the hearing.
	Complaints committee decision sent not more than five school days after the hearing.