



Complaints Policy

Coordinator	Anna Feltham
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1 Introduction

1.1 Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure applies to matters of concern or complaint raised by parents or carers of children that are current students at Clapton Girls' Academy (the Academy'). Complaints raised by individuals who are not parents / carers of current students, including parents of former students and members of the public, will be dealt with as set out below at 1.2.

1.2 Complainants who are not parents / carers of current students

Such complainants should first attempt to address their complaint informally by raising it with a relevant member of Academy staff. If this fails to resolve the situation, the complaint may be submitted in writing to the Headteacher who will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and thereafter issue a final written response within 15 school days. Where the complaint involves the Headteacher, complaints should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees, who will issue a final written response within the same timeframe.

1.3 Scope

This policy relates to concerns or complaints about the Academy or Clapton Girls' Academy Trust (the Trust). Usually complaints relating to exclusions, admissions, exams, statutory SEN assessments or matters where a child protection investigation may be required, will not be dealt with under this complaints procedure as they have their own statutory appeal or complaint processes. Where necessary the academy will exercise its discretion.

Whistleblowing and staff grievances and discipline matters will not be considered under this policy. Whilst a complaint may be raised about a staff member, such matters will be dealt with (if appropriate) under the Trust's internal staff procedures and complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint.

Complaints against third party contractors / suppliers should be made directly to the third party.

1.4 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. The Academy 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, the Headteacher (or complaints administrator) will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher 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 Academy will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

1.5 Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints, however, the Headteacher or Chair of Trustees, as appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

1.6 Complaint campaigns

If the Academy receives large volumes of complaints all based on the same subject from complainants unconnected with the school we will deem them to be a 'complaints campaign'. Such complaints will be dealt with in line with the procedure set out above for complaints raised by individuals who are not parents / carers of current students, however individual responses will not be sent to complainants in such cases. Instead, a template response will be sent to all complainants and/or a single response published on the Academy's website at the discretion of the Headteacher/Chair of Trustees.

1.7 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 only consider complaints made outside of this period if exceptional circumstances apply.

1.8 Record Keeping

A written record will be kept of all complaints that were resolved at the formal stage of the complaints procedure. Records will contain details of whether the complaint was resolved at Stage 1, or whether it proceeded to a Stage 2 complaints committee meeting. The action taken by the Academy as a result of a complaint (regardless of whether they are upheld) will also be recorded.

1.9 Confidentiality

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State for Education or a body conducting an inspection requests access to them.

1.10 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.

1.11 Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, the Academy 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 academy policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

1.12 Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

1.13 Training

The Headteacher and Chair of Trustees will ensure that relevant training is provided for any academy staff and trustees that are involved in handling complaints.

2 Raising an informal concern/complaint (the informal stage)

Informal concerns / complaints should be raised with either Heads of Year, Heads of Faculty, Support Staff Team Leaders or a member of the Leadership Team within the timescale specified above. The Academy will seek to resolve matters at the informal stage within 15 school days of the issue being raised.

Where the matter is not resolved at the informal stage, the next step is to make a formal complaint as set out below.

Complainants should observe the process set out in this policy and avoid excessive and/or repetitive communication about the same concerns. Where communications cause a significant level of disruption, the Academy may specify methods of communication and/or limit the number of contacts in a communication plan.

3 Making a formal complaint (Stage 1)

3.1 How to raise a formal complaint

Complainants should not approach individual trustees to raise concerns or complaints as they have no power to act on an individual basis and it may prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

All complaints should be marked private and confidential and emailed to the Clapton Girls' Academy mailbox cga@clapton.hackney.sch.uk or delivered to the Academy by post or hand.

Complaints involving specific role-holders should be addressed as set out in the table below:

Complaints involving:	Address for the attention of:
Staff (except Headteacher)	Ms Feltham, Headteacher
Ms Feltham, Headteacher	Ms Frances Feeney, Chair of Trustees
Chair of Trustees or the Board of Trustees	Human Resources team
A named Trustee (except the Chair)	Ms Frances Feeney, Chair of Trustees

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure document. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the main academy reception and they will direct you to the most appropriate member of staff.



In accordance with equality law, we will make 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.

3.2 Stage 1 acknowledgement and next steps

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

Within this acknowledgement, we 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 academy's Leadership Team 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.

3.3 Stage 1 outcome

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 10 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 the Academy 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 1.

3.4 Complaints about specific role-holders

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or a member of the Board of Trustees (except the Chair of Trustees), the Chair of Trustees will be appointed to complete all the Headteacher actions at Stage 1 within the timescales specified. If the Complaint is about the Chair of Trustees or the entire or majority of the Board of Trustees, an independent investigator will be appointed to complete the Stage 1 actions.

4 The Complaints Panel Meeting (Stage 2)

4.1 How to escalate a complaint to 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 which involves a hearing before a complaints committee. which will be constituted as described below. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure. A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Human Resources team within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response by emailing jwolfram@clapton.hackney.sch.uk



or by post or hand delivery. Requests received outside of this period will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

4.2 Stage 2 acknowledgement and next steps

The Human Resources team will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (by either letter or email) within 5 school days. The Human Resources Team will write to the complainant to inform them of the date, time and venue of the complaints committee meeting at least 15 school days before the meeting. They will aim to convene the meeting within 30 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Human Resources Team will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed. If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Human Resources Team will decide when to hold the complaints committee meeting. The meeting will then proceed in the complainant's absence based on written submissions from both parties.

At least 15 school days before the meeting (and usually at the same time as notifying participants of the date of the complaints committee meeting) the Human Resources Team will request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee. Such material must be submitted at least 10 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. Complaints about other matters must be raised as new complaints, starting with the informal stage of this procedure.

4.3 Complaints committee members

The Complaints committee must comprise of three people, which will include two trustees and one person who is independent of the management and running of the Academy. None of the committee members will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint or an earlier stage in the complaints procedure. Prior to the meeting, the complaints committee will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the complaints committee. The independent committee member and any other members required to form the committee shall be sourced through another local school or through the Hackney Governor Services Team, in order to make up the committee.

4.4 Complaints committee meeting

The complainant may bring someone along to accompany them at the complaints committee meeting. This can be a relative or friend. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend. Legal representation will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances.

If the complaints committee considers it appropriate for the particular case, a representative from the academy can be present at the hearing.

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 completely or in part.

If the complaint is upheld completely 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.

4.5 Stage 2 outcome

The Chair of the complaints committee will provide the complainant and the Academy with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days of the meeting.

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

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 Academy will take to resolve the complaint.

The Academy will not pay financial compensation as a response to complaints, though it may spend money on a relevant educational purpose (e.g. paying a fee for a repeat examination).

4.6 Next Steps

If the complainant believes the Academy did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2 via

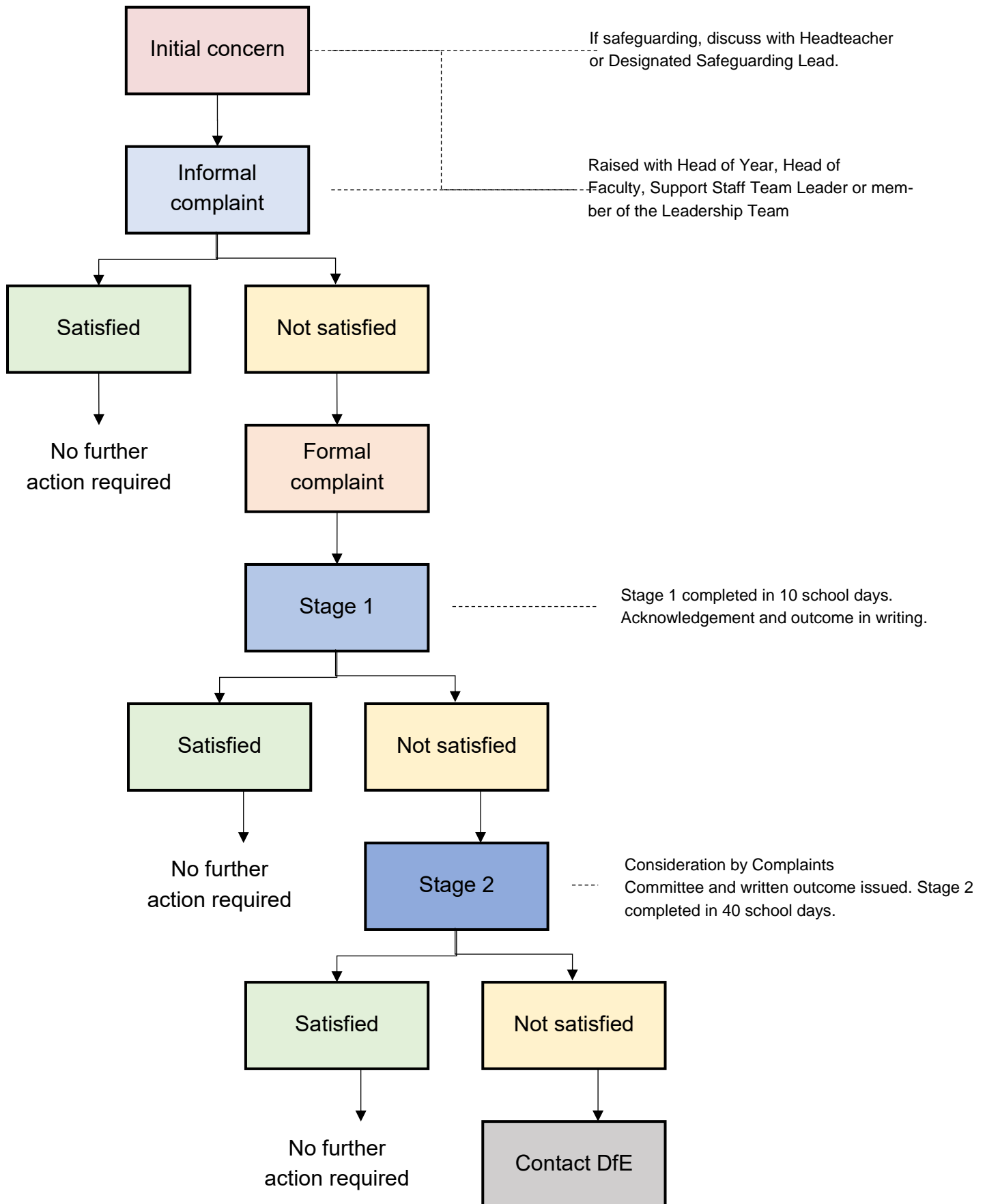
[https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact the Department for Education](https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact%20the%20Department%20for%20Education)

or the Complainant may write to the DfE at:

The School Complaints Unit (SCU), Department for Education, 2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate,
Manchester M1 2WD



Appendix 1 - Complaints process





Appendix 2 - Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Ms Anna Feltham (Headteacher) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Student's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the student (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 academy 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:



Appendix 3 - Managing unreasonable, serial and persistent complaints

1. Unreasonable (or vexatious) complaints

- 1.1. The Academy is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally restrict the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unreasonable behaviour and will act to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.
- 1.2. Whilst a complaint is being progressed, complainants should try to limit their communication with the academy that relates to their complaint. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.
- 1.3. The Academy defines 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, 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 considered and commented on
 - raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
 - makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
 - changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
 - repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
 - refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into a complaint where the academy'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.

1.4. Vexatious complaints are an example of unreasonable complaints and would include:

- obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious complaints
- insistence on pursuing complaints without value or merit (following previous concluded investigations) 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.

2. Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Trustees will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.
3. If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the academy 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.
4. 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 The Academy.

5. Serial or persistent complaints

- 5.1. If at any level the Complainant attempts to reopen an issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this complaints procedure, the Chair of Trustees may write to the Complainant to inform him/her that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter closed, and that continued correspondence is a serial/persistent complaint and that the Academy will not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.
- 5.2. A complaint should not be marked as serial before the complainant has completed the procedure and if it is, it will be the complaint marked as serial and persistent rather than the complainant.
- 5.3. A complainant should not be marked as 'serial' for referring their complaint to their MP regardless of which stage the complaint has reached.