



Complaints Policy

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1.0 Scope

This Complaints Policy is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at QEGSMAT (the Trust and its schools). Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to the Trust about any provision of facilities or services that are provided. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory policies (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), the procedures set out in this policy will be used.

Any policies referred to within this Complaints Policy can be found on the Trust or school website.

The Department for Education (DfE) highlights 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'*.

2.0 Roles and responsibilities

Complainant

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

- Explain the complaint in full as early as possible.
- Co-operate with the Trust in seeking a solution to the complaint.
- Respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint.
- Ask for assistance as needed.
- Treat all those involved in the complaint with respect.
- Refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

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

- Providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - Sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved.
 - Interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint.
 - Consideration of records and other relevant information.
 - Analysing information.
- Liaising with the complainant and the School Complaints Officer (appointed by the Headteacher) as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

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

Trust Complaints Officer

The Director of Finance and Operations is the nominated Complaints Officer of QEGSMAT and has responsibility for the operation and management of the Trust's Complaints Policy. Any communications to the Director are via the Executive PA.

School Complaints Officer

Each school will nominate a Complaints Officer.

The School Complaints Officer should:

- Ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure.
- Liaise with staff members, Headteacher, Director of Finance and Operations, Chair of Governors, Chair of Trustees or the Clerk and to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure.
- Be aware of issues regarding:
 - Sharing third party information.
 - Additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person.
- Keep records.

Panel Hearing Chair

The Panel Hearing Chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- A Clerk is appointed to:
 - Ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to Trust complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).
 - Set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
 - Collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: Stage 1 paperwork, Trust and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale.
 - Record the proceedings.
 - Circulate the minutes of the meeting.
 - Notify all parties of the panel's decision.
- The complainant and Trust are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting.

- The meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy.
- Complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person.
- The remit of the panel is explained to the complainant.
- Written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

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

- Both the complainant and the Trust are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself.
- The issues are addressed.
- Key findings of fact are made.
- The panel is open-minded and acts independently.
- No member of the panel has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure.
- The meeting is minuted.

Panel Hearing Member

Panel members should be aware that:

- The meeting must be independent and impartial and should be seen to be so. No Governor/Trustee may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the Trust and the complainant. We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- Many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated. The panel should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults. If the child/young person is the complainant, the panel should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent/carer is the complainant, the panel should give the parent/carer the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend. However, the parent/carer should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent/carer wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the panel considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
- The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

3.0 How to raise a concern or make a complaint

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 Policy. The Trust 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 School Complaints Officer will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern you will be referred 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 Trust will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this policy.

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 on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complaints against staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the School Complaints Officer via the school office.

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of the Local Governing Body, via the school office.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Local Governing Body, via the school office.

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a Trustee, should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees, via the Clerk to the Trustees.

All complaints should be clearly marked as Private and Confidential.

A template complaint form is included at the end of this policy. Help can be offered in completing the form, if required.

In accordance with equality law, all reasonable adjustments will be considered if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this Complaints Policy. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated. However, the Headteacher or Chair of the Local Governing Body, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

4.0 Time scales

A complaint must be raised within three calendar months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three calendar months of the last of these incidents. Complaints outside of this timeframe will be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time will be considered to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

5.0 Complaints Procedure

This policy covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by the Trust, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory policies, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions to schools 	<p>Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*Complaints about the application of the Behaviour Policy can be made through the Complaints Policy.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing 	<p>The Trust have a Whistleblowing Policy for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our Trust should complain through the Complaints Policy. You may also be able to complain direct to the Local Authority (LA) or the Department for Education, depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the Grievance Policy.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the Disciplinary Policy, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, LA safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on the Trust's ability to adhere to the timescales within this policy or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, the complainant will be kept informed of the proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against the Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the Complaints Policy until those legal proceedings have concluded.

6.0 Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, the Trust will keep in mind ways in which a complaint may be resolved. It may be that it is appropriate to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part and to offer one or more of the following:

- An apology.
- An explanation.
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better.
- An explanation of what steps have been taken to ensure that situation will not recur.
- An undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint.

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing.

7.0 Stage 1 – Informal Complaints

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

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, year head/subject head or Headteacher. 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 3 of the policy.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide an informal written response within ten school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to invite the complainant to make a formal complaint.

8.0 Stage 2 – Formal Complaints

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

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

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

Note: The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team 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.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within twenty school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If this deadline is not achievable the complainant will be provided 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 Trust 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 2.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or a member of the Local Governing Body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the Local Governing Body must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair;
- About the entire Local Governing Body;
- About the majority of the Local Governing Body.

Stage 2 will be escalated to the Director of Finance and Operations of the Trust.

9.0 Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a panel hearing consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint with one panel member being independent of the management and running of the school. This is the final stage of the Complaints Policy.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk, within five school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response. The date the complaint was received and acknowledgement of the

complaint will be made in writing (either by letter or email) within three 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 ten school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the complainant will be kept informed of an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

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

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair;
- About the entire Local Governing Body;
- About the majority of the Local Governing Body.

Stage 3 will be heard by the Trustees and an independent panel member.

A complainant may bring someone to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, it is not encouraged for either party to bring legal representatives to the panel hearing. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate, for instance, if an employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this Complaints Policy. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under the Trust's Disciplinary Policy, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least five 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 panel at least three school days before the meeting.

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

The panel will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the policy.

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 panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel 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 panel will:

- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

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

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled.

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

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

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

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

10.0 Complaints escalated to/about the Trust, CEO or Trustee

If a complaint is escalated to the Trust or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the Trust, then the complaint should be sent to the Director of Finance and Operations to be investigated.

An acknowledgement of the complaint will be sent within three school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 3 of this Complaints Policy and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

Following the investigation, the Director of Finance and Operations will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within twenty school days of the date that the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, an explanation will be sent to the Complainant explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a Trustee, the complaint should be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board. If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation.

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

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Clerk to the Trust Board asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel, within ten school days.

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 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 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.

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair;
- About the entire Trust Board;
- About the majority of the Trust Board.

Stage 3 will be heard by a completely independent panel.

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

One of the Complaint Panel members will be independent of the management and running of the Trust. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will not be a Trustee or an employee of the Trust.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the panel meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate, for instance, if a Trust employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this Complaints Policy. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under the Disciplinary Policy, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least five 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 panel at least three school days before the meeting.

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

The panel will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the policy.

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 panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel 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 panel will:

- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

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

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the Trust.

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

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

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

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

11.0 Next Steps

If the complainant believes the Trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published Complaints Policy or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the ESFA after they have completed Stage 3.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the Trust. They will consider whether the Trust 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 ESFA online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

**Appendix 1
Example Complaint Form**

Please complete and return to the School Complaints Officer who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil/student's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil/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 in the Trust 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:

Action taken:

Date: