Complaints Policy

2026-27

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1. Introduction

1.1 In accordance with Part 7 of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, all academies must have, and make available to parents of pupils, written procedures to deal with all complaints that include timelines and provision for a complaint to be made and considered informally, formally in writing and then to be heard by a complaints panel.

1.2 All complaints will be dealt with in confidence and matters put to a Complaints Panel will remain confidential to the members of that panel. Anyone wishing to make a complaint is also expected to keep the matter confidential and not refer to it publicly, including but not limited to the press and social media platforms. 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 Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

1.3 Complainants should not approach individual trustees to raise concerns or complaints. Trustees have no power to act on an individual basis, and having prior knowledge of a complaint will prevent the trustee from being able to sit on a panel at a later stage of the complaints process. Complainants should always be advised to follow the process laid out in this policy.

1.4 This policy applies to the whole Trust, at Cedars Academy: Low Fell and Cedars Academy: High Heworth. The same procedure and timescales apply at both sites.

1.5 Every pupil at the academy has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Complaints about the special educational provision the academy makes, including how it delivers the provision set out in a pupil's EHC plan, can be made under this policy. Decisions that belong to the local authority are dealt with elsewhere (see section 3).

2. General principles

2.1 The policy is not limited to parents or carers of pupils registered at the academy. Any person, including members of the public (but excluding members of staff), may raise a complaint under this policy.

2.2 The aim of the policy is to bring about a resolution and/or reconciliation, as informally and quickly as may be reasonably possible. It is intended to be investigatory, not adversarial, and to allow for an impartial, transparent and fair investigation to be undertaken where an informal resolution is not possible. Those responsible for investigating and responding to a complaint will aim to address the concerns raised, provide an effective response and consider any redress that might be necessary.

2.3 Where a complaint cannot be resolved informally, or following investigation, and is referred to a Complaints Panel at Stage 3 of this policy, complainants are entitled to bring someone along to the meeting to provide support. It is recommended that neither the complainant nor the Trust bring legal representation, as the panel meeting is not a form of legal proceedings and is aimed at reconciliation and addressing the concerns of the complainant. There may be occasions where legal representation

may be appropriate, for example where a member of staff is acting as a witness they may be entitled to bring union or legal representation.

2.4 Paragraph 33(g) of the Independent School Standards requires that, where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school. This gives the panel an external source of scrutiny and challenge in its consideration of the complaint. The independent panel member therefore should not be a member, trustee or employee of the Trust, or any person who has a clear connection with the Trust (for example, a solicitor who routinely handles legal matters for the Trust).

2.5 Panel meetings will go ahead where the complainant is unable (or does not wish) to attend, as long as reasonable attempts to accommodate the complainant with dates for the meeting have been made.

2.6 Panel meetings can be held virtually if it is not reasonably practicable to meet in person, if all the participants agree to the use of remote access, have access to the technology which will allow them to hear and speak throughout the meeting (and to see and be seen, if a live video link is used) and are able to put across their point of view or fulfil their function, and if the meeting can be held fairly and transparently via remote access.

2.7 In this policy:

- **the appropriate headteacher** means the co-headteacher for the site or area where the matter arose. If that co-headteacher is involved in the matter, another co-headteacher acts instead;
- **the Governance Professional** means the Governance Professional of the Trust Board;
- **the clerk** means the clerk to the Complaints Panel. This may be the Governance Professional or another person arranged by the Governance Professional;
- **Complaints Panel** means the panel of three convened by the Trust Board to hear a complaint at Stage 3. A panel is convened for each complaint; there is no standing complaints committee;
- **school days** means days when the academy is open to pupils. It does not include weekends or school holidays.

2.8 The Trust will make reasonable adjustments so that everyone can use this policy. A complainant who cannot put a complaint in writing, or who needs the process adapted in another way, should tell the academy. Staff should offer this help.

2.9 Meetings under this policy may only be recorded if everyone present agrees in advance. A recording may be agreed as a reasonable adjustment. The Trust will not normally accept as evidence a recording made covertly and without informed consent.

3. Matters not covered by this policy

The following matters cannot be considered under this policy. There are separate policies and procedures that deal with them.

3.1 Education, health and care plans and placement: the local authority decides which school is named in a pupil's EHC plan and what the plan contains. There are no admission appeals to the academy, because the local authority names the academy in the EHC plan. Disagreements with these decisions should be raised with the local authority, and can be appealed to the First-tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability).

3.2 Statutory assessments of special educational needs: any concerns should be raised directly with the local authority.

3.3 Matters likely to require a child protection investigation: complaints about child protection matters are handled under the Trust's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and in accordance with the relevant statutory guidance. Complaints can be referred to the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) or the MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub).

3.4 Exclusion of pupils: further information about challenging a suspension or permanent exclusion is available in the GOV.UK guidance Behaviour in schools: sanctions and exclusions. Complaints about the application of the Behaviour Policy can be made through this policy.

3.5 Whistleblowing: concerns raised by staff, volunteers, trustees and others working for the Trust are dealt with under the Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure.

3.6 Staff grievances: these are dealt with under the Trust's Grievance Policy and Procedure.

3.7 Staff conduct: complaints about staff capability or disciplinary issues are dealt with under the Trust's Capability Policy and Procedure or Disciplinary Policy and Procedure. Complainants will not be told of any capability or disciplinary action taken against a member of staff as a result of a complaint, but will be told that the matter is being addressed.

3.8 Services provided by other providers who may use the academy's premises or facilities: the Trust will make sure that any third party provider using its premises or facilities to offer community facilities or services has its own complaints procedure, and will direct complainants to follow that provider's procedure.

3.9 Withdrawal from the curriculum: requests to withdraw a pupil from religious education or sex education are decided under the relevant curriculum policy (for sex education, the Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) Policy). If a parent or carer is not satisfied with how a request was handled, they can complain under this policy.

3.10 Home to school transport: transport arranged by a local authority is that authority's responsibility. Complaints about it should be made to the local authority that arranges it, under its own complaints procedure.

3.11 Disability discrimination: a complaint about disability discrimination can be made under this policy. A parent (or a pupil who is over compulsory school age) can also make a claim to the First-tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability) under Schedule 17 to the Equality Act 2010. Using this policy does not remove that right.

4. Procedure for concerns and complaints

Stage 1: Informal discussion

4.1 Parents and carers are encouraged to raise any concerns they have directly with their child's teacher, an appropriate member of staff or the appropriate headteacher. Most concerns can and should be addressed and resolved in this way. If they remain unhappy they should make a formal appointment to speak to the appropriate headteacher. Occasionally a resolution is not reached or the matter is too serious to be resolved in this way, and the formal procedure below should then be followed.

Stage 2: Formal investigation

4.2 If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome at Stage 1, they must put their complaint in writing, using Complaint Form 1 (Appendix 1), within three calendar months of the incident so it can be considered under Stage 2. The Trust will consider a complaint made after this time where there are exceptional circumstances. The complainant should include details which will assist the investigation, copies of any relevant documents, and the outcome they are looking for in order to resolve the complaint. If the complainant is unable to do this, they should ask somebody to transcribe and/or submit the form on their behalf, and the academy should offer to do this if requested.

4.3 Complaint Form 1 should be sent to the academy, marked "Private and confidential" and addressed as shown in the table below. The person it is addressed to acts as Investigating Officer. If they have a conflict of interest, they should ask someone else to investigate on their behalf.

The complaint is about	Send Complaint Form 1 to	Investigating Officer
A member of staff, or the academy's provision or services	The appropriate headteacher	The appropriate headteacher
A co-headteacher (including the Director of Inclusion), the Academy Business Leader, or an individual trustee	The Chair of Trustees	The Chair of Trustees
The Chair of Trustees	The Vice-Chair of Trustees	The Vice-Chair of Trustees
The Trust Board as a whole, or any case where every trustee is conflicted or the investigation needs to be fully independent	The Governance Professional	An independent Investigating Officer, sourced by the Governance Professional through the Trust's Gateshead Council Governor Support service level agreement. This may be someone who has served on the board of another school or trust.

4.4 The Stage 2 process will be as follows:

- The Investigating Officer (or the Governance Professional on their behalf, for a complaint about the Trust Board as a whole) will acknowledge the complaint in

writing within 5 school days of receipt of Complaint Form 1, stating that it will be investigated.

- The person complained about will be told that a complaint has been received and that an investigation will be carried out. Where the complaint is about the Trust Board as a whole, the Chair of Trustees responds on the Board's behalf.
- It is important that the nature of the complaint is clearly understood, and the Investigating Officer may meet with the complainant to clarify the complaint. The complainant may be accompanied by a friend or relative if they wish.
- The Investigating Officer will investigate and collect any evidence necessary. This may include interviewing witnesses. Where this involves an interview with a member of staff, they may be accompanied by a friend or representative.
- Pupils should only be interviewed where the nature of the complaint is sufficiently serious to warrant it and adult witnesses are not available. Any interview with a pupil must take account of the pupil's communication needs, use the pupil's usual way of communicating, and take place with a trusted adult present.
- The person complained about will be provided with a copy of the complaint and supporting information, including the evidence collected by the Investigating Officer. Once they have had an opportunity to consider it, they will be invited to meet with the Investigating Officer to present their view and any supporting evidence. They may be accompanied at this meeting by a friend or representative.
- Within 10 school days of sending the acknowledgement, the Investigating Officer will write to the complainant and the person complained about, giving the outcome of the investigation and the decision on the complaint, or explaining why this cannot be achieved within 10 school days and giving a reasonable date by which the outcome will be sent in writing. The letter will explain how to take the complaint to Stage 3.

4.5 If the complainant is dissatisfied with the Investigating Officer's decision and/or the way in which the complaint was investigated, they may ask a Complaints Panel to consider those matters under Stage 3.

Stage 3: Complaints Panel

A panel of trustees will only consider a matter that has already been investigated at Stage 2.

4.6 The reasons for dissatisfaction must be put in writing using Complaint Form 2 (Appendix 2), and this will provide the focus of the Complaints Panel meeting. The complainant must send Form 2 to the academy addressed to the Governance Professional within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 decision letter. If the complainant is unable to do this, they should ask somebody to transcribe and/or submit the form on their behalf, and the academy should offer to do this if requested. The form should state any dates and times in the following two months when the complainant would be unavailable to attend a panel meeting. The Governance Professional will pass Form 2 to the clerk as soon as it is received.

4.7 Where a complaint was investigated by an independent Investigating Officer, or where the Trust has difficulty in arranging a panel of its own trustees in a timely

manner, the Governance Professional may use the Gateshead Council Governor Support service to source an independent Complaints Panel, or additional independent members to supplement a panel of trustees.

Resolving a concern or complaint

4.8 Options for resolving a concern or complaint include:

- an acknowledgement that the complaint is valid in whole or in part (or not, as appropriate);
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the Trust 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 Trust policies in light of the complaint;
- an apology.

The Department for Education's role

4.9 If this policy has been exhausted and the complainant remains dissatisfied following the outcome of Stage 3, they have the right to refer the matter to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will normally only consider a complaint that has been through this procedure and been heard by a Complaints Panel, unless a child is not getting an education, a child has been exposed to harm, or the complainant is being prevented from following this procedure. It will intervene if it believes the panel has acted unlawfully or unreasonably, or the Trust has breached a clause in its funding agreement. It will not:

- overturn the Trust Board's decision;
- re-investigate the original complaint;
- review the accuracy of minutes taken or documents provided;
- order that compensation is paid;
- direct the academy to discipline or exclude pupils;
- force the Trust to discipline or dismiss staff;
- instruct the Trust to apologise.

Any action will typically be limited to explaining the legislative framework and what it means in practice, or recommending improvements to statutory policies.

4.10 The Secretary of State can also direct an academy trust to perform its duties where it has failed to do so (section 497C of the Education Act 1996, in force from 29 June 2026).

4.11 Complainants can refer their complaint to the DfE using the online form at form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact_the_Department_for_Education.

5. Managing serial and persistent complaints

5.1 If a complainant remains dissatisfied following the conclusion of the complaints procedure and tries to reopen the same issue, the Trust can inform them that the procedure has been completed and the matter is now closed. If the complainant contacts the Trust again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as “serial” or “persistent” and the Trust may choose not to respond. A complaint will not be marked as “serial” before the complainant has completed the complaints procedure, nor because the complainant has exercised their right to refer their complaint to their MP, regardless of which stage the complaint has reached.

5.2 The Trust will not refuse to accept further correspondence or complaints from an individual it has had repeated or excessive contact with. A “serial or persistent” marking applies to the subject of the complaint, not to the complainant.

5.3 Staff are not expected to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and the Trust will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including behaviour that is abusive, offensive or threatening. Unreasonable behaviour is behaviour that hinders the Trust’s consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant’s contact, for example where 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 a complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with this policy or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account 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 this policy has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the DfE;
- seeks an unrealistic or unachievable outcome;
- makes excessive demands on staff time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact about the complaint in person, in writing, by email or 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.

5.4 Complainants should try to limit their communication with the academy about their complaint while it is being progressed. Repeated correspondence (by letter, phone, email or text) is not helpful, as it could delay the outcome being reached.

5.5 Whenever possible, the Investigating Officer will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an “unreasonable” marking.

5.6 If the behaviour continues, the appropriate headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who contact the academy excessively, causing a significant level of disruption, the Trust may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. The plan will be reviewed after six months.

5.7 The Trust may stop responding to a complainant only if all of the following apply:

- every reasonable step has been taken to address the complainant’s concerns;
- the complainant has been given a clear statement of the Trust’s position and their options;
- the complainant contacts the academy repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.

The case to stop responding is stronger if any one of the following applies:

- the complainant’s letters, emails or telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive;
- the complainant makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, staff;
- the Trust has reason to believe the individual is contacting it with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience.

The Trust will not stop responding just because an individual is difficult to deal with or asks complex questions. If the Trust decides it is appropriate to stop responding, it will tell the individual.

5.8 If an individual’s behaviour is causing a significant level of disruption, whether or not they have raised a complaint, the Trust can put in place a tailored communication strategy. For example, it can restrict the individual to a single point of contact via an email address, and/or limit the number of times they can make contact, such as a fixed number of contacts per term. Complainants who are finding the process difficult can be encouraged to ask a third party, such as their local Citizens Advice, to act on their behalf.

5.9 If an individual’s behaviour persists to the point that it may constitute harassment, the Trust will seek legal advice. In some cases, injunctions and other court orders can be issued to prevent individuals contacting the academy directly.

5.10 In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the appropriate headteacher will immediately inform the police and communicate the Trust’s actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the academy, on legal advice.

6. Stage 3 panel meeting

Actions for the clerk

6.1 The process for the clerk will be as follows:

- The clerk will acknowledge Complaint Form 2 in writing within 5 school days of receipt. The acknowledgement will state that the complaint will be considered by a Complaints Panel, usually no sooner than 12 school days and no later than 20 school days from the date the acknowledgement is sent. It will be copied to the appropriate headteacher and the Chair of Trustees (and to the Investigating Officer, if the investigation was not carried out by either).
- Within 5 school days of sending the acknowledgement, the clerk will arrange a Complaints Panel of three (two trustees and an independent panel member) to meet usually no sooner than 12 school days and no later than 20 school days from the date the acknowledgement was sent.
- The clerk will check whether trustees have a conflict of interest (including, but not limited to, being in a relationship with the complainant or having an involvement in the incident that is the basis for the complaint) that would prevent them from sitting on the panel. A trustee with a conflict must declare it to the clerk and not sit on the panel. Trustees who are also members of staff must not sit on the panel. Where there are not enough trustees to form a panel, trustees from another trust board can be used. The Trust must ensure that one panel member is independent of the management and running of the academy (see 2.4).
- The clerk will make sure the Investigating Officer is available to attend the meeting to explain to the panel the decision made at Stage 2, and the reasons for it.
- Once the panel is set up, the clerk will write to the complainant, the appropriate headteacher and the Chair of Trustees (and the Investigating Officer, if the investigation was not carried out by either) to:
    - state the meeting date, time and location, and the names of the panel members;
    - advise all parties of their right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend or adviser;
    - state that the meeting will go ahead in the absence of the complainant, unless a reason for absence acceptable to the panel is given before or at the beginning of the meeting;
    - ask for copies of any supporting documents, and the names of any witnesses all parties wish to call, at least 6 school days before the meeting, so that the clerk can send out the agenda and papers 5 school days before the meeting. The appropriate headteacher decides whether to ask members of staff to attend, subject to the discretion of the panel chair.
- 5 school days before the meeting, the clerk will send the agenda and papers to everyone attending, including:

- a cover sheet giving the meeting date, time and location, the names of everyone taking part (the clerk, complainant, Investigating Officer, panel members and any witnesses), and a table of contents;
- the procedure for the meeting (Appendix 3);
- a copy of the complaint and any supporting documents received from any of the participants;
- a copy of this policy as published on the Trust website at the time the complaint was submitted.

Guidance for panel members

6.2 It is important that the panel meeting is independent and impartial, and that it is seen to be so.

6.3 The aim of the meeting, which will be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the Trust and the complainant. However, it must be recognised 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 which will satisfy the complainant that their complaint has been taken seriously.

6.4 While this is a formal process, the meeting should be as informal as possible and not be inhibiting or intimidating to the complainant, as many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents and carers also often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible.

6.5 Everyone must be treated with respect and courtesy, and both the complainant and the Investigating Officer should be given the opportunity to state their case without undue interruption. Exceptionally, in situations of undue aggression, or where relationships have deteriorated to the point that a meeting is unlikely to make reasonable progress, the panel may hear the parties' statements separately, with only one party present, in turn, before calling them together for questions to be put. In this situation, it is important that no additional information is introduced that is not made available to the other party.

6.6 Information relating to the complaint and the meeting is confidential and should not be discussed outside the panel meeting by any party.

Proceedings and actions for panel members

6.7 Fifteen minutes before the meeting, panel members should meet at the venue to discuss with the clerk any points that may need clarifying. The clerk will remain with the panel throughout to give advice. The panel chair, using the procedure at Appendix 3 for guidance, will:

- ensure that before the meeting no party is left alone with the panel members other than the clerk;
- invite all parties to enter the room, welcome everyone, and invite those present to introduce themselves;

- check that the complainant received the papers and a copy of the meeting procedure in advance;
- explain the remit of the panel, and that the aim of the meeting is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the Trust and the complainant;
- summarise the procedure to be followed, provide any clarification requested, and explain that the panel will consider the reasons for the complainant's dissatisfaction as given in writing on Complaint Form 2;
- invite the complainant to confirm that the complaint is as set out on their form and the resolution they are seeking;
- take control of the meeting and ensure it is conducted fairly according to this policy;
- explain that the panel will remain impartial during the meeting, and that any participant may be asked to leave if their behaviour becomes unacceptable, abusive or offensive, and the meeting concluded in their absence;
- state that papers distributed in advance will be taken as read, and ask all parties to refer to them by page number and not quote from them at length;
- invite the complainant to give the reasons for their dissatisfaction with the outcome of Stage 2, drawing key points to the panel's attention. This should only refer to information that has already been submitted;
- consider individually any request by the complainant to call witnesses, consulting panel members as appropriate. Each witness, having given their information, may be questioned by the Investigating Officer and the panel members in turn, and will then leave the meeting;
- invite the Investigating Officer, and then the panel members, to question the complainant on what has been presented;
- invite the Investigating Officer to give details of their investigation, considering any requests to call witnesses in the same way;
- invite the complainant, and then the panel members, to question the Investigating Officer on what has been presented;
- invite the complainant to sum up and make a final statement, and then the Investigating Officer. New information is not to be introduced;
- tell the parties that the panel will now consider its decision, and that the clerk will communicate that decision in writing within 5 school days;
- ask all parties to leave so the panel can consider the complaint and the evidence presented, reach a decision and agree the reasons for it. The clerk remains to advise the panel and record its decision.

The panel's decision

6.8 The panel will make findings and recommendations. Within 5 school days of the meeting, the clerk will send a copy of the findings and recommendations, with the panel's decision and the reasons for it, to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. The letter will explain the complainant's right to refer the matter to the DfE (see 4.9 to 4.11).

6.9 A copy of the findings and recommendations will be kept with the complaints log (section 7) and will be available for inspection on the academy premises by the Trust Board and the co-headteachers.

7. Records of complaints

7.1 The Academy Business Leader keeps a written log of all complaints made in writing at Stage 2. For each complaint, the log records:

- whether it was resolved at Stage 2 or proceeded to a Complaints Panel; and
- any action taken by the Trust as a result of the complaint, whether or not it was upheld.

7.2 The Chair of Trustees has access to the log.

7.3 Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are confidential (see 1.2). They are stored securely and kept in line with data protection law and the Trust's records retention schedule. Complainants may have a right to copies of some records under data protection or freedom of information law.

7.4 Where a complaint is about a qualification the Trust delivers for an awarding organisation, the log also records this, and whether the complaint was escalated to the awarding organisation (see section 12).

8. Roles and responsibilities

- **The Trust Board** approves this policy, provides trustees for Complaints Panels and receives the annual summary of complaints (see 10.1). The Chair of Trustees investigates Stage 2 complaints about a co-headteacher, the Academy Business Leader or an individual trustee. The Vice-Chair investigates complaints about the Chair.
- **The co-headteachers**: the appropriate headteacher responds to concerns at Stage 1, investigates Stage 2 complaints about staff and the academy's provision, and manages unreasonable behaviour under section 5.
- **The Governance Professional** receives Complaint Form 2 and complaints about the Trust Board as a whole, arranges the clerk, and sources independent investigators and panel members through the Governor Support service when needed.
- **The Academy Business Leader** keeps the complaints log, makes sure this policy is published on the Trust website, and prepares the annual summary.
- **All staff** should try to resolve concerns informally, and help anyone who wants to make a complaint to find and use this policy.

9. Legal and statutory framework

This policy is based on:

- the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Schedule 1, Part 7, paragraph 33, which sets the standard all academies must meet for handling complaints;

- the Education and Skills Act 2008, section 109 (access to complaint records for inspection);
- the Education Act 1996, section 497C, inserted by section 56 of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 and in force from 29 June 2026 (the Secretary of State's power to direct an academy trust);
- the Equality Act 2010, including the duty to make reasonable adjustments and Schedule 17 (disability discrimination claims to the First-tier Tribunal);
- DfE, Best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures (last updated 12 March 2021);
- DfE, What academies, free schools and colleges must or should publish online (last updated 24 October 2024).

10. Monitoring and review

10.1 The Academy Business Leader will give the Trust Board an annual summary of formal complaints: the number made at Stage 2, how many proceeded to a Complaints Panel, and the actions taken as a result. Complainants will not be named. This helps trustees spot patterns and check that the policy is working.

10.2 The Trust Board will review this policy annually.

10.3 This policy is published on the Trust website. A paper copy is available from either site on request.

11. Linked policies and documents

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure
- Grievance Policy and Procedure
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Capability Policy and Procedure
- Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) Policy
- Freedom of Information Policy
- Conflicts of Interest in Assessment Policy and Procedure
- SEND Information Report
- Complaint Form 1, Complaint Form 2 and the panel meeting procedure (Appendices 1 to 3)

12. Complaints about qualifications and awarding organisations

12.1 The Trust delivers some qualifications and accredited programmes for external awarding organisations, such as ASDAN. This section applies to complaints about how the Trust has delivered, assessed or administered one of those qualifications: for

example, how a learner's work was assessed, the conduct of an assessor, or how a conflict of interest was managed.

12.2 These complaints are handled under the stages in section 4. A learner, or a parent or carer on their behalf, must complete the Trust's full complaints process, up to and including Stage 3, before escalating the complaint to the awarding organisation.

12.3 If the complainant is still dissatisfied once the Trust's process is complete, they may escalate the complaint to the awarding organisation, following that organisation's own complaints procedure and timescales. The Trust's final response will explain this and give the awarding organisation's contact details. For ASDAN, contact the Quality team: quality@asdan.org.uk, 0117 941 1126, ASDAN, Wainbrook House, Hudds Vale Road, St George, Bristol BS5 7HY.

12.4 A complaint about the awarding organisation itself, for example about its moderation decision, a certificate or its service, should be made directly to the awarding organisation. The academy will help the complainant to do this.

12.5 Until the Trust has a separate assessment appeals procedure, a learner who disagrees with an assessment decision (for example, whether a unit has been achieved) may raise it under this policy, starting at Stage 1.

12.6 The Trust will co-operate with any investigation by an awarding organisation and will share the records it asks for, in line with data protection law.

Appendix 1: Complaint Form 1

For a formal complaint at Stage 2 of this policy. If you need help completing this form, or would like to make your complaint another way, please contact the academy. Continue on a separate sheet if necessary, and attach any supporting documents, including any witness statements.

Send this form to the academy, marked “Private and confidential”, for the attention of the person shown in the table at 4.3: Cedars Academy: Low Fell, Ivy Lane, Low Fell, Gateshead NE9 6QD; Cedars Academy: High Heworth, Colegate West, Gateshead NE10 9AH; or by email to enquiries@cedarstrust.org.uk or PeterRobson@Gateshead.Gov.UK

Your name	
Address	
Postcode	
Daytime telephone	
Email address	
Which site does your complaint relate to? (Low Fell, High Heworth or both)	
Date of the incident complained about	
I wish to complain about (please tick one): □ a member of staff □ the academy’s provision or a service □ a co-headteacher or the Academy Business Leader □ a trustee □ the Chair of Trustees □ the Trust Board as a whole	
Name of the person you are complaining about (if any)	
Please summarise your complaint:	
Please summarise what outcome(s) you are seeking:	
Names of any witnesses:	
Signed and date	

Appendix 2: Complaint Form 2

For a request to take a complaint to a Complaints Panel at Stage 3. Send this form to the academy, marked “Private and confidential”, for the attention of the Governance Professional, within 15 school days of receiving the Stage 2 decision letter.

Continue on a separate sheet if necessary, and attach any supporting documents, including any witness statements.

The Complaints Panel will not consider this form until the complaint has been investigated at Stage 2.

Your name	
Please summarise the reason(s) for your dissatisfaction with the outcome of the investigation of your complaint at Stage 2:	
Please state what outcome(s) you are seeking:	
Names of any witnesses:	
Dates and times in the next two months when you would NOT be able to attend a panel meeting:	
Signed	
Date	

Appendix 3: Procedure at the Complaints Panel meeting

Before the meeting begins, during the pre-meeting and during any adjournment, no member of the panel should be alone with any party (for example, a member of staff, a co-headteacher, a trustee or a witness), except the clerk.

At the start of the meeting, all parties should enter the room together.

Welcome: the panel chair asks those present to introduce themselves.

The panel chair explains the purpose of the meeting: to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the Trust and the complainant. The panel chair explains that the panel will remain impartial during the meeting, and that any participant may be asked to leave if their behaviour becomes unacceptable, abusive or offensive, and the meeting concluded in their absence. The panel chair will then:

- ask the complainant and/or their representative to present their case (with witnesses where appropriate) and to confirm the outcome they are seeking;
- invite the Investigating Officer and panel members to ask the complainant questions;
- ask the Investigating Officer to present their case (with witnesses where appropriate);
- invite the complainant, their representative and panel members to ask the Investigating Officer questions.

All parties are asked to make notes during the meeting, to refrain from interrupting others and to ask questions at the appropriate times.

The panel chair will then:

- check that all points either party wishes to raise have been covered;
- ask the complainant and/or their representative to sum up if they wish to (new information is not to be introduced);
- ask the Investigating Officer to sum up if they wish to (new information is not to be introduced);
- tell the parties that the panel will now consider its decision, and that the clerk will send the decision to them in writing within **5 school days**;
- ask all parties to leave so the panel can consider the complaint and the evidence presented, reach a decision and agree the reasons for it. The clerk remains to advise the panel and record its decision.