

## Complaints Policy

Monitoring Responsibility	Chief Executive Officer
Next Review Date	
Approval Body	Finance and Audit Committee
Date Ratified	
Chair of Committee Signature	

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## 1. Introduction

Voyage Education Partnership (the Trust) is dedicated to providing the best possible education and support for all its pupils. This means having a clear, fair, and efficient procedure for dealing with any complaints [from parents of registered pupils] to or against an individual academy, or the Trust, so that any issues that arise can be dealt with as swiftly and effectively as possible.

This policy only fully applies to parents of registered pupils at an academy within the Trust. If complaints are raised by persons other than parents, they will be dealt with under stage 2 of the formal policy if they have not been resolved informally.

## 2. Definition

We define a concern as follow:

“an expression of dissatisfaction made orally about any aspect of the Trust or an Academy”.

We define a complaint as follows:

“an expression of dissatisfaction made in writing about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Trust affecting an individual or group”.

## 3. Application of the Complaints Procedure

Legally, all schools, academies and Trusts must have a complaints procedure which deals with the handling of complaints from parents of pupils.

All Trust staff will be made aware of complaints procedures and expected to review this document regularly in order that they are familiar with our process of dealing with complaints and can be of the most assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

This document explains that procedure, and the steps that it outlines should be referred to and followed by all pupils and their parents whenever an issue arises that causes them concern. If it becomes necessary to alter the time limits and deadlines set out within this procedure, you will be advised accordingly, given an explanation and provided with revised timescales.

**This document does not apply to complaints where there is another route available to make representations or appeal. This includes:**

- *pupil admissions*
- *pupil exclusions*
- *statutory assessments of special educational needs and education health and care plans*
- *appeals relating to internal assessment decisions for external qualifications*
- *disciplinary issues relating to members of staff*
- *matters likely to require a child protection investigation*
- *national curriculum content*
- *complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities*
- *school re-organisation proposals*
- *staff grievances*
- *staff conduct issues*

Each of these follows its own process of complaints and appeals which are outlined in their relevant policies.

If there is an allegation or concern about physical or sexual misconduct towards a child, or there is a belief that a child may be at risk of serious harm, the school may immediately refer the case to child protection and welfare services. If it is decided that there is cause for an official investigation, the decisions by these authorities will supersede those made by the Trust and outlined in this document. Where the complaint relates to a safeguarding referral made by a member of staff within the Trust, any consideration of that complaint by the Trust will be limited to a review of the reasonableness of the decision to make the referral in light of the evidence available to the member of staff at that time and in light of the Trust's safeguarding policies.

For more information on our provision for protecting our pupils, read our child protection and safeguarding policy, and the managing allegations against adults working in the trust policy.

#### **4. The Trust's Principles for Dealing with Concerns and Complaints**

The Trust will:

- Take all concerns and complaints seriously
- Make every attempt to resolve concerns by informal means without the need to use formal procedures
- Publish its complaints procedure, make it easily accessible and simple to understand and use
- Be fair, open and honest when dealing with any concern or complaint
- Give careful consideration to all concerns and complaints and deal with them as swiftly as possible, keeping people informed of progress
- Resolve any concern or complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding and wherever possible, put the interests of the child above all other issues

- provide sufficient opportunity for any concern or complaint to be fully discussed, and then resolved
- deal with concerns or complaints in an impartial and non-adversarial manner
- ensure a full and fair investigation of a complaint is undertaken by a person who has not been directly involved in the matter
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary
- respect people's desire for confidentiality
- use the outcome of a complaint to reflect on the services provided by the Academy/Trust so, if necessary, they can be improved.

## **5. Dealing with Concerns in individual Academies within the Trust**

We recognise that parents and carers will, from time to time, have normal and legitimate concerns about the progress, achievement, behaviour or welfare of their child, or about other matters connected with the Academy.

We encourage parents and carers to make those concerns known to the relevant member of staff so that they can be addressed in partnership with the Academy. Almost invariably, the sooner such concerns are raised, the easier it is for an appropriate resolution to be found.

A concern may be raised with any member of staff. For parents, this would normally be your child's tutor, teacher or Head of Year (or equivalent) and for others this would normally be the Academy Headteacher. If parents have a concern with the operation of the Academy Council, it should be raised either with the Headteacher or the Chief Education Officer. That person will try and resolve the matter or will refer you to the appropriate person. Many concerns are resolved immediately but, if this is not possible, a member of staff will respond to you within five (5) working days.

The member of staff will make a written record of the concern that was raised and the date on which it was received. If the matter cannot be resolved within five working days, or in the event that you are not satisfied, you will be advised to proceed to make a formal complaint.

## **6. Making a formal complaint**

### **6.1 Making a Formal Complaint about an Academy**

The process for making a formal complaint is set out in section 6.3.

Complaints should be brought to the Academy's attention as soon as possible to enable a proper investigation to take place. Any matter raised more than 12 months after the incident being complained of (or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 12 months of the last of these incidents) will not be considered unless the Chief Executive Officer decides that there are exceptional circumstances relevant to the delay in bringing the complaint to the attention of the Trust.

The complaint can be made in writing by letter, by using the complaints form (Appendix 2), or in person if written notes are made and countersigned by the complainant.

Anonymous complaints will not be investigated, save in exceptional circumstances, as we are unable to respond to the complainant. (These circumstances would include serious concerns such as child protection issues or bullying allegations, where the Academy is either required to involve appropriate external agencies or might conduct its own internal review to test whether there is any corroborative evidence which might trigger a formal investigation).

## **6.2 Making a Formal Complaint about the Trust**

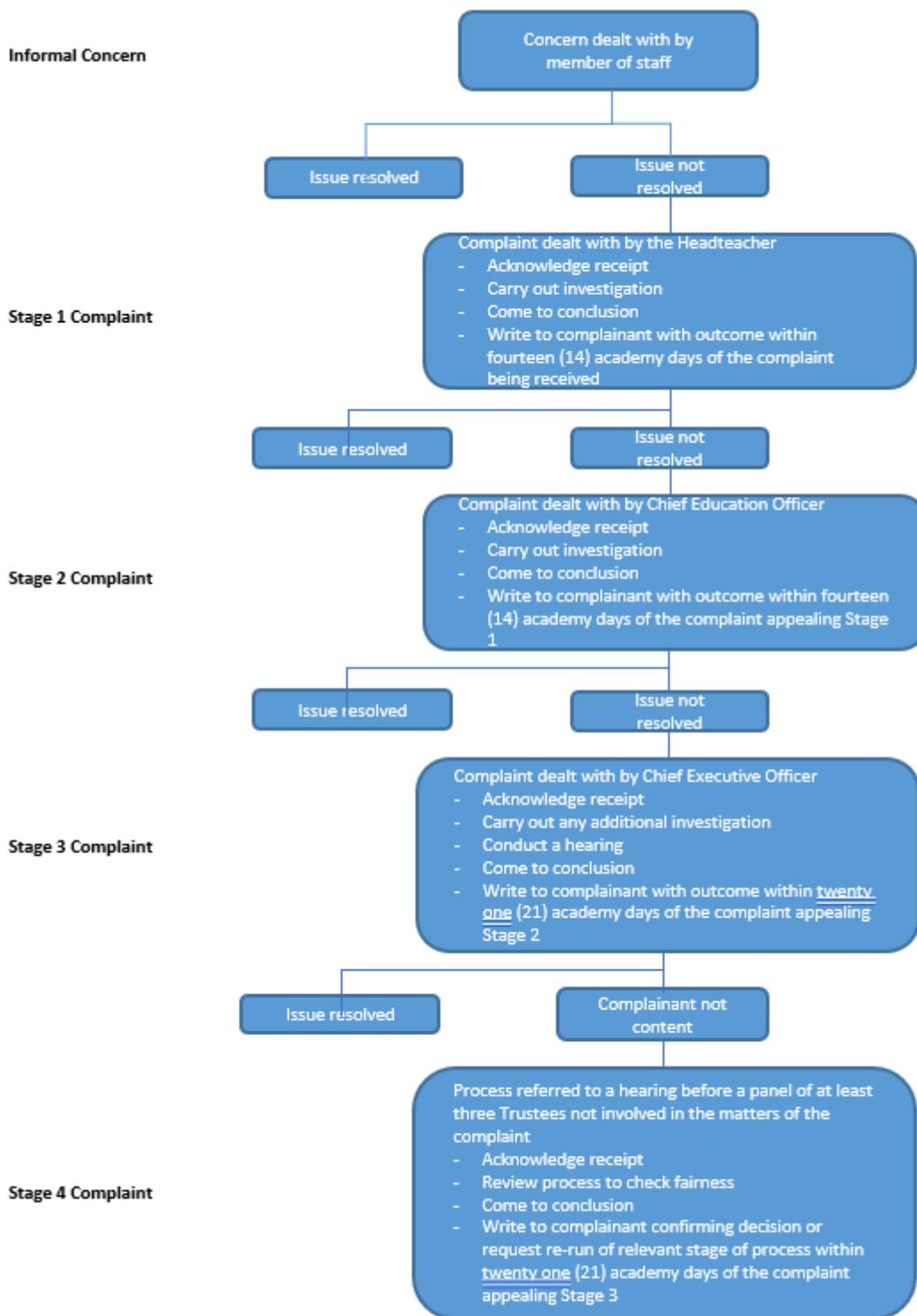
The process for making a formal complaint is set out in section 6.3.

The Trust will make every attempt to resolve concerns by informal means without the need to use formal procedures.

Complaints should be brought to the attention of the Chief Education Officer as soon as possible to enable a proper investigation to take place. The complaint will start at Stage 2 of the process. Any matter raised more than 12 months after the incident being complained of (or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 12 months of the last of these incidents) will not be considered unless the Chief Executive Officer decides that there are exceptional circumstances relevant to the delay in bringing the complaint to the attention of the Trust.

The complaint can be made in writing by letter, by using the complaints form (Appendix 2), or in person if written notes are made and countersigned by the complainant.

### 6.3 Flowchart summary of dealing with complaints



## 6.4 Where to send your complaint

If the complaint is about an individual Academy, you should send your complaint to the Headteacher.

If your complaint is about the Academy Council, you should send your complaint to the Chief Executive Officer.

If the complaint is about the Trust, you should send your complaint to the Chief Education Officer.

In the event of a complaint relating to the Headteacher, the complaint should be sent to the Chief Education Officer.

If the complaint is about the Chief Education Officer, you should send your complaint to the Chief Executive Officer.

In the event of a complaint relating to the Chief Executive Officer, the complaint should be sent to the Chair of the Board of Trustees, marked PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL. You will be advised how the complaint will be handled at this point.

In the event of a complaint about the Board of Trustees, the complaint should be sent to the Clerk to the Board of Trustees, marked PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL. You will be advised how the complaint will be handled at this point.

All Trust correspondence should be sent to the Trust offices:

Voyage Education Partnership  
Venture House  
Enterprise Way  
Boston  
Lincolnshire  
PE21 7TW

The Academy or Trust will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 2 Academy days.

## 7. Handling a Complaint

### 7.1 Stage 1

If you do not feel that your concern has been dealt with as you would like, are unhappy with the outcome of your informal meeting or feel that the issue is serious enough that it warrants it, you can make a formal complaint in writing to the Headteacher. If your complaint is about the headteacher you should go straight to Stage 2 of this procedure.

Your written complaint should provide enough detail of the issues to allow the Headteacher to investigate and respond to the complaint. You should also set out what you feel would resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher should acknowledge your complaint in writing within 2 academy days. They may already be aware of the situation. They will outline the procedure and a target date for providing a written response to the complaint, which will normally be within 14 academy days of receipt.

The Headteacher may call you in for a meeting to discuss the issue outcome, possible solutions, or to explain what has or will happen as a result of your complaint. The Headteacher will keep a record of all interactions with you and other staff, meetings and decisions made in reference to your complaint.

If the complaint is against a member of staff, the Headteacher will talk to that employee. If it is an allegation of abuse, a formal investigation may be instigated by the Trust or external child welfare authorities to whom the Academy reports. Please refer to our managing allegations against adults working within the trust policy for an outline of this procedure.

The Headteacher will respond to you in writing outlining their response to your concern, and any action that has or will be taken. If they have decided not to take any further action on the issue, they will explain what they have decided, how they have reached this decision, and will outline your right to take the matter further and the steps to be taken. If resolved satisfactorily at this stage, the procedures are complete.

### 7.2 Stage 2

If, having been through stage 1, you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint or your complaint is about the Headteacher, you may lodge your complaint with the Chief Education Officer. Your complaint should be lodged within 10 academy days of the outcome at Stage 1. If your complaint is not escalated within this timeframe, it will be deemed that the decision at Stage 1 is accepted, and the complaint will be closed (unless there are exceptional circumstances to explain the delay).

The complaint must be in writing and it should explain your concern in sufficient detail and the steps that have led up to you taking this course of action. You should also set out the actions you feel would be necessary to resolve the complaint.

The Chief Education Officer should acknowledge your complaint in writing within 2 academy days. They may already be aware of the situation. They will outline the procedure and a target date for providing a written response to the complaint, which will normally be within 14 academy days of receipt.

The Chief Education Officer may call you in for a meeting to discuss the issue outcome, possible solutions, or to explain what has or will happen as a result of your complaint. The Chief Education Officer will keep a record of all interactions with you and other staff, meetings and decisions made in reference to your complaint.

If the complaint is against a member of staff, the Chief Education Officer will talk to that employee. If it is an allegation of abuse, a formal investigation may be instigated by the Trust or external child welfare authorities to whom the Academy reports. Please refer to our allegations against adults working within the trust policy for an outline of this procedure.

The Chief Education Officer will respond to you in writing outlining their response to your concern, and any action that has or will be taken. If they have decided not to take any further action on the issue, they will explain what they have decided, how they have reached this decision, and will outline your right to take the matter further and the steps to be taken. If resolved satisfactorily at this stage, the procedures are complete.

The Chief Executive Officer reserves the right to ask for stage 2 to be undertaken by another member of the Executive Team if appropriate or necessary.

### 7.3 Stage 3

If, having been through stage 2, you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint or your complaint is about the Chief Education Officer, you may lodge your complaint with the Chief Executive Officer. Your complaint should be lodged within 10 academy days of the outcome at Stage 2. If your complaint is not escalated within this timeframe, it will be deemed that the decision at Stage 2 is accepted, and the complaint will be closed (unless there are exceptional circumstances to explain the delay).

The complaint must be in writing and it should explain your concern in sufficient detail and the steps that have led up to you taking this course of action. You should also set out the actions you feel would be necessary to resolve the complaint.

The Chief Executive Officer should acknowledge your complaint in writing within 2 academy days. They may already be aware of the situation. They will outline the procedure and a target date for providing a written response to the complaint, which will normally be within 21 academy days of receipt.

The Chief Executive Officer may call you in for a meeting to discuss the issue outcome, possible solutions, or to explain what has or will happen as a result of your complaint. The Chief Executive Officer will keep a record of all interactions with you and other staff, meetings and decisions made in reference to your complaint.

If the complaint is against a member of staff, the Chief Executive Officer will talk to that employee. If it is an allegation of abuse, a formal investigation may be instigated by the Trust or external child welfare authorities to whom the Academy reports. Please refer to our allegations against adults working within the trust policy for an outline of this procedure.

After holding a hearing, the Chief Executive Officer will respond to you in writing outlining their response to your concern, and any action that has or will be taken. If they have decided not to take any further action on the issue, they will explain what they have decided, how they have reached this decision, and will outline your right of appeal and how you can start your appeal. If resolved satisfactorily at this stage, the procedures are complete.

## 7.4 Stage 4

If you would like to lodge an appeal following the outcome of a formal complaint at stage 3, this will be taken to the appeals panel. You should write to the clerk to the Board of Trustees, marked Private and Confidential, at the address detailed in section 6.4 of this policy, to exercise this right within 10 academy days of the outcome at Stage 3. If no request for an appeals panel hearing is received within 10 academy days, it will be deemed that the decision is accepted, and the complaint will be closed (unless there are exceptional circumstances to explain the delay).

If an appeals panel is requested, the clerk to Board of Trustees will acknowledge your appeal and make the necessary arrangements and will usually convene the appeals panel within 14 academy days from the acknowledgement being sent. Where it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date within that timescale, the Trust will take reasonable steps to agree a time and date mutually convenient to all parties. If, despite best efforts, it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date and time for a hearing within a reasonable timeframe, the Governance Professional for the Trust may determine that the hearing proceeds because of written submissions from you and the Academy/Trust. The clerk will ensure that all parties to the appeal have access to the same documentation and set out a timetable to support the collation and circulation of documents. Any supporting documentation relevant to the complaint must be submitted to the appeals panel by both parties at least 5 days before the appeals panel hearing. The appeals panel is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. The appeals panel will not normally accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

You are entitled to attend the panel hearing and to be accompanied to the hearing and should notify the clerk in advance if you attend to bring anyone.

### **The appeals panel**

The appeals panel will be made up of three members of the Board of Trustees OR people, which will include at least one person independent of the management and running of the Trust.

No person can sit on the appeals panel if they have had any former knowledge or involvement in the case that is being dealt with at that time. The chair of the panel will be nominated from within the

group of panel members. All panel members will be familiar with and have access to the complaints policy.

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

The panel will consider how the complainant can be made to feel most comfortable presenting to the panel, especially in the case of a young child having to present or explain information.

### **Appeals procedure**

The Appeals Panel will determine the procedure to be followed to ensure that it is best placed to deal with the issues arising from the complaint. Appendix 3 details the procedure for an appeal hearing usually follows.

The clerk to The Board of Trustees will ensure that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken, or actions agreed. Electronic recordings of the hearing will not normally be permitted and, in any event, would require the consent of all those present.

The chair of the panel/clerk to Board of Trustees will notify the complainant of the panel's decision in writing within 5 academy days of the appeal hearing. The letter will set out the decision of the panel together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The letter may set out recommendations which will be made to the Board of Trustees. The outcome letter will also be sent to the person complained about. A copy of the letter will be made available for inspection at the Trust offices by the proprietor and Chief Executive Officer.

### **The appeals panel may:**

- dismiss all or part of the complaint
- uphold all or part of the complaint
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- evaluate all the evidence available and recommend changes to the Trust's systems or procedures as a preventative step against similar problems arising in the future.

The panel's decision is final.

### **Next Steps**

If the complainant believes the school / trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the ESFA after they have completed Stage 4.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Voyage Education Partnership. They will consider whether Voyage Education Partnership 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](http://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

## 8. Vexatious/persistent complaints

Whilst it is hoped that this document will reduce any dissatisfaction with the Trust or any of its academies, it is acknowledged that there may be rare occasions where a complainant continues to be dissatisfied with the Academy/Trust and the outcomes achieved under the complaints procedure.

Where a complainant attempts to re-open an issue which has already been dealt with under the complaints procedure, the chair of The Board of Trustees will contact them to inform them that the matter has already been dealt with and that either that stage of the policy has been exhausted or that the complaints procedure has been exhausted and the matter is considered closed. Where further correspondence is received on the same matter, this may be considered vexatious and the Trust will be under no obligation to respond to that correspondence.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the Trust again about the same issue, the Trust can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which the Trust will not respond is if:

- the Trust has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, and the Trust's position has been clearly set out in writing together with the complainant's options
- the complainant is contacting the Trust repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time
- the complainant refuses to follow the complaints procedures
- the Trust reasonably believes the aim of the contact is to cause disruption or inconvenience
- that the complainant acts or communicates in an inappropriate way towards Trust staff.

Once the Trust has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing.

The Trust will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the Academy/Trust acts reasonably.

## 9. Investigating the Complaint

The individuals leading each of the stages of the complaint may delegate the investigation to an appropriately senior member of staff who has no connection with the complaint, but the resolution of the complaint and a decision about any action to be taken rests with the individuals identified as responsible for each stage (per section 7 above).

The person/s investigating the complaint must make sure that they:

- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved
- meet with the complainant if the complainant requests a meeting
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if clarification or further information is necessary)
- ascertain what the complainant feels would put things right
- maintain an open mind
- conduct the investigation, analysing any relevant documents and interviewing those who may be involved and allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep written records of the investigation.

The Academy/Trust will retain written records of all of the parts of investigation at each stage, including notes of all meetings, interviews, discussions and telephone calls, in case the complaint is taken further.

## 10. Resolving the Complaint

At each stage in the procedure the Academy/Trust will keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It may be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. Alternatively, the complaint may not be upheld, and this may be because there is insufficient evidence to substantiate the complaint. To support the resolution, it will usually be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology (which does not imply liability)
- an explanation (especially where the complaint is not upheld)
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur

- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not recur
- an undertaking, if necessary, to review policies or procedures in light of the complaint.

Where, as a result of the complaint, the Academy/Trust takes actions that are themselves confidential, it may be necessary to inform the complainant that the matter has been fully investigated and that the appropriate procedures are being followed (for example where staff disciplinary procedures are being followed).

## **11. Records, review and monitoring of complaints**

The Academy/Trust will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls. This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law.

Voyage Education Partnership will review and evaluate all complaints no matter how far they are taken or what the outcome to ensure that similar problems are avoided in the future or to see if they could have been managed any more effectively. All records of any complaints will be kept confidential but may be inspected where appropriate by the Secretary of State or any inspection body.

## **12. Staff complaints**

Staff who have a concern about a colleague or a volunteer member of staff should refer to our whistleblowing policy. The whistleblowing policy can be located on the Trust website.

The procedure for dealing with any other staff complaints or employment grievances is set out in the Trust's Disciplinary and Grievance policies.

## **13. Complaint campaigns**

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint campaign is defined as a complaint from three or more separate individuals (whether or not connected with the Academy/Trust) which are all based on the same subject. Depending on the subject in question, the may deviate from the procedure set out in this policy and instead:

- send a template response to all complainants and/or
- publish a single response on the Academy/Trust's website (as applicable).

## **14. Publication of the Complaints Policy**

The Complaints Procedure will be available from the reception office on each Academy site.

It will also be published on each Academy and the Trust website.

## 15. Appendix 1 – Guidance for Staff on Dealing with Concerns

Staff who are approached by parents, pupils or others with matters of concern must assess the seriousness of the issue and, if subject to specific Academy policies (for example over a child protection issue) follow those policies.

If a parent of child or someone else expresses a concern that is within the remit of that member of staff, then the member of staff should deal with the concern, resolving it where possible. If the member of staff feels unable to deal with the concern, they should listen to the concern, note it down and refer it to the relevant senior member of staff, indicating to the complainant that this is what will happen.

Each situation will be different, but staff members should do all they can to:

- allay the other persons' fears
- take the concerns seriously
- remain calm and composed at all times
- be fair, open and honest when dealing with any concern or question
- give careful consideration to all concerns and deal with them as swiftly as possible
- enter into dialogue that encourages mutual understanding and, wherever possible, puts the interests of any child above all other issues
- respect peoples' desire for confidentiality.

If the matter has not been resolved amicably by this means, then the member of staff should advise the complainant to make a formal complaint. If necessary, the member of staff should make notes of the complaint and ask the complainant to sign them, so that they become the written complaint.

## 16. Appendix 2 – Complaints Form

Please complete this form and return it to the appropriate individual, who will acknowledge its receipt and inform you of the next stage in the procedure.

Your Name:	Address
Pupil's name (if relevant):	
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):	
Day time telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
Email address:	Postcode:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school/ Trust about it. You may continue on a separate piece of paper, or attach additional paperwork, if you wish.	
What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? (i.e. who have you spoken with or written to and what was the outcome?)	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
Signature:	Date:

## 17. Appendix 3 – Appeals Hearing Procedure

The Appeals Panel will determine the procedure to be followed to ensure that it is best placed to deal with the issues arising from the complaint. The procedure for an appeal is usually as follows:

1. *The complainant and headteacher will enter the hearing together.*
2. *The chair will introduce the panel members and outline the process.*
3. *The complainant will explain the complaint.*
4. *The headteacher and panel will question the complainant.*
5. *The headteacher will explain the school's actions.*
6. *The complainant and panel will question the headteacher.*
7. *The complainant will sum up their complaint.*
8. *The headteacher will sum up the school's actions.*
9. *The chair will explain that both parties will hear from the panel within 5 academy days.*
10. *Both parties will leave together while the panel decides.*
11. *The clerk will stay to assist the panel with its decision making.*

## 18. Appendix 4 – Investigation Procedures for a Formal Complaint

1. The investigation of an allegation or a complaint should always be carried out thoroughly and responsibly, irrespective of whether the complaint appears to be trivial or serious. The investigator must maintain an open mind and not prejudge any situation on the basis of knowledge of past events. The outcome of such an investigation will have considerable significance for the complainant and, where the complaint is against a particular member of staff, for the member of staff against whom the complaint has been made.
2. Any member of staff against whom a complaint has been made, should be notified that a complaint has been received, provided with a copy of the complaint and be informed that an investigation will be carried out in which his or her views will be sought.
3. It is essential that there is a clear understanding of the complaint and what remains unresolved. If the complaint is not clearly stated, the investigator should clarify the nature of the complaint with the complainant and set out clearly the issues of concern to the complainant that will be investigated.
4. Once the complaint has been confirmed the investigator should establish who he or she wishes to interview and what documentation they will need to review. Arrangements should be agreed so that accurate notes can be taken of all interviews and the outcomes of the investigation be accurately recorded.
5. The complainant and a member of staff complained about should be given the opportunity to meet with the investigator, offer documentation and to identify potential witnesses or sources of evidence. Any member of staff subject to the complaint should be advised that they may be accompanied by a friend or a trade union representative when invited to be interviewed.
6. Where children are potential witnesses, discretion should be exercised over their involvement. Pupils should only be interviewed when the nature of the complaint is sufficiently serious to warrant it and adult witnesses are not available. Only in extreme circumstances will younger pupils be interviewed.
7. Any interviews should be conducted as soon as possible to ensure that recollections are as fresh as possible and to minimise the possibility that evidence will become tainted through witnesses discussing alleged incidents with other persons. A written record must be made of all interviews.
8. In conducting interviews, the investigator should prepare the questions to be asked prior to the interview. These can always be supplemented during the interview. The investigator should allow the interviewees to answer in their own way. Their responses should be listened to attentively. Any temptation to cut an interviewee short or to seek to 'lead' them must be resisted. The interviewee should be given the opportunity of providing other relevant information at the end of the interview. It is good practice to ask the complainant what they feel would put matters right, even if this action is not one that is eventually taken.
9. Interviewees should, however, be advised that their responses must be confined to the substance of the complaint. Any attempt by the interviewee to introduce information relating to other members of staff or to issues unrelated to the complaint should be resisted.
10. The investigator should avoid reaching conclusions or passing judgement, until the investigation has been completed. The investigator should complete the investigation by creating a summary of the evidence gathered and a preferred outcome for agreement.
11. Any response letter should include the following information:

- a brief summary of the complainant's concerns and the issues that have been investigated
  - a summary of the process undertaken
  - the outcome of the investigation • the reasons for that outcome, unless confidentiality would be compromised (in which case a suitably worded conclusion should be provided)
  - any recommendations which, wherever possible, should be constructive and not punitive
  - potential next steps
12. The response letter should be sent to the complainant. Caution must always be exercised in reporting back to the complainant as revealing certain details may prejudice the ability of the employee to continue in post.
  13. The complainant should be advised that he or she may, if they are not satisfied with the response or that the appropriate procedure has been followed, request the complaint is considered at the next stage of the complaints policy.

Following consideration of a complaint at stage 4, the complainant should be advised that the complaint will not be considered further but that they do have the right of complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency.