THE ASHLEY SCHOOL ACADEMY TRUST	Policy / Procedure / Academy Document **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

POLICY / PROCEDURE / ACADEMY DOCUMENT:	**COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**	
POLICY STATUS:	**Recommended**	**Statutory** ✓
THIS VERSION APPROVED (DATE):	**12 November 2026**	
SIGNED: **(CHAIR OF MEETING)**	……	
MINUTED (DATE):	**12 November 2026**	
REVIEW DATE:	**July 2028**	
COMMITTEE:	**Finance, Operations, Risk & Audit Committee**	
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	**Administration Manager**	

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

2 PRINCIPLES

3 COMPLAINTS – FORMAL PROCEDURES

4 RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

5 VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

6 COMPLAINT ABOUT A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

7 THE STAGES OF COMPLAINTS

Stage 1

- Initial concerns

Stage 2

Stage 3 Complaint heard by the Board of Trustees' Complaints Appeal Committee

- Remit of the Complaints Appeals Committee
- Roles and Responsibilities
- The role of the Chair of the Complaints Appeals Committee
- The role of the Clerk
- Notification of the Complaints Appeals Committee decision

8 RECORDING AND MANAGING COMPLAINTS

- Recording complaints
- Board of Trustees Review
- Publicising the procedure

Appendix 1
Complaints form

Appendix 2
AI generated and automated complaints

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Ashley School Academy Trust is committed to working in close partnership with all members of the academy community. The academy places great value on the role which parents and carers can play in supporting children's learning. Staff and Trustees actively encourage a positive relationship between the academy and the families of children who attend the school.

2 PRINCIPLES

2.1 Our Complaints Procedure aims to:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- be easily accessible and publicised;
- be simple to understand and use;
- be impartial;
- be non-adversarial;
- ensure a full and fair investigation where necessary;
- respect people's desire for confidentiality;
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
- provide information to the academy's Senior Leadership Team so that services can be improved.

3 COMPLAINTS – FORMAL PROCEDURES

3.1 Formal procedures will need to be invoked when attempts to resolve the issue informally are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further. The academy has nominated **Ms Donna Petty, Administration Manager**, as Complaints Co-ordinator to have responsibility for the operation and management of the academy complaints procedure.

4 RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

4.1 At each stage in the procedure the academy will keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate 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 assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;

- an undertaking to review academy policies in light of the complaint.

4.2 Complainants will be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the academy could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence. We want to identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

5 VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

5.1 There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of the Board of Trustees will inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed as far as the Academy is concerned. The complainant can complain to the EFA if:

- the complainant considers that school's complaints procedure has not been applied correctly,
- the academy is not following the terms of its funding agreement.

5.2 The ESFA can't deal with all types of complaint and the complainant may need to contact a different agency.

Complaint	**Who to Contact**
Data Protection	Information Commissioner's Office
Discrimination	Equality Advisory and Support Service
Employment	an employment tribunal
Examinations malpractice or Maladministration	Ofqual and the awarding body

5.3 For further advice regarding 'complaining about an Academy' please visit https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

6 COMPLAINT ABOUT A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

6.1 If the complaint is about a member of the Board of Trustees, the complainant should address it to the Chair of Trustees; if the complaint is about the Chair of Trustees the complainant should address it to the Nominated Trustee. The Chair of Trustees (or Nominated Trustee) will send an initial response within 5 working days and investigate the complaint.

6.2 The Chair of Trustees (or Nominated Trustee) may:
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- decide on the appropriate action to resolve the complaint.

6.3 The Academy aims to provide a decision in response to a complaint within 15 working days of receiving all relevant information.

7 THE STAGES OF COMPLAINTS

7.1 This complaints procedure has three well-defined stages:
- **Stage one**: Initial Concerns
- **Stage two**: Formal Complaint;
- **Stage three**: Complaint heard by Board of Trustee's complaints appeal panel;

Stage 1

Initial Concerns

If, at any time, a member of the academy community has a concern about an aspect of life at the academy, the concern will be dealt with by the academy as quickly, sympathetically and effectively as possible. It is hoped that most concerns will be settled amicably at this stage.

It is important that the initial contact is with the person best placed to resolve it.

Issue:	Initial Contact:
Teaching, Homework	Curriculum, Subject or Key Stage Lead
Examinations	Deputy Headteacher (Teaching and Learning)
Care & Guidance issues	Deputy Headteacher (Behaviour for Learning)
School Curriculum Policies	Deputy Headteacher (Teaching and Learning)
Support Staff	Strategic Business Manager
Teaching Staff	Headteacher
Headteacher	Chair of Trustees
Trustees who receive concerns will pass them to the appropriate person.	

Please provide as much information as possible. The person receiving your concern will ensure that:

- an initial response is sent within five working days
- the issue is investigated thoroughly – what has happened, who has been involved and what remains unresolved
- appropriate members of staff are consulted and kept informed
- information is passed to the Senior Leadership Team so that the school's systems and practices can be improved if necessary
- confidentiality is respected
- a response is provided as quickly as possible (this might include an explanation or apology together with action to put the situation right).

Stage 2

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the way the initial concern was handled at Stage One or is unhappy with the outcome, they may wish to progress to the second stage and submit a formal complaint to be heard by the Headteacher.

The Headteacher may delegate the task of collating the information to another member of the Senior Leadership Team but will make the decision on the action to be taken. Where the Headteacher is the subject of the complaint it will be heard by the Chair of Trustees.

A Complaints Form is included at Appendix 1 and may be used to submit a formal complaint. An initial response to a formal complaint will be issued within five working days of receipt.

The Headteacher may:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- decide on the appropriate action to resolve the complaint.

We aim to provide a decision in response to a complaint within 15 working days of receiving all relevant information.

Stage 3

Complaint heard by the Board of Trustee's Complaints Appeal Panel

The complainant should write to the Chair of Trustees giving details of the complaint. The Chair, or Nominated Trustee, will convene a Board of Trustees Complaints Appeal Panel. This is made up of three members of the Board of Trustees. The members will be nominated by the Board of Trustees. The panel will choose their own chair. The Trustees' appeal hearing is the last academy-based stage of the complaints process, and is not convened merely to rubber-stamp previous decisions. Individual complaints will not be heard by the whole Board of Trustees at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

The remit of the Complaints Appeal Panel

The panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- recommend changes to the academy's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

There are several points which any trustee sitting on a Complaints Appeals Panel needs to remember:

- It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so.
- No Trustee may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it, or any other factors that might compromise them.
- The aim of the hearing, which will be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the academy and the complainant. However, it is recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour.
- An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care will be taken to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The role of the chair of the panel

The chair of the panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease;
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;
- the panel is open minded and acting independently;
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

The role of the clerk

The clerk is the contact point for the complainant and they are required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- notify all parties of the panel's decision.

Notification of the panel's decision

The chair of the panel will ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, with the panel's response. The complainant will be notified of the panel's decision within 15 working days.

8 MANAGING AND RECORDING COMPLAINTS

Recording complaints

8.1 The academy will record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing. An example of a complaint form can be found at Appendix 1. At the end of a meeting or telephone call, the member of staff will ensure that the complainant and the academy have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls will be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record. The complaints co-ordinator will be responsible for the records and hold them centrally. (In accordance with the race equality policy, complaints relating to racial or racist incidents will be logged.)

Board of Trustees review

8.2 The Board of Trustees will monitor the level and nature of complaints regularly at the appropriate committee meetings to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary. Complaints information shared with the whole Board of Trustees will not name individuals.

Publicising the procedure

8.3 There is a legal requirement for the Complaints Procedure to be publicised.

8.4 Details of the complaints procedure will be included in:

- the information given to new parents when their children join the school;
- the academy website.

Appendix 1

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to **Ms Donna Petty (Administration Manager)** who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Student's name (if applicable)**:**

Address:

Postcode:

Daytime telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint:

What actions, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint. (Who did you speak to and what was the response)?

Complaint Form

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 acknowledgements sent:** **By whom:** **Complaint referred to:** **Date:**

Appendix 2

Policy on AI-Generated and Automated Complaints

1. Overview

The Ashley School Academy Trust values constructive communication and is committed to treating all complainants with respect and courtesy. Nationally it has been noted that there has been an increase in the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automated tools to generate complaints. While these tools can assist with formatting, their use can sometimes result in correspondence that may inadvertently confuse or overcomplicate the basis of the complaint, meaning that legitimate complaints cannot be properly and effectively addressed.

2. Principles of Engagement

To ensure that school resources are directed toward resolving genuine concerns, the following procedures apply where a complaint is suspected to be significantly or entirely AI-generated:

- **Verification of Intent:** If the Trust reasonably suspects a complaint has been generated by AI (particularly where the content is generic, repetitive, or fails to specify grounds despite offers of assistance) we may require a face-to-face meeting as a prerequisite for progressing to Stage 2 (Formal).
- **In-Person Discussion:** The complainant will be invited to attend an informal meeting with the Trust representative to discuss the substance of the concern in person. This ensures the complaint is articulated clearly and that the desired outcomes are genuine and realistic.
- **Reasonable Adjustments:** In line with our commitment to accessibility, the Trust will consider any reasonable adjustments needed for individuals who may require AI tools for legitimate accessibility reasons (e.g., as a translation aid or for specific learning needs).

3. Unreasonable and Persistent Correspondence

The trust reserves the right to designate 'unreasonable' any AI-generated complaints that:

- Involve the introduction of "trivial or irrelevant information".
- Raise "large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions" meant to exhaust school time.
- Are part of an automated "complaint campaign".
- Any other communication that reasonably falls into this category.

4. Next Steps

Where a complainant refuses to engage in an in-person or verbal verification meeting without a valid reason, the school/Trust may:

- Decline to progress the complaint to a formal investigation until the concerns are verified as authentic.
- Direct the complainant to this policy and remind them of their responsibility to co-operate with the process.