

Trust Parental Complaints Policy

Version 1.1 (July 2026)

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Approval Responsibility:	Trust Board of Directors
Review and Recommendation Committee:	Trust Board of Directors
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Target Audience:	LGB's, Headteachers, Trust SLT and Board, Parents
Reference Documents:	

VERSION CONTROL

Revision level	Revision date	Description of changes
1.0	May 26	New Policy prepared.
1.1	June 26	Policy approved by Board with SoD change to centralise

Prepared: July 2026 Signature Mike Adnitt	Approved: Signature Chair of Board	Released: Signature
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1. Introduction and Core Values

Within the St Lawrence Academies Trust, we strive to create a learning environment where all individuals appreciate their individual talents and express themselves. Our approach to resolving concerns is rooted in our core Christian values: **Truth, Justice, Forgiveness, Generosity, and Respect**. We aim to resolve all complaints sympathetically, efficiently, and at the appropriate level.

2. Policy Principles

- **Confidentiality:** All correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access.
- **Retention of Records:** The Trust maintains a written record of all formal complaints. This includes whether they were resolved at Stage 2, 3, or 4, and the actions taken by the school/Trust regardless of whether the complaint was upheld. Records are retained for **six years** after the pupil leaves the school.
- **Definition of Working Days:** For the purpose of this policy, "working days" are defined as Monday to Friday during school term time.

3. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy,

A "**complaint**" is defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction' towards the actions taken or a perceived lack of action. Complaints can be resolved formally or informally.

A "**concern**" is defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt' where reassurance is required. For the purpose of this policy, concerns will be classed and addressed as complaints.

Any complaint or concern will be taken seriously, whether raised formally or informally, and the appropriate procedures will be implemented.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use formal stages of the complaints procedure. Any concerns will be taken seriously and every effort will be taken to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If an individual has difficulty discussing a concern with a particular staff member, the school will respect the views of this individual. In these cases, the person managing the complaint will refer the complainant to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

The definition of "**unreasonable complaints**" is outlined in the 'Managing unreasonable complaints' section of this policy.

For the purpose of this policy, “**duplicate complaints**” are identical complaints e.g. complaints regarding the same matter received from a complainant's spouse, partner or child. These complaints will not be addressed again and the individual making the second complaint will be informed that the complaint has been dealt with on a local level.

If the individual is dissatisfied with the result, they can appeal to the DfE, as outlined in Stage 5 of this policy. Any new details provided, however, will be investigated and managed in line with the complaints procedure.

For the purpose of this policy, “**complaints campaigns**” are where the trust, or a school within the trust, receives large volumes of complaints that are all based on the same subject.

4. Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision at schools within St Lawrence Academies Trust, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with the relevant Local Admissions Authority.
• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.

	If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) via the LA
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Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i>
Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters directly with their employer. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.

5. The 5-Stage Complaints Procedure

Stage 1: Informal Complaint

Reviewer: The Headteacher or a delegated Senior Leader.

- **Process:** Parents should initially raise concerns with the relevant teacher or staff member. If unresolved, it is escalated to the Headteacher for an informal review.
- It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.
- Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, year head, subject head or headteacher. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.
- **Acknowledgement** of the complaint at concern level should be made by the school **within 24 hours**
- **Within 5 school** days of notification of the complaint, the complainant and the relevant member of staff should discuss the issue in a respectful and informal manner to **seek a mutual resolution**.
- At this initial communication stage of the complaint, the complainant will be asked for their input as to what they believe may resolve the issue about which the complaint has been made to avoid further escalation where possible
- **Complaint against Headteacher:** If the complaint concerns the Headteacher, the parent should contact the Clerk to the Local Governing Body (LGB) for informal resolution.
- **Timescale to Raise a complaint by the complainant :** Within **3 months** of the incident.
- **Timescale for Response:** The school aims to provide an informal response within **5 working days**.

Stage 2: Formal Complaint (LGB Panel)

Review Panel: A panel of **three school-based Local Governors**.

- **Review Panel Organised by:** The **Trust Clerk**.
- **Complaint submission:** Submit a formal complaint in writing to the **School Office**. If the complaint is about the Headteacher, it must be addressed to the **Clerk to the Local Governing Board**, with contact details obtainable from the school reception.
- **Investigation:** The Headteacher investigates standard complaints. If the complaint is about the Headteacher, the Chair of the LGB conducts the investigation. The headteacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this. A headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's SLT but not the decision to be taken.
- Where the situation is recognised as complex, and it is deemed to be unable to be resolved within this timescale, the person managing the complaint will contact the complainant to inform them of the revised target date via a written notification.

- An appointment with the appropriate person for managing the complaint should be made, as soon as reasonably practical, to avoid any possible worsening of the situation.
- **Evidence:** Evidence is presented in writing or in person by the Headteacher (or investigator) and the complainant.
- **Timeline:**
 - **Acknowledgment of receipt of the complaint:** Within **5 working days**.
 - **Setting the Date:** The date for the panel hearing will be agreed and communicated within **15 working days** of the acknowledgment.
 - **Evidence Submission:** All evidence must be submitted **5 working days** before the hearing.
 - **Outcome Notification:** Written notification of the outcome within **10 working days** of the hearing.

Stage 3: Trust-Wide Review Panel

Review Panel: A panel of **three Local Governors from across the Trust** (from different schools) who have had no prior involvement in Stage 2.

- **Review Panel Organised by:** The **Trust Clerk**.
- **Process:** This stage ensures impartiality by bringing in governors from the wider Trust to review the initial findings and the school's response.
- **Timeline:**
 - **Escalation from Stage 2 to 3:** Complainant to request escalation within **10 working days** of the Stage 2 outcome.
 - **Acknowledgment:** Within **5 working days**.
 - **Setting the Date:** Date confirmed within **15 working days** of acknowledgment.
 - **Evidence Submission:** All evidence must be submitted **5 working days** before the hearing.
 - **Outcome Notification:** Written notification within **10 working days** of the hearing.

Stage 4: Trust Executive Review

Reviewer: The **CEO** or a delegated member of the **Trust Senior Executive Team**.

- **Process:** The reviewer examines the evidence and processes from Stages 1, 2, and 3. This is a review of "Policy Adherence" and "Procedural Fairness" to ensure the Trust's values of Truth and Justice were upheld.
- **Timeline:**
 - **Escalation from Stage 3 to 4:** Complainant to request escalation within **10 working days** of the Stage 3 outcome.
 - **Acknowledgment:** Within **5 working days**.
 - **Review Completion:** Final written response sent within **15 working days**.

Stage 5: External Escalation (DfE/Ofsted)

Reviewer: The **Department for Education (DfE)** or **Ofsted**.

- **When to Escalate:** Only after the internal Trust procedure (Stages 1-4) has been exhausted.
- **The DfE:** Investigates if the school followed its funding agreement or handled the complaint improperly (procedural failure). Complaints are made via the GOV.UK school complaints form.
- **Ofsted:** Does not investigate individual disputes (e.g., bullying) but considers systemic issues like poor management or safeguarding. Contact via enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. Summary Table of Responsibilities and Deadlines

Investigations Outcomes

Outcomes of complaints will either be

- Upheld - The complaint is valid and upheld
- Partially upheld
- Not Upheld - The complaint is not deemed to be valid

Upheld Complaints. If appropriate, Schools will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

The Investigation Process

- Begin investigating without undue delay in line with the policy timescales for each stage, regardless of whether the complaint is managed locally or centrally.
- Ensure clear internal escalation and coordination between academies and central trust teams.
- Make appropriate and proportionate enquiries, including reviewing records,

consulting with relevant staff across academies, and assessing compliance with policies and law.

- Seek further information from the complainant where needed and clarify the desired outcomes.
- Take into account the complexity, scale (including multi-academy issues) and potential harm when determining timescales.
- Keep the complainant informed of the complaint investigation progress and any delays.

Children and additional considerations

The trusts' schools recognise that children have the same data protection rights as adults and will:

- Communicate in clear, age-appropriate language.
- Assess their understanding, where required.
- Provide mechanisms for children to raise concerns, including indicating urgency.
- Prioritise safeguarding concerns and act promptly where risk is indicated.

Outcome

The school will:

- Provide a clear outcome without undue delay, explaining any findings, decisions and actions taken.
- Respond to each aspect of the complaint and provide supporting information where appropriate.
- Inform the complainant of their right to escalate their complaint to the next stage

Managing unreasonable complaints

The trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. The trust will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the trust itself or any of its academies; however, the trust does not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

For the purposes of this policy, **"unreasonable complaints"** include:

Vexatious complaints, which:

- Are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, or repetitious.
- Insist upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.
- Insist upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.

- Are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
- Demand for redress which lacks any serious purpose or value.

Serial or persistent complaints, which:

- Are duplicated, sent by the same complainant once the initial complaint has been closed.
- Are new complaints that are submitted additionally, as part of an existing open complaint, by the same complainant.

A complaint **may also be regarded as unreasonable** when the complainant:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- 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 the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on or 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 that complaint where the trust's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the DfE.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with

A **complaint may also be considered unreasonable** if the complainant:

- Acts maliciously or aggressively.
- Uses threats, intimidation or violence.
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language.
- Knows the complaint to be false.
- Uses falsified information.
- Publishes unacceptable information in media such as social media websites and

newspapers.

The above applies regardless of the method the complaint is made, e.g. face-to-face, by telephone, in writing or electronically.

Complainants should limit the number of communications with the trust while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent, either by letter, phone, email or text, as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the member of staff, local governor or trustee leading the response to a complaint will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

Serial or persistent complaints will only be marked as 'serial' once the complainant has completed the complaints procedure. It is the complaint that will be marked as 'serial', meaning the complainant can complain about a separate issue if necessary.

If the behaviour continues, the individual handling the complaint will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the trust or any of its academies causing a significant level of disruption, the trust may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after six months.

A decision to stop responding will only be considered in circumstances where the following statements are true

- Every reasonable step has been taken to address the complainant's concern.
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the trust's position and their options
- The complainant contacts the trust or any of its academies repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

If the above criteria are met, in making a decision to stop responding, the trust will also consider if the complainant is often or always abusive or aggressive in their communication, makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff, or if the trust believes their intent is to disrupt or inconvenience the trust or its academies.

The trust will not stop responding to a complainant on the basis that they are difficult to deal with or they ask complex questions.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from the premises.

Complaints campaigns

Where the trust becomes the subject of a complaints campaign from complainants who are not connected with the trust, **a standard, single response will be published on the school and /or trust's website.**

If the trust receives a large number of complaints about the same subject from complainants who are connected to the trust, e.g. parents, each complainant will receive an individual response. This can be a standardised response if appropriate

If complainants remain dissatisfied with the trust's response, they will be directed to the DfE.

Barring from the premises

School premises are private property and therefore any individual may be barred from entering the premises.

If an individual's behaviour is cause for concern, the headteacher of the relevant academy will ask the individual to leave the premises.

The headteacher will notify the parties involved in writing, explaining that their implied licence for access to the premises has been temporarily revoked and why, subject to any representations that the individual may wish to make. The individual involved will be given the opportunity to formally express their views regarding the decision to bar them.

This decision to bar will be reviewed by the chair of the LGB and the Trust CEO or the Trust Chair of the Board of directors, taking into account any discussions following the incident. If the decision is made to continue the bar, the individual will be contacted in writing by the Headteacher, informing them of how long the bar will be in place, and when the decision will be reviewed.

Anyone wishing to make a complaint regarding a barring order can do so in writing, including via email, to the headteacher or chair of governors.

Summary Checklist for Parents

- **Initial Contact:** Always try to resolve the issue with the class teacher first (Stage 1).
- **Forms:** Formal complaints (Stage 2) must be in writing.
- **Deadlines:** Keep note of the **10-day window** to escalate to the next stage if you are unsatisfied.
- **Evidence:** Ensure all documents you wish the panel to see are provided **5 working days** before any scheduled hearing.
- **Headteacher Complaints:** Always direct these to the **Clerk of the LGB**, not the school office staff.

5 Stage Complaints Summary

Stage	Reviewer / Panel	Panel Organised By	Submission Deadline	Acknowledgment	Hearing to be held within	Outcome Notification
1: Informal	Headteacher / SLT	School	Within 3 months	24 hours	-	5 Working Days
2: Formal	3 School Governors	Trust Clerk	Within 10 days of Stage 1	5 Working Days	15 days	10 Working Days
3: Trust wide Panel	3 External Governors	Trust Clerk	Within 10 days of Stage 2	5 Working Days	15 days	10 Working Days
4: Trust Exec review	CEO / Exec Leader	Trust CEO	Within 10 days of Stage 3	5 Working Days	-	15 Working Days
5: External	DfE / Ofsted	-	After Stage 4	External	-	External
