

The 3-18 Education Trust

Complaints Policy

Every individual is in a great school.

Approved: Spring 2023

www.318education.co.uk

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Introduction

The 3-18 Education Trust (Trust) is fully committed to the sustained improvement of the Trust and its schools. Where concerns are raised by interested parties or simply through the continual and thorough self-evaluation process, the Trust will investigate these matters thoroughly. The Trust welcomes feedback from parents/carers and other stakeholders and will always try to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible.

The formal nature of this Policy ensures the Trust meets its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents/carers (parents) of pupils at the Trust's schools, and others.

Aims of the Policy

When responding to complaints, the Trust aims to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial.
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary.
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response.
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality.
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy.
- Make sure that any decisions the Trust makes are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law.
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process.
- Consider how the complaint can feed into the Trust and school improvement evaluation processes.

The Trust tries to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The Trust aims to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full. To support this, the Trust will make sure it publicises the existence of this Policy and make it available on the Trust and schools' websites.

Throughout the process, the Trust will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

The Difference Between a Concern and a Complaint

A **concern** may be defined as '*an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought*'.

A **complaint** may be defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action*'.

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

If a parent has difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, the Trust will respect their views. In these cases, the Headteacher will refer the parent to another staff member.

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher will refer the parent 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 Trust understands however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Trust will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this Complaints Policy.

How to Raise a Concern or Make a Complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complaints against school staff, school process or procedure should be made in the first instance to the Headteacher at the school office.

Complaints against a Headteacher, a member of the MAT Central Team, Trust process or procedure should be made in the first instance to the CEO at the Trust office.

Complaints against the CEO, a Local Governor, Local Governing Body, Trustee (not Chair) or governance process or procedure should be made in the first instance to the Chair of the Trust Board at the Trust office.

Complaints against the Chair of the Trust Board or the Trust Board should be made in the first instance to the Members c/o the Governance Professional at the Trust office.

All correspondence regarding concerns or complaints must be marked Private and Confidential.

Please refer to Appendix A for the address to send a concern or complaint.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this Policy (Appendix C). If the complainant requires help in completing the form, please contact the school office. The complainant can also ask a third-party organisation for example like the Citizens Advice to help them.

Anonymous Complaints

The Trust will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher, CEO Chair of Trust Board, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time Scales

Concerns and complaints must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. The Trust

will consider concerns and complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the Police, Local Authority Safeguarding Teams or Tribunals, this may impact on the Trust's ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, The Trust will inform the complainant of a proposed new timescale.

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

Complaints Received Outside of Term Time

The Trust will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Scope of this Complaints Policy

This Policy covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by the Trust, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed in Appendix B.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use the Trust's premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure, the Trust wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, the Trust will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, the Trust 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 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 school policies in light of the complaint.
- An apology.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

Roles and Responsibilities

The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow the procedures outlined in this Policy.
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly.
- Ask for assistance as needed.
- Treat all those involved with respect.
- Not publish details about the complaint on social media.

The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes.
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely.
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the complaints co-ordinator or Complaints Committee which includes the facts and potential solutions.

The complaints co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- A Headteacher or CEO.
- The Governance Professional or a member of the Governance Support Team
- Any other staff member providing administrative support.

The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure.
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members or those involved in governance.
- Be aware of issues relating to:
 - Sharing third party information.
 - Additional support needed by complainants, for example interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person.
- Keep records.

Clerk to the Complaints Committee

The clerk will be:

- The Governance Professional, or
- a member of the Governance Support Team.

The clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the Complaints Committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings.
- Arrange the complaints hearing.
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing.

Complaints Committee Chair

The Complaints Committee Chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout.
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case.

Complaints Procedure - school related concerns and complaints

The procedure is for complaints against school staff (not Headteacher), school processes or procedures.

Stage 1: Informal

The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Headteacher, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school office (Appendix A).

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 5 school days and investigate and provide a response within 15 school days. If this is not possible, the complainant will be kept informed, and reasons provided.

The informal stage may involve a meeting between the complainant and the school.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

Stage 2: Formal

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint to the Headteacher:

- In a letter or email
- In person
- Through a third party acting on their behalf

The complainant is encouraged to use the Complaint Form (Appendix C).

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If the complainant needs assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office (refer to Appendix A).

The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

The Headteacher (or other person appointed by the Headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 20 school days.

Stage 3: Panel Hearing (Complaints Committee)

Convening the Panel

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

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Governance Professional, via the MAT office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The Governance Professional will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk to the Complaints Committee will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 50 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk to the Complaints Committee will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

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

At the meeting

A complainant may bring someone along to the Committee meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend.

Generally, the Department of Education does not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the Committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a Trust employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under (Human Resources) staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk to the Complaints Committee will:

- Confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
- Request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the Committee at least 6 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The Committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

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

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The Committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The Committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part, or
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the Committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and the school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

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

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

The Committee will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about.

Complaints Procedure – non-school (except Headteacher) concerns and complaints

The procedure is for complaints against Headteachers, the CEO, MAT Central Team, Local Governors, Local Governing Bodies, Trustees and the Trust Board.

Stage 1: Informal

Complaints against a Headteacher, a member of the MAT Central Team, Trust process or procedure should be made in the first instance to the CEO at the Trust office.

Complaints against the CEO, a Local Governor, Local Governing Body, Trustee (not Chair) or governance process or procedure should be made in the first instance to the Chair of the Trust Board at the Trust office.

Complaints against the Chair of the Trust Board be made in the first instance to the Members c/o the Governance Professional at the Trust office.

The procedure outlined in school related concerns and complaints Stage 1 will be followed by an appropriate independent person.

Stage 2: Formal

The procedure outlined in school related concerns and complaints Stage 2 will be followed.

If the complaint is about:

- The Headteacher
- A member of the MAT Central Team or
- Trust process or procedures

An independent investigator will carry out the steps in school related concerns and complaints Stage 2. They will be appointed by the CEO and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation.

If the complaint is about:

- The CEO
- A Local Governor
- Local Governing Body
- A Trustee (not Chair) or
- Governance process or procedures

An independent investigator will carry out the steps in school related concerns and complaints Stage 2. They will be appointed by the Chair of the Trust Board and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation.

If the complaint is about:

- The Chair of the Trust Board or
- The Trust Board

An independent investigator will carry out the steps in school related concerns and complaints Stage 2. They will be appointed by the Members of the Trust and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation.

Stage 3: Panel Hearing (Complaints Committee)

If the complaint is about:

- The Headteacher
- A member of the MAT Central Team or
- Trust process or procedures

An independent investigator will carry out the steps in school related concerns and complaints Stage 3. They will be appointed by the CEO in consultation with the Governance Professional and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation.

If the complaint is about:

- The CEO
- A Local Governor,
- Local Governing Body,
- Trustee (not Chair) or
- Governance process or procedures

An independent panel and Governance Professional will carry out the steps in school related concerns and complaints Stage 3. The panel will be appointed by the Trust Board in consultation with the Governance Professional.

If the complaint is about:

- The Chair of the Trust Board
- The Trust Board

An independent panel and Governance Professional will carry out the steps in school related concerns and complaints Stage 3. The panel will be appointed by the Members of the Trust in consultation with the Governance Professional.

Referring Complaints on Completion of the Trust's Procedure

If the complainant believes the 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 3.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the Trust. The ESFA will consider whether the Trust has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:
Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

Persistent Complaints

Unreasonably persistent complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore the Trust will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the Trust's complaints procedure .
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive.
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure, beyond all reason.
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames it sets out.
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time.
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value.

Steps the Trust will take.

The Trust will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. The Trust will maintain its role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when Trust representatives meet with individuals. The Trust will follow its complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the Trust in a disruptive way, the Trust may put communications strategies in place. It may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address.
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term.
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#).
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary.

Stopping responding

The Trust may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- The Trust believes it has taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns.
- The Trust has provided a clear statement of its position and their options.
- The complainant contacts the Trust repeatedly, and it believes their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience.

Where the Trust stop responding, it will inform the individual that it intends to do so. The Trust will also explain that it will still consider any new complaints they make.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the Trust will immediately inform the Police and communicate its actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from a Trust site.

Duplicate complaints

If the Trust has resolved a complaint under this procedure and receives a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, the Trust will assess whether there are aspects that it has not previously considered, or any new information it needs to take into account.

If the Trust is satisfied that there are no new aspects, it will:

- Tell the new complainant that the Trust has already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete.
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the Trust's original handling of the complaint.

If there are new aspects, the Trust will follow the complaint procedure again.

Complaint campaigns

Where the Trust receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the Trust, the Trust may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the Trust/school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the Trust's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

Record Keeping

The 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 final 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 at each school or the MAT office, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the Complaints Committee.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or through a subject access request under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

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

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with Local Governors or Trustees in case a Complaints Committee needs to be organised at a later point. Where the Local Governing Body is aware of the substance of the complaint before the Complaints Committee stage, the Trust will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the Chair of the Trust Board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

Policy Monitoring and Review

Monitoring

The Chief Executive Officer will monitor the outcomes and impact of this policy on an annual basis.

Review

Member of Staff Responsible	Chief Executive Officer
Relevant Guidance/Advice/Legal Reference	Part 7 of the Education Regulations 2014. ESFA best practice guidance for school complaints procedures 2020
Policy Adopted By	Trust Board
Date of Policy	Spring Term 2023
Review Period	Annually
Date of Next Review	Spring Term 2024

Appendix A – Trust and School Office Contact Details

Trust / School	Address
The 3-18 Education Trust	The MAT Central Office Longden Road Shrewsbury SY3 9EE Tel: 01743 284000
Coleham Primary School	Greyfriars Road, Shrewsbury, SY3 7EN Tel 01743 362668
St Martins School	Moors Bank Oswestry SY10 7BD Tel: 01691 776500
The Priory School	Longden Road Shrewsbury SY3 9EE Tel: 01743 284000
The Thomas Adams School	Lowe Hill Wem SY4 5UB Tel: 01939 237000
William Brookes School	Farley Road Much Wenlock TF13 6NB Tel: 01952 728900

Appendix B – Complaints Outside the Scope of this Policy

Excluded Matters	Who to contact
Admissions to schools	The process for challenging admissions decisions is set out in relevant statutory guidance.
Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs	Concerns about statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, should be raised with the Local Authority
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under the Trust’s Child Protection Policy and Procedure 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.
Suspensions and exclusion of pupils from school.	The process for challenging exclusions decisions is set out in the DfE’s statutory guidance and information can be found at https://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions
National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus
School re-organisation proposals	Where concerns are not adequately addressed by the Trust, complaints can be raised direct with the Department for Education
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.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the Trust’s internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the Trust’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.
Whistleblowing	The Trust has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all employees in the Trust, 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 direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus . Volunteer staff who have concerns should raise them through this Complaints Policy. Volunteer staff may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of the complaint.

Appendix C – Complaint Form

You will find a word document copy of this form on the Trust / schools' websites. Boxes will expand to fit your text. If you need support with this, please contact the school/Trust. Hard copies can be posted upon request.

In accordance with equality law, the Trust will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it, and any action taken to date.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork, including electronic evidence. If so, please give details
Signature: Date:
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By whom:
Complaint referred to:
Date:

Appendix D – Summary of Complaints Procedure.

Concern / complaint received.

Stage 1 (informal)

Complaint received by a member of staff.

- Acknowledgement of receipt of complaint within 5 school days.
- Written response post investigation within 15 school days.
- Complaint and outcome recorded.

Issue not resolved and the complainant decides to progress the complaint.



Stage 2 (formal)

Complaint received by Headteacher (or other Complaints Co-ordinator) in writing.

- Acknowledgement of written receipt of complaint in writing within 5 school days.
- Clarification of unresolved issue.
- Meeting with complainant (if necessary).
- Written response post investigation within 20 school days.
- Complaint and outcome recorded.

Issue not resolved and the complainant decides to progress the complaint.



Stage 3 (panel hearing)

Complaint received by Governance Professional within 10 school days of Stage 2 completion.

- Acknowledgement of written receipt of complaint in writing within 5 school days.
- Complaints panel appointed.
- Complaints panel meeting within 50 school days of Stage 2 request (max number of alternative dates can be issued)
- Written notification to all parties 10 school days before meeting.
- Circulate relevant documentation 5 school days prior to meeting.
- Written response post investigation within 5 school days of meeting.
- Complaint and final outcome recorded.

Next step

If the complainant believes the 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 Department for Education after they have completed Stage 3.