Complaints Policy

This policy is effective in all Academies within the Learning without Limits Academy Trust and the Trust Central Team. Where the term 'Trust' is used in this policy, it covers all Academies and the Trust Offices.

Associated Policies:	
Academy Admissions Policies	Disciplinary Procedure
Academy SEND Policies	Staff Behaviour Policy (Code of Conduct) Policy
Grievance Procedure	Staff Expectations Policy
Capability Policy	Whistleblowing Policy

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Version	Date	Author	Changes
V4.2	Dec 2025	MH	1.1. Additional detail to explain how the policy is split into various sections. Stage 1; 1.1. additional text added to re-iterate the timeframes as set out in the earlier key principles section. Stage 2; 2.3.1. minor wording change 2.3.7 – minor wording change Stage 3; 3.4.4 – new paragraph added to enable re-arranged complaint hearings to be arranged sooner than the current minimum of 10 working notice, enabling complaints to be considered in a timely manner. Part 2; introduction text amended to aid understanding Stage 1; 1.1. additional text added to re-iterate the timeframes as set out in the earlier key principles section. Policy approved at Trust Board meeting 11 December 2025.

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1. Aims

1.1. The aims of this policy are to deal with complaints and concerns about an Academy, the Trust or any individual connected with it, by following the correct procedure thoroughly and in an open, honest and fair manner. The policy is split into four sections. The first part, which applies to all forms of concerns and complaints, includes the key principles of how concerns and complaints will be managed, recorded and monitored. The second section covers concerns and complaints raised by parents and carers whilst the third is in relation to those raised by other persons. The final section refers to how repetitious or vexatious complaints will be managed.

1.2. 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
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into Academy and Trust improvement evaluation processes

1.3. The Trust aims to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed inline with this policy.

1.4. The Trust aims to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full. To support this the Trust will publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the Trust website.

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

2. Purpose of this policy

2.1. We need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. Parents, carers and members of the public should never feel, or be made to feel, that a complaint, made in a reasonable and appropriate way, will reflect adversely on any learner or their opportunities at any Academy within the Trust. We will investigate and try to resolve every complaint in a positive manner and will treat every complaint as an opportunity:

- To put right any matter which may have gone wrong
- To review our systems and procedures in the light of the relevant circumstances

2.2. Reasonable adjustments will be made to this policy where required to ensure that all complainants can access and complete this complaints procedure. For example, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations, or virtually if requested by the complainant.

3. Scope of this policy

3.1. We intend to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage. Where this is not possible there may be occasions when complainants would like to raise the matter formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

3.2. This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of learners who are registered at one of the Academies within the Trust. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to an individual Academy within the trust, or the Trust itself, about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Part 1 of this policy outlines how parents/carers of registered learners currently attending Academies within the Trust can raise a concern or complaint. Concerns or complaints from other persons will be dealt with in accordance with Part 2 of this policy.

3.3. This procedure does not apply to concerns and complaints relating to the matters listed in Appendix 1. Please refer to the table in Appendix 1 for signposting related to some specific types of complaint. All Trust policies are available on the Trust website.

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

3.5. Anonymous concerns or complaints will not normally be investigated under this procedure. The Academy Principal, Chair of Governors, Chair of Trustees or the Chief Executive Officer (as appropriate), will determine whether there are exceptional circumstances to justify conducting an investigation into the issues raised anonymously.

3.6. All staff will be made aware of this Complaints Policy and are expected to review it regularly so they are familiar with the process of dealing with complaints and can be of assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

4. Who is responsible for carrying out this policy?

4.1. The Trust Board has overall responsibility for this policy, and for reviewing the effectiveness of actions taken in response to concerns raised under this policy.

4.2. The Trust Board has delegated the day-to-day responsibility for the operation of these procedures to the Academy Principal.

5. Definitions

5.1. The Department for Education's (DfE) guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A concern is defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought".
- A complaint is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action".

5.2. Other terms used in this policy:

- **Meeting/hearing** - an in person or virtual meeting or hearing (i.e. telephone or video conference where all parties can participate verbally), virtual meetings/hearings will only be held if all parties have access to appropriate equipment to attend and are happy to do so
- **Parent** - a biological parent, carer or anyone who has parental responsibility or care for a child
- **Working days** - excludes weekends and Academy holidays and periods of partial or total Academy closure.

6. Legislation and guidance

6.1. This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils in our Trust.

6.2. It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations, and refers to the Department for Education (DfE).

6.3. This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

7. Key Principles

7.1. The Trust acknowledges that raising concerns or complaints can be a difficult, emotional, and stressful time, particularly for parents and carers. We expect our staff to always be respectful and courteous when dealing with you. We also expect you to treat our staff with the same respect and courtesy. We will not accept abusive and threatening behaviour towards our staff from anybody at any time. In circumstances where this happens the trust will take the action outlined in Part 3 of this policy.

7.2. The Trust expects all complainants to make reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution. This will usually be the most effective way to swiftly resolve any concerns.

7.3. The Trust encourages parents and others to approach the Academy with any concerns and not to air concerns about the Trust, the Academy or its staff on social media sites. Posting negative comments on social media can cause damage and upset and is often counter-productive to the education of our learners.

7.4. To investigate a complaint properly and fairly, we have implemented a staged approach. We anticipate that almost all complaints that arise will be resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2 outlined below.

7.5. We expect our members of staff to be addressed in a respectful manner and for communication to remain calm at all times. The procedure under Part 3 will only be used on very rare occasions to deal with repetitious and/or vexatious complaints or complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner.

7.6. Concerns or complaints should be brought to our attention as soon as possible. Any matter raised more than 3 calendar months after the incident being complained of (or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 3 calendar months of the last of these incidents) will not be considered. We will, however, consider complaints made outside of this time frame where exceptional circumstances apply. A complaint raised outside this time frame should therefore confirm the reasons for the delay in raising it.

7.7. Where a complaint is received outside of term time, we will consider it to have been received on the first working day following the holiday period.

7.8. On rare occasions an Academy may receive complaints from a number of individuals relating to the same issue. In order to deal with these complaints efficiently the Academy will follow the procedure set out in Part 4.

7.9. If it becomes necessary to alter the time limits and deadlines set out within this procedure, the complainant will be advised accordingly and given an explanation as to why this has been the case and provided with revised timescales. If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority safeguarding teams or tribunals/courts, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have

completed their investigations. Where a complaint is raised but we do not have clarity from the complainant on the issues and/or desired outcomes, we will inform the complainant what information we need to progress the complaint and pause this procedure until reasonable clarity is achieved.

7.10. Complainants should not approach individual governors or trustees to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may prevent them from considering complaints at later stages.

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

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

8. Records of complaints

8.1. A record will be kept of all written formal complaints, including at what stage they were resolved and action taken by us as a result of those complaints regardless of whether they were upheld. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where:

- access is requested by the Secretary of State
- disclosure is required in the course of an Academy inspection
- an individual has a legal right to access their own personal data contained within such documentation
- under other legal authority

8.2. We will make the findings and recommendations of a Complaints Panel available for inspection on the Academy premises by the Trust and the Principal.

9. Learning lessons

9.1. The Trust CEO / Chief Administrative Officer will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Principal, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the Academy or Trust can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

10. Monitoring arrangements

10.1. The Academy Principal will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in the section entitled ‘Learning lessons’.

10.2. Academy complaints records are logged and managed by the Academy Principal,their delegated representative or Academy Operations Manager.

10.3. The Chief Administrative Officer will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure Trust-wide.

11. Learning without Limits Wellbeing Statement

11.1. The Trust will always put the effective education of our learners at the heart of any decision that we make. In doing so, we recognise that the requirement to adhere to policies and procedures may be time consuming and can impact on workload. For this reason the Trust and its Academies will always endeavour to support staff when policies and procedures are being actioned.

12. Review of this policy

12.1. This policy is reviewed annually by the Trust, or sooner if new legislation comes into force. We will monitor the application and outcomes of this policy to ensure it is working effectively.

13. Archived Policy Reviews Changes

Version	Date	Author	Changes
V1.0	March 2017	AE	New policy
V2.0	December 2019	AE	Full review taking on new LwLAT policy formats and changes in legislation, including feedback received from Academies
V3.0	February 2022	AE	Name changed to Complaints Policy. Academy logos updated. Contents table added. The role of the complaints co-ordinator has been removed. In keeping with the Scheme of Delegation, references to the role of the Local Governing Body (LGB) and the role of the Board of Trustees have been updated. Section 13 - Stage 4: Review by the Board of Trustees has been added. Section 14 - Complaints about the Trust or Central Staff has been added. LwLAT Wellbeing statement added. Appendix 1: Complaints Form removed.
V4.0	April 2024	AE	Significant Policy review. New policy format. Policy review period reduced from 3 years to 1 year. Policy approved at Trust Board meeting 26th April 2024. List of Associated policies updated. Policy split into four parts and content updated to allow for clarity of process dependant on the complainant and the nature of their concern. Department for Education contact information added, with links to the DfE website, to replace those for the ESFA.

V4.1	April 2025	AE	Previous policy changes archived to end of document. Associated Policies list updated. 1.1. removed and 3.2 added instead. 1.1. reworded for clarity 3.2. Added and wording in 3.3 added for clarity. 5.2. The term 'meeting' has been expanded to include 'hearing', as referred throughout the policy and the word 'biological' has been added. 7.1 added and 7.2 expanded, for clarity. 7.6. Updated to read 3 'calendar' months Stage 2; 2.1. expanded for clarity around emailed complaints. 2.3.2. and 2.4. expanded for clarity. 3.4. reference to 'panel' updated to 'Complaints Panel' for clarity, throughout. Stage 4 – Referral to DfE updated. Part 4 title updated, for clarity. Policy approved at Trust Board meeting 1st May 2025.

Part 1: Complaints Procedure for Parents

1. Stage 1: Informal Concerns

1.1. An informal concern can be raised in person, by telephone or email. Concerns may also be raised by a third party acting on behalf of a parent, as long as they have appropriate authority to do so. As per the key principles section of this policy, any matter raised more than 3 calendar months after it occurred (or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 3 calendar months of the last of these incidents) will not be considered. Most enquiries and concerns can be dealt with satisfactorily either by the class teacher, the head of year or a member of the pastoral team, without the need to resort to the formal procedure. We value informal meetings and discussions and encourage parents to approach staff with any concerns they may have, and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding.

1.2. It is always helpful if you can fully explain the nature of the concern and specify the outcome you are looking for. Where appropriate, you may be invited to an informal meeting with the member of staff most appropriate for dealing with that concern. The member of staff dealing with the concern will make sure that you are clear on what action (if any) has been agreed. This may be put in writing, if appropriate.

1.3. The appropriate individual to deal with an informal complaint will depend on the nature of complaint. The Principal may designate a senior member of staff to deal with an informal complaint, such as a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

1.4. Any complaint about the Principal (and raised with them by the parents), which can't be resolved informally with the complainant, should be raised by the parents in writing to the Trust's Lead Governance Professional at governance@lwlat.org.uk to be dealt with under the formal stage of the complaints procedures.

1.5. The Academy will respect the views of a parent who indicates that they would have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff. In this case, the Principal, or their delegated representative, will refer the parent to another designated member of staff. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved in the circumstances leading to the concern feels too compromised to deal with it, the Principal/delegated representative may consider referring the parent to another member of staff. The member of staff may be more senior, but this is not essential.

1.6. The Trust/Academy will log all informal concerns and inform the CEO/Principal of any serious concerns.

1.7. There is no suggested timescale for resolution at this stage given the importance of dialogue through informal discussion, although it would be expected that most issues will be resolved within 15 working days. Where no satisfactory solution has been found, you will be advised that if you wish your concerns to be considered further you should write to the Principal under Stage 2 of this procedure within 15 working days.

2. Stage 2: Formal Written Complaints

2.1. If your concerns are not resolved under Stage 1, you are entitled to put your complaint in writing and send this to the Academy Principal, via the Academy Office, marked private and confidential. Please use 'complaint' as the subject of your email or mark it clearly on your letter. This will ensure that your correspondence gets the priority it deserves from a large volume of communications the Trust/Academy receives each day.

2.2. The role of the Principal (or their delegated representative) at Stage 2

2.2.1. The Principal's (or their delegated representative, in accordance with the procedure) role is:

- to ensure that the complainant is fully updated throughout the procedure
- to ensure that the correct procedure has been followed
- to ensure that an investigation is carried out, and a report compiled
- to meet the complainant, if appropriate
- if the complaint is being referred to Stage 3, notify the Trust's Lead Governance Professional to arrange a Complaints Panel

2.3. If your concern is about:

2.3.1. **the Principal**, or if the Principal has already considered your complaint under Stage 1, your complaint should be sent to the Trust's Lead Governance Professional at governance@lwlat.org.uk marked as Private and Confidential, who will arrange for a suitable individual, such as the Chair of the Local Governing Body, to investigate the concerns in accordance with Stage 2.

2.3.2. **the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole local governing body**, your complaint should be sent to the Trust's Lead Governance Professional at governance@lwlat.org.uk marked as Private and Confidential, who will arrange for a governor or trustee (as applicable) with no connection to the complaint to investigate the concerns in accordance with Stage 2.

2.3.3. **the clerk of the local governing body**, your complaint should be sent to the Trust's Lead Governance Professional at governance@lwlat.org.uk, who will then determine the most appropriate action with regards to Stage 2 and Stage 3.

2.3.4. **the local governing body as a whole**, your complaint should be sent to the Trust's Lead Governance Professional at governance@lwlat.org.uk, who will then determine the most appropriate action with regards to Stage 2 and Stage 3.

2.3.5. **the Chief Executive Officer,** your complaint should be sent to the Trust's Lead Governance Professional at governance@lwlat.org.uk, who will arrange for a suitable individual, such as the Chair of Trustees, to carry out the Stage 2 procedures.

2.3.6. **a trustee or a member of the Trust**, your complaint should be sent to the Trust's Lead Governance Professional at governance@lwlat.org.uk who will arrange for a suitable individual, such as a Trustee or the Chair of Trustees unless there is a conflict of interest, to investigate the concerns in accordance with Stage 2.

2.3.7. **the Lead Governance Professional**, your complaint should be sent to the Chair of the Trust Board at info@lwlat.org.uk marked Private and Confidential who will arrange for a suitable individual to carry out the Stage 2 procedures.

2.3.8. **the trustee board as a whole**, your complaint should to sent to the Trust's Lead Governance Professional at governance@lwlat.org.uk who will arrange for the matter to be independently investigated.

2.4. It is very important that you describe your complaint clearly and include a clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint. We strongly encourage you to use the Complaint Form provided at Appendix 3 of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the Academy office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you. In all cases your written complaint must include:

- the nature of the complaint
- details of how the matter has been dealt with so far
- the names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events and copies of all relevant documents
- a clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint.

2.5. Your complaint will normally be acknowledged in writing within five working days of receipt. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the Trust's complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This will normally be within 15 working days of receipt.

2.6. If appropriate, the Principal (or their delegated representative) may invite you to a meeting to clarify your complaints and to explore possible resolutions. If you accept that invitation, you may be accompanied by one other person, such as a friend, relative or interpreter, to assist you. Where possible, this meeting will take place within 10 working days of receipt of the written complaint.

2.7. If necessary, witnesses will be interviewed and statements taken from those involved. If the complaint centers on a learner, the learner will usually be interviewed. If the matter includes a complaint relating to a member of staff, the member of staff will have the opportunity to respond to the complaint.

2.8. Once the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, you will be provided with a written response to the complaint, including an explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. This will include what action will be taken to resolve the complaint (if any). You will be advised that if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, you may request that your complaint be heard by a Complaints Panel under Stage 3 of this procedure.

2.9. The Trust may engage an independent, external person to carry out the investigation into the Stage 2 complaint or to review the investigation and response at Stage 2. This may be appropriate where the complaint is particularly complex or involves legal issues.

2.10. Please be aware that where your complaint relates to an employee a copy of the complaint may be shared with them in order to investigate the issues raised.

3. Stage 3: Referral to a Complaints Panel

3.1. If you are dissatisfied with the decision under Stage 2, you may request that a Complaints Panel be convened to consider your complaint. The Complaints Panel will principally consider those elements of the Stage 2 response to a parent's complaint with which you remain dissatisfied. The 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.

3.2. To request a hearing before a Complaints Panel, you should write to the Trust's Lead Governance Professional at governance@lwlat.org.uk within 15 working days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 2. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. You should ensure that you provide copies of all relevant documents and provide the details of all the grounds of the complaint about which the you remain dissatisfied and the outcome you are looking for.

3.3. Your written request will be acknowledged within five working days of receipt.

3.4. The role of the Trust's Lead Governance Professional at Stage 3

3.4.1. The Trust's Lead Governance Professional is the contact point for the complainant and the Complaints Panel, and should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff / Principal, the Chief Executive Officer, Chair of Governors of an Academy and Chair of the trustees (as applicable) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be mindful of the timescales to respond to complaints
- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- ensure that the Complaints Panel has access to legal advice, where appropriate
- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, taking reasonable steps to find a date that is convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: stage 1 paperwork, Academy and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing within an agreed timescale
- ensure the hearing is appropriately minuted
- notify all parties of the Complaints Panel's decision

3.4.1. The Trust's Lead Governance Professional will arrange for a Complaints Panel to be convened, made up of at least three members of Trust governance, including:

- governors of a local governing body and/or trustees of the Trust (as appropriate) with no prior involvement in the matter

- one person who is independent of the management and running of the Academy. This can be a governor, from a local governing body at a different Academy within the Trust, who has no conflict of interest or prior knowledge of the complaint.

3.4.2. The panel members will determine who of their members will act at Chair of the panel.

3.4.3. Every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within 20 working days of the receipt of your request. As soon as reasonably practicable and in any event at least 10 working days before the hearing, you will be sent written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the Complaints Panel members who will be present. Fair consideration will be given to any bona fide objection to a particular member of the Complaints Panel. You will also be informed of the name of the person who will be presenting the case on behalf of the Academy (referred to in this policy as the 'Academy representative'). The Academy Representative at the Stage 3 Complaints Panel hearing is usually the Stage 2 decision maker, as they will need to attend to answer questions from the Complaints Panel on their decision(s) and the reasons for these at Stage 2 of the proceedings.

3.4.4. In order to ensure the complaint is considered as promptly as possible, it may not be possible to provide you with 10 working days' notice of a re-scheduled hearing should the original hearing date be rejected. A minimum of 5 working days will be provided.

3.4.5. If, despite best efforts, it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date and time for a hearing within a reasonable timeframe, the Trust's Lead Governance Professional may determine that the hearing proceeds on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

3.4.6. You have the right to be accompanied to the hearing by a friend, relative or interpreter. You should notify the Trust's Lead Governance Professional in advance if you intend to bring anyone to the hearing. We do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the Complaints Panel hearing. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend. The Complaints Panel itself may take legal advice and/or be supported by a legal advisor at the hearing on matters of law and procedure.

3.4.7. A copy of the complaint and any other documents provided by you in support of your complaint, or by the Academy representative in defense of the complaint, will be provided to the Complaints Panel as soon as practicable upon receipt. Copies of these documents shall also be provided to you or the Academy representative (as applicable) at least three working days before the hearing. The Complaints Panel reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented by either party less than three working days prior to the hearing. The Complaints Panel is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. The Complaints Panel will not normally accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

3.4.8. The hearing will be conducted to ensure that each party has the opportunity to address the Complaints Panel. The procedure to be followed during the hearing will be explained to the parties by letter in advance of the hearing. The Trust's Lead Governance Professional 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.

3.4.9. Unless otherwise stated, the procedure for the Stage 3 hearing is as follows:

- the parent and Academy representative will enter the hearing together
- the Chair of the Complaints Panel will introduce the Complaints Panel members and outline the process
- the parent will explain the complaint
- the Academy representative and Complaints Panel members will question the parent
- the Academy representative will explain the Academy/Trust's actions
- the parent and the Complaints Panel members will question the Academy representative
- the parent will sum up their complaint
- the Academy representative will sum up the Academy/Trust's actions
- the Chair of the Complaints Panel will explain that both parties will hear from the panel within five working days
- both parties will leave together while the Complaints Panel decides
- the Trust's Lead Governance Professional, and any legal advisor assisting the Complaints Panel (if applicable), will stay to assist the Complaints Panel with its decision making.

3.4.10. There may be occasions when it is necessary to deviate from this complaints procedure, however this should only be if this is reasonable and justified, subject to the Academy/Trust continuing to meet their statutory requirements under Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. The parent will be notified of any changes.

3.4.11. A Complaints Panel may be temporarily adjourned if the Complaints Panel requires further evidence or in exceptional circumstances (for example, if clarification sought by the Complaints Panel is essential to the proceedings). If possible this will be resolved immediately but if not, an adjourned date must be arranged as soon as possible.

3.4.12. After the hearing, the Complaints Panel will consider their decision and inform you and, where relevant the person complained about, of their decision in writing within five working days. The letter will set out the decision of the Complaints Panel together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The Complaints Panel can (by a majority if necessary):

- 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 Academy or Trust systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

3.5. The role of the Chair of the Complaints Panel

3.5.1. The Chair of the Complaints Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease.
- the remit of the Complaints Panel is explained to the complainant
- the written material is seen by everyone in attendance (provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR)
- key findings of fact are made, and that any issues not previously mentioned in writing should not be raised at the hearing and, if they are mentioned at the hearing, these should not be noted or considered by the Complaints Panel
- both the complainant and the Academy are given the opportunity to make their case, and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the hearing, or verbally in the hearing itself
- the Complaints Panel is open-minded, acts independently and no Complaints Panel member has an external interest in the outcome or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the hearing is minuted

4. Stage 4: Referral of complaint to Department for Education

4.1. If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Complaints Panel, you are entitled to refer your complaint to the Department for Education (DfE).

4.2. The DfE will only investigate the complaint in limited circumstances. For more information on the DfE's remit in relation to Academy/Trust complaints visit: How DfE handles complaints about academies

4.3. You can contact the DfE for general assistance on complaint handling by:

- Calling the National Helpline on 0370 000 2288
- using the DfE's online contact form
- Writing to:

  Department for Education
  School complaints compliance unit
  Piccadilly Gate
  Store Street
  Manchester
  M1 2WD

Part 2: Concerns or Complaints from other Persons

We wish to work closely with other members of the local community and will deal with their concerns and complaints, as follows:

1. Stage 1

1.1. Concern regarding an Academy or its operations may be made to any member of staff. That member of staff will attempt to resolve the matter immediately or may, if appropriate, refer the matter to their line manager or member of the senior leadership team (SLT) who is best placed to deal with the concern. It is expected that most concerns will be responded to orally or in writing within five working days. If a longer period is required, you will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation. As per the key principles section of this policy, any matter raised more than 3 calendar months after it occurred (or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 3 calendar months of the last of these incidents) will not be considered.

2. Stage 2

2.1. Where a concern is not resolved at Stage 1, you should put your complaint in writing and send this to the Academy Principal, via the Academy office marked Private and Confidential. The Principal may delegate the task of investigation and/or responding to the complaint to a member of SLT or other suitable member of staff. Some complaints may need to be dealt with as a formal complaint in the first instance, depending on the nature of the complaint (for example, a serious safeguarding incident). A formal response to the complaint will usually be provided within 15 working days of receipt of the letter of complaint although if a longer period is required to respond, you will be kept updated.

3. Stage 3

3.1. If you are not satisfied with the response at Stage 2, you may request a review by writing to the Trust Lead Governance Professional at governance@lwlat.org.uk within 15 working days of receipt of the letter at Stage 2. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. The Trust's Lead Governance Professional will then determine the most appropriate action with regards to Stage 3.

4. Stage 4

4.1. If you are dissatisfied with the decision at Stage 3, you are entitled to refer your complaint to the Department for Education (DfE). Further information about making a complaint to the DfE, including an online enquiry form, can be accessed on the DfE's website: How DfE handles complaints about academies

4.2. Concerns or complaints regarding the Principal or the Trust should be referred direct to the Trust's Lead Governance Professional at governance@lwlat.org.uk who will arrange for the stages above to be considered by an appropriate person.

Part 3: Repetitious and vexatious complaints and complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

There are rare circumstances where we will deviate from the complaints procedure set out in Parts 1 and 2. These include, but are not necessarily limited to:

1. Repetitious, including serial and/or persistent, complaints

1.1. Where the complainant's complaint is the same, similar to or based on the same facts of a complaint which has already been considered in full and we have:

- taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
- given the complainant a clear statement of our position and their options

1.2. We will write to the complainant to advise that the complaints procedure has been exhausted and that we will not be responding to any further correspondence in relation to these matters. The complainant will be referred to Stage 4.

2. Vexatious complaints

2.1. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator defines the characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint as:

- complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitious
- insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason
- insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner
- complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value

2.2. Examples include but are not limited to:

- refusal to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refusal to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- refusal to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insistence on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introducing trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raising large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- seeking an unrealistic outcome, such as the inappropriate dismissal of staff

- making excessive demands on Academy time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- knowingly providing falsified information
- publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

3. Complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

3.1. Where the complainant's behaviour or language towards staff, governors, trustees or members is aggressive, abusive, offensive, discriminatory or threatening or insulting personal comments are made about, or threats are made towards, staff.

3.2. In the circumstances outlined in (2) and (3) above, we may:

- inform the complainant that we consider their complaint to be vexatious or the manner in which they are pursuing their complaint to be unreasonable and why, and ask them to desist
- conduct the Complaint Panel on the papers only i.e. not hold a hearing
- refuse to consider the complaint any further and refer the complainant if all the following conditions are meet:
    - we have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
    - the complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options
    - the complainant contacts us repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time
- The case to stop responding is stronger if we agree with one or more of these statements:
    - their letters, emails, or telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive
    - they make insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff
    - we have reason to believe the individual is contacting us with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

3.3. We will not stop responding just because an individual is difficult to deal with or asks complex questions.

3.4. We may also restrict the complainant's access to the Academy, e.g. requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only), requiring contact to take place with a named person only, restricting telephone calls to specified days and times or number of contacts or banning the complainant from the Academy's premises.

3.5. Where the complainant's behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, governors, trustees or members we will consider other options - for example, reporting the matter to the police or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

Part 4: Complaint Campaigns

1. Definitions

1.1. 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) which are all based on the same subject.

1.2. Depending on the subject in question, we may deviate from the procedure set out in this policy and instead:

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

Appendix 1 - Matters Covered by Other Trust policies

All Trust policies can be found on the Trust website.

List of Matters	Signposting
Admissions	The process for challenging admissions decisions is set out in academy admissions policies in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.
Child protection matters	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under each Academy's' **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.
Exclusions	The process for challenging exclusions decisions is set out in the DfE's statutory guidance and information can be found at: School suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
National Curriculum content	Please contact the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk/contactus
Academy re-organisation proposals	Where concerns are not adequately addressed by the Academy, complaints can be raised directly with the Department for Education.
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use Trust premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about their service. Please contact them direct.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the Trust **Grievance Procedures**.
Staff conduct	Certain complaints about staff may need to be dealt with under the Trust **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.
Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with the local authority.
Whistleblowing	We have a Trust **Whistleblowing Policy** for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person 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

Appendix 2 - Summary of Complaints Procedure for Parents & Carers (Part 1)

Stage 1: **Informal concerns**	Parent brings complaint to attention of member of Academy staff
	Issue to be resolved (guide: within 15 working days)
	Where no satisfactory solution has been found, parent to be advised that they should proceed to Stage 2

Stage 2: **Formal Written Complaint**	Parent to put complaint in writing, for the attention of member of Academy staff within 15 working days. Use of the Complaint Form is highly recommended.
	Complaint to be acknowledged within five working days
	Meeting with parents within 10 working days (where appropriate)
	Response to the complaint sent within 15 working days
	Where no satisfactory solution has been found, parent should proceed to Stage 3

Stage 3: **Referral to Complaint Panel**	Parent to request, to the Trust Lead Governance Professional at goverance@lwlat.org.uk a hearing within 15 working days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 2
	Request to be acknowledged within five working days
	Hearing to take place within 20 working days of receipt of request
	Notification of date, time and place of the hearing and details of the panel members present sent at least five working days before the hearing
	Academy representative and parents to submit evidence in support of their case to the Trust Lead Governance Professional at goverance@lwlat.org.uk at least three working days before the hearing
	Complaint Panel decision sent not more than five working days after the hearing

Appendix 3 - Complaints Form

Your name:
Learner's name:
Your relationship to learner:
Your address and postcode:
Your daytime telephone number:
Your evening telephone number:
Your email address:
Your complaint is: (if you have more than one complaint, please number these)
What action have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint(s) in accordance with Stage 1 of the Trust Complaints Policy? (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)

What would you like as an outcome from your complaint(s)?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, give details here:

Your signature: Date:

All functions of the complaints procedure must adhere to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Please complete and return to the Academy office in a sealed envelope addressed to the Principal or Trust Lead Governance Professional marked **Private and Confidential**.

For Office use only

Date received:

Date acknowledgement sent:

Responsible member of staff: