



THE CONSORTIUM
ACADEMY TRUST

Shaping Positive Futures

Concerns and Complaints Policy

The Consortium Academy Trust (TCAT)
An Exempt Charity Limited by Guarantee
Company Number 07665828

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Policy Owner (position)	Director of Governance
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**NB – This document can only be considered valid when viewed on The Consortium Academy Trust website. If the copy is printed or downloaded and saved elsewhere the Policy date should be cross referenced to ensure the current document is referenced. The linked policies can be viewed at www.consortiumtrust.co.uk*

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I. Introduction

We welcome positive feedback and enjoy being able to pass on compliments to our staff. If you would like to share positive feedback, please email enquiries@consortiumtrust.co.uk

We aim to resolve concerns or complaints at the earliest possible stage and, where possible, informally. **Please contact the school (in person /email /telephone call) in the first instance with any concern /complaint to give the school the opportunity to resolve.**

If the issue is regarding shared services, then please email complaints@consortiumtrust.co.uk

Equally we recognise there may be times when you may have concerns or wish to make a complaint about an aspect of our work. Any person, including members of the public, may raise a concern or make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that we provide, unless separate statutory procedures apply (see section 4 for details of the scope of this policy).

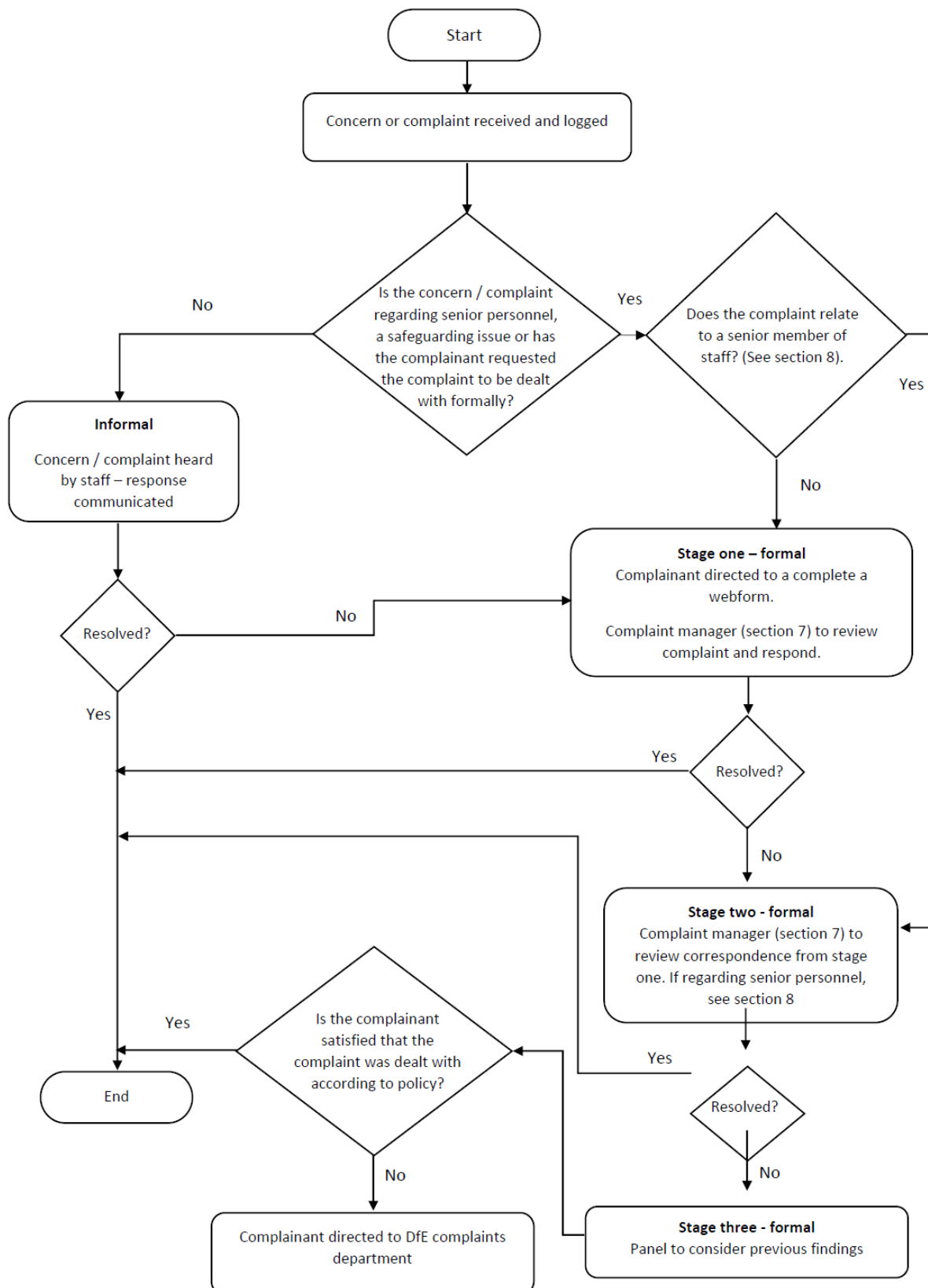
This policy has been created to handle concerns and complaints relating to any aspects of the provision of facilities or services against:

- Any member of staff
- Any school within the Trust
- Any Local Governing Body of the Trust
- Individual Trustees or the Board of Trustees
- The Trust as a whole

The policy is designed to be straightforward, impartial, non-adversarial, allows a full and fair investigation, respects confidentiality, and delivers an effective response and appropriate redress.

Once a complaint has been made, it can be resolved or withdrawn at any stage.

2. Process Flowchart (new)



3. Legislation and guidance

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Education Act 2002
- Equality Act 2010
- Part 7 of The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014
- Immigration Act 2016
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- HM Government (2016) 'Code of Practice on the English language requirement for public sector workers'
- ESFA (2021) 'Best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures'
- DfE (2025) 'Academy trust handbook 2025'

This policy meets the requirements set out in [part 7 of the schedule to the Education \(Independent School Standards England\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that the Trust must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents/carers of learners at the school.

It is also based on guidance published by the Department for Education on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations, and refers to [good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE). This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

4. Scope of this policy

This procedure covers all concerns /complaints about any provision of facilities or services by the Trust, other than those that are dealt with under other statutory procedures listed below.

Exceptions	Relevant Policy/Procedure
• 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 are dealt with under the relevant Admissions Policy and in accordance with statutory guidance.
• 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).
• Exclusion of children from school	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions .

	Trust Suspension and Exclusion Policy
Whistleblowing	We have an internal Whistleblowing Policy 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 whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under our Grievance Policy.
Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises / facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.
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.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or tribunals, 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.

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

5. Concerns and Complaints

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*'.

Both concerns and complaints can be dealt with informally, usually by a telephone call or meeting with an appropriate member of staff.

Some issues raised will not reach the threshold of a concern – such as a reported missing PE kit or a forgotten parents' evening time slot. An issue is only a concern when it is believed that if left untreated then it could lead to a complaint.

6. Raising a concern or complaint informally

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 this policy. Dealing with the issue informally will often provide a speedier response.

An informal concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone, directly to the school or the shared services central offices (if the issue is regarding shared services). They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant if they have appropriate written consent to do so.

If, after raising with the school /shared services the complainant feels that the issue remains unresolved, then they will be referred to section 7 – raising a formal complaint.

7. Raising a formal complaint

Logging your complaint

We understand that an informal process may not always be appropriate. For example, if the subject matter of the complaint relates to alleged serious misconduct, a safeguarding matter or where the complainant would like to raise the matter formally. In such cases, we will aim to resolve the issue through the process outlined below.

All formal complaints must be made using the Complaints Form that is on the Trust and each school website. The electronic forms will feed directly to the central complaints helpdesk. If the person does not have any means to complete the form online, hard copies of the form can be found at each School Reception. In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure.

The complainant will receive an automatic acknowledgement including a unique call number immediately.

Stage 1

The complaint will be referred to the appropriate Complaint Manager (see table below).

If the complaint involves senior personnel, the complaint will be passed to the person listed in section 8.

Stage	Complaint Manager
1	Any member of Senior Leadership that the Headteacher appoints to deal with the complaint. If the complaint is regarding shared services, then a Head of Department/ Service will be assigned by a Director
2	The Headteacher or Shared Service Director Complaints about senior personnel to be investigated by those listed in section 8.
3	Panel of three (at least one panel member that is independent of the management and running of the school) A governor from another Trust school can be an independent panel member as they have no direct involvement with the management and running of the school being complained about

The Complaint Manager may investigate the complaint themselves or may choose to appoint an 'Investigating Officer'.

The Investigating Officer will take time to understand the nature and scope of the issues raised and undertake a fact-finding exercise to establish the facts. If the matter is particularly complex, we may consider appointing an external Investigating Officer.

During the investigation, the Investigating Officer (or the Complaint Manager if they choose to investigate the complaint themselves) will:

- Establish the facts relating to the complaint
- Speak to the complainant
- If necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Collect any related documents

The Investigating Officer will complete the investigation in adequate time for the Complaint Manager to come to an informed decision.

The Complaint Manager is responsible for determining the outcome of the complaint and writing a formal response. The decision will be based on the **balance of probabilities** – i.e. more likely than not that something has occurred.

The Complaint Manager will aim to provide a formal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint (or notification of its escalation). If unable to meet this deadline, the complainant will be provided with an update and revised response date.

The response will provide an explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the Trust will take to resolve the complaint. At each stage, the Complaint Manager will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they be dissatisfied.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 then the complaint will be escalated to Stage 2 of the policy.

Stage 2

(Complaints against senior personnel will be dealt with at Stage 2 and the Complaint Manager will follow the approach to the investigation outlined in Stage 1.)

A new Complaint Manager will be appointed If the complaint wishes to escalate their Stage 1 complaint to the next stage.

All supporting documentation from Stage 1 will be provided to the appropriate Complaint Manager at Stage 2.

The Stage 2 Complaint Manager is entitled to rely upon the facts established during the investigation completed at Stage 1 and may confer with the Stage 1 Investigating Officer or Complaint Manager if necessary.

The Stage 2 Complaint Manager may decide to undertake further investigations themselves or through appointing another Investigating Officer if:

- The initial investigation at Stage 1 is incomplete, does not include all relevant evidence, or has determined facts which are not consistent with the evidence; or
- Further information has come to light that needs to be investigated; or
- In the unlikely event that the investigation has not been undertaken in good faith or if there is evidence of bias.

The Stage 2 Complaint Manager will provide a formal written response within 10 school days which sets out their decision and will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint to Stage 3 should they be dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

Stage 3

This is the final stage of the Complaints process. The Compliance Manager will contact the complainant and request availability for the complainant to attend a panel meeting.

The panel will consist of three governors who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, at least one of which is independent of the school.

Where the complaint concerns an individual school, in line with the DfE's guidance, a local governor serving on the Local Governing Board of a different school within the Trust may occupy this independent panel member role, as they will be sufficiently separate from the school.

The complainant will be informed of the date of the meeting, which will be within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the panel Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

The panel will make all reasonable attempts to accommodate a complaint meeting with the complainant, but should the complainant be unable to attend after two attempts at convening a meeting, or should they refuse to attend a meeting the Trust is entitled to:

- Convene a meeting in their absence
- Reach a conclusion on the evidence available in the interests of drawing the complaint to a close

The panel will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations/gathering insight/evidence over the telephone, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the issues raised and the complainant's needs. If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support provided confidentiality is maintained. This can be a relative or friend. We do not encourage either party to bring their child or legal representatives to the panel meeting. However, there may be occasions when either is appropriate. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Representatives from the media or any form of covert recording equipment are not permitted.

The panel is entitled to rely upon the investigation completed at Stage 1 to establish the facts relating to the complaint, but may decide to undertake further investigations through appointing an Investigating Officer if:

- The investigation at Stage 1 was incomplete, do not include all relevant evidence, or have determined facts which are not consistent with the evidence; or
- Further information has become known that needs to be investigated, or
- In the unlikely event that the investigation has not been undertaken in good faith or if there is evidence of bias.

At least 5 school days before the meeting, the Clerk of the meeting 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
- Share any written material with the complainant and the panel

The panel will not review any new aspect to the complaint at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint.

The panel members will appoint their own Chair.

Recording of the panel hearing may take place for accuracy of the minute taking. Consent of all parties attending must be sought before recording takes place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. The meeting will be held in private.

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

- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the panel 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 Panel will provide the complainant with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days of the hearing. The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled.

8. Complaints about senior personnel

Complaints against senior personnel will always be dealt with formally by the following members of staff (Complaint Managers).

Complaint regarding	Complaint Manager
School Senior Leadership Team	Headteacher
Headteacher	CEO or LGB Chair
Shared Service Directors	CEO
Director of Governance	Trustee
CEO	Trustee
Trustees	Chair of the Trust
Chair of the Trust	Independent panel or Members
Individual Governors	Chair of Governors

9. Further information

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the CEO or Chair of the Board of Trustees, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Vexatious communications

Vexatious communications will be dealt with under the Dealing with Persistent and Vexatious Complaints and Harassment Policy.

Duplicate complaints

For the purpose of this policy, “duplicate complaints” are identical complaints received from a complainant’s spouse, partner or child or a repeated attempt by a complainant to revisit the same facts or circumstances that have been previously considered under this policy. These complaints will not be addressed again and the individual making the second complaint will be informed that the complaint has been dealt with. If the individual is dissatisfied with the result, they can appeal to the DfE, as outlined in the Next Steps section of this policy, (section 11). Any new details provided by a complainant’s spouse, partner or child, however, will be investigated and managed in line with this procedure.

Time scales

You must raise the complaint within three calendar months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three calendar months of the last of these incidents. It is entirely at our discretion as to whether we consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

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

Decision making

Our decision will be based on the balance of probabilities – i.e. that it is more likely than not that something has occurred.

Withdrawal of a complaint

Where a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing. Despite the complaint having been withdrawn, we are still entitled to continue any investigation we see fit.

We will not under any circumstances ask, or pressure an individual, to withdraw a complaint.

Approaching Governors directly

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. Governors have no power to act on an individual basis, and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Recording Meetings

We may wish to use a recording device for accuracy of the minutes. Should you wish to use a recording device you will seek our agreement in advance.

Audio or Video Evidence

We will **not** accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without informed consent of all parties being recorded.

Handling Complaints Fairly

We will make sure that complainants are treated fairly and offered a chance to state their case either in person or in writing, at each stage of the procedure.

10. Record keeping

A record will be kept of all complaints, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision. The record will be kept no longer than is reasonably necessary in accordance with the UK GDPR.

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

11. Next steps

If the complainant believes that the Trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the DfE after they have completed Stage 2.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by The Consortium Academy Trust. They 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 DfE online at [Home - Customer Help Portal](#) or by telephone on 0370 000 2288.