

Complaints Resolution Procedure

Approved by Governor committee:
N/A

Date to be reviewed:
December 2023

Responsibility of:
The Principal

Date ratified by Governing Board:
12th December 2022

1.Introduction

The values and ethos of the Academy are central to our Complaints Resolution Procedure. We are committed to ensuring the highest levels of communication and partnership with our parents through our pastoral structure, regular opportunities for face-to-face and written/electronic communication and our Home-Academy Agreement.

Parents/carers, students and any other interested parties (hereafter, complainant) are encouraged, through this procedure and through the pastoral structure, to raise concerns or to make complaints easily and without anxiety and in the knowledge that concerns and complaints will be treated seriously, impartially and, except where disclosure is legally required, confidentially.

This Complaints Resolution Procedure describes the actions to be followed if a complainant wishes to make a formal complaint about any aspect of Chelsea Academy. This includes complaints about the curriculum, but excludes complaints for which other policies exist including Sexual Health and Relationships Education, Admissions, Exclusions, Special Educational Needs and Staff Grievances.

This policy is written with due regard to the government guidance, *Best Practice guidance for academies complaints procedures* updated March 2021 and meets the requirements in the standard at the *Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014*, Schedule 1, Part 7.

2. The Five Stage Procedure

The key stages of our Complaints Resolution Procedure are as follows:

Stage 1	Informal Resolution with a relevant staff member.
Stage 2	Formal Complaint to the relevant member of Leadership Team for investigation
Stage 3	Formal Resolution by appeal to the Principal.
Stage 4	Independent Resolution through a panel hearing.
Stage 5	Referral to the Department for Education (DfE)

Note: If a complaint is made directly against the Principal the procedure begins at Stage 4.

2a. Stage 1 – Informal Resolution (this is where most complaints will be dealt with)

Resolution

Complainants should, wherever possible, seek an early and informal resolution of all concerns. Chelsea Academy will take reasonable measures necessary to respond to and rectify any concerns before they become a Formal Complaint. Such measures will include some or all of the following:

- giving advice or reassurance;
- explaining the context to an incident or decision;
- gathering information from other staff or students;
- finding information from other sources;
- referring the concern or potential complaint to a senior colleague;
- reviewing or amending practice; giving feedback to complainant;
- apologising for mistakes or oversights; or
- arranging an informal meeting to listen to, and try and solve, the complaint.

The member of staff who responds to the complainant should provide a prompt summary in writing to the complainant within 10 school days, detailing the concern and what has been done at the informal resolution stage.

Making contact

A complainant with a concern or potential complaint should normally first contact the student's Learning Coach, if the concern is of a pastoral nature, or the child's classroom teacher, if the concern is around learning and lessons. There may be occasions where the first contact may be with an alternative, normally more senior teacher, for example the student's Head of Year or Curriculum Leader. Other staff (for example, a subject teacher, or member of the Leadership Team) may need to be involved or consulted if this teacher cannot resolve the matter alone.

If the complainant is not putting forward a complaint on behalf of, or in respect of, a particular student, if, for example, it is a member of the public, contact would be made with the Principal, via the Principal's EA and the matter dealt with accordingly (which could include other members of the Leadership Team resolving the issue).

Parents and carers are welcome to contact the Chair of Governors in the manner outlined on the Academy website on any issue, however if they are raising a concern or complaint the Academy will ask that they follow the Complaints Resolution procedure.

Any complaint against a member of the Leadership Team should go to the Principal in the first instance, although the Principal may choose to ask another member of the Leadership Team to respond, at their discretion. The appointed member of the Leadership Team will always be senior to the member of the Leadership Team against whom the complaint is being made. A complaint against the Principal should go straight to the Chair of Governors (via letter marked Private and Confidential).

Time-frame

In the event that a complainant is dissatisfied with Chelsea Academy's response through the informal complaints resolution process, then they are entitled to proceed with a formal written complaint in accordance with the procedure below (this will be within 10 school days from the date of the informal decision letter)

2b. Stage 2 – 5 Formal Complaints

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution by the relevant member of the Extended Leadership Team

1. If the concern or complaint has not been resolved informally, the complainant should put it in writing using the Formal Complaint Record (**Appendix A**), addressed to the relevant member of Extended Leadership Team (**Appendix B**). The Principal may, at their discretion, decide that a different member of the Extended Leadership Team should respond to the complaint.
2. In their complaint, the complainant is required to suggest proportionate and reasonable action which will resolve their complaint.
3. There will be an initial response within 10 school days of the complaint being received. Where necessary, the member of the Extended Leadership Team will meet with the complainant to discuss the matter and if possible to reach a resolution at this stage.
4. Where a complaint is received during a school holiday, it will be deemed to have reached the school on the first full school day following its arrival.
5. It may be necessary to carry out investigations. The Academy has the discretion to decide which member of the Extended Leadership Team should lead on the investigation. The member of the Extended Leadership Team will keep records of all complaints, and of meetings held in relation to them. Once the member of Extended Leadership Team is satisfied that all the relevant facts have been established, a response to the complaint will be made and the complainant will be informed in writing, within 15 school days of the Formal Complaint being received by Chelsea Academy.

6. The nature of the response will depend on the nature of the complaint but it will always give a judgement whether and to what extent, if at all, the complaint is justified, and reasons; the response may include actions which the Academy intends to take or a decision.
7. A complainant, for complaints of a particularly serious kind (and for any complaints relating to the actions or conduct of a member of Leadership Team), may choose to address the Formal Complaint directly to the Principal, in which case Stage 3, the Formal Resolution by Appeal to the Principal, will be dealt with by the Principal.

Stage 3 – Formal Resolution by Appeal to the Principal

1. If Stage 2 has not resolved the complaint satisfactorily the complainant should write to the Principal within 15 school days of the date of the written response stating why an appeal for resolution by the Principal is requested and, wherever possible, the action which the complainant wishes Chelsea Academy to take to resolve the concern.
2. The Principal will acknowledge the appeal. Stage 3 will then follow the same steps, timescale, record keeping and form of response as set out for resolution by the member of the Extended Leadership Team in Stage 2.
3. If the complainant is not happy with the Principal's response at Stage 3 then they can request this to be escalated to Stage 4. This must be done in writing to the Chair of Governors and the complainant must explain clearly how they would like the complaint resolved. This must be within 10 school days of the date of the decision letter.

Stage 4 – Independent Resolution through a panel hearing

1. If Stage 3 has not resolved a complaint satisfactorily, the complainant should write within 10 school days of the Principal's response to The Chair of Governors, who will acknowledge the letter of complaint within five school days of receiving the complaint.
2. A panel of two Governors and one member who is independent of the management and the running of the Academy (all of whom have not been involved in the complaint up to this point) will be convened to hear the complaint, normally within 20 school days of the complaint being acknowledged by the Chair of Governors.
3. The Clerk to the Governors or EA to the Principal (depending on availability), unless he/she is the object of the complaint, will be present to act as clerk to the panel.
4. Members of the panel will have access to all relevant documentation and will be able to ask representatives of Chelsea Academy and the complainant for any other relevant information or documentation. It is intended that the process should not be legalistic.
5. The complainant may be accompanied at this meeting by one other person (e.g. relative, friend or a relevant specialist). If the complaint is from a group then no more than two representatives from that group will be allowed to attend the meeting.
6. If a student has made a complaint, they are encouraged to bring a parent, and may also be accompanied by one other person (e.g. relative, friend or a relevant specialist).
7. Due to the sensitive nature of some complaints it may be inappropriate for a student to be in the entirety of the panel hearing. The Chair of the complaints panel will, where he/she feels it is appropriate, ask a student of the Academy to leave the panel hearing at their discretion. The Chair also has the right to remove any person whose behaviour is unacceptable.
8. Both the Academy and the complainant can submit supporting papers to the complaints panel and these will be accepted at the discretion of the Chair of the panel.
9. If the Chair of the panel imposes a deadline before which papers must be submitted, then they reserve the right to refuse anything submitted after that date.
10. The Principal may be accompanied by another person to support them during the hearing.
11. If possible, the panel will resolve the complaint without further investigation. Where further investigation is needed, the panel will decide how to carry out the investigation.

12. After due consideration of all relevant facts, the panel will give written findings in response to the complaint; the findings will depend on the nature of the complaint but the panel will always give a judgement whether and to what extent, if at all, the complaint is justified, and the panel's reasons. The findings may include recommendations or actions which the panel requires Chelsea Academy to take.
13. The findings of the panel will be final. A copy of the findings will be sent to the complainant, Principal and Governors (at the Academy address) and any person who is the object of the complaint, by electronic mail or by post, at the discretion of the panel.

Stage 5 - Referral to the Department of Education.

If Stage 4 has not resolved a complaint satisfactorily, the complainant should write within 10 school days of the report of the Governors' findings on the complaint, to the Department of Education requesting their advice using the online form.

3. Complaint Campaigns

Chelsea Academy, like all schools, could become the focus of a complaint campaign and receive a large volume of complaints which:

- Are all based on the same subject
- Include complainants unconnected with the Academy.

Should this be the case, the Academy will respond to the first complainant following the same steps, timescale, record keeping and form of response as outlined at stage 2. The Principal will then ensure that others who have complained as part of the same campaign receive, or are sign-posted to, the response (in a way which respects the original complainant's confidentiality). This could mean:

- Sending a template response to all complainants
- Publishing a single response on the Academy's website.

4. Students wishing to make a complaint

Students are entitled to make a formal complaint in exceptional circumstances. The pastoral structure of Chelsea Academy gives many opportunities for informal resolution and all reasonable attempts should be made to resolve concerns before a formal complaint. If a student wishes to carry forward a formal complaint, the stages outlined above apply.

5. Confidentiality

All information, correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential by the Academy, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting a formal inspection requests access to them. Complainants are expected to comply with the confidentiality of the process.

6. Complaints Register

Chelsea Academy will maintain a register of all formal complaints (Stage 2 and above). This register will help to identify trends and ensure that a resolution is made with appropriate feedback to the relevant parties.

7. Publication of Procedures

The existence of the Complaints Resolution Procedure shall be published on Chelsea Academy's website as part of its publication scheme. Printed copies are available on request at Chelsea Academy.

8. Summary of time scales for a complaint

	Initial response by Academy	Investigation and response	Response by complainant*
Informal	Within 10 school days of a concern being raised.	Included in initial response.	A formal complaint to be made within 10 school days from the date of the informal decision letter.
Formal	Within 10 school days of the complaint being received.	Within 15 school days of the complaint being received.	Within 15 school days of the date of the member of the Leadership Team's written response.
Appeal	Within 10 school days of receipt of the appeal request.	Within 15 school days of the appeal.	Within 10 school days of the date of the Principal's written response.
Independent	Within 5 school days of receipt of the complaint.	Within 20 school days of the initial response to the complaint.	Within 10 school days of the date of the Governors' report.

*After any of these time intervals have elapsed, it will be assumed that the complainant does not wish to continue with the complaint, and the matter will be closed by the Academy. Complainants cannot re-open a closed complaint unless there are exceptional circumstances to justify their doing so.

9. Conduct and unreasonable complainants

Chelsea Academy is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially in accordance with its Complaints Resolution Procedure. Chelsea Academy expects that all parties will be respectful and courteous throughout the complaints process to maintain the confidentiality of it and Chelsea Academy will not tolerate verbal or physical harassment or abuse towards any of its staff members. The Academy will not tolerate any attempts to make public statements or derogatory or negative comments about the Academy or employees during this process.

In cases where threats are made against staff or allegations are made public or unnecessary unpleasant behaviour is seen, the Academy reserves the right to impose communication restrictions. This will only be done in exceptional circumstances and the Academy will warn complainants that their behaviour is unreasonable before issuing any restrictions. This will not prevent the complaint from being considered.

The Principal may decide to class a complaint as vexatious, if it has the following characteristics:

- complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, 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

There will also inevitably be situations where, despite all stages of the complaints resolution procedure having been followed, the complainant will remain dissatisfied. In this instance, the Academy will inform a complainant who tries to re-open the same issue that the procedure has been completed and the matter is closed. If the complainant chooses to contact the Academy again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the Academy may choose not to respond.

Whilst the Academy will note names of those who have made vexatious, serial or persistent complaints, the Academy will not refuse to accept further correspondence or complaints from an individual they have had repeat or excessive contact with. The application of a 'serial or persistent' marking should be against the subject or complaint itself rather than the complainant.

In rare circumstances the Academy may, having taken the appropriate advice, pause or stop the complaints process. Where complainants have previously had a complaint deemed as vexatious this will also be considered as a reason to pause or stop the complaints process. More guidance on how this type of behaviour will be dealt with, and how the decision to stop responding will be made, is available in Appendix C.

Appendix A
Formal Complaint Record

Please complete all sections of this record. The record should be sent to the Principal's PA, Chelsea Academy.

Name of complainant: _____

Name of student at Chelsea Academy: _____

Please give **full details** of your Formal Complaint.

Please suggest the **proportionate and reasonable** action that Chelsea Academy can take to resolve your Formal Complaint

If you would like to do so, please continue on a separate sheet or attach a letter to this Formal Complaint Record.

Appendix B

Extended Leadership Team contacts for stage 2

Principal	Complaint against a member of Leadership Team
Senior Vice Principal (Inclusion)	Safeguarding; bullying; pastoral care; SEND
Vice Principal (Quality of Education)	Teaching and Learning; Curriculum; subject choices
Director of Finance and Operations	Premises; financial management; catering; Staff recruitment; Community liaison
Assistant Principal (Teaching and Learning)	Feedback and Assessment
Assistant Principal (Inclusion)	Christian Ethos; Community conduct; School trips; Student Voice
Assistant Principal (KS4 and Data)	Exams
Assistant Principal (KS5)	Sixth Form; Bursary

The Principal may, at their discretion, decide that a different member of the Extended Leadership Team to that specified above should respond to a complaint.

Appendix C

Unreasonable Complaints

This appendix sets out how we will decide which actions or behaviours will be treated as unreasonable or unreasonably persistent, and what we will do in those circumstances.

It is important to distinguish between people who make a number of complaints because they really think things have gone wrong, and people who are unreasonably persistent in making their complaints. The Academy will always seek to respond to a complainant and respond appropriately.

If the complainant is persisting because their complaints have not been considered in full then the Academy must address this. However, if the Academy has already done so and has demonstrated this to the complainant, the Principal (or Chair of the Governors Panel) should consider whether the behaviour of the complainant is now inappropriately persistent. This process should only be used as a last resort and after all reasonable measures have been taken to resolve complaints in accordance with the Academy's Complaints Resolution Procedure.

Identifying unreasonable or unreasonably persistent behaviour

We will not tolerate deceitful, abusive, offensive, threatening, discriminatory or other forms of unacceptable behaviour from complainants, nor will personal attacks or threats towards employees be tolerated. When such actions occur, the Chelsea Academy will take proportionate action to protect the wellbeing of our staff and the integrity of our processes; this may include closing the complaint following a warning that the behaviour is not acceptable.

The following are some of the actions and behaviours which the Academy would consider to be unreasonably persistent behaviour. Single incidents may be unacceptable but unreasonably persistent behaviour will usually be found when the complainant demonstrates the following behaviour over time:

- refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint despite offers of assistance;
- refusing to cooperate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
- refusing to accept that issues are not within the power of the Academy to investigate, change or influence;
- insisting on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the Complaints Resolution Procedure or with good practice (insisting, for instance, that there must not be any written record of the complaint);
- making what appears to be an unjustified complaint about the staff dealing with the complaints, and seek to have them replaced;
- making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff dealing with the complaint by, for example, lengthy phone calls or emails to numerous Academy staff and expecting immediate responses, raising subsidiary or new issues whilst a complaint is being addressed that were not part of the complaint at the start of the complaint process;
- introducing trivial or irrelevant new information whilst the complaint is being investigated and expecting this to be taken into account and commented on;
- changing the substance or basis of the complaint without reasonable justification whilst the complaint is being considered;
- denying statements made at an earlier stage in the complaint process;
- electronically recording meetings and conversations without the prior knowledge of the other person involved;
- refusing to accept the outcome of the complaint process after its conclusion or repeatedly arguing the point with no new evidence;

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- making the same complaint repeatedly, perhaps with minor differences, after the Complaints Resolution Procedure has been concluded, and insist that the minor differences constitute 'new' complaints which should be put through the full Complaints Resolution Procedure;
- raising numerous detailed but unimportant questions and insisting they are all answered.
- threatening staff both directly or indirectly.
- posting inappropriate comments about the Academy on social media or to external parties.

Actions in the event of unreasonable or unreasonably persistent behaviour.

In most instances when we consider someone's behaviour is unreasonable we will explain why and ask them to change it. We will also warn them that, if the behaviour continues, we may take action to restrict their contact with the Academy. Any restriction imposed should be appropriate and proportionate. Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of Academy staff we may report the matter to the police or consider taking legal action.

Restrictions that may be imposed by the Principal include:

- Restricting contact only with named members of staff;
- Restricting contact by telephone except with a named Academy staff member;
- Restricting correspondence in connection with the complaint to letter and not email;
- Banning a complainant from the Academy site except with prior permission from the Principal;
- Communicating with an alternative person, for example another parent/relative of a student.

In the event of unreasonable or unreasonably persistent behaviour which leads the Principal to impose restrictions, the Principal or designated member of Academy staff will notify the complainant:

- why their behaviour is being treated as unacceptable;
- the action the Academy is going to take;
- the duration of this action; and
- When this action will be reviewed.

Where the behaviour is abusive or it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, the Academy will consider other options, including reporting the matter to the police or taking legal action to restrict access to Academy premises. In such cases, the Academy may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

Ceasing contact

The decision to stop responding to a complainant will never be taken lightly. If the restrictions outlined above have been put in place but have not been followed by the complainant, or the situation is still not improved, then the Academy may decide to stop responding. This decision will only happen if:

- the Academy has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
- the complainant has been given a clear statement of the Academy's position and their options
- the complainant contacts the Academy repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

If any of the following statements apply, the Academy will be very likely to stop responding to a complainant:

- 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 that the individual is contacting us with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience.

If the decision to stop responding is taken by the Principal, the complainant will be notified of this in writing.