



KEYSTONE
ACADEMY TRUST

Concerns and Complaints Procedure

Updated by Tracey Roscher October 2023	Ratified by Trustees October 2023
Next Review due October 2024	

Introduction

All schools in Keystone Academy Trust (KAT) are committed to developing strong partnerships with parents/carers and other stakeholders. This provides a good basis for mutual understanding and for preventing and resolving complaints and grievances.

We hope that the adoption of a clear complaints procedure will help to ensure that most complaints are resolved quickly and smoothly and as close to the source of the misunderstanding or problem as possible. In this way complainants can feel assured from the outset that all complaints will be listened to carefully, in line with a defined procedure for dealing with issues that have not immediately been resolved. We also hope that a staged framework might prevent an early and unnecessary escalation of the problem. In addition, we will ensure that lessons learned from the investigation of complaints will prove useful to improve the academy's policy and practice.

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at any Keystone Academy Trust school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to the Trust about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

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

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

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure.

Keystone Academy Trust takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the CEO or the headteacher of each school will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the headteacher or CEO will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand, however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Keystone Academy Trust will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint:

Three stages

This policy sets out a three-stage complaints procedure:

Stage 1: informal raising of a concern raised orally or in writing to a member of staff

Stage 2: formal complaint in writing to the Headteacher

Stage 3: formal complaint in writing to the Local Governing Board

Stage 1 - A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or headteacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

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

Complaints against individual school staff (except the headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to The Headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints against a Head of School should be made in the first instance, to the Executive Headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints against the Headteacher or Executive Headteacher should be made in the first instance, to the Chair of Governors via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints against the CEO or Deputy CEO should be made in the first instance, to the Chair of Trustees via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole local governing board should be addressed to Mrs Gill Arnold (Clerk to the Trustees) via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Trustees, any individual Trustee or the whole board of Trustees should be addressed to Mrs Gill Arnold (Clerk to the Trustees) via Keystone Head Office, Bourne Westfield Primary Academy, Westbourne Park, Bourne PE10 9QS. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this policy. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice Bureau to help you.

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

Anonymous complaints

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

Time scales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

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

Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by any Keystone Academy Trust school, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<input type="checkbox"/> Admissions to schools <input type="checkbox"/> Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Lincolnshire County
<input type="checkbox"/> School re-organisation proposals	Council
<input type="checkbox"/> Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>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). LADO@lincolnshire.gcsx.gov.uk 01522 554674</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Exclusion of children from school*	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i> <i><link to school behaviour policy></i>.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Whistleblowing	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>

<input type="checkbox"/> Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the internal grievance procedures of Keystone Academy Trust
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, of Keystone Academy Trust. 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.
<input type="checkbox"/> Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
<input type="checkbox"/> National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

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 any school or parties in connection with Keystone Academy Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Keystone Academy Trust wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

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

Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

Stage 2

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher/Head of School (unless they are about the Headteacher/Head of School), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing on the Complaint Form.

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

Within this response, the Headteacher/Head of School will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher/Head of School can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Headteacher/Head of School may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Headteacher/Head of School (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher/Head of School will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Headteacher/Head of School is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

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

The Headteacher/Head of School will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

If the complaint is about the headteacher, or a member of the local governing board (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled Trustee and the CEO will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about the Head of School must be made to the Executive Headteacher via the school office.

Complaints about the Headteacher, Executive Headteacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk to Trustees, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- **jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or**
- **the entire local governing board or**
- **the majority of the local governing board**

Stage 2 will be considered by the CEO and an impartial Trustee from the Keystone Academy Trust board and a panel member that is independent of the management and running of the academy. At the conclusion of their investigation, the panel will:

- provide a formal written response to the complainant and where relevant, the person complained about.
- Make a copy of the report available for inspection on the academy premises by the Trustees, members and the Headteacher.
- If the complaint is about the CEO/Deputy CEO stage 2 will be considered by the Chair of Trustees and an independent investigator. At the conclusion of their investigation, the panel will:
- provide a formal written response to the complainant and the CEO
- Make a copy of the report available for inspection by the Trustees and the Members.

If the complaint is:

- **jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair of the Trustees or**
- **the entire board of Trustees or**
- **the majority of the board of Trustees**
- Stage 2 will be considered by two of the Members and a panel member that is independent of the management and running of the trust. At the conclusion of their investigation, the panel will: provide a formal written response to the complainant and where relevant, the person/persons complained about.
- Make a copy of the report available for inspection by the members.

Stage 3

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3;

- a meeting with members of the local governing boards complaints committee, which will be formed a local governor with no previous knowledge of the complaint, a trustee from Keystone Academy Trust with no previous knowledge of the complaint and an independent panel member. Or
 - a meeting with members of the board of Trustees' complaints committee, which will be formed of the first two, impartial, Trustees available and an independent panel member.
- Or
- an extraordinary meeting of the members' complaints panel, which will be formed of the first two, impartial, Members available and an independent panel member.

The nature of the complaint and who the complaint is against will determine at which level the stage 3 procedures occur. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office and copied to the Clerk of Trustees, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 2 school days.

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

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

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

The complaints committee will consist of at least three panel members with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint at least one of whom will be completely independent of the management of the Trust. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than two governors, Trustees or members available an entirely independent committee will be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 3.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

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

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

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

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 10 school days before the meeting.

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

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

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

Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can: ☐ uphold the complaint in whole or in part;

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

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

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

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

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Keystone Academy Trust

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire local governing board or
- the majority of the local governing board

Stage 3 will be heard by a committee of independent trustees from within Keystone Academy Trust. The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school, local governing board or Trustees will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Keystone Academy Trust will provide for a written record to be kept of all complaints that are made.

It will record:

- (i) whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and
- (ii) action taken by the school as a result of those complaints

(regardless of whether they are upheld);

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

Vexatious/persistent complaints

Whilst it is hoped that this document will reduce any dissatisfaction with the Trust or any of its academies, it is acknowledged that there may be rare occasions where a complainant continues to be dissatisfied with the Academy/Trust and the outcomes achieved under the complaints procedure. Where a complainant attempts to re-open an issue which has already been dealt with under the complaints procedure, the chair of The Board of Trustees will contact them to inform them that the matter has already been dealt with and that either that stage of the policy has been exhausted or that the complaints procedure has been exhausted and the matter is considered closed.

Where further correspondence is received on the same matter, this may be considered vexatious and the Trust will be under no obligation to respond to that correspondence. If the complainant subsequently contacts the Trust again about the same issue, the Trust can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which the Trust will not respond is if:

- the Trust has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, and the Trust's position has been clearly set out in writing together with the complainant's options
- the complainant is contacting the Trust repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time
- the complainant refuses to follow the complaints procedures
- the Trust reasonably believes the aim of the contact is to cause disruption or inconvenience
- that the complainant acts or communicates in an inappropriate way towards Trust staff.

Once the Trust has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing. The Trust will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the Academy/Trust acts reasonably.

Our Parents and Carers Code of Conduct sets out clear expectations around communication with schools and what is considered unacceptable behaviour.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 3.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school or Trust. They will consider whether Keystone Academy Trust has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD.

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the designated person within the policy who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

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

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Roles and Responsibilities Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - consideration of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator (this could be the headteacher / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person keep records.

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- 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);

- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale;
- record the proceedings;
- circulate the minutes of the meeting;
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting;
- the meeting 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 meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person;
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant;
- 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.

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting;

- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently;
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- the meeting is minuted;
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so;
No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it;
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant;
We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations;
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting;
Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child;
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting;

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.