



COMPLAINTS POLICY

2024-25

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Reviewed by	IET Board - Annually
Next Review	September 2025

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1 Aims

At Isle Education Trust (IET) we will try to resolve every concern or complaint in a positive way and in a transparent manner. 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 complaint procedure.

The aim of this policy is to ensure that a complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level and resolved as soon as possible.

When responding to complaints we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial.
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate.
- Consider how the complaint can feed into academy and trust improvement processes
- support the vision and values of the Trust and its establishments

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

We will ensure we publicise this policy and make it available on the individual academy and Trust websites.

2 Legislation and Guidance

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

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 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.

English Language Requirement – Immigration Act 2016

A legitimate complaint received in respect of the above, whereby a member of the public feels that a public-facing member of staff has insufficient proficiency in English will be investigated in line with this policy.

Members of staff subject to the complaint will be notified of the complaint and given an opportunity to give their own account of the incident. A complaint will be assessed against an objective assessment of the level of fluency relevant to the role in question.

A complaint about a member of staff's accent, dialect, manner or tone of communication, origin or nationality will not be considered a legitimate complaint.

3 Definitions and Scope

This is the complaints policy for all Academies within Isle Education Trust and can also be used for general complaints that are not academy specific.

Concerns and Complaints

The DfE guidance explains 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'*.

IET will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.

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

We intend to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

Complaints not within the scope of this policy

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding/Child Protection matters
- Suspensions and permanent exclusions
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff conduct and discipline

These matters are already provided for by existing statutory procedures.

Please see [Appendix 1](#) for further information relating to complaints not within the scope of the policy.

Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with SEN about the academy's support are within the scope of this policy.

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

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 this happens, we will inform the complainant of a proposed new timescale.

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

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at an Isle Education Trust academy. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to IET 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. However, we reserve the right to amend parts of the procedure and in most cases if the complaint is not a parental complaint a more simplified process would be applied at Stage 3 with the CEO reviewing the complaint rather than a panel.

Anonymous complaints

Any anonymous concern or complaint will not be investigated under this procedure unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and the local process is complete
- Direct them to the ESFA if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint
- If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

Complaint campaigns

A complaint campaign is defined as the academy/trust receiving:

- a number of complaints all based on the same subject.
- multiple complaints from complainants unconnected to the academy.

In the event of a complaint campaign (as defined above), the academy will not respond to each complaint individually but will either:

- send a template response to all complainants or
- publish a single response on the academy or trust website.

4 Principles

Timescales

IET expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises. The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

Timescales in this policy are given in "school days". School days exclude weekends, bank holidays, school holidays and training days. When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, our aim is to resolve the complaint. If appropriate we will acknowledge whether 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 wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Social media

In order for complaints to be resolved as quickly and fairly as possible, IET requests that complainants do not discuss complaints publicly via social media such as Facebook. Complaints will be dealt with confidentially for those involved, and we expect complainants to also observe confidentiality. Defamatory, offensive, or otherwise inappropriate comments on social media will be reported to the appropriate authorities.

Right to be accompanied

Complainants have the right to be accompanied by a friend, relative or other third party to any meetings or hearings held under the formal stages in this Complaints Policy. These meetings are not legal proceedings, and the trust does not encourage either party to bring legal representation but will consider this on a case by case basis.

If a complainant does want to be accompanied by someone who is legally qualified, they must notify admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk at least 5 days prior to the meeting.

Any member of staff interviewed as part of the investigation process into a complaint has a right to be accompanied by to the meeting by another colleague or trade union representative.

Any student interviewed as part of the investigation process or who is the subject of the complaint must be accompanied to the meeting/hearing by a parent/carer or teacher who they are comfortable with.

Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

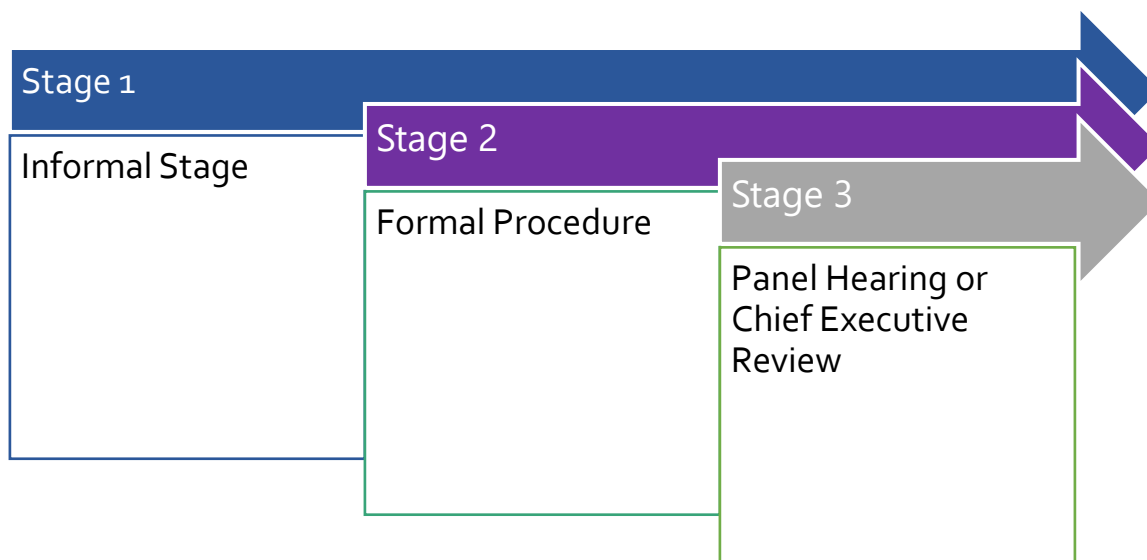
- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

We also intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits will be set for each action within each stage.

Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set, and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline with an explanation for the delay.

5 Complaint procedures at each stage

There are three stages to the IET Complaints Policy:



The aim of each stage is to ensure that the complaint is fully considered, and a clear finding is communicated to the complainant, which either resolves the matter to their satisfaction or explains why this is not possible.

Complainants will be given the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in line with policy, unless there is clear evidence that the complaint meets the unreasonably persistent or vexatious criteria defined within this Policy.

New issues or complaints raised at Stage 2 should be given the opportunity to go through Stage 1 to seek an efficient resolution for all parties involved. Complainants will be encouraged to seek resolution to the new issues or complaints through Stage 1 of the complaints process.

[Appendix 2](#) provides an overview of where to direct a complaint.

Stage 1: Informal Stage

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised in the first instance with the relevant teacher (the class teacher, form teacher, subject teacher, head of year) or an appropriate member of staff according to the matter concerned. This may be by letter, email, telephone or in person by requesting a meeting via the academy/trust office.

Complainants should not approach individual governors/trustees 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 a later stage of the procedure.

If the member of staff is unable to deal with the concern immediately or if they need to refer the matter to someone else, they will take note of the date and details and subsequently ensure that appropriate action is taken to deal with the matter without undue delay.

If a concern is raised with a member of staff who feels that they are not the best person to deal with it, the matter will be referred to the principal for them to determine the best person to deal with the matter. This does not escalate the stage of this policy the matter is being dealt with.

Where a concern is raised about a principal (or Executive Principal), the Chair of the Academy Oversight Committee (AOC) or Management Oversight Committee (MOC) should initially refer the concern to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Trust. The CEO will review the concern. If it is decided that the concern requires a formal investigation, it will be dealt with as a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure, otherwise it will be referred back to the academy for an informal resolution to be explored.

Any concern about the CEO should be referred to the Chair of Trustees. The Chair will review the concern. If it is decided that the concern requires a formal investigation, it will be dealt with as a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure, otherwise it will be referred back to the CEO for an informal resolution to be explored.

Wherever possible, concerns will be acknowledged within 3 school days and complainants will receive an informal response within 10 school days. If it is not possible to meet this deadline, the person raising the concern will be informed.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint (Stage 2).

Stage 2: Formal complaint

If a complainant feels that their concern or complaint has not been resolved to their satisfaction at the informal stage, or they wish the complaint to be dealt with immediately as a formal complaint as an informal resolution is unlikely, they may raise a formal complaint under this policy.

The complainant must put their complaint in writing to the principal (unless the complaint is about the principal) in which case it should be sent to admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk. This should be within 10 school days of receiving the Stage 1 letter.

Complainants should ensure that their letter of complaint provides as much detail as possible about the matter, including relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, copies of any relevant documents, and a clear indication of the action(s) they seek to resolve the complaint. To assist with this, the Stage 2 Complaint Form ([Appendix 3](#)) should be completed.

The principal (or IET admin) will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (by email) within 5 school days. Investigation of the complaint will be undertaken by the principal or delegated to a nominated individual ("the investigating officer"), as appropriate. Where delegated, the investigating officer will be a senior member of staff, governor, or trustee, who has had no prior involvement with the complaint.

If further information is required, the principal/investigating officer will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved, and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The principal/investigating officer will usually request a face-to-face meeting as the most appropriate way

of doing this. If a meeting is offered, the complainant may be accompanied by one other person such as a friend or relative to assist them in explaining the nature of their concerns.

The principal /investigating officer will then proceed to investigate the complaint.

If necessary, this will include interviewing those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish. If the complaint centres on a student, the student should also be interviewed. Students should normally be interviewed with their parent present, but if this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint or if the student (secondary academies only) has specifically said that they would prefer that their parents were not involved, another member of staff with whom the student feels comfortable should be present. If a member of staff is complained against, they must have the opportunity to present their case.

Once all the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, a written conclusion of the investigation will be sent to the complainant. Where reasonably possible, this will take place within 15 school days of receipt of the complaint.

If the principal/investigating officer 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 academy/trust will take to resolve the complaint. The outcome response will include:

- The findings of the investigation
- The outcome of the complaint, for example:
 - That, in the view of the investigating officer, the complaint requires no further action and the reasons why
 - That, in the view of the investigating officer there is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion and therefore the complaint cannot be upheld
 - An acknowledgement that the situation could have been handled differently or better

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and they wish to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the clerk, in writing to admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk within 10 school days of receiving the Stage 2 complaint response.

Stage 2: Formal complaint - variation for complaints against a Principal, Executive Principal or member of the Trust's Central Services Team

If the subject of the formal complaint is a Principal/ Executive Principal, then the complaint should be put in writing to the Chair of the AOC/MOC. If the subject of the complaint is a member of the Trust's Central Services Team, then the complaint should be put in writing to the CEO. In consultation with the Trust, an investigating officer not directly involved in the complaint will be appointed to review the matter. This may be the Chair of the AOC/MOC in the case of complaints against a principal. Another Principal, Executive Principal, or member of the Trust's Central Services Team will not be considered under this policy to be directly involved in a complaint through undertaking their management overview role.

The investigating officer will follow the procedure set out under Stage 2: Formal complaint above.

Stage 2: Formal complaint - variation for complaints against the Chief Executive Officer, Chair of AOC/MOC or the AOC/MOC (as a whole)

If the subject of the formal complaint is the Chief Executive Officer, Chair of AOC/MOC, or the whole AOC/MOC, then the complaint should be put in writing to the Chair of Trustees. The Chair of Trustees will appoint an investigating officer not directly involved in the complaint to review the matter. The Chair will also nominate a Trustee to make a recommendation or decision based on that report. The Chair of Trustees may fulfil either of these roles.

The investigating officer will follow the procedure set out under Stage 2: formal complaint above.

Stage 3: Panel Hearing or Chief Executive review

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the decision under the formal stage, they may request that a Panel is convened to review the complaint at Stage 3. The complaint will only be considered if the relevant procedures at Stages 1 and 2 have been followed.

This is the final stage of the IET complaints procedure.

To request a hearing by a Panel, the complainant should submit a request to admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk within 5 school days of the Stage 2 response being sent to the complainant, using the Stage 3 Panel Hearing Request Form ([Appendix 4](#)). Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The request must set out clearly the reasons why the complainant is dissatisfied with the response and may include evidence to support their reasons.

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

It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial. No individual may sit on the appeal panel if they have had prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. The panel review hearing will usually comprise of two people who are involved with IET governance (trustees or governors depending on the nature of the complaint) and one individual independent of the management and running of the academy/trust.

The independent member will not be an employee of the Trust. A member of an AOC/MOC from a different academy in the Trust is considered to have no conflict or prior knowledge of the complaint when a complaint is specific to an academy and not a trust wide complaint.

New allegations that have not been raised at Stage 2 may not be raised at this point. New evidence which was not provided before the completion of the Stage 2 investigation will not normally be considered. The chair of the panel shall have discretion to permit further evidence if it is relevant to the matters to be considered as part of the review.

The role of the Panel is not to conduct a further investigation of the complaint. The Panel's role is to consider the procedural fairness of the investigation undertaken at Stage 2 and the determination made.

The clerk will convene the panel hearing. Whenever possible, the panel hearing will be held within 15 school days of receipt of the hearing request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the panel hearing; however, the panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant.

All parties will be provided with at least 5 school days' notice of the hearing. Where a complainant refuses or is unable to attend a meeting and reasonable attempt have been made to accommodate them, the meeting may proceed in their absence and reach a conclusion in the interests of drawing the complaint to close.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress. Any written representations/relevant documentation for consideration by the panel and the names of any representatives attending the hearing should be sent to the clerk at least 3 school days prior to the hearing. Any submissions or documents not submitted in accordance with this timescale will not be considered unless the panel in their absolute discretion believes it is just to accept them.

If the complainant believes that a proposed member of the panel is biased, they should raise it with the clerk as soon as possible. They should submit evidence of the bias in support of the suggestion. Local governors with no prior exposure to the complaint will usually be considered to be unbiased unless evidence is shown to the contrary.

All parties will be issued with papers at least 3 school days prior to the hearing. The panel may request to speak to witnesses and this decision will be at the absolute discretion of the panel.

At the meeting:

At the Panel Hearing, the complainant and representatives from the academy/Trust (e.g. investigating officer and Principal), as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or verbal submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant may be accompanied at the meeting by one other person such as a friend or relative.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

The clerk will also attend the hearing in order to keep records of the proceedings.

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.

At the meeting, each party will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence. Witnesses may also be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the academy/Trust representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and academy/Trust representatives have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave the meeting and the panel will consider the evidence.

Unless otherwise communicated, the standard procedure for the Panel Hearing will be as set out in [Appendix 5](#).

After the panel hearing, the panel will consider their decision and inform the complainant of the decision within 5 school days. The panel will also provide a copy to the academy/Trust and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint. The panel can:

- Request further information from the complainant and/or the academy/trust to assist them in making their decision
- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- Uphold the complaint in whole or part.

If the complaint is upheld (either in whole or in part), the panel may:

- Make recommendations regarding suitable resolutions if they find that issues have been overlooked or not appropriately addressed at Stage 2
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the academy/trust systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not reoccur.

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

A copy of the panel's findings and recommendations will be made available for inspection on the academy/trust premises by the Trust and Principal.

Stage 3: Complaint review - variation for complaints against the CEO, Trust Central Team, Chair of AOC/MOC, and AOC/MOC (excluding individual members)

To request a Panel Hearing, the complainant should submit a request via admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk (or the Chair of the Trustees in respect of complaints against the CEO) within 10 school days of the Stage 2 response being sent to the complainant, using the Stage 3 Panel Hearing Request Form (Appendix 4). The request must set out clearly the reasons why the complainant is dissatisfied with the response and may include evidence to support their reasons.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, and those involved in the investigation of the complaint at Stage 2, the Trust may decide that it is appropriate for the complaint to be reviewed at trust-level. Complaints against the CEO will always be reviewed at trust-level. A trust-level review panel will usually be comprised of two Trustees who have no prior knowledge of the complaint and one person independent of the management and running of the academy and/or trust as appropriate.

The independent member will not be an employee of the Trust. A member of an AOC/MOC from a different academy in the Trust is considered to have no conflict or prior knowledge of the complaint.

Stage 3: Complaint review - variation for non-parental complaints

Complaints from non-parents/legal guardians of students within one of our establishments may request a Chief Executive Review as Stage 3. The Chief Executive will review the procedural fairness of the investigation undertaken at Stage 2 and the determinations made, they will not consider additional complaints. The Chief Executive may delegate this Review to a senior member of Trust staff who has not previously been involved in the complaint. The Review will be undertaken within 15 school days of receipt of the review request.

[Appendix 6](#) shows a flow chart of the above procedure.

[Appendix 7](#) shows the timescales for each element.

[Appendix 8](#) gives contact information for the academies and Trust.

[Appendix 9](#) shows roles and responsibilities of key individuals involved in the complaints procedure.

6 Referring complaints on completion of this procedure (Stage 4)

If the complainant is not satisfied with the way their complaint has been handled, they may refer their complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). The ESFA will expect the complainant to have exhausted the Trust's complaints policy before complaining to them.

The ESFA will not overturn a Trust's decision about a complaint. However, it will look into:

- Whether there was undue delay, or the academy/Trust did not comply with its own complaints procedure
- Whether the academy/Trust was in breach of its funding agreement with the secretary of state
- Whether the academy/Trust has failed to comply with any other legal obligation

If the academy/Trust did not deal with the complaint properly, it will be asked to re- investigate the complaint. If the Trust's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the Trust will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

ESFA can be contacted via the Department for Education's online schools' complaint form www.gov.uk/complain-about-school or in writing to the following address:

Ministerial and Public Communications Division, Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD.

7 Persistent, unreasonable or vexatious complaints and behaviour

IET is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the academy/Trust. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening. We define unreasonably persistent complaints as those which, because of the frequency or nature of the complainants' contacts with the Trust and its academies, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints.

Examples of unacceptable or vexatious behaviour include any action or series of actions which are perceived by a staff member or volunteer to be deceitful, abusive, offensive, or threatening whether they are delivered verbally, in writing, or a combination of the two. This includes not only behaviour directed at them, but also their colleagues, associates, academy or the Trust.

Single incidents may be unacceptable, but more often the difficulty is caused by unreasonably persistent behaviour that is time consuming to manage and interferes with proper consideration of the complaint.

In those cases where our students, staff, academies, or the Trust as a whole, suffer adversely from persons making repeated, frivolous, or persistent complaints, or who pursue complaints in a threatening or abusive way, our Persistent and Vexatious Complainants Policy detailed in [Appendix 10](#) will be applied.

8 Confidentiality, data protection and records management

Complaints will be handled in the strictest confidence by the Trust and its academies. Data protection principles will be applied in line with the IET Data Protection Policy.

Correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State for Education or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them or where the Trust is otherwise required by law to disclose them.

It is expected that complainants will also keep their complaint private and confidential. Complainants are expected not to discuss complaints publicly via any form of social media or with third parties.

Electronic recordings of meetings must not be made by either the Trust, its academies, or the complainant. A meeting to discuss a complaint may not go ahead if the complainant is insistent on recording the meeting.

Due to privacy rights under data protection legislation, the information disclosed to complainants relating to the outcome of a complaint may be limited if it relates to a third-party, for example, disciplinary action against a staff member or student.

Audio or video evidence from complainants will not be accepted unless informed written consent from all parties has been given.

Records of complaints, regardless of whether they are upheld, will be confidentially retained by the academy and/or Trust for a period of 6 academic years from the end of the academic year in which they were concluded. These records will include:

- Progress of the complaint and the final outcome
- Whether the case progressed to a panel hearing or the stage at which the complaint was resolved
- The action taken by the academy or trust, regardless of outcome.

9 Learning lessons

The Trust Board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with academy and Trust leadership 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.

Appendix 1 - Complaints not within the scope of this policy and further information

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

Exceptions	Further Information
Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
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).</p>
Exclusion of children from school*	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*Complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the IET complaints procedure.</i></p>
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 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.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about an academy should complain through the trust'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>
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the IET internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the IET internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>

Appendix 2 - Where to direct your complaint

Complaint refers to:	Stage 1 - Informal	Stage 2 - Formal	Stage 3 - Review
General school matters, including progress, curriculum, provision, achievement, behaviour, and welfare	Relevant teacher, e.g. class teacher, form tutor, subject teacher	Principal	admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk To form a review panel (can be governors and/or trustees + independent).
Member of school staff/ individual governor (excluding chair)	Principal in first instance. Concern may be passed to the member of staff concerned or an appropriate alternative staff member for response at Stage 1	Principal in the first instance.	admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk To form a review panel (can be governors and/or trustees + independent)
Principal/Executive Principal	Chair of Governors (AOC/MOC) in first instance. Concern may be escalated to Stage 2 or passed back to the principal for a response at Stage 1	Chair of AOC/MOC	admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk To form a review panel (can be governors and/or trustees + independent)
Member of Trust Central Services (not CEO)	Relevant staff member	CEO in the first instance	admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk To form a trustee review panel (+ independent)
Chair of Governors (AOC/MOC) / complaint against entire governing board	Chair of Trustees in the first instance. Concern may be escalated to Stage 2 or passed back to school for Stage 1	Chair of Trustees	admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk To form a trustee review panel (+ independent)
Chief Executive Officer	Chair of Trustees in the first instance. Concern may be escalated to Stage 2 or passed back to CEO for response at Stage 1	Chair of Trustees	admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk To form a trustee review panel (+ independent)

In all cases, IET reserves the right to appoint appropriate alternative investigating officers to respond to a complaint.

If the complaint relates to anything other than the things listed above, please send your complaint to admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk . The clerk will liaise with the appropriate people and determine the most appropriate course of action. It may be that in certain circumstances the process will deviate from the published procedure.

Appendix 3 - Stage 2 Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the relevant person (outlined in Stage 2 of the procedure) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Name:	
Student's name (if relevant):	
Relationship to the student (if relevant):	
Address:	
Contact telephone number(s):	
e-mail:	
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the academy 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:	
Admin Use:	
Date received:	Date response sent:
Received by:	Response sent by:
Complaint referred to:	Referred on:

Appendix 4 - Stage 3 Panel Hearing/ Review Request Form

Please complete and return to admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Please ensure that you attach copies of your formal complaint and of the response(s) from the academy/Trust.

Name:	
Student's name (if relevant):	
Relationship to the student (if relevant):	
Address:	
Contact telephone number(s):	
e-mail:	
I submitted a formal complaint to the academy/Trust on:	
My complaint was submitted to:	
I received a response on:	
From:	
I am dissatisfied with the way in which the procedure was carried out because:	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?	
Signature:	
Date:	
Admin Use:	
Date received:	Date response sent:
Received by:	Response sent by:
Complaint referred to:	Referred on:

Appendix 5 – Standard Procedure for a Panel Hearing

Below sets out best practice for the operation of a review panel although it is recognised that, where circumstances dictate, it may be necessary to depart from this.

The Clerk will constitute a Panel Hearing made up of three members. The constitution of the panel is set out within this policy.

Once a panel is identified, the panel should elect a Chair (The Chair will usually be the independent person). The Chair will work in conjunction with the Clerk to make arrangements for the panel hearing, including:

- Setting the date for the hearing.
- Identifying an appropriate venue for the hearing giving thought to, amongst other matters, the need for 'breakout' rooms and the safeguarding of children. In all but exceptional circumstances, the venue should be on IET premises however it is recognised that in some circumstances it may be necessary to hear a complaint at an external venue.
- Setting a date for the exchange of documentation between the parties and the panel.
- Carrying out an initial review of documents to ensure all documentation is available to the panel and the parties for the hearing. It should be remembered that a number of policies and procedures are available on the academy/trust websites and these documents can be called up during the course of the hearing where necessary.
- Identifying any support which is necessary for the panel including HR advice, legal advice, clerking and/or minute taking.
- Setting an agenda for the hearing which provides for each party to open their case and question the other party on their case. The Chair will ensure that this agenda is followed during the hearing in order to enable each party to fairly set out their case without interruption.

Where either party requests a change of dates or provides documents after the specified deadline, a decision on the same will be at the panel's absolute discretion. Where repeated or unreasonable adjournment requests are received from one party the panel may proceed in the absence of a party.

The scope of the panel's inquiry will be as set out in the complaints policy. The panel has discretion to consider matters beyond the scope of the policy where, in the view of the panel, it will assist the parties to have a determination in order to achieve reconciliation between the parties.

The panel will make a decision on the matter in issue and may also make recommendations to the academy/trust which will assist, for example, in achieving reconciliation between the parties or in avoiding future similar incidents. Such recommendations may arise from the matter in issue or from matters which become apparent during the course of the panel hearing.

The hearing will be non-adversarial in style. All parties and their representatives should ensure that they communicate appropriately throughout the hearing. The panel has the absolute discretion to halt proceedings if an inappropriate approach is taken by any party.

After the hearing the panel will deliberate in private accompanied by any advisor. The decision may be communicated orally after these deliberations where appropriate. In all circumstances the decision will be communicated in writing within 5 working days.

The standard panel hearing procedure is as follows:

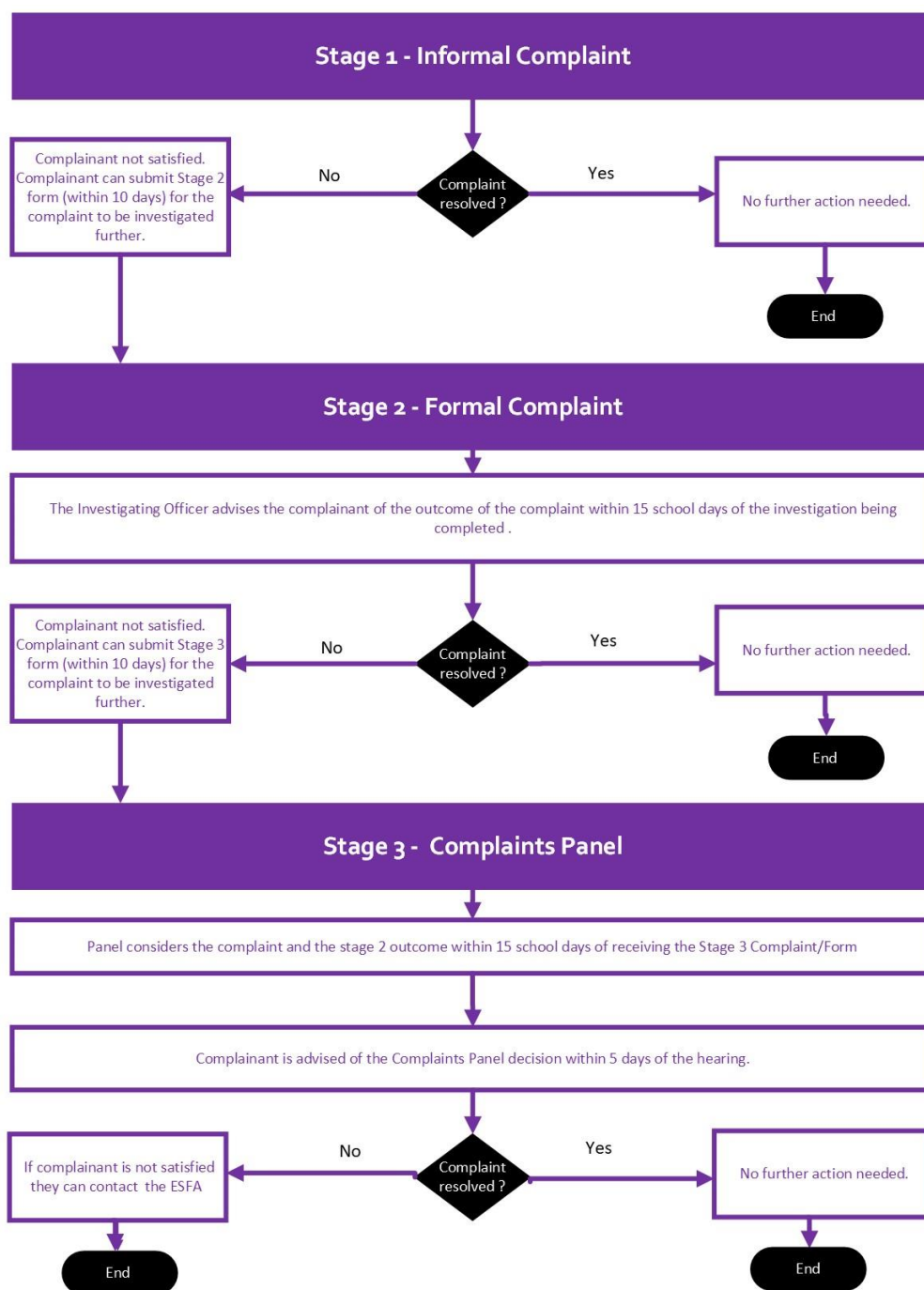
- The papers for the hearing will be circulated by the Clerk five working days prior to the panel hearing. Any additional material should be provided to the Clerk no later than three working days before the panel hearing for distribution to relevant parties.
- The hearing will be as informal as possible commensurate with the fact that it is part of a formal procedure. The style will not be confrontational or adversarial and will be a genuine attempt to allow the complainant and the respondent to present their sides on the issue.
- The Chair of the panel will
 - welcome the complainant and the representative(s) of the academy/Trust.
 - check that all parties have received and read all previously distributed submissions.
 - invite the complainant to present their case.
- The academy/Trust may ask questions.
- The panel may ask questions.
- The Chair will then invite the academy/Trust to present its case.
- The complainant may ask questions.
- The panel may ask questions.
- The academy/Trust will then sum up their case without adding anything new.
- The complainant will then sum up their case without adding anything new.
- The complainant and the academy/Trust will then leave the hearing.
- The panel will then deliberate to reach a decision which, if a vote is needed, will be determined by a simple majority. If the voting is tied the Chair will have the casting vote.

As a result of the hearing, the panel can:

- 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.
- Make findings and recommendations that can include recommending action or procedures to ensure that issues of a similar nature do not recur.

The Chair of the panel will ensure that the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about is notified of the panel's findings and recommendations, in writing.

Appendix 6 – Flowchart of the IET Complaints Procedure



Appendix 7 - Summary of complaints procedure and timescales

Informal Concerns/ Complaints	
Stage 1	Complainant brings complaint to attention of relevant member of staff in person or in writing. Contact academy office or Trust office (ietadmin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk) for contact details.
	Acknowledgement within 3 school days
	Response to be sent within 10 school days
	Where no satisfactory solution has been found, complainant may move to Stage 2
Formal Complaints	
Stage 2	Complainant to put complaint in writing using Complaint Form (Appendix 3) within 10 days of receiving the Stage 1 letter.
	Complaint to be acknowledged within 5 school days
	Meeting with complainant.
	Response to the complaint sent within 15 school days
Referral to Panel Hearing	
Stage 3	Complainant to request hearing within 10 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 2
	Complainant to put complaint in writing using Complaint Form Appendix 4 and send to admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk
	Request to be acknowledged within 5 school days
	Hearing to take place within 15 school days of receipt of request
	Notification of date, time and place of the hearing and details of the panel present sent at least 5 school days before the hearing
	Trust/ academy and complainant to submit evidence in support of their case to Clerk at least 3 school days before the hearing
Panel decision sent not more than 5 school days after the hearing	

Appendix 8 - How to raise a concern or make a complaint / Contact details

Academy Offices:

For contacting individual staff and Principals

- Coritani Academy admin@coritani-iet.co.uk
- Epworth Primary Academy admin@epworthprimary-iet.co.uk
- South Axholme Academy admin@southaxholme-iet.co.uk

Trust Office:

For contacting the CEO, Central Services Team, chair of trustees or the chair of the local governing body (AOC/MOC) and clerk to Trustees

- Email: admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk
- Post: Complaints, IET, Staynor House, Newborn Court, Epworth, DN9 1HQ

Please mark all correspondence: Private & Confidential.

For any other complaint please enquire in the first instance to admin@isleeducationtrust-iet.co.uk and you will be advised of the appropriate course of action.

Please note that although complaints may be addressed to an individual e.g. the CEO, that person may determine there is a more suitable person to deal with the complaint and delegate accordingly. You will be advised of who is dealing with the complaint at an early stage.

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.

Appendix 9 Roles and responsibilities

<p><u>Complainant</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain the complaint in full as early as possible • co-operate with academy/trust 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.
<p><u>Investigating Officer</u></p>	<p>The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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. <p>The investigator should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 principal or complaints panel that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems. • The principal or complaints panel will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

<p><u>Complaints Co-ordinator</u></p>	<p><i>(this could be the principal or CEO / designated complaints governor or trustee or other staff member providing administrative support)</i></p> <p><u>The complaints co-ordinator should:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure • liaise with staff members, Principal, CEO, Chair of AOC/MOC, Chair of Trust or the Clerk and to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure • be aware of issues regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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.
<p><u>Clerk</u></p>	<p>The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the panel and should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 and within an agreed timescale record the proceedings • circulate the minutes of the meeting • notify all parties of the committee's decision.

<p><u>Panel Chair</u></p>	<p>The panel's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>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</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • both the complainant and the academy 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 they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the academy has one).
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<p><u>Panel Member</u></p>	<p>Panel members should be aware that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the meeting must be independent and impartial and should be seen to be so no governor / trustee 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 academy/Trust 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated. ○ The panel 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. <p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.
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Appendix 10 Persistent and Vexatious Complaints Policy

We define unreasonably persistent complaints as those which, because of the frequency or nature of the complainants' contacts with the Trust and its academies, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints.

Examples of unacceptable or vexatious behaviour include any action or series of actions which are perceived by a staff member or volunteer to be deceitful, abusive, offensive, or threatening whether they are delivered verbally, in writing, or a combination of the two. This includes not only behaviour directed at them, but also their colleagues, associates, academy or the Trust.

Single incidents may be unacceptable, but more often the difficulty is caused by unreasonably persistent behaviour that is time consuming to manage and interferes with proper consideration of the complaint.

In those cases where our students, staff, academies, or the Trust as a whole, suffer adversely from persons making repeated, frivolous, or persistent complaints, or who pursue complaints in a threatening or abusive way, our Persistent and Vexatious Complainants Policy detailed in this section will be applied.

Unreasonably persistent or vexatious complainant behaviour

The following list, whilst not exhaustive, provides examples of behaviour by complainants which may be described as unreasonably persistent or vexatious. In these examples, a contact may be in person, by telephone, letter, email, SMS text message, or via social media. We will not tolerate behaviours such as:

- Communicating in an unacceptable way with staff, governors or Trustees, for example, the complainant's contact is abusive, harassing, offensive or threatening.
- Refusing to articulate or specify the grounds of a complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refusing to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure.
- Refusing to co-operate with the complaints procedure or the complaints investigation process.
- Insisting that the complaint is dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- Mis-using academy/trust email addresses and telephone numbers, for example, contacting staff on mobile numbers or cc'ing multiple staff into communications regarding their complaint
- Demanding special treatment or immediate escalation of their complaint.
- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with frequent, detailed, or lengthy phone calls, emails or letters, and/or insisting on immediate responses, hindering the consideration of their or other people's complaints and/or the proper running of the academy/trust.
- Raising numerous, detailed but unimportant questions and insisting they are all answered, or repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence.

- Pursuing a complaint which is unfounded, vexatious, or has patently insufficient grounds.
- Pursuing a complaint which is the same, similar or based on the same facts of a complaint which has already been considered in full by the academy/trust.
- Submitting repeat complaints with minor additions/variations that the complainant insists make these 'new' complaints.
- Seeking unrealistic outcomes in relation to their complaint, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value.
- Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with issues, and seeking to have them replaced.
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds, denying or changing statements they made at an earlier stage, or introducing trivial or irrelevant new information at a later stage.
- Covertly recording meetings and conversations.
- Adopting a 'scatter gun' approach, pursuing parallel complaints on the same issue.

How we will respond

When we believe a complainant to be unreasonably persistent or vexatious, we will tell them why and ask them to change their behaviour. If their behaviour continues, we will take action to restrict the complainant's contact with the academy and/or Trust. Any such restrictions will be evidence based, appropriate, and proportionate.

Examples of actions we may implement include:

- Restrict the complainant's access to the Trust/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 or emails to specific days or times or banning the complainant from an academy's premises.
- Conduct a Stage 3 review of the complaint on the papers only, i.e. not hold a hearing.
- Close or refuse to consider the complaint and refer it directly to the ESFA.

In cases where this becomes necessary, we will write to tell the complainant why we believe their behaviour is unacceptable, what action we are taking and its planned duration.

The Trust recognises that individuals who feel dissatisfied by the academy's/Trust's actions may feel angry about their treatment. However, the Trust has a duty of care to its staff and volunteers and will take all necessary steps to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its employees, governors, and trustees.

Where a complainant's behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and wellbeing of staff, members of governors or Trustees, 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.

There is no internal route of appeal against the decision that a complaint is persistent and/or vexatious.

Closing a complaint

Where a complainant:

- Tries to re-open an issue with an academy or the Trust after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted, and the academy/Trust has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint; or
- Has behaved in a way which has invoked the application of the Persistent and Vexatious Complainants Policy and their behaviour continues to hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints or the proper running of the academy/Trust.

the chair of governors (or other appropriate person) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the academy or Trust again about the same issue, the academy/Trust can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- Every reasonable step has been taken to address the complainant's needs, and
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the academy's or the Trust's position and their options (if any), and
- The complainant is contacting the academy or Trust repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time.

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The academy/Trust will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the academy with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, and/or
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, and/or
- The individual makes insulting comments about, or threats towards, staff or volunteers.

Once the academy/Trust has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email. We may also advise the complainant that any further contact on the matter provided in writing will be read and placed on file without acknowledgement and telephone calls will be terminated and logged.

The academy/Trust will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the academy/Trust acts reasonably.

IET reserves the right to make amendments to this policy at any time without notice.

End