Complaints Policy 2026

EKC Schools Trust

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Purpose

The aim of this policy is to resolve complaints or concerns about the Trust, any School within the Trust, or any individual connected with the Trust, in a fair, thorough, and transparent way. The Trust takes complaints seriously and views them as opportunities to learn and improve in the future.

This policy provides a clear framework for working together and complaints handling and is divided into two parts:

- **Complaints raised by parents and carers of a current pupil at a School within the Trust - PART A**
- **Complaints raised by those who are not parents and carers of current pupils - PART B**

Please note: Only complaints submitted on the Trust Complaints Form will be reviewed.

Schools Trust is a Parent-Friendly Trust and a recognised leader in parental engagement through its partnership with Parentkind – the UK's largest parent charity. As part of this commitment, we align our approach to complaints with Parentkind's Department for Education (DfE) endorsed guidance for families and schools.

We actively encourage all complainants to read Parentkind's guidance - www.parentkind.org.uk/parent-guide-to-raising-concerns-with-your-childs-school before raising a complaint under this procedure. Our aim is always to work together with families to resolve concerns quickly, respectfully, and at the lowest appropriate level.

Those considering raising a complaint are reminded that the Trust's core purpose is to educate and safeguard pupils. It has a responsibility, as a publicly funded body, to allocate its resources proportionately and fairly. Complainants are therefore requested to cooperate with this process and to be mindful of the length and volume of correspondence. This will also assist with ensuring a prompt and effective resolution.

Requests for reasonable adjustments to the process set out below will be considered to ensure that Complainants can access and complete the process.

Please note that complaints about matters where an alternative complaints/ appeal process exists will not be generally dealt with under this policy. These are set out below in Part C.

The complaint procedures set out in this policy do not apply to and are not intended for use by pupils.

Part A - Complaints Raised by Parents and Carers of a Current Pupil at a School Within The Trust

Note: Where the complaints process has been started (but not completed) whilst parents/carers have children at the School, but the children have since left, the procedure for current parents should continue to be used.

1 Stage 1: Informal Resolution:

1.1 Any matter of concern or complaint should be raised and attempted to be resolved on an informal basis. Generally, it is expected that, where the matter relates to a pupil, it will have been raised with the relevant member of staff, (e.g. classroom teacher, Phase Leader, Head of Department) before a request is made to deal with it under the formal stages of this policy.

1.2 The concern or complaint should be raised with the School or Trust within **3 months** of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within **3 months** of the last of these incidents. Complaints made outside of this time frame may not be considered unless exceptional circumstances apply.

1.3 The School will seek to resolve matters at the informal stage within **15** school days[1] of the issue being raised.

1.4 Where the matter is not resolved at the informal stage, it may be elevated to the formal stage as set out below.

2 Stage 2: Formal Resolution: Investigation by a Nominated Individual

2.1 Stage 2 complaints **must** be set out using the form available at **Appendix 1**, within **10** school days of the Stage 1 response and addressed to the Headteacher of the School (unless the complaint relates to the Headteacher, in which case please refer to the section headed '**Complaints against specific role-holders**' below). The complaint should set out briefly the grounds of the complaint, stating where it is believed the School or Trust has not met reasonable expectations (or what it is considered the School should have done) and confirming the outcome sought. If a complainant is unable to complete the form appropriately, they will be invited to a meeting to facilitate this.

2.2 An investigation (fact-finding) will be carried out by a nominated individual identified by the Headteacher/ Chair of the Local Governing Body as appropriate, who will acknowledge the complaint within **5** school days *and may offer a meeting*. The investigator will speak to others involved. Whenever reasonably possible, any meeting with the parent or carer will take place within **15** school days of receipt of the written complaint.

2.3 The investigator will put their findings in writing to the Headteacher/Chair of

[1] School days in this policy refers to days when the School is open to pupils and students for teaching, and does not include INSET days.

the Local Governing Body and will indicate what, if any, steps should be considered to resolve the matter. The Headteacher/Chair of the Local Governing Body provide the complainant with a written outcome letter, whenever reasonably possible, this will be done within **15** school days of any meeting with the parent; if no meeting is arranged it will be within **25** school days of the written complaint being received.

2.4 Where the parent remains dissatisfied, they may request that the complaint be escalated to Stage 3.

3 Stage 3: Formal Resolution: Complaints Panel Meeting

3.1 Stage 3 complaints **must** be set out using the form available at **Appendix 1**, stating where the complainant remains dissatisfied, and the outcome sought, and lodged with the Governance Manager (Clerk) within **10** school days of the Stage 2 response.

3.2 The Governance Manager will acknowledge the Stage 3 complaint within **5** school days and will convene a Complaints Panel.

3.3 The Complaints Panel must comprise at least two people, one of whom is independent of the day-to-day running of the School (e.g. governors, Trust Executive Team)

3.4 The Complaints Panel may include, but is not limited to, one or more persons from the following categories:

i. a member of the Trust Executive Team;

ii. a member of the Local Governing Body of the School where the complaint emanated from;

iii. a member of a Local Governing Body from another School within the Trust;

iv. a member of the Board of Trustees from the Trust;

v. a member of a Local Governing Body or Trustee of another School Trust;

vi. a person not connected with the School or the Trust.

3.5 None of the members of the Complaints Panel will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.

3.6 The independent panel member may be a member of a Local Governing Body from another School within the Trust as long as they have no conflict and no prior knowledge of the complaint.

3.7 The Governance Manager will invite the School to put in writing its response to the Stage 3 complaint within **15** school days of receiving the request. Whether or not the School has responded, the Governance Manager will convene a meeting of the Complaints Panel. That meeting will be held on School premises as quickly as practicable, given the need to find a date that is reasonably convenient for the complainant, the School and the members of the Complaints Panel. Whenever possible, the meeting will be held within **15** school days of the end of the School's response time. The meeting date, time and location will be confirmed to all parties at least **10** school days in advance.

3.8 The meeting is not a court case; it will be held in private and will be as informal as circumstances allow. For this reason, electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted unless a complainant's disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before the recording of the meeting takes place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. The complainant will have the opportunity to put forward her/his reasons for dissatisfaction and to enlarge on them, but may not introduce reasons that were not previously put in writing. The Complaints Panel will not accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded. The complainant and the School/Trust will have the opportunity to put forward their response, and the Complaints Panel members will be able to ask questions. The complainant will have the opportunity to make final comments to the Complaints Panel.

3.9 The Complaints Panel may make findings and recommendations, and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be:

i. sent by electronic mail or otherwise provided in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the School or person complained about;

ii. available for inspection on the School premises by the Trust.

3.10 The Complaints Panel will formulate its response as quickly as reasonably possible, aiming to do so within **10** school days, and the Governance Manager will notify all concerned.

3.11 At any meeting, the complainant will be entitled to bring a companion along to provide support (e.g. friend, advocate (KPAS)). This complaints procedure is not a legal (court-like) process; therefore, legal representation is not permitted.

3.12 If the complainant fails to attend the Complaints Panel Meeting on the day without compelling reasons, the Complaints Panel will still proceed in their absence and the process will continue to its conclusion. Any further attempt to re-open the matter will be considered as falling under the "Serial or persistent Complainants" section as set out below.

4 Department for Education

4.1 **Only** once the complaints process is concluded at Stage 3, the matter is closed. If the Complainant is still not satisfied, then they may contact the Department for Education (DfE).

4.2 There is an online procedure at: https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe. The Complainant may also write to the DfE at: Ministerial and Public Communication Division, Department for Education, 2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate, Manchester M1 2WD

5 Complaints Against Specific Role-Holders

5.1 Complaints against the Headteacher

Any complaint relating to the Headteacher of the School must be raised in the first instance with the Deputy CEO, who will, if an informal resolution cannot be reached, designate a Trust Director to investigate the complaint as per **Stage 2**.

5.2 Complaints Against a Local Governing Body

Where a complaint is brought against a member of the Local Governing Body, the Director of Governance will appoint an investigating officer in the same way as in the first stage of the formal process at **Stage 2**.

If the complaint is against the Chair of the Local Governing Body, then the Vice Chair of the Local Governing Body will appoint an investigating officer in the same way as in the first stage of the formal process at **Stage 2.**

In exceptional circumstances, the Director of Governance may, at their absolute discretion, determine that a complaint against a member of the Local Governing Body should be dealt with at Trust Board level and, if so determined, a Trustee will oversee **Stage 2.**

5.3 Complaints Against Individual Trustees/The Board of Trustees

If the complaint is against a Trustee, the Director of Governance will appoint an investigating officer. In the case of a complaint against either the Chair or the Board of Trustees as a whole, the Director of Governance will refer to the Members as in the first stage of the formal process at **Stage 2**.

Where the complaint moves to **Stage 3,** the Director of Governance will determine how the Complaint Panel is to be constituted, but will ensure that at least one person is independent of the Trust.

5.4 Complaints Against the Chief Executive Officer or Other Trust Office Staff

If the complaint is against a member of Trust staff, then the CEO, (or, in the case of a complaint against the CEO, the Chair of Trustees), will appoint an investigating officer in the same way as the first stage of the formal process at **Stage 2**.

The general provisions set out in Part C below apply.

Part B – Complaints Raised By Those Who Are NOT Parents and Carers of a Current Pupil

Complaints made by those who are not parents of current pupils, which includes complaints made by parents of former pupils after they have left the School, will be dealt with as follows:

1 Stage 1: Informal Resolution:

1.1 Complainants should first attempt to address their complaint to the relevant School or the Trust (as appropriate) informally by raising the matter with a relevant member of School or Trust staff, within 3 months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 3 months of the last of these incidents. The School/Trust (depending on the nature of the complaint) will seek to resolve the matter informally within 15 school days.

2 Stage 2: Formal Resolution:

2.1 If it is not possible to resolve the matter informally, a formal complaint **must** be set out using the form available at **Appendix 1.** The complaint will be acknowledged within 5 school days by the Governance Manager. The Chief Executive Officer or Chair of Trustees will issue a final written response within 15 school days.

The general provision set out in Part C below apply.

Part C – General Provision

1 Complaints That Will Not Be Considered Under This Policy

1.1 Complaints relating to the matters set out below will not be considered under this policy as they have their own appeal or complaint processes.

1.2 Complaints raised under this policy may refer to staff conduct; however, any action taken under the Trust's internal disciplinary procedures is confidential, and complainants will not be provided with information about this and will not receive an outcome letter.

1.3 Where the scope of a complaint is unclear, the School/Trust may write to the complainant seeking clarification and/or summarising what the key grounds of complaint are understood to be and/or may request a meeting with the complainant for this purpose.

Matter	**Route for Raising Concern/Complaining**
Admissions	Admissions Appeal – see Admissions Policy and Statutory Admissions Appeal Code, or complaint to DfE
Exclusions	Statutory review process. See individual school's Behaviour Policy.
Statutory SEN Assessments	SEND Tribunal (and see SEN Code of Practice)
Matters Likely to Require Child Protection Investigation	Raise with Designated Safeguarding Lead, Director of Safeguarding - see Child Protection and Safeguarding & Prevent Policy, or a direct referral can be made to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).
Safeguarding Decisions	Actions taken to protect a child's safety, including referrals to social care, are part of the school's legal responsibilities and cannot be reviewed or overturned through the complaints procedure.
Staff Grievances and Disciplinary Matters[2]	Staff Grievance Policy and Staff Disciplinary Policy
Whistleblowing	Whistleblowing Policy

[2] Note that where complaints relate to staff conduct, these may be dealt with under both this Complaints Policy and the Staff Grievance & Staff Disciplinary Policies. In such circumstances Complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any Staff disciplinary investigation or processes.

2 Complaints Relating to Nursery Provision

2.1 The process as set out in Part A will be followed.

2.2 Parents are further advised that, where they have concerns regarding the School meeting EYFS requirements, they may contact Ofsted on 0300 123 4666.

3 Complaints Relating to Church Schools

Where a complaint relates specifically to the religious character of the school, collective worship, Religious Education, or other matters connected with the school's church foundation, the Trust may seek advice from, or inform, the Diocese as appropriate. This does not replace the Trust's formal complaints procedure.

4 Complaints Received Outside of Term Time

The School/Trust (as appropriate) will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

5 Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a Complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm the withdrawal in writing.

6 Record Keeping and Confidentiality

6.1 A written record will be kept of all complaints that reach the formal stage, whether they are resolved following Stage 2, or proceed to a Panel hearing (Stage 3), and any action taken by the School as a result (regardless of whether they are upheld). Complaint records will be maintained securely. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection requests access to them.

6.2 The complainant should also keep all correspondence, statements and records relating to their complaint confidential, and must not disclose (by way of electronic communication, social media or otherwise) any information or documents relating to their complaint.

7 Anonymous Complaints

Where an anonymous complaint is received, the School/Trust will use its reasonable endeavours to consider the complaint as best as it reasonably can. However, the School/Trust will not be required to consider the complaint pursuant to any specific process and will handle anonymous complaints on a case-by-case basis.

8 Complaint Campaigns

8.1 Where the School/Trust receives a number of complaints all based on the same subject which, in its reasonable opinion, may be deemed a 'complaint' campaign' it will deal with the complaints in the following way: individual responses will not be sent to complainants in such cases, instead a collective response will be sent to all complainants.

8.2 Where the complaint campaign involves complainants who are parents, individuals and entitled to follow the complaints policy.

9 Artificial Intelligence

9.1 In line with the Parentkind Parent Guide to school complaints, complainants are urged to exercise caution in the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in complaint processes, as it can introduce an unnecessarily legalistic and contentious approach that is not conducive to resolving the issue in an effective way. AI can also introduce inaccurate information, including misstating law, and make a complaint more complex than necessary.

9.2 Complainants are reminded that publicly available AI platforms and chatbots are **not confidential**. Complaints, and *in particular those containing the personal data of pupils, staff and other individuals* therefore should not be uploaded to or processed via platforms such as ChatGPT.

10 Serial or Persistent Complainants

If at any level a Complainant or connected party attempts to reopen an issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this Complaints Policy, the Chair of Trustees may write to the Complainant to inform them that the procedure has been exhausted, the matter is closed and that the Trust will therefore not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

11 Vexatious Complaints

11.1. Complaints with any of the following characteristics may be deemed to be vexatious:

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

11.2. In such cases, the Chair of Trustees may write to the Complainant to inform them that the complaint is deemed to be vexatious and to give them an opportunity to change their approach. Should the complaint continue to be raised in a vexatious manner, the Chair of Trustees will write to the complainant confirming that the Trust will not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

11.3. The DfE Best Practice Guidance for School Complaints Procedures will be taken into account in reaching any decision to stop responding. Specifically, the following criteria will usually be met:

i. the School/Trust will have taken every reasonable step to address the Complainant's concerns;

ii. the Complainant will have been given a clear statement of the School/Trust's position and their options; and

iii. the Complainant contacts the School/Trust repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.

The case to stop responding will be stronger if one or more of the following applies:

iv. the Complainant's letters, emails, or telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive;

v. the Complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff; appropriate action.

vi. the School/Trust has reason to believe the individual is contacting them with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience.

In line with the organisation's duty to prevent third-party harassment and protect the wellbeing and safety of staff, such conduct will not be tolerated and may lead to restrictions on communication, withdrawal of the complaints process, and/or other appropriate measures.

11.4. In cases where a complainant's behaviour is deemed to be anti-social, harassing, or significantly disruptive (requiring a disproportionate and unreasonable allocation of resources) the Trust reserves the right to refer the matter to the relevant authority for consideration of a Community Protection Warning under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. The Trust will only consider this step in exceptional circumstances, and in consultation with the appropriate authorities, to ensure that any action taken is proportionate and legally compliant.

11.5. Complainants are also referred to the Parentkind parent guide to school complaints which emphasises the importance of trying to work with the school to resolve the issue and explains steps that schools may take where complainants act unreasonably including pausing the complaint, issuing a warning and, in cases of persistent or extreme abusive behaviour, banning the complainant from the school site.

12 Legal Proceedings

If a Complainant threatens or commences legal action against the School/Trust (including the issuing of a letter before claim) 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.

Part D – Data Protection Complaints

Concerns or complaints about the Trust's management of personal data will be dealt with as follows:

1 Stage 1: Informal Resolution:

Complainants should first attempt to address their complaint to the relevant School of the Trust (as appropriate) informally by raising the matter with a relevant member of School or Trust staff, within 3 months of the concern. The School/Trust (depending on the nature of the complaint) will seek to resolve the matter informally within 15 school days.

2 Stage 2: Formal Resolution:

If it is not possible to resolve the matter informally, a formal complaint **must** be set out using the form available at **Appendix 1.** The complaint will be referred to and acknowledged by the Data Protection Officer (DPO) within 30 days. The DPO who will review the case and provide a written response without undue delay.

3 Information Commissioners Office

3.1 **Only** once the complaints process is concluded at **Stage 2**, the matter is closed. If the Complainant is still not satisfied, then they may contact the Information Commissioners Office (ICO).

3.2 The Complainant may write to the ICO at:

Information Commissioners Office
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane,
Wilmslow,
Cheshire,
SK9 5KF.

Appendix 1 – EKC Schools Trust Complaints Form

This form should be used to raise a formal complaint only after a matter has been raised informally under either Part A, Part B or Part D of the Complaints Policy, and you are not satisfied with the response. Please refer to the Complaints Policy when completing this form.

The Complaints Form is designed to help you express your complaint (and capture all relevant information) and is provided to help ensure that the process can be followed effectively. The Academy/Trust may seek further clarification from you, which may unavoidably delay the process.

Please consider the complaints form carefully.

Your Details	
Name	
Email	
Address	
Name of pupil, year group and your relationship to them	
Complaint Details	
Academy name (if complaint relates to a specific Academy)	
Grounds of complaint (max 250 words)	
What steps have been taken to resolve the complaint informally? (*including details of who the matter was raised with, when and what solution as offered*) (max 50 words)	
Why have the steps taken so far failed to resolve the complaint? (*including what you consider should have been done/where the Academy or Trust has not met reasonable expectations in its response*) (max 50 words)	

Outcome Sought	
What action would you like taken to resolve the matter? (max 50 words)	
Signed	
Date	

Please send completed forms to **office@ekcschoolstrust.org** or hand in to the school office in a sealed envelope marked for the attention of the relevant addressee *(generally, this will be the Headteacher for complaints about a specific Academy, or the Clerk to the Trustees for complaints about the Trust, however, please refer to the Complaints Policy and in particular paragraph 6, 'Complaints about specific role-holders', for further information)*.