

Leading Learners Multi Academy Trust



Complaints Policy

Approved by:	Trust Board	Date: 18 th March 2026
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Last reviewed on:	24 September 2026
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Next review due by:	September 2027
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Introduction

This policy statement and procedure sets out the approach of Leading Learners Multi Academy Trust (the Trust), and all its schools, to dealing with concerns and complaints. The procedure is intended to allow a concern or complaint relating to the Trust or one of its schools to be raised by a parent, carer, or anyone else. We value good relationships with parents and carers and our wider communities and will do everything we can to establish and maintain these. This includes seeking to resolve any concerns or complaints promptly, and with the aim of reaching resolution wherever possible.

Scope

This procedure describes the processes to be followed when parent/carers of current registered pupils at schools in our Trust have concerns or make complaints about that school or the Trust.

For complaints from the following, the Trust reserves the right to substitute this procedure for an alternative, shorter procedure where it is appropriate to do so, typically Stage 1 (informal concern) and Stage 2 (formal written complaint):

- parent/carers of previous pupils
- parent/carers about something that does not relate to your child(ren)
- non-parents/carers
- others including members of the public

The third stage of this policy does not apply to those who are not parents/carers of pupils on roll at a school within the Trust.

Some complaints might be dealt with in other policies, for example, complaints involving pupil admissions, child protection or pupil exclusions. Where necessary, a school will exercise its discretion. If at any stage in the procedure it becomes apparent that the complaint falls outside of this general complaints procedure, parents will be informed.

This procedure deals with specified day-to-day complaints against the management and/or operation of the school which fall outside the scope of the following procedures:

- Complaints which have an alternative statutory avenue of appeal or complaint, i.e. admissions, exclusions, SEN assessments, Section 409 Curriculum Complaints and those covered by the Education (School Records) Regulations 1989.
- Serious complaints which must be dealt with by specific employment procedures e.g. allegations of professional abuse, criminal offences or those that are potentially staff disciplinary issues.

- Complaints about safeguarding referrals which the school is statutorily required to make

Anonymous complaints or complaints sent as part of a complaints campaign will not usually be investigated. However, the Trust will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Employees of the Trust should raise any concerns relating to their employment through the appropriate staffing procedure, not through this process.

Where a complaint is against the Central Trust, a member of the Central Team, a Trustee, a local governor, or the Trust Board as a whole, please refer to Appendix C.

General Principles

We will treat all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously and will advise complainants of the procedures for dealing with their concerns. In return, we expect complainants to behave respectfully towards all members of the Trust's community. In particular, any disagreement with a school should not be expressed inappropriately or in front of pupils.

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing, including by email. If they do not respond to this request within 15 school days the matter will be judged to be closed.

All references to 'headteacher' in this procedure include 'executive headteacher' depending on the leadership arrangements in place in the school at the time of the complaint.

We do not normally accept electronic audio or video recordings as evidence when we are asked to consider a complaint. If we do accept a recording, we may also ask for the written consent of all recorded parties before it is viewed. We may accept independently notarised transcriptions of recordings. We do not accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The Trust will make reasonable adjustments for complainants where required under the Equality Act 2010. Alternative formats and other support arrangements will be provided where reasonably necessary

Timescales

Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident complained about occurring or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. Complaints made outside of this time frame will only be considered if,

having taken advice, the Headteacher or the CEO is of the view that exceptional circumstances apply.

Unless otherwise stated, time-scales in this procedure refer to school working days for the relevant school, excluding school holidays, in service training (INSET) days and bank holidays. Any complaints made outside of term time will be considered to have been received on the first school working day after the holiday period. There may be times when the investigation takes longer than the timescales outlined in this policy. Where this is the case we will keep the complainant informed of the revised timescales and the reasons for this.

The Complaints Procedure

Stage One - Resolution at a Local Level

1. This stage of the policy will apply to all concerns and complaints raised directly with the school. Concerns must be raised initially with the relevant school, before they are escalated to formal stages, other than in exceptional circumstances.

This might be where the substance of the complaint directly concerns the conduct or actions of the Headteacher; in such a case the Chair of the LGB will take overall responsibility for Stage One of the process, involving a member of the Trust's Central Team as appropriate.

2. The Headteacher is responsible for overseeing Stage One of the process, but this may be initially or fully delegated to an appropriate member of school staff. The member of staff dealing with the concern should ensure they have a clear understanding of the issue(s), what it is that the complainant considers should have been done, or where they feel the school has not met reasonable expectations, as well as the resolution being sought.
3. Stage One gives all parties the opportunity to explore the issues causing concern and to seek to resolve them without recourse to formal stages. The Headteacher, or relevant member of school staff, may attempt resolution directly through meetings or other conversations with the complainant, or in other ways which may include involving other members of staff, the Chair of the LGB or CEO in discussions.
4. The Headteacher or relevant staff member should make a judgement on whether a written outcome is required at Stage One, in conjunction with the complainant. This is unlikely to be required if the complainant is satisfied with the response and outcome, and the situation has been resolved verbally.

5. In normal circumstances, this stage will last no longer than twenty school working days from the date the concern was first raised, either verbally or in writing, with the school. During this period every effort should be made to resolve the situation on an informal basis and all parties will be expected to fully engage with efforts to achieve this resolution.
6. Despite the best efforts of all parties, there may be occasions where informal resolution is not possible, in which case the complainant may elevate the issue to Stage Two, as set out below.

Stage Two- Formal Investigation by a Nominated Individual

1. If the complainant wishes to elevate their complaint to Stage Two, they should complete the following form:

[Stage 2 Complaint Form – Fill in form](#)

If, for any reason, the complainant is unable to use the form, they should contact the Trust's Governance Manager on enquiries@leadinglearnersmat.co.uk. The completed form should be submitted within 10 working days of receiving the Stage One decision. The complaint will be acknowledged within 5 school days of receipt of the formal complaint by the Trust.

Upon receipt of the complaint the Governance Manager will request from the school a summary of the complaint and the response provided at Stage One. If the complaint is unclear, the Headteacher and/or Trust representative will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. A face-to-face meeting may be the most appropriate way of doing this. If, after this, the complaint remains unclear, the Headteacher and/or Trust representative may not proceed with an investigation into the complaint. In such a case, this will be communicated to the complainant.

2. An investigation will then be carried out by a nominated individual identified by the Governance Manager in consultation with a member of the Trust Central Executive Team as appropriate.

This may be a Trust employee either from a different school or from the Trust's Central Team. In exceptional circumstances a trustee may investigate, or an external investigation may be commissioned. The investigator may seek to meet with the complainant and will speak to others involved as they deem necessary.

3. Once all the relevant facts have been established, the investigator will put their findings in writing. This will give an explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, they will indicate what they are proposing to do. Whenever reasonably possible, this will be done within 10 school working days of any meeting with the complainant. If no meeting is arranged, it should be within 20 school working days of the written complaint being received.

If a meeting is arranged at Stage Two, the complainant may ask someone to accompany them to help them explain the reasons for their complaint and to support them. The investigating officer may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.

4. The investigating officer will keep records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation. They may be supported in note-taking by a member of the Trust's Governance Team or Central Team.
5. Where the matter is not resolved at this stage, the complainant may elevate it to Stage Three, as set out below.

Stage Three - Resolution via Complaints Panel Meeting

1. If the complainant wishes to elevate their complaint to Stage Three, they should notify the Governance Manager using the details set out in Appendix A within 10 school working days of receiving the Stage Two findings. Any such request must be set out in writing, stating where the complainant remains dissatisfied and what remedies are being sought. This request will generate a meeting in front of a complaints panel.
2. On receipt of the request to have a complaint heard by a panel, we will confirm that we have received the correspondence and will make arrangements for a panel to be convened.
3. As soon as possible following this we will inform the complainant of a date for the panel meeting. This date will take into account their availability to attend. The meeting will be held as quickly as practicable given the need to find a date that is reasonably convenient for the complainant, the school and panel members. The aim will be for the panel to be convened within 20 school working days of receiving the request for a hearing. If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates without good reason, the Governance Manager will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using any written submissions from both parties, but those able to attend the hearing will be able to as the panel may wish to ask questions.

The complainant will be notified by letter and this letter will inform them of the date, time and location of the meeting, and provide an explanation of what will happen at the hearing. This meeting may take place via an electronic meeting platform such as Microsoft Teams.

4. The panel will comprise three members who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint so will be able to consider it without prejudice. These members may be governors, trustees or members of the Trust's central team. At least one of the members of the panel will be a person who is independent of the management and running of the school. In line with the DfE's guidance, a local governor serving on the LGB of a different school within the trust may occupy this role, as they will be sufficiently separate from the school being complained about.
5. The meeting is not a court case; it will be held in private and will be as informal as circumstances allow. The Chair of the panel will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating and will do their best to put all parties at ease.
6. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted unless a complainant's own disability or medical 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.
7. The complainant will have the opportunity to put their reasons for dissatisfaction and to expand upon them but may not introduce reasons that were not previously put in writing. The school will have the opportunity to put its side of things and each side, as well as the panel members, will be able to ask questions.
8. The panel can request additional information from other sources if necessary. All parties will receive copies of these papers at least five school working days before the meeting.
9. The complainant will be entitled to bring a companion along to provide support. They are there to provide support, rather than to speak on the complainant's behalf, and will not usually be permitted to speak during the meeting except with the permission of the Chair. Legal representation representing the complainant will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances and with prior agreement from the Trust. It may sometimes be appropriate for the panel to take advice from a legal adviser, but this adviser will not attend the panel meeting.
10. If the complainant fails to attend on the day without compelling reasons, their complaint will be judged to be withdrawn (and the matter closed), from the Trust's perspective.

11. Should the person representing the school and/or the complainant wish to invite relevant witnesses to present their evidence directly to the panel and to be questioned, they should inform the clerk to the panel of this at least 5 days before the hearing. Whether the panel allows such witnesses to be invited to the hearing will be decided by the Chair. Witnesses should attend the meeting only while they give their statement and take questions.
12. As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses previously undisclosed should be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the hearing will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to the new evidence.
13. Other than in exceptional circumstances pupils or other children/young people will not be permitted to attend panel meetings.
14. The person who investigated the matter at Stage Two may be accompanied by someone from the Trust Central Team.
15. The meeting will be minuted, usually by a member of the Trust's Governance Team. The panel may make findings and recommendations and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about.
16. The following people will be entitled to attend the panel meeting:
 - panel members
 - an adviser to the panel who may also take notes of the meeting, or may be accompanied by a minute taker
 - the complainant(s) and their companion if they choose to bring one
 - the investigator and their companion if they choose to bring one
 - any witnesses (for the duration of their evidence)
19. In addition, if the investigator is external to the school, they may be accompanied by a senior member of school staff or a member of the Trust's central team.
20. All parties will withdraw, other than the panel members, the advisor to the panel and the note-taker (if this is a different person), while the panel reaches a conclusion, which may be that the complaint is upheld or rejected in full, or upheld in part. If time constraints, or other factors, mean that a decision cannot be reached immediately then the panel will reconvene as soon as possible. This subsequent meeting will include panel members, the advisor to the panel and note-taker only and may take place via an on-line meeting platform.

The outcome and the reasons for the panel's decision will be communicated in writing to all relevant parties within five working days of the hearing other than in exceptional circumstances. A copy of the written outcome, inclusive of findings and recommendations, will be kept in school and central Trust records, and will be available on the school's premises for inspection by both the Trust and the Headteacher.

Managing unreasonable complaints

The Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. The school will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school itself; however, the school does not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

For the purposes of this policy, "unreasonable complaints" include:

- Vexatious complaints, which:
 - Are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, or repetitious.
 - Insist upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.
 - Insist upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.
 - Are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
 - Demand for redress which lacks any serious purpose or value.
- Serial or persistent complaints, which:
 - Are duplicated, sent by the same complainant once the initial complaint has been closed.
 - Are new complaints that are submitted additionally, as part of an existing open complaint, by the same complainant.

A complaint may also be regarded as unreasonable when the complainant:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.

- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced.
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed.
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the trust's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the DfE.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the complainant:

- Acts maliciously or aggressively.
- Uses threats, intimidation or violence.
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language.
- Knows the complaint to be false.
- Uses falsified information.
- Publishes unacceptable information in media such as social media websites and newspapers.

The above applies regardless of the method the complaint is made, e.g. face-to-face, by telephone, in writing or electronically. Whenever possible, the member of staff or trustee leading the response to a complaint will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

Complainants should limit the number of communications while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent, either by letter, phone, email or text, as it could delay the outcome being reached. Serial or persistent complaints will only be marked as 'serial' once the complainant has completed the complaints procedure. It is the complaint that will be marked as 'serial', meaning the complainant can complain about a separate issue if necessary. A complaint will not be marked as serial where a complainant has exercised their right to refer their complaint to their MP.

If the behaviour continues, the individual handling the complaint will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the Trust or any of its schools causing a significant level of disruption, the school may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan.

A decision to stop responding will only be considered in circumstances where the following statements are true:

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

If the above criteria are met, in making a decision to stop responding, the school will also consider if the complainant is often or always abusive or aggressive in their communication, makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff, or if the school believes their intent is to disrupt or inconvenience the school.

The Trust will not stop responding to a complainant on the basis that they are difficult to deal with or they ask complex questions. In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from the premises. Please refer to Appendix B for further details.

Data Protection Complaints

In accordance with the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 and UK data protection legislation, individuals have the right to make a complaint to the Trust if they believe their personal data has been handled incorrectly or unlawfully. Complaints may be made in writing, by email, through existing complaints procedures, or verbally (including in person or by telephone). Individuals are not required to use a specific form in order to make a complaint.

Where a data protection complaint is received, the Trust will:

- acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 30 calendar days of receiving it;

- make appropriate enquiries into the issues raised;
- take reasonable steps to investigate and address the complaint without undue delay;
- keep the complainant informed of progress where appropriate; and
- inform the complainant of the outcome of the investigation.

Where a complaint is received electronically, an automated acknowledgement may be used to confirm receipt. Where complaints are made verbally, acknowledgement may be given verbally.

If a complaint relates to the handling of personal data by a third party acting on behalf of the Trust (for example, a data processor), the Trust will liaise with the relevant organisation in order to investigate the issue and provide a response.

Individuals who remain dissatisfied after the Trust has responded to their complaint have the right to raise their concerns with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the UK's independent authority for data protection.

Contact details for the ICO can be found at: <https://ico.org.uk>.

Record Keeping

A digital record will be kept of all complaints that were resolved at Stages Two or Three of the complaints procedure for a period of 12 months. Records will contain details of the stage at which the complaint was resolved, closed, or withdrawn. The action taken by the school or the Trust as a result of a complaint (regardless of whether it is upheld) will also be recorded.

Confidentiality

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

Further Avenues for Complaining

Department for Education (DfE): Once the complaints process is concluded (or a complaint has been terminated due to undue delay or failure to lodge a request for a Stage 3 Panel Meeting within the time stated in the policy) the matter is closed. If the complainant is still not satisfied then they may contact the DfE. There is an online procedure for doing so at: [Contact the Department for Education - GOV.UK](#) or the complainant may write to the DfE at: The School Complaints Unit (SCU), Department for Education, 2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate, Manchester M1 2WD.

Ofsted: Ofsted advises that “you should complete all steps in the school's complaints procedure before you contact Ofsted”. Their advice can be accessed directly here: [Ofsted - Complain About a School](#). Ofsted cannot resolve disagreements between a complainant and a school, or affect the results of a school's complaints process.

Complaints Relating to Fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Requirements

In order to comply with the statutory framework, written concerns or complaint relating to the fulfilment of the EYFS Requirements will be dealt with in accordance with the following process:

- The written concern/complaint will be acknowledged within 5 school working days;
- The Headteacher will investigate the concern or complaint which may include meeting with the complainant and the Head of Early Years. A written response notifying the complainant of the outcome of the investigation will be sent within 28 school working days of the complaint being received.
- Where the complainant remains dissatisfied, the governance team will ensure that a formal Complaints Meeting will be convened in accordance with Stage 3 of this policy.
- A record of the written complaints and their outcome will be maintained and made available to Ofsted on request.

The EYFS statutory framework can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework-2> Parents are further advised that where they have concerns regarding the school meeting EYFS requirements they may contact Ofsted on 0300 123 4666.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Staff and Trustees, on an annual basis, will review this policy unless circumstances demand an earlier review.

Appendix A - Contact Details

Trust Governance Manager - enquiries@leadinglearnersmat.co.uk

By post - Leading Learners Multi-Academy Trust, Ennerdale Road, Astley, Tyldesley, Greater Manchester, M29 7PY

By phone - 07354 249265

Appendix B - Barring from the School Premises

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Schools will therefore act to ensure they remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community.

If an individual's behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask them to leave school premises. In serious cases, the Headteacher or the Trust can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the individual may wish to make.

This is a Headteacher decision but subject to review by the CEO. We will always give parent/s the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing.

The decision to bar should then be reviewed within 5 school days, taking into account any representations made by the parent. The decision will then either be confirmed or overturned. If the decision is confirmed the parent should be notified in writing without delay, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by email, to the Headteacher or CEO via the contact details contained in Appendix A.

Appendix C - Raising a Complaint Against a local governor, a trustee or a Member of Central Team

Where a complaint is about a matter relating specifically to the persons/groups below, whilst the general principles of this policy will be applied, the complaint will be considered immediately at Stage Two of the policy.

- a central Trust employee (including the CEO)
- a local governor
- a trustee
- the Local Governing Board (as a whole)
- the Trust Board or Multi Academy Trust (as a whole)

The investigating officer/body may differ depending on the subject of the complaint. In exceptional circumstances an independent investigator may be commissioned, who will submit a report on completion of their investigation.