

Acorn Trust

Complaints Policy



Written by:	JA Hewitt (CEO)
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Next Review Date:	Summer 2019
Chairs Signature	

Mission Statement

The Acorn Trust is a Multi-School Trust established with the aim of providing outstanding learning and opportunities for the children within its care.

Children are our nation's most precious resource. Their school life and learning experience will shape them for the whole of their lives

Safeguarding Statement

At the Acorn Trust we recognise our moral and statutory responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children.

We work to provide a safe and welcoming environment where children are respected and valued. We are alert to the signs of abuse and neglect and follow our procedures to ensure that children receive effective support, protection and justice.

The procedures contained in the Safeguarding Policy apply to all staff, volunteers and governors

Complaints Policy

1 Introduction

- 1.1 We are committed to developing a strong partnership with pupils, parents/carers and other stakeholders. This provides a good basis for mutual understanding and for preventing and resolving complaints.
- 1.2 We hope that the adoption of a clear complaints procedure will help to ensure that most complaints are resolved quickly and smoothly and as close to the source of the misunderstanding or problem as possible. In this way complainants can feel assured from the outset of a fair hearing, in line with a defined procedure for dealing with issues that have not immediately been resolved. We also hope that a staged framework might prevent an early and unnecessary escalation of the problem. In addition, we will ensure that lessons learned from the investigation of complaints will prove useful to improve the school's policy and practice

2 Scope

- 2.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of actions by the Trust, school or its staff that affects an individual or a group and requires a response from the Trust or school. This procedure deals with such complaints if made by a pupil, a parent or other external stakeholder, except that there are separate appeals procedures for a parent dissatisfied with a decision regarding either the admission or the exclusion of their child.
- 2.2 There are also separate procedures to deal with a complaint raised by or on behalf of a member of staff. These include the Grievance Procedure for a complaint by an employee of unfair treatment, the Harassment Procedure for an employee complaining of bullying or intimidation, the Disciplinary Procedure for an employee complaining about the conduct of another member of staff and the Whistle Blowing Procedure for an unresolved allegation of institutional malpractice.

3 Principles

- 3.1 We believe that most complaints can be resolved satisfactorily by informal discussion either over the telephone or through a meeting involving the key people involved.
- 3.2 Informal queries and complaints should be taken up directly with the relevant member of staff either verbally or in writing. Formal complaints concerning an individual school should be addressed to the appropriate Headteacher in writing; complaints concerning the Trust should be addressed to the CEO or The Chair of the Trust.
- 3.3 All complaints will be acknowledged within 48 hours of receipt and dealt with as quickly and efficiently as possible. The length of the period will vary with the gravity and complexity of the complaint and the urgency with which it needs to be settled. However, the intention is that all complaints should be settled within a period which is reasonable in the circumstances.
- 3.4 All formal complaints will be investigated fully, fairly and carefully and

complainants will be kept informed of progress.

- 3.5 The aim is always to secure the resolution of the complaint to the satisfaction of the complainant if possible.

4 Representation

- 4.1 At any stage, the complainant may be accompanied by a friend, colleague or other representative. In this case, the complainant should make their own arrangements for such representation. The representative may ask questions, confer with the complainant and make summary statements but may not answer questions on behalf of the complainant.

5 Recording

- 5.1 The Headteacher will acknowledge receipt of a written complaint within three working days.
- 5.2 The complaint will be recorded by the Local Advisory Body or Trust Clerk, together with the outcome and reasons for the outcome. The complainant will be informed of the outcome in writing, together with their entitlement to appeal the outcome.
- 5.3 Where the complaint is upheld, any action to be taken by the Trust or School in response will also be recorded and shared with the Trust at the appropriate committee.

6 Stage One: Informal Complaints

- 6.1 Informal complaints or concerns should be raised with the relevant member of staff, such as class teacher, Inclusion Manager or Pastoral Manager. Where an informal complaint is raised with the Headteacher, it will normally be passed to the most appropriate member of staff to deal with it informally. If the complainant indicates that they would have difficulty discussing the complaint with this member of staff, the Headteacher may direct them to another member of staff. Similarly, if the most appropriate member of staff feels they would have difficulty in dealing with the complaint objectively, the Headteacher may direct the complainant to another member of staff.
- 6.2 In certain circumstances, the Headteacher may instead choose to deal with the complaint informally in person, or the relevant member of staff may ask the Headteacher to deal with it informally in person.
- 6.3 If the complaint has been made in writing, the Headteacher may choose to treat it as a formal complaint and invoke the formal procedure.
- 6.4 If the complaint has been made to the Chair of Governors in the first instance, he or she will refer the complaint to the Headteacher. However, if the complaint concerns the Headteacher and has already been taken up with the Headteacher without being resolved, the complaint must be made in writing to the Chair using the Complaint Form (see Appendix A). The Chair will then invoke the formal procedure.
- 6.5 The member of staff to whom the complainant is referred will carry out an investigation and decide on any appropriate action. The complainant and the Headteacher will be informed of the conclusions drawn from

the investigation and action to be taken, together with details of how to make a formal complaint if they remain dissatisfied.

- 6.6 It is a precondition to the operation of this policy that the complainant shall have made reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution and shall have acted in relation to the matter in a reasonable and measured way consistent with the parent code of conduct. The Chair of Trustees shall have a discretion, which will be exercised reasonably, not to allow a complaint to be pursued where this precondition has not been met.
- 6.7 In some cases, matters affecting general school policy may be judged by the Headteacher, in consultation with the Chair of Governors, to be an appropriate area for discussion at Advisory Body or any other Trust Committee level, in order to resolve the complaint. In these circumstances care will be taken to ensure that the identity of the complainant and the individual complained of are not disclosed in case a formal complaint is made subsequently.
- 6.8 Every effort will be made to resolve the problem to the satisfaction of the complainant at this informal stage. Possible outcomes include:
- i. complaint resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant;
 - ii. complaint not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant;
 - iii. complaint dealt with under another procedure;

7 Stage Two: Formal Resolution at Local Level: Investigation by a member of the Senior Leadership Team

- 7.1 The Headteacher will ensure the complaint is investigated fully. The Headteacher may delegate responsibility for conducting the investigation to another member of staff.
- 7.2 Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher, the Headteacher will inform the complainant in writing that they should send a completed Complaint Form to the Chair of the Advisory Board, who will then take the place of the Headteacher throughout the formal procedure.
- 7.3 Once the investigation has been completed, the Headteacher will review all the information and discuss the findings with the complainant with the aim of resolving the complaint to the complainant's satisfaction.
- 7.4 The Headteacher will decide on the outcome and inform the complainant in writing of the decision, together with details of how to appeal against the decision if they remain dissatisfied. A meeting may also be arranged to convey the reasons for the decision.
- 7.5 Rarely, the decision may involve taking disciplinary action against an individual, for which there is a separate procedure. In this event, the complainant will be informed that the complaint will be pursued through disciplinary action. The Trust's disciplinary procedures require that all details of proceedings remain confidential, and consequently the complainant will not be informed of the outcome.
- 7.6 Possible outcomes include:
- i. complaint withdrawn;

- ii. complaint dismissed;
- iii. complaint dealt with under another procedure;
- iv. complaint upheld.

7.7 Stage 3 – Formal Resolution: CEO

1. The complainant must put the complaint in writing, addressed to the CEO of the Trust, setting out briefly the facts and stating what it is that the complainant considers should have been done or where the school has not met reasonable expectations.
2. The CEO may appoint a member of the Local Advisory Body of the school to investigate the complaint. The investigation may include the offer of a meeting with the complainant, whenever reasonably possible, any meeting with the complainant will take place within 15 school days of the written complaint being received.
3. The investigator will put her/his findings in writing and will indicate what, if any, steps should be taken to resolve the matter. Whenever reasonably possible, this will be done within 15 school days of any meeting with the complainant; if no meeting is arranged it will be within 15 school days of the written complaint being received.

Where the complainant remains dissatisfied he may request the complaint is dealt with at Stage 4 by completing Appendix B. Any such request **must** be set out in writing, stating where the complainant remains dissatisfied, what remedies are being sought and be lodged within **10** school days of the complainant receiving the findings in writing. The request must be addressed to the Chair of the Trust who will convene a hearing.

8. Stage 4 : Appeals Hearing

- 8.1 The Complaints Panel will consider all complaints at Stage 4.
- 8.2 The Complaints Panel will comprise of at least three people, which will include one person who is independent of the management and running of the Academy Trust and any of its schools.
- 8.3 The Complaints Panel may also include one or more persons from the following categories:
 - (i) A member of the local Advisory body of the school where the complaint emanated from;
 - (ii) A member of a local Advisory body from another school within the School Trust;
 - (iii) A member of the Board of Trustees from the Academy Trust;

- 8.4 None of the members of the Complaints Panel will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.
- 8.5 The Clerk will invite the school to put in writing its response to the complainant's reasons. The school will provide this within 15 school days. At the end of that period (whether or not the school has responded) the Clerk will convene a meeting of the Complaints Panel. That 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 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. At any meeting, the complainant will be entitled to be accompanied by a friend but legal representation will not be allowed.
- 8.6 The meeting is not a court case, it will be held in private, and will be as informal as circumstances allow. The complainant will have the opportunity to put her/his reasons for dissatisfaction and to enlarge on 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. The complainant will have the opportunity to make final comments to the Panel.
- 8.7 The Panel may make findings and recommendations and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be
- (i) sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about
 - (ii) available for inspection on the school premises by the Academy Trust, the Headteacher and the CEO
- 8.8 The Panel will formulate its response as quickly as reasonably possible, aiming to do so within 10 school days, and the Clerk will notify all concerned.
- 8.9 The Appeals Committee may:
- i. dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
 - ii. uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
 - iii. decide on any further action to be taken;
 - iv. If appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

9 Attendance at a Complaints Panel Hearing

The Complaints Panel will only be arranged if the complainant and/or their representative attend. If the complainant does not confirm attendance or fails to attend on the day without compelling reasons, the Complaints Panel will not proceed and the complainant will lose their right to the complaint being heard. Any further attempt to re-open the matter will be considered as falling under the serial/persistent complaint section as below.

10 Serial or persistent complainants

If at any level a complainant attempts to reopen an issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this complaints procedure, the Chair of the Trust may write to the complainant to inform him/her that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter closed, that continued correspondence is vexatious and that the Trust will not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

11 Record Keeping

A written record will be kept of all complaints that were resolved at the formal stage of the complaints procedure. The Trust reserves the right to record meetings. Records will contain details of whether the complaint was resolved at stage 2, stage 3 or proceeded to a stage 4 panel hearing. The action taken by the school or the Academy Trust as a result of a complaint (regardless of whether they are upheld) will also be recorded.

12 Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

- 12.1 The Trust will review this procedure within two years and assess its implementation and effectiveness.

Appendix A



Complaint Form

<p>Name:</p> <p>Address:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Tel/Mobile:</p>

Complainant

Details of Complaint

<p><i>Please include full details, including dates, times and names of those involved.</i></p>
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<p><i>Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary. Once completed, send this form to the Clerk who will arrange for your complaint to be investigated.</i></p>

Signed _____ Date _____

For office use

Date Received by Clerk ___ Date of Response to Complainant ___

Appendix B



Complaint Appeal Form

Name:

Address:

Tel/Mobile:

Complainant

Date complaint was submitted in writing:

Date response received from Executive Headteacher in writing:

I am dissatisfied with the response to the above complaint and would like an Appeal Hearing for the following reasons:

Signed _____ Date _____

Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary. Once completed, send this form to the Trust Clerk who will arrange for your appeal to be heard.

For office use

Date Received by Trust Clerk ___ Date of Response to Complainant ___