



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES POLICY – MARCH 2026

Statement of Intent

The Premier Academy aims to resolve all complaints at the earliest possible stage and is dedicated to continuing to provide the highest quality of education possible throughout the procedure.

This Policy has been created to deal with any complaint against a member of staff or the Academy as a whole, relating to any aspects of the Academy or the provision of facilities or services.

Any person, including a member of the public, can make a complaint about the provision of facilities or services that the Academy provides. This Policy outlines the procedures that the Complainant and Academy must follow.

Once a complaint has been made, it can be resolved or withdrawn at any stage.

This policy is published on the Academy website and is available in hard copy upon request from the Academy Office to parents/carers of children and the wider public.

Legal Framework

This Policy has due regard to statutory legislation, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Education Act 2002
- Equality Act 2010
- Part 7 of The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014
- Immigration Act 2016
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- HM Government (2016) 'Code of Practice on the English language requirement for public sector workers'
- ESFA (2021) 'Best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures'
- DfE (2025) 'Academy trust handbook'

This Policy will be implemented in accordance with the following Academy policies:

- Admissions Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Suspension and Exclusion Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy

Definitions

For the purposes of this Policy, "working days" refers to school days - any day on which the Academy is open to children. This excludes weekends, bank holidays, and school holidays (even if staff are working on-site).

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

A “complaint” can be defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action’. Complaints can be resolved formally, through this procedure, or informally dependent on the Complainant’s choice.

Any concern or complaint will be taken seriously, whether formally or informally, and the appropriate procedures will be implemented.

A “grievance” is an issue raised by a member of staff where they feel the Academy has not implemented a policy or process fairly or properly. Any complaints by an employee about their employment will be dealt in line with the Academy’s Grievance Policy.

For the purpose of this Policy, “unreasonable complaints” include:

- Vexatious complaints:
 - Are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious.
 - Posting details of the complaint on social media whilst the procedure is ongoing.
 - 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:
 - Are duplicated, sent by the same Complainant once the initial complaint has been closed.

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.

For the purpose of this Policy, “duplicate complaints” are identical complaints received from a Complainant’s spouse, partner, grandparent or child. These complaints will not be addressed again, the individual making the second complaint will be informed that the complaint has been dealt with on a local level and if they are dissatisfied with the result, they can appeal to the DfE.

Any new details provided by a Complainant’s spouse, partner, grandparent or child, will be investigated and dealt with in line with the Complaints Procedure.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Complainant is expected to:

- Cooperate with the Academy in seeking a timely solution to the complaint.
- Express their concerns in full at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Respond promptly to requests for information or meetings.
- Treat all individuals involved in the process with respect and courtesy.

The Complaints Coordinator manages the procedural flow and ensures compliance. They will:

- Liaise with all parties (including the CEO and Chair of Governors) to ensure the procedure runs smoothly.
- Update all parties at each stage and provide awareness of relevant legislation (e.g. Equality Act 2010, UK GDPR).
- Support the Complainant by identifying any additional needs, such as interpretation or accessibility requirements.
- Maintain formal written records of all formal complaints (Stages 2–4). This record must state:
 - Whether the complaint was resolved at a formal stage or proceeded to a panel hearing.

- The action taken by the Academy (regardless of whether the complaint was upheld).
- All correspondence and statements kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or an inspection body requests access.

The Investigator - involved in Stages 1 and 2, the Investigator will:

- Establish facts through a sensitive and thorough interview process with the Complainant, staff, and children where relevant/appropriate. Children will be interviewed in the presence of a supportive adult (who is not the subject of the complaint).
- Analyse evidence and relevant records in a comprehensive and fair manner.
- Recommend resolutions and courses of action to the Complainant in a clear, understandable response.
- Monitor timescales to ensure the investigation remains within the policy's limits.

The Panel (Chair, Members and Clerk) ensures an independent and impartial review at Stage 4.

Note: The Panel cannot provide financial compensation.

The Panel Chair will:

- Set the tone by conducting the hearing in an informal, non-adversarial manner that puts participants (especially children) at ease.
- Ensure fairness by giving both parties the opportunity to state their case without interruption.
- Reach outcomes based strictly on facts and evidence and confirm that no panel member has a prior interest in the case.

Panel Members will:

- Remain impartial, acting as an independent body to achieve a reasonable resolution or reconciliation.
- Exercise Authority to uphold or dismiss the complaint and recommend changes to Academy policy to prevent reoccurrence.

The Panel Clerk will:

- Coordinate logistics by setting the date, time, venue and circulating all evidence and documentation at least five working days before the hearing.
- Record and notify by minuting the proceedings and formally notifying all parties of the panel's final decision.

Making A Complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing (e.g. via email or using the Complaint Form – Appendix A) or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a Complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complaints against Academy staff (except the CEO) should be made in the first instance, to the CEO via the Academy Office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the CEO should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the Academy Office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Any complaint made against the entire Governing Body, or complaints involving the Chair and the Vice Chair, should be made in writing to the Clerk. The Clerk will then determine the most appropriate course of action, depending on the nature of the complaint. This action may involve sourcing an independent investigator to initially deal with the complaint and then getting the complaint to be heard by co-opted governors from another school.

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.

Complaints are expected to be made as soon as possible after an incident arises to amend the issue in an appropriate timescale.

Complaints must be lodged within three months of the incident occurring. While the Academy adheres to this timeframe, complaints submitted outside this window will not be automatically refused and we will consider exceptions on a case-by-case basis.

In the case of any timescales changing, all parties involved will be informed of the changes in a timely manner.

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

A complaint can progress to the next stage of the procedure even if it is not viewed as “justified”.

The Academy reserves the right to vary this procedure in exceptional circumstances. Any such deviation, along with the rationale for the change, will be formally recorded and shared with all parties where appropriate.

Information about a complaint will not be disclosed to a third party without consent from the Complainant.

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

Scope of Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by The Premier Academy, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including:

- Admissions
- Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation
- Exclusion of children from school
- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff conduct.

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 the Complainant commences legal action against the Academy in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage of the procedure, the Academy is committed to reaching a resolution. Where a complaint is upheld, in whole or in part, we will acknowledge this and may offer one or more of the following:

- A formal explanation.
- An acknowledgment that the situation could have been handled differently or better.
- An apology.
- An assurance that the event will not recur, including an explanation of the specific steps taken to prevent a repeat and the timescales for these changes.
- A commitment to review relevant Academy policies or procedures in light of the complaint.

Complaint Withdrawal

If the Complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

The Role of the Department for Education (DfE)

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after the Academy's internal complaints procedure has been exhausted (Stage 4), they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State for Education via the Department for Education (DfE).

The DfE will not typically re-investigate the substance of the complaint or overturn any decisions made by the Academy. Their role is to ensure the Academy has handled the matter correctly and in accordance with the law. The DfE will only intervene if it has evidence that the Academy has:

- Breached a clause in its Funding Agreement.
- Failed to comply with statutory duties or education legislation (including the *Independent School Standards*).
- Acted unreasonably when exercising its education functions.

Complainants should be directed to the [DfE's online school complaints portal](#). When managing a complex case, the Academy reserves the right to seek procedural advice from the DfE's regional teams to ensure it is acting reasonably and lawfully; however, the Department will not provide advice on the specific resolution of an individual complaint.

Monitoring and Review

The Academy's Complaints Procedures Policy will be reviewed annually, or earlier considering the latest guidance issued by the DfE.

Responsibility for reviewing the procedures outlined belongs to the Governing Body.

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The Complaints Procedure: Summary of Stages

- Stage 1 (Informal): Resolution through discussion with the relevant staff member or CEO.
- Stage 2 (Formal Investigation): Formal written complaint investigated by the CEO (or Chair of Governors if the complaint is about the CEO).
- Stage 3 (Panel Hearing): A formal appeal heard by a panel including at least one person independent of the management and running of the Academy.
- Final Escalation: Referral to the Department for Education (DfE).

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Most concerns can be resolved quickly through informal discussion. The Complainant should initially raise the matter with the staff member most directly involved (e.g. Class Teacher, Year Group Leader, Assistant Heads, SENDCo or Safeguarding Lead).

The staff member will make every effort to resolve the issue promptly.

If the Complainant is not satisfied with this initial response, they may seek a meeting with a member of the Senior Leadership Team. If the matter remains unresolved after these informal discussions, the Complainant may progress to Stage 2.

At any point, the Academy may suggest independent mediation if both parties agree.

Stage 2: Formal Investigation

If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, the Complainant must submit the complaint in writing to the CEO (via the Academy Office). If the complaint concerns the CEO or a Governor, it should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governors.

The Investigation Process:

- The CEO (or a designated Senior Investigator) will acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days and provide a target date for a full response (usually within 15 working days).
- The Investigator will establish the facts by interviewing relevant parties and reviewing evidence.
- A formal written response will be issued, providing a full explanation of the decision, the reasons for it and any remedial action the Academy will take.
- The response will clearly outline how the Complainant can escalate to Stage 3 if they remain dissatisfied.

Stage 3: Complaints Appeal Panel

This is the final stage of the Academy's internal complaints procedure. A Complainant wishing to appeal a Stage 2 decision must notify the Clerk to the Governors within 10 working days of receiving the Stage 2 response.

The Panel Composition:

- The Panel will consist of three people who have had no prior involvement in the complaint.
- At least one panel member will be independent of the management and running of the Academy.
- The Chair of Governors is prohibited from sitting on this panel if they had any involvement at Stage 2.

The Hearing:

- The Clerk will aim to convene the hearing within 15 working days of receiving the appeal.
- The Complainant may be accompanied by a friend or representative. *The meeting is not a legal proceeding; therefore, legal representation is not normally permitted.*

- The Panel will review the evidence, hear representations from both the Complainant and the Academy and reach a final decision.
- The Panel may:
 - Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
 - Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
 - Recommend changes to Academy systems or procedures.

Notification of Findings

The Panel's findings and recommendations will be provided in writing to the Complainant and, where relevant, the individual complained about, within five working days. A formal copy will also be retained on the Academy premises for inspection by the CEO and the Governing Body.

Whilst the final findings and recommendations are shared with the parties involved, the underlying evidence, witness statements and minutes of the hearing remain the property of the Academy. These records are strictly confidential and subject to UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018; they will not be released to third parties or the Complainant unless there is a specific legal or statutory requirement to do so.

Final Escalation: Referral to the Department for Education (DfE)

If the internal procedure is exhausted and the Complainant remains dissatisfied, they may refer their complaint to the Secretary of State.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of the complaint but will consider whether the Academy has adhered to education legislation, its Funding Agreement, and its own statutory policies.

Submissions should be made via the online portal at: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe>

Appendix A – Complaint Form

Please complete and return to The Premier Academy who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

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

Desired Outcome: Please describe what actions or resolutions you believe would resolve your complaint at this stage.

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

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Action taken:

Date: