



One Community Trust

COMPLAINTS POLICY

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1. Introduction

The aim of this policy is to resolve complaints or concerns about One Community Trust (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 a chance to learn and improve for the future.

- A concern is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought.” The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.
- A complaint is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action.”

Please note that:

- School days in this policy refers to days when a school is open to pupils for teaching and does not include INSET days.
- References to ‘parents’ in this policy include carers
- 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 will continue to be used.
- An independent investigator is an individual with no prior knowledge of the complaint.

The aim of this policy is to resolve complaints or concerns about any aspect of One Community Trust, namely the Trust or 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 a chance to learn and improve for the future. Resolution should remain the core objective throughout the complaints process.

Anyone can make a complaint, but a different process applies depending on whether the person raising the complaint is a parent /carer of a current pupil at a school within the Trust. Please refer to ‘Complaints Procedure for parents / carers of current pupils’ if you are a parent of a current pupil, otherwise please see ‘Complaints raised by those who are not parents / carers of current pupils.’

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 on ‘Complaints that will not be considered under this policy’

Requests for reasonable adjustments to the process set out below will be considered to ensure that complainants can access and complete the process. Additional guidance will form part of the appendices.

2. Complaints that will not be considered under this policy

Usually, complaints relating to the matters set out in the table below will not be considered under this policy as they have their own appeal or complaint processes. Where necessary the Trust will exercise its discretion.

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

| 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 Academy Exclusions Policy |
| Statutory SEN assessments | SEND Tribunal (and see SEN Code of Practice) |
| Safeguarding matters where it involves an allegation against a member of staff | Raise with Designated Safeguarding Lead or a direct referral can be made to the Local Authority Designated Officer at Warrington Borough Council - see Child Protection / Safeguarding Policy |
| Data protection / FOI | Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) |
| Staff Grievances and Disciplinary matters ¹ | Staff Grievance & Disciplinary Policy |
| Whistleblowing | Whistleblowing Policy |
| Third party contractors / suppliers | Provider concerned |

3. [Roles and Responsibilities](#)

3.1 The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow this policy
- Co-operate with the school or trust throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not approach individual governors about the complaint
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

3.2 The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare an impartial comprehensive report to the Headteacher or complaints committee, which includes the facts and potential solutions

3.3 The complaints co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- The Headteacher or CEO/ Operations Director
- Any other staff member providing administrative support

The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the Headteacher, chair of governors/trustees, clerk and CEO and chair of trustees
- Be aware of issues relating to:
 - Sharing third-party information
 - Additional support needed by complainants; for example, interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- Keep records

3.4 Clerk to the local governing Committee and trust board

The clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints panel if required, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

3.5 The committee chair

The committee chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

4. Complaints about fulfilment of early years requirements

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

a) The written concern/complaint will be acknowledged within 5 school days

b) The school Headteacher/Principal will commission an investigation into 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 days of the complaint being received.

c) Where the Complainant remains dissatisfied, the Clerk to the Local Governing Committee will ensure that a formal Complaints Panel will be convened in accordance with Stage 3 of this policy.

Parents who have concerns should raise them through the complaints process. Where they are not satisfied having exhausted the Complaints Process, parents are further advised that where they have concerns regarding the school meeting EYFS requirements they may contact Ofsted.

A record of the written complaints and their outcome will be maintained and made available to Ofsted on request.

5. Complaints Procedure for parents / carers of current pupils

Resolving Concerns and Informal Complaints

The school aims to resolve concerns quickly, fairly and informally wherever possible. Most concerns can be addressed without the need to invoke the formal complaints procedure, and doing so often leads to a faster and more satisfactory outcome for all parties.

The formal complaints procedure should therefore be used only after appropriate informal steps have been taken. A formal complaint should not be the first course of action unless the matter is of a serious nature.

Before submitting a formal complaint, individuals are expected to have attempted to resolve the matter through the appropriate informal channels.

Informal Resolution – Expected Steps

Before a complaint is considered under the formal complaints procedure, the school expects that, where appropriate, the complainant has:

- Raised the concern directly with the relevant member of staff at Stage 1
- Given the member of staff reasonable opportunity to respond
- Escalated the concern to the member of staff's line manager (for example, Head of Faculty, Head of Year or other appropriate middle leader)
- Attended a meeting to discuss the concern and seek resolution
- Raised the matter informally with the school and allowed reasonable time for the school to investigate and respond

Where these steps have been followed and the issue remains unresolved, it may then be appropriate to submit a formal complaint. Only if the complainant remains dissatisfied following the outcome of Stage 1 should a complaint be escalated to Stage 2.

Scope of the Formal Complaints Procedure

The formal complaints procedure is intended to address serious or significant concerns that have not been resolved through informal processes. It is not designed to deal with routine matters, day-to-day operational issues, or concerns that fall within established school management procedures.

The following guidance outlines how different types of concerns should normally be raised:

- Classroom-related matters, including behaviour management, sanctions or teaching and learning concerns, should be raised with the class teacher in the first instance and, if unresolved, escalated to the Head of Faculty or appropriate middle leader
- Concerns relating to pastoral matters or pastoral staff should be raised with the relevant member of the Senior Leadership Team responsible for pastoral provision
- Whole-school issues, structural concerns, or matters relating to decisions taken at Senior Leadership Team level should initially be raised with a Deputy Headteacher or the Headteacher to seek resolution

A matter would normally only be considered appropriate for a formal complaint where these routes have been followed and the concern remains unresolved.

The Headteacher has discretion to determine whether a complaint meets the criteria to be dealt with under the formal complaints procedure. Where a complaint does not meet this threshold, the school may redirect the matter to be addressed through a more appropriate informal or internal process.

5.1 Complaint Process

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

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 relevant staff in the school before a request is made to deal with it under the formal stages of this policy.

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.

The school or Trust will seek to resolve matters at the informal stage within 15 school days of the issue being raised by the parent.

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

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution: Investigation by a Nominated Individual

Stage 2 complaints must be set out in writing, ideally using the form available at Appendix 1, within 10 school days of the Stage 1 response. It must be addressed to the Headteacher of the School (unless the complaint relates to the Headteacher in which case please refer to section headed 'Complaints against specific role-holders' below). The complaint should set out briefly the grounds of the complaint, stating what it is that the parent considers should have been done or where the School or Trust has not met reasonable expectations and confirming the outcome sought.

The Chair of the Local Governing Board/ Headteacher as appropriate will nominate an individual as complaints coordinator who will keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure and make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the headteacher, chair of governors/trustees, clerk and CEO and chair of trustees as relevant.

The complaints coordinator will acknowledge the complaint within 5 school days.

An investigation will be carried out by a nominated individual (the investigator) identified by the Chair of the Local Governing Board/ Headteacher as appropriate, who may offer the parent a meeting. The investigator will speak to others involved. Whenever reasonably possible, any meeting with the parent will take place within 15 school days of the written complaint being received.

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 parent; if no meeting is arranged it will be within 25 school days of the written complaint being received.

Where the parent remains dissatisfied, he or she may request the complaint is escalated to Stage 3.

Stage 3 – Formal Resolution: Complaints Panel Meeting

Stage 3 complaints must be set out in writing, stating where the parent remains dissatisfied and the outcome sought, and lodged with the Trust Compliance and Information Manager within 10 school days of the Stage 2 response.

The Compliance and Information Manager will acknowledge the Stage 3 complaint within 5 school days and will inform the Clerk to the Trustees who will convene a Complaints Panel.

The Complaints panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the Trust and must consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school.

The panel cannot be made up solely of governing board members, as they are not independent of the management and running of the school. The independent panel member may however be a member of a Local Governing Committee from another school within the Trust if they have no conflict, no prior knowledge of the complaint and no apparent bias.

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

- (i) a member of the Local Governing Committee of the School where the complaint emanated from;
- (ii) a member of a Local Governing Committee from another School within the Trust;
- (iii) a member of the Board of Trustees from the Trust; and/or
- (iv) a member of a Local Governing Committee or Trustee of another School Trust.

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

The Clerk 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 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 parent, 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.

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 parent'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 parent will have the opportunity to put forward her/his reasons for dissatisfaction and to expand upon them but may not introduce reasons that were not previously put in writing. The Complaints Panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded. The parent and the School/Trust will have the opportunity to put forward their respective version and views of events and each side, and the Complaints Panel members will be able to ask questions. The parent will have the opportunity to make final comments to the Complaints Panel.

The Complaints Panel aim to reach conclusions and make recommendations and a copy of those conclusions and recommendations will be:

- a) sent by electronic mail or otherwise provided in writing to the parent and, where relevant, the School or person complained about; and
- b) available for inspection on the School premises by the Trust, the Principal and the Chief Executive Officer.

The Complaints 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.

At any meeting, the parent will be entitled to bring a companion along to provide support. Legal representation will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances.

If the parent 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 below.

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 Complaints Panel Meeting within the time stated in the policy) the matter is closed.

If the Complainant is still not satisfied, they may contact the Department for Education (DfE). There is an online procedure at: [https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact the Department for Education](https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact_the_Department_for_Education)

The Complainant may write to the DfE at:

The School Complaints Unit (SCU)
Department for Education
2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate
Manchester M1 2WD

5.2 Complaints against specific role-holders

Complaints against the Headteacher

Any complaint relating to the Headteacher of the School must be raised in the first instance with the Chair of Governors who will then involve the Trust’s Chief Executive Officer who will aim to resolve the matter through dialogue. If resolution cannot be reached, the Chief Executive Officer will designate an independent Investigator who may be a senior member of the Trust, a member of a Local Governing Committee or the Trust Board or an external individual if required to investigate the complaint as per Stage 2 – Formal Resolution process.

Complaints against the Local Governing Committee

Where a complaint is brought against a member of the Local Governing Committee, it should be raised with the Chair of the Local Governing Committee who will investigate the complaint (or appoint another member of the Local Governing Committee to do so) as per Stage 2 – Formal Resolution process.

If the complaint is against the Chair of the Local Governing Committee, then the Vice Chair of the Local Governing Committee will investigate the complaint (or appoint another member of the Local Governing Committee to do so) in the same way as per Stage 2 – Formal Resolution process.

In exceptional circumstances the Chair of Trustees may at his or her absolute discretion determine that a complaint against a member of the Local Governing Committee should be dealt with at Trust Board level and, if so determined, the Chair of Trustees will oversee Stage 2.

Complaints against individual Trustees / the Board of Trustees

If the complaint is against a Trustee, then it should be raised with the Chair of Trustees by writing to the Clerk to the Board of Trustees. In the case of a complaint against the either Chair or the Board of Trustees as a whole, then it should be put in writing to the Clerk to the Board of Trustees who will refer it to the Members.

In such cases the Chair of Trustees / the Members will investigate the complaint or appoint an appropriate person to do so in the same way as per Stage 2 – Formal Resolution process.

Complaints against the Chief Executive Officer or other Trust office staff

If the complaint is against a member of Trust staff, then it should be raised with the Chief Executive Officer, (or in the case of a complaint against the Chief Executive Officer, the Chair of Trustees) who will investigate the complaint (or appoint another member of the Board of Trustees to do so) in the same way as per Stage 2 – Formal Resolution process.

5.3 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.

5.4 Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

5.5 Duty of Care

The Trust takes its duty of care to all staff and stakeholders very seriously and will endeavour to provide any support necessary to those involved in the complaints process. This commitment is reflected in our approach to handling complaints, ensuring fairness, confidentiality, and support throughout the procedure.

6. Record keeping and confidentiality

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 by the nominated complaints coordinator and in line with the Trust Data Protection Policy and Document Retention Policy.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a Committee conducting an inspection requests access to them.

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

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, either a template response will be sent to all complainants, or a single response will be published on the School/Trust's website at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer and/or Chair of Trustees.

Where the complaint campaign involves complainants who are parents they will be entitled to escalate the complaint to a panel hearing if they are dissatisfied with the School/Trust's response. The School/Trust will consider how best to manage panel hearings in such circumstances.

9. Serial, persistent or vexatious complaints

9.1 Serial or persistent complaints

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 procedure, the Chair of Trustees may write to the Complainant to inform him/her that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter closed, that continued correspondence on the same matter is vexatious and that the Trust will not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

9.2 Vexatious complaints

Complaints with 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.

In such cases, the Chair of Trustees may write to the Complainant to inform him/her that the complaint is deemed to be vexatious and that the Trust will not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

10. Complaints raised by those who are not parents / carers of current pupils

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:

- a) 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 School/Trust (depending on the nature of the complaint) will seek to resolve the matter informally within 15 school days.
- b) If it is not possible to resolve the matter informally, the complaint may be submitted in writing, using the form available at Appendix 1 or through the complaint form on the Trust/ School website, to the Chief Executive Officer, or where the complaint relates to the Chief Executive Officer, to the Chair of Trustees.
- c) The complaint will be acknowledged within 5 school days and a final written response will be issued within 15 school days.

With the exclusion of the section outlining the "Complaints Procedure for parents / carers of current pupils" the remainder of the policy applies.

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.

11. Monitoring Arrangements

The Trust board/ local governing board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The Trust Board/ local governing Committee will track the number and nature of complaints, and review appropriately.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the clerk to the Trust Board/ local Governing Committee

This policy will be reviewed by the Operations Director every year. At each review, the policy will be approved by the Trust Board.

12. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Exclusions policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- Staff absence procedures
- SEN policy and information report
- Data Protection Policy and Privacy notices

Appendix 1 – One Community Trust Complaints Form

This form should be used to raise a formal complaint only after a matter has been raised informally under section 5 of the Complaints Policy and you are not satisfied with the response. Please refer to the Complaints Policy when completing this form.

Your details Name

Email

Address

Name of pupil, year group and your relationship to them (if applicable)

Complaint details

School name (if complaint relates to a specific School)

Grounds of complaint

What steps have been taken to resolve the complaint informally (including details of who the matter was raised with, when and what solution was offered)

Why have the steps taken so far failed to resolve the complaint? (including what you consider should have been done / where the School or Trust has not met reasonable expectations in its response) Outcome sought What action would you like taken to resolve the matter?

Signed Date

Please send completed forms to relevant email address stated in Appendix 2 or hand in to the school office in a sealed envelope marked for the attention of the relevant addressee (generally this will be the Principal for complaints about a specific School or the Compliance and Information Manager for complaints about the Trust, however please refer to the Complaints Policy and in particular section 5.2 complaints about specific role-holders, for further information.

Appendix 2 – Contact Details

| School | Headteacher | School Email Address | Chair of Governors |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|--|---------------------------|
| Birchwood High School | Emma Mills | contactus@birchwoodhigh.org | Colin Burrows |
| Brook Acre Primary School | Jo Holmes | brookacrebusiness@onecommunitytrust.co.uk | Dawn Farrent |
| Croft Primary School | Anne Mains | croft@onecommunitytrust.co.uk | Julie Thompson |
| Culcheth Primary School | Reina Fazackerley | culchethprimary@onecommunitytrust.co.uk | Kate O'Donnell |
| Gorse Covert Primary School | Gill Poole | office@gorsecovert.co.uk | Chris Burrows |
| Locking Stumps Primary School | Jamie Vermiglio | lockingstumpsprimary@onecommunitytrust.co.uk | Alison Fisher |
| Oakwood Primary School | Joanne Reilly | oakwoodprimary@onecommunitytrust.co.uk | David Cheetham |
| Woolston Primary School | Craig Burgess | woolstoncprimary@onecommunitytrust.co.uk | Nikki Osborne |

Appendix 3 – OCT Proposed complaints process

STAGE 1 – INFORMAL RESOLUTION

- Raise concern with school
- **Within 3 months** of the issue (*Complaints submitted outside this timeframe may be considered where exceptional circumstances apply*)
- Response **within 15 school days**

Is the issue resolved? YES → END

NO ↓

STAGE 2 – FORMAL INVESTIGATION

- If a complaint is received directly at Stage 2 without evidence that Stage 1 has been completed, the school may refer the complaint back to Stage 1 for informal resolution.
- Written complaint to the Headteacher **within 10 school days** of the Stage 1 response (*If the complaint concerns the Headteacher, it should be addressed to the Chair of the LGC / Trust*)
- Acknowledged **within 5 school days** of receipt of the complaint
- Investigation by nominated individual appointed by the Headteacher or LGC/Trust
- Parent may be offered a meeting (**normally within 15 school days**)
- Written outcome issued: **Within 15 school days** of a meeting, or **within 25 school days** if no meeting takes place

Is the parent satisfied? YES → END

NO ↓

STAGE 3 – COMPLAINTS PANEL MEETING

- Written request **within 10 school days** of the Stage 2 response.
- Acknowledged by the Trust Compliance officer **within 5 school days**
- A Clerk appointed by the Trust Compliance Officer
- Independent panel (3 or more members who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school.)
- The Clerk 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 responds, a Panel Meeting will be convened
- The Clerk will inform all parties of a Panel Meeting held within **15 school days** of the end of the school's response.
- The meeting date, time and location will be confirmed to all parties at least **10 school days** in advance. The complainant may attend and may be accompanied by a companion.
- The Complaints 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

PROCESS FORMALLY CLOSED

If still dissatisfied the complainant is entitled to contact Department for Education directly