



Horizon Academy Trust

Where anything is possible

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Approved and signed by the Board of Trustees
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1. Aims

Our Trust aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at a Trust academy.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The Trust will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the Trust website.

2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the Academy.

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on [creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations](#), and refers to [good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the [Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework](#) with regards to dealing with complaints about the Academy's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

3. Definitions and scope

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint.

A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”.

The Academy will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.

A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”.

The Academy intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with SEN about the Academy’s support are within the scope of this policy. Such complaints should first be made to the Class Teacher, SENCO or Headteacher; they will then be referred to this complaints policy. The Academy’s SEN policy includes information about the rights of parents of pupils with disabilities who believe that the Academy has discriminated against their child.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use Academy premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

4. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

We also intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits will be set for each action within each stage.

Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set, and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline with an explanation for the delay.

The Academy expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and no later than 3 months afterwards. We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

Complaints about our fulfilment of early years requirements

We will investigate all written complaints relating to the Academy’s fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of

receiving the complaint. The Academy will keep a record of the complaint (see section 9) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the Academy is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by calling 0300 123 4234 or 0300 123 4666, or by emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. An online contact form is also available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>.

We will notify parents and carers if we become aware that the Academy is to be inspected by Ofsted. We will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

5. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the Headteacher or a Governor)

Stage 1: informal

The Academy will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Headteacher as appropriate, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school office.

The Academy will acknowledge informal complaints within **5 working** days, and investigate and provide a response within **10 working** days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher, as appropriate.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

Stage 2: formal

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint into writing, usually to the Headteacher and/or the subject of the complaint. This letter should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher (or other person appointed by the Headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within **10 working** days.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the chair of governors in writing within **5 working** days.

Inform the Chair of Governors in writing

This letter should set out the details of the complaint including evidence as set out above. The complainant should also specify what they feel would resolve the complaint, and how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently.

The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within **10 working** days. If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the

chair of governors in writing within **5 working** days.

Stage 3: review panel

Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal, stage.

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor 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 Academy. 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 panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 9).

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel; however, the review panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the Academy representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and Academy representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel must then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide a copy of the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the proprietor and Headteacher.

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within **5 working** days.

6. Complaints against the Headteacher

Informal

An employee who wishes to make an informal complaint against the Headteacher with a view to resolving an issue may use any of the following approaches:

- Approach a Deputy Headteacher or another member of the leadership team
- Contacting the trade union representative who may contact the Headteacher's trade union representative or the Headteacher directly.
- Approaching the Chair of Governors or Trust - The Chair of Governors may delegate the matter to a Trust Director/Governor with the particular skills to enable him or her to provide assistance in this type of problem.

Whoever undertakes this role cannot subsequently be a member of Complaints Panel or the Appeals Committee dealing with the matter.

Where the situation cannot be resolved through mutual discussion, consideration should be given to the use of mediation.

It must be noted that this is the informal part of the process and that any person the employee chooses to contact to assist in resolving the problem must deal with the matter on a confidential basis.

Formal

The employee may contact the Chair of Governors and/or Trust to raise a complaint against the Headteacher. The complainant must put the details in writing outlining their specific complaint to the Chair of Governors/Clerk to Governors. The same steps outlined within the Complaints Procedure will apply.

Only an external investigating officer or one or more Governors/Trust Directors may carry out an investigation into complaints against the Headteacher.

7. Referring complaints on completion of the Academy's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the ESFA. The ESFA will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the Academy. The ESFA will not overturn an Academy's decision about a complaint. However, it will look into:

- Whether there was undue delay, or the school did not comply with its own complaints procedure
- Whether the school was in breach of its funding agreement with the secretary of state
- Whether the school has failed to comply with any other legal obligation

If the school did not deal with the complaint properly, it will be asked to re-investigate the complaint. If the school's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

8. Persistent complaints

Where a complainant tries to re-open the issue with the Academy after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the Chair of Governors (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the Chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the Academy again about the same issue, the Academy can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- The Academy has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the Academy's position and their options (if any), *and*
- The complainant is contacting the Academy repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The Academy will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the Academy with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, and/or
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, and/or
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint.

Once the Academy has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The Academy will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the Academy acts reasonably.

9. Record-keeping

The Academy will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the Academy will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

10. Monitoring arrangements

The Trust Board will review this policy at least every three years and assess its implementation and effectiveness. The policy will be promoted and implemented throughout the academies.