Complaints Procedure

SAFFRON ACADEMY TRUST

Date adopted or ratified: April 2026

This procedure is regularly reviewed following recommended guidelines.

This procedure is applicable to all schools within Saffron Academy Trust.

This procedure is based on the model complaints procedure from the DfE.

Independent advice and guidance on how to raise a concern or complain effectively can be found in the 'Parent guide to school complaints', issued jointly by Parentkind and the Department for Education, via this link: *V8- Parent Complaint Guide*

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Helena Romanes School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as complaints about staff conduct which will be dealt with under the academy's internal disciplinary procedures if appropriate, or appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

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

A complaint may be defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action*'.

Parents and schools share the same goal: supporting children's education.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Helena Romanes School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, Ms Catherine Davis, Executive Headteacher, will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, Ms Catherine Davis will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Helena Romanes School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

When issues come up, you need to know how to raise these with the school to get an outcome that supports you and your child. The best way to resolve concerns is through clear, respectful communication.

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing 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.

Concerns should be raised with the class teacher, Head of Year / subject head or Headteacher). If the matter is brought to the attention of the Executive Headteacher, they may decide to delegate the matter or deal with it themselves, depending on the circumstances. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

The Parent guide explains the five steps to making a school complaint:

Step 1 What kind of issue is it?
Complaints come in difference shapes and sizes. The best first step is to identify what kind of issue it is to make sure you can get the quickest action with your school.

Is it feedback?

Sometimes you will want to share your voice with your school without needing them to respond, but you expect them to listen and take it on board. Feedback is often sought by schools who want to hear and adapt to parents' views.

Is it a concern?

Sometimes you have a worry or doubt over an important issue and you are looking for reassurance. Schools should take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Is it a complaint?

Sometimes you are dissatisfied with the school's actions or lack of action. The school Complaints Procedure outlines the steps you need to take to complain.

Step 2 Who in the school do I go to?
Often issues can be best resolved by the person closest to your child, their teacher or form tutor, before escalating it to a senior leader or the headteacher.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.

Step 3 How do I raise my complaint?
Concerns are best resolved in discussion with your school. Complaints are best resolved when documented with your school.

Step 4 When to expect a response?
Different schools have different policies for handling complaints – see below for timescales.

Step 5 Where to escalate a complaint?
Once you have fully followed your school's complaint procedure, you may still feel you need action from your school and there are a few ways that may apply to you. Contacting several people at once could slow things down.
Is it for your school's governing body? To be considered if you are unhappy with the school's response.
Is it for the Department for Education? To be considered if you are unhappy with the way your complaint has been handled or the school is preventing you from following the complaints process. In some circumstances, the DfE can consider if the school has followed relevant statutory guidance and education law.
Is it Ofsted? Ofsted do not resolve disputes between parents and schools. They may keep your complaint on file for their next inspection but don't always provide a response to parents.

Formal complaints against school staff (except the headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to Ms Catherine Davis, (the Executive Headteacher) via the school office**.** Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to Mr Graham Oxborrow (the Chair of Governors), via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to Mrs Becky Poynter (Clerk to the Governing Body) via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a Trustee of the Trust, should be addressed to David Barrs, Chair of Trustees, via the Trust office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask a third-party organisation for example like the Citizens Advice to help you.

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.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the head teacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation. If we can find out enough information to take the complaint further, or if the complaint is serious, we will follow this policy as closely as we can. If we can't find out any other information or the complaint isn't serious, we will take no further steps, although the complaint will be logged.

Time scales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

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

Confidentiality

When participating in the complaints procedure each party automatically agrees to undertake to not at any time disclose to any person (or more widely on social media) any confidential information concerning any part of the complaint’s procedure, including but not limited to any personal information regarding any party to the complaint (including any personal information which may be used to identify the complainant or the person subject to the complaint), the content of the complaint, and the timeline and result of the complaint, except as permitted by the following clause:

Each party may disclose the other party’s confidential information to any professional or volunteer who are required to know such information for the purposes of carrying out the complaint’s procedure or as may be required by law, a court of competent jurisdiction or any governmental or regulatory authority.

Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Helena Romanes School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs or school re-organisation proposals should be raised through Essex County Council.
• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Safeguarding and Child Protection policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). The LADO can be contacted using: 03330 139 797
• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. **complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.*
• Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.

• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.
• National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

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 you of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against Helena Romanes School 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 in the procedure, Helena Romanes School wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Practical considerations when handling complaints
While the school is committed to handling all complaints fairly, proportionately, and in accordance with this policy, certain factors may affect the way a complaint is managed. The following points clarify how the school will approach particular circumstances that could impact the process or timeframe for response.

- **Complex or Legally Referenced Complaints including the use of AI**
  "AI doesn't always get it right when citing laws and can make a complaint more complex than necessary." (Ref: **'Parent guide to school complaints': *V8- Parent Complaint Guide***)
  Detailed references to legislation are rarely helpful in explaining your complaint. The school just needs to be able to clearly understand the issue that has led to your complaint. All complaints will be considered in accordance with this policy (or other school policies, such as staff disciplinary procedures); however, the school is not required to provide a legal interpretation or detailed response to every statutory reference included in a submission. Responses will focus on the substantive matters raised and their relevance to the school, its pupils, and staff. Where appropriate, the school may seek legal or professional advice, but reserves the right to limit its response to matters within its remit and operational responsibility, and with reference to the substance of the complaint.

- **Subject Access Requests (SARs)**
  The school acknowledges the statutory right of individuals to make a Subject Access Request (SAR) under data protection legislation. Where a SAR is submitted in relation to a complaint, the school will process the request in accordance with legal requirements and within the appropriate statutory timescales, following the school's Data Protection Policies. Depending on the nature of the Subject Access Request, the scope of the search will usually be limited to information relevant to the subject matter of the complaint. If you wish the SAR to be processed prior to the hearing of your complaint, this may cause delays and extend the timeframe of the complaints process as the school may need to complete the data disclosure before progressing or finalising aspects of the investigation.

Withdrawal of a complaint

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

Dealing with your concern or complaint

The majority of concerns from parents, carers and others are managed under the following general procedure. It's in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to follow formal procedures. We take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

The procedure is divided into three stages:

Stage 1 – Informal complaints

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, Head of Year / subject head or headteacher.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide a response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the issue remains unresolved, the complainant may wish to proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2 – Formal complaints

Formal complaints must be made to the head teacher (unless they are about the head teacher), via the school office. This may be done in person or in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form).

The head teacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Within this response, the head teacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The head teacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The head teacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the head teacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be

accompanied if they wish

- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the head teacher will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the head teacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Helena Romanes School will take to resolve the complaint.

The head teacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

If the complaint is about the head teacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about the head teacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- *jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or*
- *the entire governing body or*
- *the majority of the governing body*

Stage 2 will be escalated to the CEO of the Trust.

Usually, concerns and complaints are resolved either at Stage 1 or Stage 2. If following these stages, the complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, the Governors will become involved and take your complaint to Stage 3.

Stage 3 – Complaints Review Panel

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3: a panel of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint will consider the complaint. The panel will include one member who is independent of the management and running of the school. This is to ensure that the panel has the benefit of an external source of scrutiny and challenge in its consideration of the complaint. The panel will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting all parties to a joint meeting, or to separate meetings, or through written representations. In making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs. **This is the final stage of the complaints procedure**.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

If a meeting is to be held, the Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

- *jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or*
- *the entire governing body or*
- *the majority of the governing body*

Stage 3 will be heard by the trustees and an independent panel member.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the panel hearing. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

The Complaints Review Panel meeting will proceed irrespective of whether or not the complainant attends. If the complainant fails to attend on the day, the Complaints Review Panel will still proceed in their absence and the process will continue to its conclusion.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under (Human Resources) staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 5 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Helena Romanes School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education (DfE) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Helena Romanes School.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Helena Romanes School will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All 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 2008 Act requests access to them.

Complaints about the Trust, CEO or Trustee

If a complainant wishes to complain directly about the Trust, then the complaint should be sent to the CEO to be investigated.

The CEO will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 5 school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

Following the investigation, the CEO will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 15 school days of the date that the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the CEO will write to the complainant explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a Trustee, the complaint should be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board. If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation

NB. Where the Chair of the Trust Board has investigated the complaint, they will write the letter of outcome to the complainant and provide a copy to the CEO.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Clerk to the Trust Board asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel, within 10 school days.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire trust board or
- the majority of the trust board

it will be heard by a completely independent committee panel.

The Complaint Panel will consist of three members. None of the three members of the Complaint Panel will have been involved in the incidents or events which led to the complaint, or have been involved in dealing with the complaint in the previous stages, of have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint.

One of the Complaint Panel members will be independent of the management and running of the Academy Trust. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will not be a Trustee or an employee of the Trust.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a trust employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 5 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Saffron Academy Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department of Education (DfE) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Saffron Academy Trust.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Saffron Academy Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All 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 2008 Act requests access to them.

Next Steps

If a complaint has completed the procedures in the complaints procedure and the person making the complaint remains dissatisfied, they have a right to refer their complaint to the DfE. They may only be able to help if you are unable to complain, or are not satisfied with how the academy handles your complaint, because the academy:

- does not have a complaints procedure
- did not provide a copy of its complaints procedure when requested
- does not have a procedure that complies with statutory regulations
- has not followed its published complaints procedure
- has not allowed its complaints procedure to be completed

The DfE cannot change an academy's decision about a complaint. Their role is to make sure the academy handles your complaint properly by following a published process. The DfE will not normally consider complaints received more than 12 months after a decision or the academy's last action.

If you think your concerns are within DfE's remit, please refer to the guidance: How DfE handles complaints about academies:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complain-about-an-academy/complain-about-an-academy

If, after reading this guide, you think the DfE should consider your complaint, you can contact them using the online enquiry form and tick the box that says 'complaint'.

Using the online enquiry form is the quickest way to contact the DfE, but they can also accept hard-copy documents sent to:

Department for Education
School complaints compliance unit
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

The DfE asks that you do not submit original documents and that what you do send relates solely to the complaint you have asked them to consider. You should be aware that the DfE is unable to return documents sent to them.

Policy on the Management of Unreasonable and/or Persistent Complainant Behaviour

Saffron Academy Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Saffron Academy Trust defines unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants as '*those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the Trust or any of the schools within the Trust, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints*'.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable or unreasonably persistent when the person making the complaint:-

1. refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
2. refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
3. refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
4. insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
5. introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects 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/or to their own timescales;
6. makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
7. changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
8. denies or changes statements they made at an earlier stage;
9. submits falsified documents from themselves or others;
10. adopts a 'scatter gun' approach; pursuing parallel complaints on the same issue with various organisations;
11. repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
12. refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence;
13. seeks an unrealistic outcome;
14. 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/or by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;
15. submits repeat complaints with minor additions/variations the complainant insists make these 'new' complaints.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically: -

• maliciously;
• aggressively;
• using threats, intimidation or violence;
• using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
• knowing it to be false;
• using falsified information;
• publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school 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.

Whenever possible the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss, or put in writing, any concerns with the complainant informally before invoking this policy.

If the behaviour continues the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact any school in Saffron Academy Trust causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.
Further methods for dealing with unreasonable and / or persistent complainant behaviour include:

- communicating in writing only
- re-directing all communications to the Chair of Governors or to a named individual at the school
- holding all meetings in the presence of at least two members of senior staff, or in the presence of a school governor
- blocking the complainant from school e-mails and school social media accounts
- setting up a dedicated e-mail inbox for the complainant that will be monitored periodically at agreed intervals
- reserving the right to cease to respond to the complaints and directing the complainant to the DfE
- taking steps to bring legal action for harassment against the complainant (subject to appropriate legal grounds)

In response to any serious incident, or threat, 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 school premises.

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 a parent's behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask him/her to leave school premises. In serious cases, the Headteacher or the local authority can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make. Schools should always give the parent the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing. A breach of a ban from school premises may result in the parent being fined.

New complaints
New complaints from people whose behaviour has previously been deemed unreasonable will be treated on their merits. Restrictions imposed in respect of an earlier complaint will not automatically apply to a new matter.

Please note: The Trust reserves the right to seek legal advice if it judges the number and/or frequency of complaints received from one complainant to have become unreasonable for the school and/or Trust to manage and is impeding the organisation's ability to meet its statutory obligation to educate children. Such frequency or volume of complaints might be deemed to be harassment.

This policy has been drafted with reference to guidance on the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman website.

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Ms Catherine Davis (Executive Headteacher) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: **Postcode:** **Day time telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:** **Email address:**
Please give concise details of your complaint (including dates, names of witnesses, etc) to allow the matter to be fully investigated:

What action, if any, have you already taken to resolve your complaint?
What actions do you feel might resolve the complaint at this stage?
Please continue on a separate sheet, or attach additional documents if you wish. Number of additional pages attached =
Signature: **Date:**
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Action taken:
Date:

Complaint review request form *(must be sent within 10 school days of receiving outcome notice):*

X Primary Academy:

Please complete this form and return it the school office for the attention of the Headteacher or the clerk for the attention of Chair of Governors.

Your name:

Relationship with school (e.g. parent):

Pupil's name (if relevant to your complaint):

Your address:

Telephone number:

Signature:

Date:

Dear Sir/Madam,

I submitted a formal complaint to the school on ....., and I am dissatisfied by the procedure that has been followed.

My complaint was submitted to ..... and I received a response from ..... on .....

I have attached copies of my formal complaint and the response(s) from the school. I am dissatisfied with the way in which the procedure was carried out, because

You may continue on separate paper, or attach additional documents if you wish.

Number of additional pages attached –

Appendix A - Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect

What actions do you feel might resolve the complaint at this stage?

- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
  - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
  - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
  - consideration of records and other relevant information
  - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the head teacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The head teacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator

(this could be the head teacher or CEO / designated complaints governor or trustee or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, head teacher, CEO, Chair of Governors, Chair of Trust or the Clerk and to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
  - sharing third party information
  - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Clerk to the Governing Body / Trust Board

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- provide procedural advice and ensure that everyone involved in the complaint process is aware of

their duties

- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- Make a written record of the proceedings
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

  If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so

  No governor / trustee may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

  We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting

  Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.

- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

  Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

  The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

  If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

  However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.