



Minerva
Learning Trust

Complaints Procedure

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Minerva Learning Trust Complaints Procedure

A complaint is defined as:

"An expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to a school or teacher, which requires a response."

Minerva Learning Trust is committed to providing outstanding education for all pupils and our schools should work positively with all parents and carers and the school community. However, if a parent/carer or member of the public feels that a situation has arisen that they are unhappy about then they have a right to make a complaint. Any and every complaint made will be taken seriously and dealt with swiftly and professionally. All parents/carers will be made aware of this policy and the procedures to follow if they wish to make a complaint.

Students, parents or carers can make a complaint to a Trust School about most aspects of its function including:

- Attitude/behaviour of staff
- Teaching and learning
- Application of behaviour management systems
- Bullying
- Provision of extra-curricular activities

Members of the general public may make complaints to a Trust School if the School is directly responsible for the issue being complained about, for example:

- Behaviour of students during break-times
- Disturbance to neighbours during School hours
- Health and Safety issues of premises
- Behaviour of staff

1. General principles

This policy document details procedures for responding to complaints made to the Trust and Schools within the Trust. Wherever possible all informal concerns will be dealt with seriously at the earliest stage therefore, reducing the number that develop into formal complaints. The School or Trust will try to handle concerns without the need for formal procedures. Formal procedures need only to be started when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

2. Statutory obligations

Complainants must be aware that there is a complaints procedure and copies of this policy will be available on request. If the process results in an appeal to the Local Governing Body or Trust Board, this procedure is statutory. The meeting must have at least one member of the panel is independent of the management and running of the academy or the Trust. Parent(s) must be allowed to attend the meeting and be accompanied if they wish.

3. Dealing with complaints

It is important to be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

The School and Trust will:

- welcome complaints as a positive means of promoting student/parent satisfaction
- use complaints as a way of identifying opportunities to do things better
- listen to students, parents and carers
- seek to resolve complaints swiftly
- reply with an acknowledgement letter in the first instance if a complaint is sent in by letter and state we are looking into the matter
- have clear, simple to understand, published procedures for making a complaint
- keep complainants informed about progress
- provide redress where a complaint is found to have substance
- regularly review how effective the complaints procedure is

4. Records

All complaints will be recorded by the relevant establishment within the Trust including informal complaints. Such records will include:

- resolution details of informal complaints
- details of whether the complaint is resolved following a formal procedure
- whether there was progression to a panel hearing and,
- details of the action taken by the School/Trust as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld)

The Chief Executive Officer (Trust) or the Headteacher (Schools) is responsible for ensuring that staff record all complaints and their outcome. Records relating to individual complaints are confidential, except where the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) or a statutory body conducting an inspection requests access to them. The Trust Board/Local Governing Body will monitor the level and the type of complaints and review the outcomes.

5. Investigating complaints

The person who takes forward the first formal procedure should make sure they:

- establish what has happened so far and who has been involved
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- meet the complainant or contact them if further information is required
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- interview those involved, with an open mind
- keep notes of any interviews
- keep the Chair of the establishment governing body informed without giving any details at this stage.

6. Resolving complaints

At each stage, the establishment will keep in mind ways the complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. It might also be appropriate to offer:

- an apology
- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps taken to make sure it will not happen again
- an undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint.

Complainants should be encouraged that state which actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage.

A copy of the findings and recommendations of a complaint will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, to the person complained about.

Where a complaint reaches a panel hearing, the findings and recommendations of that panel will be available for inspection at the establishment premises by the complainant and the Headteacher/CEO.

7. Vexatious complaints

There may be occasions when a complainant becomes dissatisfied even though all stages of the procedure have been followed. A vexatious complaint is likely to involve some or all of the following:

- the complaint arises from a historic and irreversible decision or incident;
- contact with the School is frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful for staff;
- the complainant behaves in an aggressive manner to staff when they present their complaint or is verbally abusive or threatening;
- the complainant changes aspects of the complaint partway through the complaint process;
- the complainant makes and breaks contact with the School/Trust on an ongoing basis; or
- the complainant persistently approaches the School/Trust (and in some cases the Local Authority) through different routes about the same issue in the hope of getting different responses.

If the situation is challenging but it is possible to proceed, staff should avoid giving unrealistic expectations on the outcome of the complaint.

In instances where there is a complete breakdown of relations between the complainant and the establishment, a decision may be made to restrict contact. Any restrictions imposed should be appropriate and proportionate. The options that the establishment is most likely to consider are:

- requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only);

- requiring contact to take place with a named member of staff (for example, the Headteacher);
- restricting telephone calls to specified days and times;
- asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about his/her future contact with the School/Trust; and
- informing the complainant that if they still do not follow this advice (as stated above) any further correspondence that does not present significant new matters or new information will not necessarily be acknowledged but should be kept on file.
- if the complainant tries to reopen an issue that has already been examined through the complaints procedure, the Chair of the establishment governing body is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

8. Timescales

The School will consider and resolve complaints as quickly and efficiently as possible and set realistic time limits for each action. However, where investigations are complex, new time limits can be set as long as School informs the complainant of the reason for the delay and give them new deadlines.

9. The stages of the process

Stage 1 – complaint heard by a staff member

It is in everyone's interest to resolve complaints at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the establishment can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. Staff should be fully aware of the procedures and know what to do if and when they receive a complaint.

A complainant might feel they would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. Be flexible and refer the complainant to another member of staff. If the complaint is about the Headteacher, the complaint should be referred straight to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

If a staff member directly involved feels compromised and unable to deal with the matter, once again, refer to another staff member. This does not have to be a more senior member of staff; the ability to consider a complaint objectively and impartially is more important.

If a complainant approaches a governor/trustee in the first instance, the complainant should be referred to an appropriate member of staff. Governors/trustees should not act on individual complaints outside the formal procedure or be involved in the early stages in case they need to sit on a panel at the later stage.

Verbal or written acknowledgement should be provided to the complainant within five working days of receiving a complaint. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the complaints procedure and give a target date for providing a response to the complaint which should normally be within 10 working days. If the target cannot be met, a letter should be written within 10 working days explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised target date.

If the complainant considers the matter unresolved at stage 1 and wishes to take the matter to the next stage, the complaint must be made in writing to the Headteacher (schools) or CEO (Trust) within 10 days of receiving the stage 1 outcome. Please see stage 2 and Appendix A, which provides an overview of the complaints process.

Stage 2 – complaint heard by the Headteacher (Schools)/ CEO (Trust)

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the way in which the complaint has been handled at stage one, they may go to stage two and have the complaint heard by the Headteacher/CEO.

The Headteacher/CEO will decide who is the most appropriate person to deal with a complaint. This could be a member of the Senior Leadership team or a Head of Year/Middle Leader. The Headteacher/CEO should be kept informed of any investigation carried out and should be involved in the final decision.

The complainant should use Appendix B Complaints Form, providing as much detail as possible. The complaint will be acknowledged within five working days. The acknowledgement should include a summary of the complaints procedure and a target date of 15 working days for providing a response. If this date cannot be met, the complainant should be contacted and given a reason for the delay and a revised target date.

The Headteacher/CEO will meet with the complainant to discuss their concerns and find solutions. The complainant may bring a friend, family member or advocate to the meeting and interpreting services should also be made available where necessary. The Headteacher/CEO may have another member of staff present to observe and record the meeting and promote staff safety. Care should be taken in these circumstances not to create an intimidating atmosphere for the complainant.

The Headteacher/CEO will make whatever enquiries they consider necessary to ascertain the facts and the legitimacy of decisions taken. This may include:

- Interviewing staff/students
- Reviewing minutes of meetings
- Reviewing School/Trust records

Students should be interviewed in the presence of another member of staff, or in the case of serious complaints (for example, where the possibility of criminal investigation exists) in the presence of their parents/carers. Again, care should be taken in these circumstances not to create an intimidating atmosphere.

It is important that complaints are investigated thoroughly and objectively. If the Headteacher/CEO feel unable to do this (for example, if they have been directly involved in the decision making process that led to the complaint), they should delegate responsibility for investigating the complaint to another member of the leadership team or the Chair of the establishment governing body. It is strongly advised that records of interviews, telephone conversations and other documentation are retained. If the complaint is about the Headteacher then the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) will investigate.

Once all the relevant facts have been established, the Headteacher/CEO should provide a written response to the complainant. This should include a full explanation of decisions taken and the reasons for them. Where appropriate, it should include details of the actions to be taken to resolve the complaint.

It may be useful at this point to offer the complainant a meeting to discuss the response and seek reconciliation. The complainant should be provided with details of how to contact the establishment governing body if they are not satisfied with the response.

If the complainant considers the matter unresolved at stage 2 and wishes to take the matter to the next stage, the complaint must be made in writing to the establishment governing body within 10 days of receiving the stage 2 outcome from the School.

Stage 3 -The Complaints Committee

If the Complaints Committee is activated this is the last stage of the process. The panel will be made up of three people who have not previously been involved with any aspect of the complaint, two of whom will be governors/trustees and one who is independent from the management and running of the school.

At this stage of the process, a parent(s) has a statutory right to attend the meeting and also to be accompanied if they wish. At least 7 days' notice of the panel hearing will be given to parents.

The meeting will allow for:

- the complainant to explain their complaint and the Headteacher/CEO to explain the response.
- witnesses to be brought by the complainant and/or the Headteacher/CEO.
- the Headteacher/CEO and the complainant to ask questions of each other and any witnesses.
- the committee to ask questions of the complainant, Headteacher/CEO and any witnesses.
- the complainant and the Headteacher/CEO to summarise their position.

Having considered all the evidence and questioned all parties, the committee can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- decide on the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes or actions to establishment systems and procedures to make sure that similar problems do not recur.

A written response detailing the decisions, recommendations and the basis on which these have been made should be sent to the complainant within 15 working days. Copies of all correspondence and records of meetings must be retained.

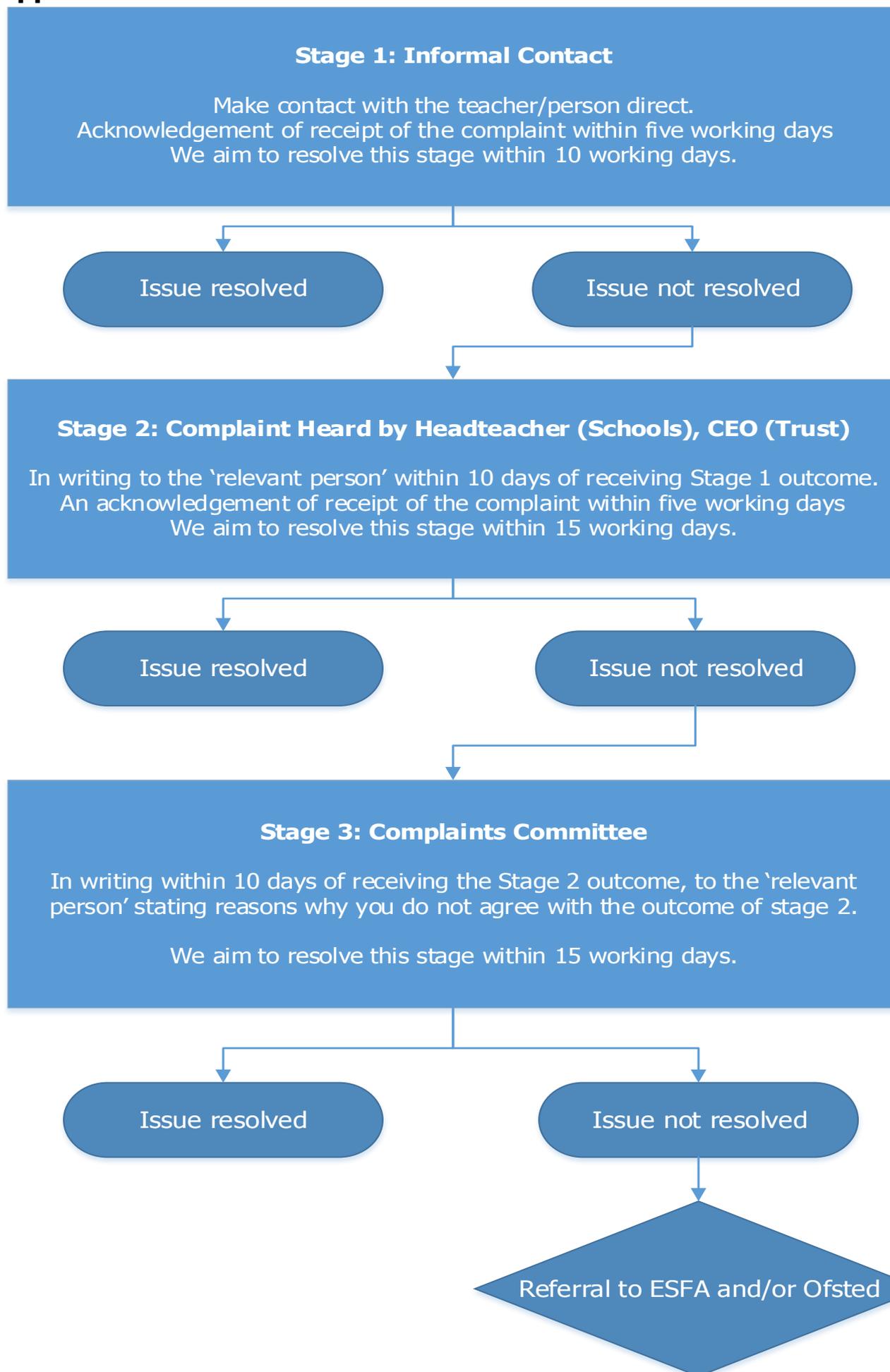
The complainant should be notified of the right to appeal to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are unhappy with the way in which procedures have been carried out.

Complainants who are not satisfied about the handling of their complaint may contact the ESFA via their "school complaints form" found on the government website www.gov.uk

10. Withdrawing a Complaint

Complaints may be withdrawn in writing at any time. The Headteacher and Chair of the establishment governing body should review the issue of concern and consider whether further investigation is required through other internal management systems.

Appendix A



Appendix B

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Headteacher who will acknowledge receipt within 5 working days and will provide a written response within 15 working days.

Your name:

Student's name:

Your relationship to the student:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint.

**What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint.
(Who did you speak to and what was the response)?**

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

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

Any other detail:

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Print name and date: