SHARE
MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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Name of policy writer	A Eastham
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1. Policy statement

Your child's experience is important to everyone at our school. We want to work together with you to ensure that your child is happy at school, and that they achieve their best. If you feel something has gone wrong, we want to hear from you.

SHARE Multi Academy Trust is committed to providing a fair, transparent and accessible process for resolving concerns and complaints.

We encourage you to tell us about concerns as soon as possible so we can work with you to resolve them quickly and informally wherever possible. Where this is not possible, the trust will investigate complaints fairly, impartially and in a timely manner.

2. Scope

This policy applies to parents and carers of pupils attending schools within SHARE Multi Academy Trust who wish to raise a concern or make a complaint about the education or services provided by the trust or one of its academies.

The policy covers concerns relating to the actions of:

- academy staff;
- Headteachers;
- Executive Headteachers;
- Trust staff;
- local governance arrangements;
- the Trust Board.

Where a complaint concerns the Trust Board, it should be addressed to the Trust Members. Complaints relating to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) should be addressed to the Chair of the Trust Board. These complaints should be sent to the Governance Professional jayne.newson@sharemat.co.uk.

3. Legal and statutory framework

This policy has been developed with reference to:

- Education Act 2002
- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (Part 7)
- Academy Trust Handbook
- Department for Education Best Practice Guidance for Academy Complaints Procedures
- Equality Act 2010
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Human Rights Act 1998

The trust will ensure that complaints are handled in accordance with current statutory guidance.

4. Policy aims and objectives

The aims of this policy are to:

- provide an accessible and transparent complaints process;
- encourage concerns to be raised at the earliest opportunity;
- resolve complaints quickly and fairly;
- ensure investigations are fair and impartial;
- promote positive relationships between families and schools;
- ensure parents and carers understand how their concerns will be considered;
- comply with statutory requirements;
- identify lessons learned and opportunities for improvement across the trust.

We value feedback and use complaints as an opportunity to improve the quality of education and services provided across the trust.

5. Role and responsibilities

Board of Directors

The Board of Directors are responsible for:

- approving this policy;
- ensuring the trust has an effective complaints procedure;
- monitoring the effectiveness of the policy through assurance and reporting.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented consistently across the trust and that complaints are managed appropriately. The CEO may delegate investigations or hearings of a complaint to an appropriate executive leader, as appropriate.

Headteachers

Headteachers are responsible for:

- promoting the early resolution of concerns;
- ensuring complaints are investigated fairly and promptly;
- implementing any actions arising from complaints.

Headteachers may delegate the investigation of a complaint to an appropriate senior leader where appropriate.

Staff

All staff are responsible for:

- treating concerns seriously and respectfully;
- seeking to resolve concerns informally where possible;
- cooperating with complaint investigations.

Complaint Review Panel

The review panel is responsible for considering complaints that have reached Step three of the procedure and making findings and recommendations in accordance with this policy.

6. Procedures - How we resolve concerns and complaints

SHARE Multi Academy Trust aims to resolve concerns as quickly and informally as possible. Most issues can be resolved through discussion with the appropriate member of staff without the need for a formal complaint.

Where concerns cannot be resolved informally, or where the matter is sufficiently serious, parents or carers may make a formal complaint under this procedure.

The trust will ensure that complaints are:

- dealt with fairly and impartially;
- investigated by an appropriate person who has not been directly involved wherever reasonably practicable;
- considered promptly;
- handled confidentially;
- resolved at the earliest opportunity.

In most cases, we work well with parents to resolve concerns. We recognise that emotions can run high, but we expect communication to remain respectful. Where behaviour becomes unreasonable, abusive, or intimidating, or where there is a refusal to engage with the policy and process, it can be harder for us to support a resolution. In these cases, we may suspend consideration of a complaint or place proportionate restrictions on how we manage contact.

Step One (Informal): Talk to us

It's always best to begin by speaking with a member of staff as soon as you can, letting them know what has happened and what you would like us to do to make it better. We will get back to you as soon as we can, usually within three (3) to five (5) school days.

We will work with you to understand your concerns and will ensure that the most appropriate member of staff is involved. Where appropriate, we may also involve other members of staff who are best placed to help resolve the issue. This may involve more than one conversation before the matter is resolved.

If, after we have had a reasonable opportunity to discuss and try to resolve your concern informally, you feel there is still more for us to do, you can make a formal written complaint. Details of how to do this are in Step Two.

Step Two (Formal): Write to us

If you have not had an informal conversation (Step One) with a member of staff about your concerns, please get in touch to see if we can fix things right away.

If you still have concerns, you can write to us with a formal complaint. When you write, include brief details of what happened, who was involved, who you've already spoken to, and what you would like us to do next.

You don't need to write a long letter – in fact, keeping it short usually helps us reply more quickly. We have a complaint form on our website Step Two: Write to us and raise a formal complaint – Fill in form that asks for the details we need. If you are struggling to access this form, you can also complete the form in appendix A at the end of this policy.

We will let you know we have received your query within five (5) school days. We will check your written complaint to make sure we have all the information we need. This includes things like any people involved, the date and time of any events, and what you would like us to do to put things right. We will tell you if we

need any more information. We may request a meeting or call first to ensure we have understood your concern before responding in writing.

Wherever possible, your complaint will be looked after by someone who is not directly involved in the issues raised. This may include a member of staff from our trust, or someone involved in school or trust governance. We will let you know who this is and when you should expect an update.

The person looking after your complaint will speak to relevant people and collect any information that might help respond.

After considering your concerns, we will then give you a formal reply setting out our response and any actions we have taken or plan to take, usually within another fifteen (15) school days.

For more complex concerns we may suggest a joint meeting with someone from outside of the school to discuss the issue, to help understand and resolve your concerns.

If we still can't agree, you can ask for a panel hearing. We'll provide more details of this when we send our response. You can also refer to the details in Step Three.

Step Three (Panel Hearing): Meet with a review panel

Where we cannot reach agreement during Step Two of the complaints process, you can ask for a formal meeting to discuss your complaint, called a panel hearing.

To ask for a panel hearing contact the person dealing with your complaint and give them a brief explanation of why you are not happy with the outcome of step two and what you would like the panel to consider resolving your concern. This should normally be within ten (10) school days of our reply, unless there are special circumstances. This helps ensure events are fresh in everyone's minds and we can put things right quickly.

The review panel will look again at your original complaint and any concerns you have about how we have handled it. It won't consider any new complaints.

The panel will have at least three people not directly involved in the complaint, including one person who is independent of the management and running of the school. The panel will be assisted by a member of staff who will take notes and provide advice on procedures.

You do not have to attend the panel hearing if you do not want to. If you choose not to attend, the review panel will consider your complaint based on the written information available. If you do want to attend, we will do our best to agree a time and date with you for the meeting, usually within twenty (20) school days of you asking. The meeting will usually be in person, but it can be held online if that is more convenient for everyone.

Please let us know if you need help to attend, like an accessible meeting room or an interpreter or other assistance.

Around a week before the meeting we will provide you and the review panel members copies of letters and other relevant information.

You can bring someone, like a friend or relative, to the meeting to help you. If your complaint is about a member of staff, they may bring a friend or colleague to support them.

The meeting is confidential and is not open to the public or the media. Information about the complaint will only be shared with those who need it to investigate, consider or respond to the complaint.

The purpose of the hearing is not to reinvestigate every aspect of the complaint, it is to review your complaint and how it has been handled, consider all the available information and decide whether your complaint should be upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

The meeting will be led by one of the panel members. If you choose to attend, they will ask you to outline your concerns. They and the other panel members may ask you questions. They may also talk to other people involved in the complaint.

The meeting is not a legal hearing and you should not bring legal representation. There is no 'cross examination' of witnesses and you will not be able to ask other people questions directly. Further information about who may attend the panel hearing and arrangements for support and representation is set out in Section 7, 'Other things that are good to know'.

Before the hearing ends, you will have another chance to share your views. In most cases the panel will not give an instant decision. Instead, they will meet again separately to discuss your concerns and what they have heard from other people and write to you later with their findings and recommendations.

After the meeting, the review panel will consider all the evidence presented before reaching its decision.

The panel will decide whether the complaint is:

- upheld
- partially upheld
- not upheld

The panel may also make recommendations to the school or the trust where it believes improvements could be made.

We will write to you with the review panel's findings and recommendations within ten (10) school days of the hearing. A copy will also be provided to the headteacher, the trust and, where appropriate, the person complained about.

In accordance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, a copy of the panel's findings and recommendations will also be made available to the proprietor (SHARE Multi Academy Trust) and the headteacher.

A panel hearing is the end of the trust's complaints procedure. If you are still not happy, you can complain to the Department for Education using the complaint form on their website. The Department can look at whether we have handled

your complaint properly, but it won't investigate the details of any underlying complaint.

7. Other things that are good to know

Who can raise concerns

This policy only applies to parents or carers of children at the school. If you are not a parent or carer at the school you can still get in touch but we will consider your concerns outside of this policy.

The type of concerns we can consider

This policy covers general concerns and complaints about how our school or the trust has acted or the education and services we provide. Some matters have separate statutory or regulatory procedures and cannot be considered under this complaints policy. These include admissions, exclusions and suspensions, safeguarding concerns, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) statutory processes (such as decisions relating to Education, Health and Care Plans), staff grievances, staff disciplinary or capability matters, whistleblowing, subject access requests, Freedom of Information requests, and data protection matters. If your concern is better dealt with under one of these procedures, we will let you know as soon as possible and explain the appropriate process to follow.

Time scales

You should let us know about any problem within three months of it happening; we cannot normally look into older problems, unless there are exceptional circumstances. We will always try to keep to the time scales set out here, but for complex queries or because of school holidays or staff availability, it may take longer to reply. We will let you know if this is the case. If at any point we haven't heard from you for four weeks after our reply, we will write to you to close your enquiry – but you can ask us to re-open it if there are special circumstances.

For the purposes of this policy, a school day means a day during term time when the academy is open to pupils. The definition of a school day excludes weekends, school holidays and bank holidays. For the avoidance of doubt, term dates are published on each academy website, and information about term dates is made available to parents and pupils regularly.

Timescales at a glance

Steps	Normally completed within
Step One - Talk to us	As soon as possible
Step Two – Write to us	20 school days
Request a Panel	Within 10 school days
Step three - Panel hearing	Usually within 20 school days
Written outcome	Within 10 school days

Who can attend a panel hearing

The people who attend a complaint panel hearing will depend on who the complaint is about.

Complaints about an academy
Those who can attend are:
- the complainant;
- the investigation officer; and
- the Headteacher/Principal or Vice Principal.

Complaints about the Headteacher/Principal
- Those who can attend are:
- the complainant;
- the school/college trust leader; and
- the investigation officer.

The Headteacher/Principal may be invited to attend the panel hearing. The involvement of other staff will be at the discretion of the Chair of the panel.

Complaints about the trust
Those who can attend are:
- the complainant;
- the investigation officer; and
- the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Those who can attend are:
- the complainant; and
- the Chair of Trustees.

The CEO may be invited to attend the panel hearing. The involvement of other staff will be at the discretion of the Chair of the panel.

Complaints about the Chair of Trustees or Trustees
Those who can attend are:
- the complainant; and
- the independent investigations officer.

Support and representation

The complainant may be accompanied at the panel hearing by a friend or relative to provide support.

Generally, it is not encouraged for either party to bring legal representatives to a complaint panel meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For example, if an academy employee is called as a witness at a complaint panel meeting, they may wish to be supported by a trade union representative and/or legal representative.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend a complaint panel hearing.

The Chair of the Complaint Panel may determine whether the involvement of any other staff or individuals is appropriate, taking into account the nature and circumstances of the complaint.

Retention of Records

A full written record of all formal complaints will be maintained in accordance with the Trust's Records Retention Schedule.

The written record will include:

- The date the complaint was received
- The nature of the complaint
- Whether the complaint was resolved following the formal complaints procedure or proceeded to a Complaint Panel Hearing
- The outcome of the complaint
- Any findings and recommendations made by the Complaint Review Panel (where applicable)
- The action taken by the school or the trust because of the complaint, regardless of whether the complaint was upheld

Complaint records relating to pupils will be destroyed in line with the Trust's Records Retention Schedule.

Confidentiality

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where disclosure is required:

- By the Secretary of State
- by a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008
- under another legal authority or where otherwise required by law

Help from other organisations

We understand you might want to raise concerns with other organisations that oversee the work we do, such as the Government or Ofsted. It is best to talk to us first and go through the steps in this guide because it helps us put things right more quickly and avoids duplicating work for you and for us. In most cases external organisations will expect you to have completed our complaints policy before getting involved.

Duplicate enquiries

We will usually consider and reply to concerns individually. If we receive lots of similar concerns at the same time – for example from a campaign group – we may decide to deal with them together and send you a shared reply that responds to common concerns.

Persistent or Serial Complaints

In most cases, we will consider every complaint through the stages of this policy. However, there may be occasions where a parent or carer continues to raise the same complaint after it has been fully considered, repeatedly raises complaints that are unreasonable or do not directly affect them.

In these circumstances, where it is reasonable and fair to do so, SHARE Multi Academy Trust may decide not to investigate the complaint further under this policy.

If we decide not to consider a complaint because it is persistent or serial, we will write to the parent or carer within five (5) school days to explain our decision and the reasons for it.

Anonymous Complaints

SHARE Multi Academy Trust will not investigate anonymous complaints under the procedure in this Complaints Policy. Proper investigation may be impossible if we cannot obtain further information from the parent or carer. It is also more difficult to establish whether any complaints are credible. Anonymous complaints will be referred to the headteacher who will decide what, if any, action should be taken.

Using Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Some people like to use AI tools to help organise their thoughts. We recommend against using public AI tools because they can store and republish personal information, such as sensitive details about your child. AI tools can also introduce inaccurate information, like old rules or laws from other countries. This can delay our response to you. You should always carefully check the output to make sure it is accurate.

If we find it difficult to clearly identify the key concerns from what you have shared, we may suggest a meeting or call to help us focus on what matters most and respond as accurately and helpfully as possible.

Help with special educational needs (SEND)

We work together with the local authority to provide support for children with special educational needs and disabilities. We will always try to help, but for some things that are outside of our control we will refer you to the local authority.

- **What we are responsible for:** We provide teaching, with reasonable adjustments to help your child, and support from our own resources (known as SEN support). We monitor your child's progress, put support plans in place, and review these with you.
- **What the local authority is responsible for:** The local authority decides whether to assess a child for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), issues and maintains the EHCP, and provides the funding and services specified within it.
- **What an EHCP sets out:** An EHCP describes your child's needs, the provision required to meet those needs, and who must deliver it. Schools must implement the parts of the plan that fall within their control, and the local authority must provide the provision it is responsible for.

Some support depends on national or local funding decisions that are outside out control. We will always do our best within the resources available to us. If you

are unsure about who is responsible for a particular aspect of SEND support, please ask.

8. Monitoring and evaluation

SHARE Multi Academy Trust is committed to learning from concerns and complaints to improve the quality of education and services provided across its academies. The trust will use information from complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement in its policies, procedures and the quality of education and services provided.

The trust will monitor:

- the number and nature of complaints received;
- themes and trends arising from complaints;
- timescales for responding;
- outcomes of investigations;
- actions taken to improve practice.

Complaint information will be reviewed periodically by senior leaders and reported to the Board of Directors as appropriate. Personal information will be anonymised when reports are prepared.

The effectiveness of this policy will be reviewed every two years (2), or sooner, where there are changes in legislation, statutory guidance or operational requirements.

The policy will be published on the trust and each academy website and provided to parents and pupils on request. A copy of this Complaints Policy will be provided to the parent or carer when a concern, difficulty or complaint is first raised.

9. Training and awareness

The trust will ensure that those responsible for implementing this policy understand their responsibilities and are appropriately supported.

This includes:

- induction for senior leaders responsible for complaint investigations;
- guidance for headteachers and trust leaders on complaint handling;
- training for review panel members on their role and the principles of impartial decision-making;
- periodic updates where legislation or statutory guidance changes.

Staff will also be encouraged to resolve concerns informally wherever appropriate and to promote positive relationships with parents and carers.

10. Equality and diversity statement

SHARE Multi Academy Trust is committed to ensuring that all members of its community are treated fairly, with dignity and respect.

The trust will implement this policy in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and will not discriminate on the grounds of:

- age;

- disability;
- sex;
- gender reassignment;
- pregnancy and maternity;
- race;
- religion or belief;
- sexual orientation;
- marriage or civil partnership.

Reasonable adjustments will be made where required to enable individuals to access the complaints process.

This may include:

- accessible documentation;
- interpreters;
- alternative formats;
- accessible meeting arrangements;
- additional support for those with disabilities or communication needs.

11. Linked policies

- Behaviour Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- SEND Policy
- Admissions Policy
- GDPR Policy
- Freedom of Information Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Equality Policy

12. Schedule of Amendment

Version No.	Date of Issue	Amendment
1		Complete rewrite of the Complaints Policy following adoption of the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) complaints framework. Introduced a simplified three-stage complaints procedure, aligned the policy with the new SHARE MAT policy template, improved accessibility and readability, clarified governance responsibilities, strengthened monitoring arrangements and retained SHARE MAT specific statutory requirements.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Something gone wrong? Let us know

The quickest and easiest way to make a formal complaint is by completing the online complaint form available on our website. Once you have completed the form and selected Submit, it will be sent securely to the school automatically, allowing us to begin looking into your complaint as quickly as possible.

You do not need to write a long explanation. Simply provide the key information about your concerns, who has been involved, any steps you have already taken to try to resolve the issue, and what you would like us to do to put things right.

If an informal complaint has not been raised previously, the school reserves the right to determine which stage of the complaints procedure is appropriate for handling your concerns.

Access the online complaint form here: Step Two: Write to us and raise a formal complaint – Fill in form.

If you are unable to access or complete the online form, you can use the paper version below instead. Once completed, please return it via email or in person to the school office whitcliffe.office@sharemat.co.uk, where it will be passed to the appropriate member of staff for consideration.

Your name:	**Telephone number:**
Your email address:	**Child's name:**
Child's date of birth (DOB):	**Child's year group/class/form:**
Your relationship to the child: Are you… ○ Parent ○ Carer ○ Family member with parental responsibility ○ Other (please tell us)	**Which school does your child attend?**

Your complaint - What is your complaint about?
Please choose the closest option:

○ Teaching and learning ○ Behaviour ○ Bullying ○ SEND support
○ Attendance ○ Communication ○ School trip ○ Health and safety
○ Staff conduct ○ Leadership ○ Other

Please tell us what happened:
Please write in your own words where possible. You do not need to use AI or write a long explanation. Short, clear answers help us understand your concerns more quickly and allow us to respond sooner.
Try to include:

- what happened;
- when it happened;
- who was involved.

Have you already spoken to anyone about this?
○ Yes ○ No

If yes:
Who did you speak to?

What happened?

What can we do to help put things right?
Please keep your answer brief

I confirm that the information I have provided is accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Signature: **Date:**