



COMPLAINTS POLICY

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Reviewed by the SLT MAT Board

“The Trustees of the Southport Learning Trust are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people at every opportunity and expect all staff and volunteers to share this commitment”

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Introduction

The trustees of Southport Learning Trust have approved and adopted this procedure to allow parents/carers of pupils attending schools within the Trust to raise a concern or complaint. Concerns or complaints from persons other than parents/carers or pupils should be dealt with in accordance with the procedure set out in Annex 1.

This procedure does not apply to concerns and complaints relating to the following, which are dealt with under separate policies:

- exclusions;
- admissions;
- appeals relating to internal assessment decisions for external qualifications;
- complaints about Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP);
- grievances or disciplinary issues relating to members of staff; or
- issues related to child protection.

The aims of the procedure are:

- to deal with any complaint against any school in the Trust or any individual connected with it by following the correct procedure;
- to deal with all complaints thoroughly and by being open, honest and fair when dealing with the complainant.

All staff will be made aware of this complaints procedure and are expected to review this policy regularly in order that they are familiar with our process of dealing with complaints and can be of assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

Understanding this procedure

In order to investigate your complaint as fully as possible, we have implemented a staged approach, a summary of which is set out at Annex 2. We anticipate that almost all complaints that arise will be resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2 below.

We expect our members of staff to be addressed in a respectful manner and for communication to remain calm at all times. The procedure under Part 2 will only be used on very rare occasions to deal with unreasonably persistent complainants or unreasonable complainant behaviour.

To enable a proper investigation, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the school as soon as possible. In general, any matter raised more than 3 months after the event being complained of will not be considered.

An anonymous concern or complaint will not be investigated under this procedure unless there are exceptional circumstances.

If it becomes necessary to alter the time limits and deadlines set out within this procedure, you will be advised accordingly and given an explanation as to why this has been the case and provided with revised timescales.

In this procedure:

- 'school days' excludes weekends and holidays;
- 'parent' means a parent, carer or anyone with legal responsibility for a child.

PART 1: Complaints Procedure

Stage 1: Informal concerns

Many enquiries and concerns can be dealt with satisfactorily by the members of staff without the need to resort to the formal procedure. We value informal meetings and discussions and encourage parents

to approach staff with any concerns they may have, and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding.

It is always helpful if you can fully explain the nature of the concern and identify the outcome you are looking for. You may be invited to an informal meeting with the member of staff most appropriate for dealing with that concern. The member of staff dealing with the concern will make sure that you are clear on what action (if any) has been agreed. This may be put in writing if appropriate.

If the matter is brought to the attention of the Headteacher they may decide to deal with your concerns directly at this stage. If the concerns are about the Headteacher these should be referred directly to the Chair of the Local Governing Body.

There is no suggested timescale for resolution at this stage given the importance of dialogue through informal discussion, although it would be expected that most issues will be resolved within 15 school days. Where no satisfactory solution has been found, you will be advised that if you wish your concerns to be considered further you should write to the Headteacher under Stage 2.

Stage 2: Formal Written Complaints

If your concerns are not resolved under Stage 1 or you wish your concerns to be dealt with immediately as a formal complaint, you should put your complaint in writing and send this to the Headteacher of the relevant school, which in the vast majority of cases will be the school your child attends.

Your written complaint should include details which might assist the investigation, such as the nature of the complaint, details of how the matter has been dealt with so far, the names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events and copies of all relevant documents. It is very important that you include a clear statement of the actions that you would like the school to take to resolve your complaint. You may wish to use the Complaint Form provided in Annex 3.

Your complaint will normally be acknowledged in writing within 5 school days of receipt. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the school's complaints procedure and target date for providing a response to the complaint.

The Headteacher (or personnel appointed by them) will usually invite you to a meeting to clarify your complaint/s and to explore possible resolutions. If you accept that invitation, you may be accompanied by one other person, such as a friend, relative, advocate or interpreter, to assist you. Where possible, this meeting will take place within 10 school days of receipt of the written complaint.

If necessary, witnesses will be interviewed and statements taken from those involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, the pupil should also be interviewed. Pupils should normally be interviewed with their parent present, but if this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint or if the pupil has specifically said that s/he would prefer that their parents were not involved, another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable should be present. If a member of staff is complained against, they must have the opportunity to present their case.

Once all the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, you will be provided with a written response to the complaint, including a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. This will include what action the school will take to resolve the complaint (if any). You will be advised that if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, you may request that your complaint be heard by the Complaints Committee.

If in the early stages of the investigation, Headteacher considers that the complaint is best dealt with immediately at Stage 3, it will be passed to the Chair of the Local Governing Body and you will be informed of this action without delay.

What if the complaint is about the Headteacher?

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or if the Headteacher has been closely involved at Stage 1, your complaint should be sent to the Chair of the Local Governing Body who will carry out all the Stage 2 procedures.

What if the complaint is about a member of the school's Local Governing Body?

You should contact the Chair of the Local Governing Body who will investigate the concerns in accordance with Stage 2. If the complaint is about the Chair of the Local Governing Body you should contact the Chair of Southport Learning Trust.

If the complaint is about the Local Governing Body as a whole, you should send your complaint to the Chair of the Southport Learning Trust c/o Clerk to Directors at Greenbank High School, Hastings Road, Southport, PR8 2LT.

Stage 3: Referral to the Complaints Committee

If you are dissatisfied with the decision under Stage 2, you may request that a Complaints Committee be convened to consider your complaint. Your request will only be considered if you have completed the relevant procedures at Stages 1 and 2.

To request a hearing before the Complaints Committee, you should write to the Clerk to the Local Governing Body, within 10 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 2. You should ensure that you provide copies of all relevant documents and state all the grounds for your complaint and the outcome that you are looking for.

Your written request will be acknowledged within 5 school days of receipt.

The Clerk will arrange for a Complaints Committee to be convened, made up of at least three members, including:

- members of the Local Governing Body and/or trustees of the Trust with no prior involvement in the matter; and,
- one person who is independent of the management and running of Southport Learning Trust.

The Clerk shall appoint one of these members to be the Chair of the Committee.

Every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within 20 school days of the receipt of your request. As soon as reasonably practicable and in any event at least 5 school days before the hearing, you will be sent written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the committee members who will be present. Fair consideration will be given to any bona fide objection to a particular member of the committee. The notification will also inform you of your right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend, relative, advocate or interpreter and explain how the meeting will be conducted. You should notify the Clerk in advance if you intend to bring anyone to the hearing.

A copy of the complaint and any other documents provided by you in support of your complaint or by the school in defence of the complaint will be provided to the Complaints Committee as soon as practicable upon receipt. Copies of these documents shall also be provided to you or the Headteacher (as applicable) at least 3 school days before the hearing. The Complaints Committee reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented by either you or the school less than 3 school days prior to the hearing. The Complaints Committee is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.

The hearing will be conducted in such a way as to ensure that each party has the opportunity to address the Complaints Committee. The procedure to be followed during the hearing will be set out to the parties by letter in advance of the hearing. The Clerk will ensure that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken or actions agreed.

Unless otherwise stated, the procedure for an appeal will usually proceed as follows:

- the parent and Headteacher enter the hearing together;
- the Chair of the Committee introduces the committee members and outlines the process;
- the parent will explain their complaint;
- the Headteacher and committee members will question the parent;
- the Headteacher will explain the school's actions;

- the parent and the committee members will question the Headteacher;
- the parent will sum up their complaint;
- the Headteacher will sum up the school's actions;
- the Chair of the Committee will explain that both parties will hear from the committee within 5 school days;
- both parties will leave together while the committee decides;
- the Clerk will stay to assist the committee with its decision making.

After the hearing, the Complaints Committee will consider their decision and inform you and the Headteacher of their decision in writing within 5 school days. The letter will set out the decision of the committee together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The committee can (by a majority if necessary):

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

Stage 4: Referral of complaint to Education Funding Agency (ESFA)

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Complaints Committee, you are entitled to refer your complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) who has limited powers to review the handling of the complaint in accordance with about ESFA's Academies' Procedure.

The ESFA will consider complaints that fall into any of the following three categories:

- where there is undue delay or the school did not comply with its own complaints procedures when considering a complaint;
- where the school is in breach of its funding agreement with the Secretary of State; or
- where the school has failed to comply with any other legal obligation.

At the time of writing this procedure, the ESFA procedure and the ESFA school complaints form are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

Records of complaints

A written record will be kept of all complaints, including at what stage they were resolved. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of a school inspection or under other legal authority.

PART 2: Unreasonably persistent complainants and unreasonable complainant behaviour

There are rare circumstances where we will deviate from the Complaints Procedure set out in Part 1.

These include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- where the complainant's behaviour towards a staff member, the Local Governing Body or Trustees is unacceptable, for example, is abusive, offensive or threatening;
- where, because of the frequency of their contact with the school, the complainant is hindering the consideration of their or other people's complaints and/or the proper running of the school;
- where the complainant uses Freedom of Information requests excessively and unreasonably;
- where the complainant insists upon pursuing unsubstantiated complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes and/or insists upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- where the complainant insists on only dealing with the Headteacher on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the school to deal with such matters;
- where the complainant's complaint is clearly vexatious and / or has patently insufficient grounds;

- where the complainant's complaint is the same complaint which has already been considered in full by the school.

For the purpose of this policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of the actions above in such a way that they:

- a. appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff and/or;
- b. cause ongoing distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or;
- c. have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community and/or are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health.

In the case of persistent or vexatious complaints and/or harassment, the school will verbally inform the complainant that his/her behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable / unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this policy. This will be confirmed in writing.

If the complainant's behaviour is not modified the school will take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:

- a. inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this;
- b. inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties;
- c. conduct the Complaints Committee on the papers only i.e. not hold a hearing;
- d. refuse to consider the complaint and refer the complainant directly to Stage 4;
- e. restrict the complainant's access to the school e.g. requesting contact in a particular form (for example letter only), requiring contact to take place with a named person only, restricting telephone calls to specified days and times or banning the complainant from the school's premises;
- f. consider putting in place a specific procedure for dealing with complaints from the complainant, i.e. the complainant will not be able to deal directly with the Headteacher but only with a third person to be identified by the Local Governing Body of the school, who will investigate, determine whether or not the concern / complaint is reasonable or vexatious and then advise the Headteacher accordingly.

In all cases we will write to tell the complainant why we believe his or her behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, what action we are taking and the duration of that action.

Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, members of the Local Governing Body or Trustees, we will consider other options, for example reporting the matter to the police or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

Annex 1

Concerns or Complaints from persons other than parents/carers of registered pupils in the school

The main body of this complaints policy applies solely to complaints made by parents or carers of pupils in the school. The school wishes to work closely with other members of the local community and will deal with concerns and complaints as follows:

1. A concern regarding the school and/or its operations may be made to any member of staff. That member of staff will attempt to resolve the matter immediately or may, if appropriate, refer the matter to their line manager or member of Senior Leadership Team (SLT) who is best placed to deal with the concern. It is expected that most concerns will be responded to orally or in writing within 5 school days. If a longer period is required, you will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation.
2. Where a concern is not resolved at stage 1, a formal complaint should be sent to the Headteacher to investigate. The Headteacher may delegate the task of investigation and/or responding to the complaint to a member of SLT or may escalate the complaint straight to stage 3. A formal response to the complaint will usually be provided within 10 school days of receipt of the letter of complaint although if a longer period is required to respond, you will be kept updated.
3. If you are not satisfied with the response at stage 2, you may request a review by writing to the Chair of Governors. You should write to the Chair within 10 school days of receipt of the letter at stage 2. The Chair may consider the complaint alone or may convene a complaints committee on the same terms as set out in the main body of the complaints policy. The decision at this stage will usually be sent to you within 20 school days of receipt of the request for a review.

The decision at stage 3 exhausts the school's complaints procedure.

Annex 2

Summary of Complaints Procedure

Stage 1	
Informal Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parent brings complaint to attention of member of staff• Issue to be resolved within 15 school days• Where no satisfactory solution has been found, parent to be advised that they should proceed to Stage 2
Stage 2	
Formal Written Complaint	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parent to put complaint in writing using Complaint Form.• Complaint to be acknowledged within 5 school days.• (Optional) Meeting with parents within 10 school days.• Response to the complaint sent within 15 school days
Stage 3	
Referral to Complaints Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parent to request hearing within 10 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 2.• Request to be acknowledged within 5 school days.• Hearing to take place within 20 school days of receipt of request.• Notification of date, time and place of the hearing and details of the committee members present sent at least 5 school days before the hearing School and parents to submit evidence in support of their case to Clerk at least 3 school days before the hearing• Complaints Committee decision sent not more than 5 school days after the hearing.

Annex 3

Southport Learning Trust Complaints Form

Your Name:	
Pupil's Name:	
Your Relationship to the pupil:	
Your address and postcode:	
Your daytime telephone number:	Your evening telephone number:
Your email address:	
Your complaint is: (if you have more than one complaint, please number these in order of priority)	
What action have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint(s)? (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)	
What would you like as an outcome from your complaint(s)?	
Is additional documentation being attached to support your complaint? If so please provide details:	
Your signature:	Date:
All functions of the complaints procedure must adhere to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998, General Data Protection Regulation 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Please complete and return to the school office in a sealed envelope addressed to the Headteacher, Chair of the Local Governing Body or the Clerk the Local Governing Body / Clerk to the Trustees (as appropriate).	
Office Use Only: Date Received: Date acknowledgement sent: Responsible member of staff:	