

Complaints Policy

April 2026



The Stour Academy Trust

The Stour Academy Trust

Date from: April 2026

Review Date: April 2027

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at The Stour Academy Trust. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to the academy about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as 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'*.

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. Therefore, as part of any formal complaint we do request that commentary/evidence is provided as to how this complaint was addressed informally first.

The Stour Academy Trust takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

We would ask that any concern first be addressed with the particular member of staff involved, if you have difficulty discussing a concern with this person, we will of course respect your views. In these instances where you are not willing to address these concerns with the particular staff member, we would ask that you liaise with the Parent Support Advisor, Deputy Head Teacher or Head Teacher whom are accessible via the main office or via school communication systems. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the head teacher 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 are not happy with the outcome of these informal discussions detailed above and would like to raise their concerns formally as a complaint. In this case, the academy will attempt to manage these complaints internally at academy level, prior to escalation to the Trust through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to make a complaint

An **informal complaint** can be made in person, by telephone, in writing or by email.

A **formal complaint** will only be accepted in writing or by email on the complaint's template provided (see Annex A). 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. As per above no formal complaint will be accepted unless an attempt has been made to resolve this informally.

Formal Complaints against academy or academy staff (except the Head Teacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Head Teacher via the academy office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Formal Complaints that involve or are about the Head Teacher should be addressed to the PA to the CEO, via the Trust office at The Stour Academy Trust, Park View, Sturry, CT2 0NR or via email to pa@stouracademytrust.org.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential. These will then be shared with either a Trust School Improvement Partner, Trust Advisor or a Trust Executive Head Teacher.

Formal Complaints that involve a Trust School Improvement Partner, Trust Advisor or Executive Head Teacher should be addressed to the PA to the CEO, via the Trust office at The Stour Academy Trust, Park View, Sturry, CT2 0NR or via email to pa@stouracademytrust.org.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential. These will then be shared with either the COO or CEO of the Trust.

Formal Complaints about the Chief Operations Officer (COO)

The same process detailed above will apply. These complaints will be investigated by a Trust School Improvement Partner.

Formal Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a Trustee of the Trust, should be addressed to the Governance Professional to the Board of Trustees, via the Trust office at The Stour Academy Trust, Park View, Sturry, CT2 0NR or via email to clerk.trust@stouracademytrust.org.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Formal Complaints will be acknowledged in writing and an investigating officer appointed to manage the complaint.

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 academy office. You can also ask a third-party organisation for example the Citizens Advice Bureau 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 CEO, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

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.

Withdrawal of a complaint

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

Scope of this complaints procedure

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

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to academies	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the LADO Education Safeguarding Advisory Services (LESAS) who has local responsibility for safeguarding. County LESAS Service: 03000 41 11 11
Exclusion of children from academy*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the Trust's complaints procedure.</i>
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 academies within the Trust should complain through the Trust'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 Trust's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the Trust's internal discipline and conduct 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.
Data protection matters	Complaints about data protection matters are handled under our data protection policy and in accordance with relevant guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the ICO directly, but the ICO will usually expect you to have raised your concerns with our Data Protection Officer in the first instance.
Freedom of information matters	Complaints about our compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 are handled under our freedom of information policy and in accordance with relevant guidance from the ICO. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the ICO directly, but the ICO will usually expect you to have raised your concerns with us in the first instance.

If a complainant commences legal action against The Stour Academy Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

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 timescales

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, The Stour Academy Trust and its academies want 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 Trust policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Stage 1 – Informal complaints

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

Concerns should initially be raised with the staff member involved. If, however you do not deem this appropriate you could raise your informal complaint to the Parent Support Advisor, class teacher, or member of the academy leadership team such as the Head Teacher or Deputy Head Teacher to allow for this concern to be reviewed and addressed informally.

Many of these concerns can be addressed immediately however if further exploration is required, at the conclusion of their exploration, the appropriate person reviewing the complaint will provide an informal verbal or written response within 5 school days of the date of the complaint being raised.

If the issue remains unresolved, or you are unhappy with the outcome of the informal process the next step is to make a formal complaint in writing using the formal complaints form. No formal complaint will be considered unless an informal complaint has been made first to allow for resolution.

Stage 2 – Formal complaints

Formal complaints must be made to the Head Teacher (unless they are about the Head Teacher), using the complaints form within annex A. Complaints not presented on annex A will not be considered. These forms should be submitted via email using the email address on the school website or via the main school office.

The Head Teacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing or by email within 5 school days.

Within this response, the Head Teacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, what informal measures were taken first, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Head Teacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting, virtual meeting or telephone call could be the most appropriate way of doing this.

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

Formal Complaints against academy or academy staff (except the Head Teacher) 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 (or investigator) will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of acknowledgment of the complaint.

If the Head Teacher (or investigator) 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 the academy will take to resolve the complaint. The investigator will also draw a conclusion of uphold/ partially uphold or not uphold the complaint.

Formal Complaints that involve or are about the Head Teacher

The same process detailed above will apply. These complaints will be investigated by either a Trust School Improvement Partner, Trust Advisor or Trust Executive Head Teacher.

Formal Complaints that involve a Trust School Improvement Partner, Trust Advisor or Executive Head Teacher

The same process detailed above will apply. These complaints will be investigated by either the COO or CEO of the Trust.

Formal Complaints about the Chief Operations Officer (COO)

The same process detailed above will apply. These complaints will be investigated by a Trust School Improvement Partner.

Formal Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a Trustee of the Trust

The same process detailed above will apply. These complaints will be investigated by a panel of the Board of Trustees.

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

Stage 3 – Internal Review

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 – an internal review.

The purpose of this review is for the reviewer to:

- investigate if the complaints policy has been followed
- decide if the investigation was carried out to a sufficient standard
- decide if they (the reviewer) agree with the outcomes from stage 2 (uphold/partially uphold/not upholding of complaint)

The reviewer will have had no part or involvement in the investigation and would be as follows:

A formal complaint investigated by the Headteacher / at school level would be reviewed by a Trust School Improvement Partner, Trust Advisor or Trust Executive Head Teacher

A formal complaint investigated by a Trust School Improvement Partner, Trust Advisor or Trust Executive Head Teacher would be reviewed by the COO/CEO

A formal complaint investigated by the COO/CEO would be reviewed by the opposite person

A request to escalate to Stage 3 should be made within 10 school days of receiving the outcome of stage 2. This should outline why you feel stage 2 has not been undertaken correctly. This should be addressed to the PA to the CEO, via the Trust office at The Stour Academy Trust, Park View, Sturry, CT2 0NR or via email to pa@stouracademytrust.org.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

The internal reviewer has 5 school days to acknowledge receipt of the stage 3 complaint.

The internal reviewer has 15 school days from receipt of your escalation to stage 3 request to undertake a review and respond with a written outcome.

Stage 4 – Panel Hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the internal review stage 3 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 4 – a panel hearing consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint e.g., other Trust Head Teachers / Central Team members with at least one panel member who is a Trustee of The Stour Academy Trust. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 4 must be made to the Governance Professional, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 response. These should be addressed to the Governance Professional to the Board of Trustees, via the Trust office at The Stour Academy Trust, Park View, Sturry, CT2 0NR or via email to clerk.trust@stouracademytrust.org.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

The Governance Professional will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing or email within 5 school days.

Requests received outside of the 10-day time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Governance Professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the panel. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of acknowledgment of the complaint receipt of the Stage 4 request. If this is not possible, the Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed. This panel could be held virtually or in person.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Governance Professional 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. 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 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.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

The Governance Professional 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 – this could also be held virtually
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the panel at least 10 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The panel 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. An audio record may also be made with the prior consent of the attendees to assist with recording the meeting minutes. This will be used to provide summary

minutes which will be shared upon request. Covert recordings of investigation meetings are expressly prohibited.

The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel 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 panel will:

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

The chair of the panel will provide the complainant and the academy / Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the academy/Trust. The DfE will not investigate the outcome of the complaint but will investigate the process. 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 the academy / Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent in writing, email or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the academy 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 CEO or Trustee

A formal complaint about the CEO or a Trustee will be managed in the same way as the above, there are however different stakeholder involvements.

If a complaint is escalated to The Stour Academy Trust or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the Trust. These should be addressed to the Governance Professional to the Board of Trustees, via the Trust office at The Stour Academy Trust, Park View, Sturry, CT2 0NR or via email to clerk.trust@stouracademytrust.org.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

The Governance Professional to the Board of Trustees will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 5 school days of the date that the written request was received.

Stage 1

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

Concerns should initially be raised with either the CEO or Trustee.

Many of these concerns can be addressed immediately however if further exploration is required, at the conclusion of their exploration, the appropriate person reviewing the complaint will provide an informal verbal or written response within 5 school days of the date of the complaint being raised.

If the issue remains unresolved, or the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the informal process the next step is to make a formal complaint in writing using the formal complaints form. No formal complaint will be considered unless an informal complaint has been made first to allow for resolution.

Stage 2

The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant. The Chair of the Board will detail the appointment of the investigating officer.

Following the investigation, the Chair of the Board will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 15 school days of acknowledgment of the complaint receipt. If this time limit cannot be met, the Governance Professional will write to the Complainant explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

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 of Trustees 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 stage 2, the complainant should write asking for the complaint to be escalated to stage 3.

Stage 3

As per stage 3 detailed earlier, the stage 2 investigation will come subject to an internal review. This internal review will be undertaken by another Trustee not involved in stage 2.

The Governance Professional will record the date the complaint has been escalated to stage 3 and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing or email within 5 school days.

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

The internal reviewer has 15 days from receipt of your escalation to stage 3 request to undertake a review and respond with a written outcome.

Stage 4

Stage 4 will be heard by a completely independent 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, or 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 panel 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.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

The Governance Professional 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 panel at least 10 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The panel will 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. minutes, which will be shared upon request. Covert recordings of investigation meetings are expressly prohibited.

The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel 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 panel will:

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

The Chair of the panel will provide the complainant and The Stour Academy Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by The Stour 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 The Stour 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 Trust 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.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the academy / Trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the DfE after they have completed Stage 4.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by The Stour Academy Trust. They will consider whether the academy / Trust has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent Academy Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE using their online contact form or by writing to:

Department for Education
School Complaints Compliance Unit
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Annex A: Complaint Form

All formal complaints will only be considered using the below form. Please complete and return to the appropriate person outlined within this policy 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 details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the academy about it.

What actions have you undertaken to date to informally resolve this complaint?

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

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

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Action taken:

Date:

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 academy 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
- 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 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 that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The investigator will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Internal Reviewer

The internal reviewer's role is to review the investigators conduct and outcomes of the original complaint in line with the complaints policy and the comprehensive records / reports received from the investigator above.

The internal reviewer will:

- 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 that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The internal reviewer will then determine whether to agree or disagree with the outcomes from the stage 2 investigation and communicate this in writing

Governance Professional to the Trust Board

The Governance Professional is the contact point for the complainant and the panel and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to academy complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- 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, academy and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the panel's decision.

Panel Chair

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

- both parties are asked (via the Governance Professional) 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 panel 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 academy 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 panel is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the panel 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 Governance Professional (and complaints co-ordinator, if the academy has one).

Panel Member

Panel members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so. No Trustee may sit on the panel 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 academy 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 panel 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 panel 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 panel 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 panel considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.