

Connect Academy Trust

Concerns and Complaints

Approved by the Board of
Connect Academy Trust, October 2023

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1	Feb 2020	No change
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4	January 2023	Link to GDPR policy updated.
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7	October 2023	Name changed to Concerns and Complaints policy

For Next Review and Approval by the Board of Connect Academy Trust, September 2024

Contents

1. Compliments
2. Comments
3. Concerns
4. Complaints
5. What To Do First If You Have Any Concerns
6. What To Do Next
7. If You Are Still Unhappy
8. Unacceptable Behaviour

Appendix A – Concerns and Complaints Flowchart

Appendix B – Complaint Form

Complaints Policy

If you have a compliment, comment, concern or complaint...

We would like you to let us know.

You are requested to raise directly with the Trust or individual school any issues regarding the Trust or individual school or its staff. All members of staff are familiar with the procedure and are able to assist you.

1. Compliments

We like to hear when we have done a good job so that we can share what we do well with the staff and children to ensure we continually improve.

2. Comments

We welcome helpful suggestions for improving our work.

3. Concerns

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought. Please tell us of any concern you have as soon as possible so that we can try to resolve it.

If you are a parent/carer be assured that no matter what you want to talk to us about, our support for you and your child will not be affected in any way.

4. Complaints

A complaint is a concern which has not been satisfactorily resolved. If you feel we have not dealt satisfactorily with your concern, please tell us as soon as possible that you wish to make a formal complaint, as it is difficult for us to investigate properly an incident or problem that happened some time ago.

If at any formal stage of the complaint it is determined that staff disciplinary or capability proceedings are necessary in order to resolve the issue, the details of this action will remain confidential to the CEO/Headteacher and/or the individual's line manager. As the complainant you are entitled to be informed that action is being taken, but you are not entitled to participate in the proceedings or receive any detail.

We will not usually investigate complaints about issues and incidents that are more than three months old.

We aim to keep to the timeframes outlined for stages 2 and 3 in the attached flowchart but sometimes more complex complaints take longer to investigate. If this is the case we will keep you informed of progress.

If you seek to remain anonymous it may not be possible to take action. However, if an anonymous complaint is received which may need to be treated as a child protection matter it will be dealt with under the appropriate statutory procedure.

This policy does not cover the following types of complaints for which there are statutory or formalised procedures in place:

Procedure dealing with:	Further information available from:
Appeals with respect to admissions	See Trust Admissions Policy or contact the Local Authority's School Admissions Team
Appeals with respect to exclusion of pupils	See Trust Behaviour/Exclusions Policy or contact the Local Authority's Inclusion and Attendance Manager
Special Educational Needs Statements/Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP)	Local Authority's 0-25 SEND Statutory Assessment Team
National Curriculum and Religious Education	Local Authority's Education and Learning team

Child Protection Issues	Local Authority's Advice and Assessment team, Children's Social Care
Child Protection Investigations against Staff	Local Authority Designated Officer
Whistleblowing	The Trust has an internal Whistleblowing Policy for employees and voluntary staff which is available from the Trust office. Other concerns can be raised directly with Ofsted on 0300 123 3155 or via email at whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk
Staff Grievances and Disciplinary procedures	The Trust has internal Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures for employees which are available from the Trust office.
Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information requests	See the Trust's Freedom of Information and Data Protection Policies
Services provided by other external organisations who use the Trust premises or facilities	External providers should have their own complaints procedures and should be contacted direct.

5. **What To Do First If You Have Any Concerns (Stage 1)**

Most concerns can be sorted out quickly by speaking with your child's class teacher, or another member of staff.

If you have a concern that you feel should be looked at by the headteacher you can contact her/him first, although the vast majority of issues are best managed by the class teacher in the first instance. It is usually best to discuss your concerns face to face. You may need to make an appointment to do this and can make one by phoning or going to the reception.

You can take a friend or relation to the appointment with you if you want to, although they will be present as moral support only and are not able to take an active part in the meeting.

All staff will make every effort to respond to your concerns informally. They will make sure that they understand what you feel went wrong, and they will explain their own actions to you. They will ask what you would like the school to do to put things right. Of course, this does not mean that in every case they will come round to your point of view but it will help both you and the school to understand both sides of the issue. It may also help to prevent a similar problem arising again.

6. **What To Do Next (Stage 2)**

If you are dissatisfied with the response to your concern at Stage 1, you can make a formal complaint to the Headteacher. This can be done by completing the attached complaint form. Complaints submitted by any other means will not be accepted.

The Headteacher will arrange an investigation of the complaint and may interview any members of staff or pupils involved. The Headteacher will ask to meet you for a discussion of

your complaint and the outcome of the investigation. Again, you may take a friend or relation with you if you wish. Media representatives are not permitted to attend. You will receive a written response to your complaint.

If your complaint is about the headteacher, the CEO will arrange an investigation of the issue at this stage. See 'If You Are Still Unhappy' below. If your complaint is about the CEO or a member of the Board of Trustees, then you should refer your complaint to the Governance Professional of the Trust, via admin@connectacademytrust.co.uk

7. If you are still unhappy (Stage 3)

The complaint will normally be resolved by Stage 2. However, if you are dissatisfied with the response you may wish to contact the CEO or Governance Professional at Connect Academy Trust, via admin@connectacademytrust.co.uk

The CEO will respond to the complainant at this stage.

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

Within this response, the CEO will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The CEO can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this. Media representatives are not permitted to attend meetings.

During the investigation, the CEO (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those about which a complaint has been made, 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 CEO will provide a formal written response within **20 school days** of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the CEO 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 the actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The CEO will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 3. Complaints about the CEO, a member of the Trust Board, or local governing body of the school, must be made in the first instance to the Trust Governance Professional via the Trust's central office, who will refer the matter to the Executive Team.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or

- the entire Local Governing Body or
- the majority of the Local Governing body then Stage 3 will be escalated to Board of Trustees.

8. Stage 4 – Formal Complaint Panel

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 3 and wishes to take the matter further, they can request the complaint is escalated to Stage 4, which involves a panel hearing consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the Trust and School.

This is the final stage of the Trust complaints procedure.

The aim of the panel hearing will be:

- reconciliation
- to put right the things that may have gone wrong

A request to escalate to Stage 4 must be made to the Trust Governance Professional, via admin@connectacademytrust.co.uk, **within 10 school days** of receipt of the Stage 3 response. Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

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

The Trust Governance Professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date, time and location of the panel hearing at least **5 working days** in advance. They will aim to convene a meeting between **12 and 20 days** of receipt of the Stage 4 request. If this is not possible, the Trust Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed. However, the Appeal Panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant.

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

A complainant may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the panel hearing. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Media representatives are not permitted to attend complaint meetings.

At least **5 school days** before the meeting, the Trust 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 committee at least **5 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. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The 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 Trust's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The Chair of the Panel will provide the complainant and school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within **10 school days** of the panel hearing.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education Funding Agency (EFA) or DfE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the Trust and/or school 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 about which a complaint was made.

A written record will be kept of all complaints and of whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or proceeded to a panel hearing.

Following the meeting the Governance Professional will issue a letter confirming the panel's decision.

If you are dissatisfied with the Trust's internal procedure you can refer your complaint to the Education Funding Agency (Stage 5). Complaints about MATs can be sent by going online at www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus or by post to Ministerial and Public Communications Division, Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD.

9. Complaints escalated to or about the Trust, CEO or Trustee

If a complaint is escalated to the Trust or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the Trust, then the complaint should be sent to the Trust Governance Professional to be investigated.

The Trust Governance Professional will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within **5 school days** of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will be investigated under Stage 4 of this Complaints Policy and confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

Following the investigation, the relevant person will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within **10 school days** of the date that the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the relevant person will write to the Complainant within **5 school days** of the date that the letter was received, explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

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

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

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Trust Governance Professional asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel, within **20 school days**. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

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

The Trust Governance Professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date, time and location of the meeting at least **5 working days** in advance. They will aim to convene a meeting within **12 and 20 school days** of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Trust Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed. However, the Complaint Panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant.

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

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Trust Board or
- the majority of the Trust Board

This will be heard by a completely independent Complaint 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 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 school/Trust. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will neither 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 meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

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

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

Media representatives are not permitted to attend.

At least **5 school days** before the meeting, the Trust 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 committee at least **5 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.

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

The 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 school or Trust's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The Chair of the Panel will provide the complainant and CEO with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within **10 school days** of the panel meeting.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education Funding Agency (EFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the 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 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.

A written record will be kept of all complaints and of whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or proceeded to a panel hearing.

10. Unacceptable Behaviour

As a Trust, we are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, providing a highquality service to those who make them. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the Trust. However, there are a small number of people who hinder our work with serial or persistent complaints, for example where the Trust is contacted repeatedly by an individual making the same points, or who asks us to reconsider our position. We consider this unacceptable behaviour and will inform the individual and ask them to change it. If the unacceptable behaviour continues, we will take action to restrict their contact with our Trust staff. In all cases where we decide someone's behaviour is unacceptable, we will write to tell them why, what action we are taking and how long it will last. We will also tell them how they can challenge the decision if they disagree with it. New complaints from people whose behaviour has been unacceptable in the past will be looked at without bias.

We also do not expect our staff to tolerate any behaviour that is unacceptable, for example, abusive, offensive or threatening and we will take action to protect our staff from such behaviour, including reporting the matter to the police or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give prior warning of that action. Alternatively, we may temporarily bar such an individual from Trust premises. We will write to tell them why they are being barred from the Trust sites, how they can maintain contact with the Trust, and how long it will last. Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so by letter or email to the CEO or Chair of the Board of Directors. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the Secretary of State or the Education Funding Agency.

APPENDIX A - CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS FLOWCHART

Stage 1: Informal discussion with your child's
Headteacher in some cases)

class teacher (or

Issue Resolved No
further action required

Issue Not Resolved
Consider submitting formal complaint

Stage 2: Formal Complaint to the Headteacher

The Headteacher will:

- Acknowledge receipt of complaint within 2 school days
- Investigate the complaint
- If the complaint is about the headteacher, the CEO will arrange an investigation at this stage, which may involve the governing body of the school.
- Arrange meeting with complainant to discuss outcome of investigation within 12 school days (not including school or bank holidays)
- Immediately after meeting, write to complainant outlining results of investigation and meeting

Issue Resolved

No further action required

Issue Not Resolved

Consider submitting formal complaint to

Governance Professional to the CEO.

Stage 3: Formal Complaint to the Trust

- Governance Professional will acknowledge receipt of complaint within 2 school days
- Governance Professional will check if complaint referred within 3 months of incident
- CEO will respond to the complainant at this stage

Issue Resolved

No further action required

Issue Not Resolved

Consider submitting formal complaint the

Board of Trustees

Stage 4: Formal Complaint Panel

- The Governance Professional (GP) will arrange complaints appeal panel meeting at a mutually convenient time within 15 school days (not including holidays) of receipt of complaint and deal with paperwork
- The panel will hear evidence from both the complainant and school/Trust and make a decision on the

complaint

- GP will issue a letter confirming the panel decision within 10 school days of appeal panel meeting

Issue Not Resolved

Issue Resolved

No further action required

Consider submitting formal complaint to Secretary of State, Department for Education

Stage 5: Formal complaint to Education Funding Agency/DfE

The EFA/DfE will consider complaint on behalf of the Secretary of State

-
- The EFA/DfE will look at whether the Trust followed its own procedures and will not normally reinvestigate

the substance of the complaint

- The Secretary of State will only intervene where the Board of Directors has acted unlawfully or unreasonably and where it is expedient or practical to do so



Appendix B Complaint

Form

This form is designed to help you ask the Headteacher (or others) to investigate your formal complaint. Please complete this form and return it to the Headteacher (or Trust) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. If you need assistance with completing this form, please contact the school office.

Your name:	
Child's name:	
Your relationship to the child:	
Your address:	
Your postcode:	
Your telephone number:	
Your email address:	

Please give details of your complaint including dates, names of staff and what happened:

What have you already done to try and sort out your complaint, including who have you spoken to at the school and what did they say?

What do you feel would be a satisfactory and reasonable outcome to this complaint?

If you have attached any relevant documents to this form, please list them below:

Your signature:	
Date:	
OFFICIAL USE ONLY	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By who:	
Complaint referred to:	
Date:	

The current Connect Academy GDPR Policy is available at [Policies • Connect Academy Trust](#)

For individual School Privacy Policies please visit your child's school website.