DUNSTONE
EDUCATION TRUST

COMPLAINTS POLICY

We Care ● We Challenge ● We Commit

Document Control Table		
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		Dunstone Education Trust
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Date	**Author**	**Note of revisions**
Sept 2024		Adoption of the policy
Sept 2025	A Galbraith	**Whole document:** Replacement of any ESFA reference to DFE. ESFA no longer exists.
		Page 5 (Stage 3) Panel Independence "independent of Trust" and inclusion on infographic
		Section 5 Updated: At least 1 panel member must be independent of the management and running of the **academy trust**, and none of the panel members should have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.
		Page 6 Section 6a included:
		Page 7 (Section 9) Reference now to a Trust-level complaint register
Sept 2026 V4	A Galbraith	Policy reviewed and updated to strengthen procedural fairness, safeguarding, governance and information-sharing arrangements. 1. **Page 5 – Section 3:** Safeguarding escalation clarified. 2. **Page 6 – Section 5:** Formal complaints process clarified. 3. **Page 7 – Section 5:** Review panel arrangements strengthened. 4. **Page 7 – Sections 6 and 6A:** Complaint-handling responsibilities clarified. 5. **Page 9 – Section 9:** Confidentiality and record-keeping updated. 6. **Pages 11–12 – Appendix 1:** Minor drafting corrections.

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Complaints Procedure for Parents & Others

1. Aims

At the Dunstone Education Trust our aims to meet statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of students at the Academy, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into academy improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The academy trust will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the Academy website.

2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of students at the Academy.

It is also based on guidance published by the **Department for Education (DfE)** on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations, and refers to good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE).

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

3. Definitions and scope

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint.

A **concern** is defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought".
The academy will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.

A **complaint** is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action".
The academy intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.
There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy

outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

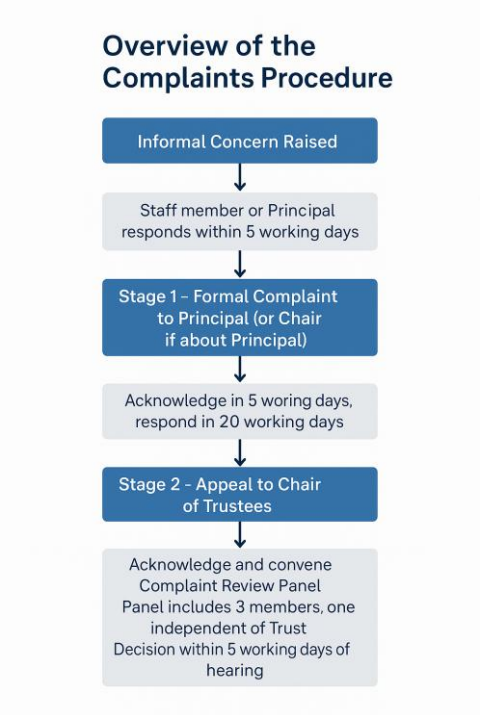
- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEND)
- Safeguarding matters
- Exclusion
- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Where a complaint raises a safeguarding or child protection concern, the matter will be referred without delay to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or other appropriate person in accordance with the Trust's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and statutory guidance. The complaints procedure will not delay any necessary safeguarding action.

Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with SEN about the academy's support are within the scope of this policy. Such complaints should first be made to the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO); they will then be referred to this complaints policy. Our SEN policy and information report includes information about the rights of parents of students with disabilities who believe that our Academy has discriminated against their child.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use academy premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.



4. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

We also intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits will be set for each action within each stage.

Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set, and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline with an explanation for the delay.

The academy expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and no later than 3 months afterwards. We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

5. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the Principal or Trustee)

Stage 1: informal

The academy will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Principal, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the Principal's PA at the Academy office.

The academy will acknowledge informal complaints within five working days, and investigate and provide a response within twenty working days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the Principal and/or the subject of the complaint, if appropriate. If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

Stage 2: Formal

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint in writing to the Principal. Where the complaint concerns the Principal, a governor or a trustee, it should be submitted in accordance with section 6 of this policy. This letter should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. A complaints form is attached included as Appendix 1 to this policy (see page 9). The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint. A response from the academy confirming acknowledgement of the complaint will be sent within five working days.

The Principal (or other person appointed by the Principal for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within twenty working days.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the Chair of Trustees in writing within five working days of receiving the written conclusion.

Stage 3: Review Panel

Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal, stage.

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the academy trust and must consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member must be independent of the management and running of the academy trust, and none of the panel members should have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. The panel cannot be made up solely of trustee board members, as they are not independent of the management and running of the academy.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 9).

The complainant will be given reasonable notice of the date of the review panel hearing. The Trust will make reasonable efforts to agree a suitable date, taking account of the availability of the complainant, panel members and other relevant participants. Where reasonable attempts to arrange a hearing have been unsuccessful, the panel may proceed in the complainant's absence, provided it is fair and reasonable to do so. At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the academy, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.
The panel, the complainant and the academy representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and academy representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel must then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide a copy of the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the proprietor and Principal.

A written record will be kept of all complaints made in accordance with this policy along with details of whether they were resolved following a formal procedure or progression to a panel hearing.

The academy will inform those involved of the decision in writing within five working days.

6. Complaints against the Principal, Governor or Trustee

Complaints made against the Principal should be directed to the Chair of Trustees.

Where a complaint is against the chair of governors or any member of the trustee board, it should be made in writing to the clerk to the trustee board in the first instance.

Complaints under this section will be considered by an appropriate person who has not been directly involved in the matters complained about. Where the complaint proceeds to a review panel, the panel will be constituted in accordance with section 5 of this policy. The Trust will ensure that responsibility for investigating and determining complaints is allocated in accordance with its governance arrangements and that no individual is responsible for determining a complaint about their own conduct.

6A. Complaints about the Trust or Central Services

Complaints that relate to the wider Dunstone Education Trust, including services provided centrally (such as finance, governance, estates, data protection or HR) should be submitted in writing to the Chief Executive Officer of the Trust. If the complaint concerns the CEO, it should be addressed to the Chair of the Trust Board, via the Clerk to Trustees.

The Trust will follow a procedure equivalent to that described in this policy, with necessary adaptations for central services and personnel.

Complaints under this section will be considered by an appropriate person who has not been directly involved in the matters complained about. Where the complaint proceeds to a review panel, the panel will be constituted in accordance with section 5 of this policy. The Trust will ensure that responsibility for investigating and determining complaints is allocated in accordance with its governance arrangements and that no individual is responsible for determining a complaint about their own conduct.

7. Referring complaints on completion of the academy's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the academy's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the **Department for Education (DfE)**. The **DFE Complaints Unit** will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the academy. The **DFE** will not overturn an academy's decision about a complaint. However, it will look into:

- Whether there was undue delay, or the academy did not comply with its own complaints procedure
- Whether the academy was in breach of its funding agreement with the secretary of state
- Whether the academy has failed to comply with any other legal obligation

If the academy did not deal with the complaint properly, it will be asked to re-investigate the complaint. If the academy's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the academy will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:
https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

8. Persistent complaints

Where a complainant tries to re-open the issue with the academy after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and the academy has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the Chair of Trustees (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the academy again about the same issue, the academy can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- The academy has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the academy's position and their options (if any), *and*
- The complainant is contacting the academy repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The academy will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the academy with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, and/or
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, and/or
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, academy staff

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint.

Once the academy has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The academy will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the academy acts reasonably.

9. Record-keeping

The academy will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed at the academy premises only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be treated as confidential, except where disclosure is required or permitted by law, including in response to requests from the Secretary of State, an authorised inspection body or a valid request under applicable information rights legislation. Any disclosure will be managed in accordance with the Trust's data protection and information governance arrangements.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law and our privacy notices.

The academy will record the action it takes as a result of complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld)

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole trustee board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the trustee board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the academy will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the trustee board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

10. Learning lessons

The trustee board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Principal, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the academy can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

11. Monitoring arrangements

The trustee board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The trustee board will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 10.

A central register of complaints across all Trust academies and central services will be maintained by the Dunstone Education Trust. This enables oversight of trends, repeated themes, and learning opportunities across the Trust.

This policy will be reviewed by the Principal and full trustee board every three years, or sooner where required by changes in legislation or from lessons learned (See section 10). A light-touch review will also be conducted annually to ensure alignment with any updates in Department for Education guidance or changes in legislation.

At each review, the policy will be approved by the full trustee board.

12. Links with other policies

- Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:
- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Complaints and grievance (staff) procedure
- SEN policy and information report
- Privacy notices

This policy will supersede any previous policy in place at The Dunstone Education Trust

Appendix 1

Complaint Form

Please complete and return this form addressed to the Principal who will appoint a Complaints Co-Ordinator who will acknowledge receipt within five working days.

Your name:
Students' / Staff members name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the student / staff member (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Daytime telephone number: Evening telephone number: Email:
Please give details of your complaint

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint (who did you speak to and what was the response)?
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details
Signature **Date**
Official use
Date acknowledgment sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Date: