

Swift Academies

Complaints Procedure

Accepted by: Board of Directors March 2018

Approving Body: Board of Trustees

Committee: Standards

Review Cycle: 1 year

Last reviewed: November 2020

Date for next review: November 2021

This policy applies to all concerns and complaints including those concerning the support provided to students with medical conditions. Specific policies are also in place for the following:

- **Child Protection** issues
- **Exclusions** where separate procedures apply
- **Staff Grievance & Discipline**

This policy complies with Schedule 1, Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, the Equality Act 2010, Section 29 of the Education Act 2002. It also takes recognition of non-statutory advice issued by the Department for Education to maintained schools and Local Authorities.

This policy covers all Academies within Swift Academies.

English Language Requirement – Immigration Act 2016

A legitimate complaint received in respect of the above, whereby a member of the public feels that a public-facing member of staff has insufficient proficiency in English will be investigated in line with this policy and will adhere to the relevant Code of Practice.

Members of staff subject to the complaint will be notified of the complaint and given an opportunity to give their own account of the incident. A complaint will be assessed against an objective assessment of the level of fluency relevant to the role in question.

A complaint about a member of staff's accent, dialect, manner or tone of communication, origin or nationality will not be considered a legitimate complaint.

Timescales

We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage of the Complaints Procedure are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. For the purpose of this policy, a "working day" is defined as a weekday when the school is open. The definition of a "working day" excludes weekends and Bank Holidays.

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

Policy Aim and Statement

Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level and resolved as soon as possible; doing so is good practice, it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote parents' and students' confidence in our ability to safeguard and promote welfare. We will try to resolve every concern or complaint in a positive way with the aim of resolving the issue in a transparent manner.

The Trust expects that most concerns can be resolved informally and guarantees to treat seriously and confidentially all concerns whether raised informally or formally.

Statement

We need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. We recognise that a difficulty that is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, which could be damaging to relationships and also to our Trust culture. We intend that parents and students should never feel, or be made to feel, that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a student or his/her opportunities at school. The policy, however, distinguishes between a concern or difficulty which can be resolved informally and a formal complaint which will require further investigation.

The difference between a concern and a complaint is defined in the Department for Education advice June 2020:

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

Concerns should initially be raised with the Class Teacher, appropriate member of the Pastoral Team, Head of Department/Phase Leader or the appropriate member of the school's Leadership Team. The school will respect the views of the complainant who indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff. In these cases, the Head Teacher/Head of School, will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Head Teacher/Head of School, 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 would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, the school will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this Complaints Procedure.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

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

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to schools Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs School reorganisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with the individual school and/or the Darlington LA Admissions Team.
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 local authority designated officer (LADO) Carol Gasper - LADO (01325 406459) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH): 01325 742020 / ccdref@darlington.gcsx.gov.uk .
Exclusion of children from school*	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 and the Discipline (Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare)/Behaviour Policy</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 whistleblowers 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 our school should complain through the school'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. https://swiftacademies.org.uk/policies/

Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures. https://swiftacademies.org.uk/policies/
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary 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. https://swiftacademies.org.uk/policies/
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own Complaints Procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus
Data protection	Information Commissioner's Office https://ico.org.uk/concerns/handling/
Discrimination	Equality Advisory and Support Service http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/app/ask
Employment	an employment tribunal https://www.gov.uk/courts-tribunals/employment-tribunal
Exam malpractice or maladministration	Ofqual and the awarding body https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual/about/complaintsprocedure

Please note that 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 a complainant commences legal action against a Trust school in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the Complaints Procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, the Trust wants 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 apology;
- 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;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so. When a complaint is made it is important that as much information is collected as possible and the complainant is offered the opportunity to identify what actions might resolve their complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual Governors or Trustees to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the Head Teacher/Head of School) should be made in the first instance, to the Head Teacher/Head of School via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Head Teacher/Head of School should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Chief Executive Officer should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees, via any of the Trust's School offices. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual Governor or the whole Local Governing Body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Local Governing Body via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Trustees, any individual Trustee or the whole Trustee Board should be addressed to the Clerk to the Board of Trustees via any of the Trust's School offices. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure (Appendix A). If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice 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.

Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Head Teacher/Head of School (unless they are about the Head Teacher/Head of School, when they should be directed to the Chair of the Governing Body), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form (Annex A)), or by telephone. The Head Teacher/Head of School will record the date the complaint is received and will send an initial response acknowledging receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.

Note: The Head Teacher/Head of School may delegate the investigation to another senior member of staff (an Investigating Officer) but not the decision to be taken.

Guidance for Investigating Officers is attached in Appendix B.

The Head Teacher/Head of School/Investigation Officer may request additional information, or clarification of the information recorded in Appendix A from the complainant in order for them to be able to investigate the complaint fully.

During the investigation, the Head Teacher/Head of School (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/Head of School will provide a formal written response within 20 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Head Teacher/Head of School 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 school will take to resolve the complaint.

The Head Teacher/Head of School will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the Head Teacher/Head of School, Chief Executive Officer or a member of the Local Governing Body or Board of Trustees (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled Governor or Trustee will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1. If this is the case the appointed person will for the purpose of the complaints procedure carry out the role as Head Teacher/Head of School.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Local Governing Body or Board of Trustees or
- the majority of the Local Governing Body or Board of Trustees

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Local Governing Body or Board of Trustees. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

At the end of Stage 1 Appendix C will be completed.

Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the Local Governing Body/Board of Trustees complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, Governors or Trustees available. This is the final stage of the Complaints Procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The Clerk 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.

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

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

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

The complaints committee will consist of at least three Governors or Trustees with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three Governors or Trustees from the school/Trust available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent Governors/Trustees through another local school in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The following are also entitled to attend the hearing, submit written evidence and address the Panel;

- The complainant(s) and or/one representative
- The Head Teacher/Head of School (or Governor or Director if applicable)
- The investigating Officer
- Any other person who the Complaints Panel considers to have a reasonable and just interest in the appeal and who would assist the panel in their decision making

Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting as these committees are not a form of legal proceedings. However, we recognise that there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate, for instance, if a school employee is called as a witness, 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.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk 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 be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

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

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

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

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Local Governing Body or Board of Trustees or
- the majority of the Local Governing Body or Board of Trustees

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent co-opted Governors or Trustees.

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 school/Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the School/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 Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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 school 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.

Investigating Officer

The Investigating Officer's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a 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 Investigating Officer 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 for the Head Teacher/Head of School or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The Head Teacher/Head of School or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Coordinator (this could be the Head Teacher/Head of School/Chief Executive Officer, Member of the LGB or Trustees or other staff member providing administrative support)

The Complaints Coordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, Head Teacher/Head of School, Chief Executive Officer, Chair of Governors, Chair of Trustees and Clerk to ensure the smooth running of the Complaints Procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support (This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person)

- keep records.

Clerk to the Local Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee 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 school 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 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 committee's decision.

Committee Chair

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

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) 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 committee 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 school 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

A checklist for a Panel Hearing is attached at Appendix D.

Unreasonable Complaints and Unreasonable Behaviour

Please see Appendix E for further details of how unreasonable complaints and unreasonable behaviour will be dealt with and examples of behaviour which will not be tolerated.

Anonymous Complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Head Teacher/Head of School, Chief Executive Officer, Chair of Governors or Chair of Trustees, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Duplicate complaints

If, after closing a complaint at the end of the complaints procedure, we receive a duplicate complaint from a spouse, a partner, a grandparent or a child not attending this school, we will remind them that we have already considered the complaint and the local process is complete. Complainants will be advised to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our handling of the complaint.

Complaint campaigns

If we receive what we consider to be a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject and possibly from complainants not connected to the school, then we will treat these complaints as being part of a campaign and respond in one of the following two ways, depending upon the nature and scale of the complaint:

- send the same response to all complainants; or
- publish a single response on the school's website.

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Head Teacher/Head of School who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Address:
Postcode:
Day time telephone number: Evening
telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

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 acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Supplemental Guidance to Investigating Officers

Investigating Complaints General

1. It is suggested that at each stage, the person investigating the complaint (the Investigating Officer), makes sure that they:
 - establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
 - clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
 - meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
 - clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
 - interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
 - conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
 - keep notes of the interview or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting.

Investigation and resolution

2. The Investigating Officer will ask relevant staff to formally record their recollection of the events including timelines and details of correspondence and file/meeting notes that are relevant to earlier stages.
3. In addition, the Investigating Officer will invite the complainant to meet him/her to give the complainant the opportunity to present oral evidence or to clarify the complaint. The complainant may be accompanied by a friend. The Investigating Officer will record the details of the complaint and a copy of the notes will be provided to the complainant and the relevant staff.
4. The Investigating Officer will collect such other evidence as is deemed necessary. This may include the interviewing of witnesses and others who may provide relevant information.
5. The Investigating Officer will provide relevant staff with a copy of the complaint and the complaints form together with any additional evidence presented by the complainant collected by the Investigating Officer. Once there has been an opportunity for relevant staff to consider the evidence, they will be invited to meet separately with the Investigating Officer, in order to present written and oral evidence in response. Staff may be accompanied at this meeting by a work colleague or representative

The investigation will be undertaken as soon as possible.

Interviewing Best Practice Tips

Children/young people:

- Children/young people should be interviewed in the presence of another member of staff, or in the case of serious complaints (e.g. where the possibility of criminal investigation exists) in the presence of their parents/carers. However, it might not always be possible to conduct an interview in case it prejudices a LADO or police investigation.
- Care should be taken in these circumstances not to create an intimidating atmosphere.
- Children/young people should be told what the interview is about and that they can have someone with them.

All – Including Staff/Witnesses:

- Explain the complaint and your role clearly to the interviewee and confirm that they understand the Complaints Procedure and their role in it.
- Staff are allowed a colleague to support them at their interview. The colleague must not be anyone likely to be interviewed themselves, including their line manager.
- Use open, not leading questions.
- Do not express opinions in words or attitude.
- Ask single not multiple questions, i.e. one question at a time.
- Try to separate ‘hearsay’ evidence from fact by asking interviewees how they know a particular fact.
- Persist with questions if necessary. Do not be afraid to ask the same question twice.
- Make notes of each answer given.
- Deal with conflicting evidence by seeking corroborative evidence. If this is not available, discuss with the Complaints Coordinator/ Head Teacher/Head of School, Chief Executive Officer, Chair of Governors or Chair of Trustees the option of a meeting between the conflicting witnesses.
- Make a formal record of the interview from the written notes as soon as possible while the memory is fresh. Show the interviewee the formal record, ask if s/he has anything to add, and to sign the record as accurate.

Complaint Outcome

Complainant : _____

Date of Complaint : _____

Name of Investigating Officer : _____

Date of outcome meeting : _____

Complainant is satisfied with the outcome and the complaint has been resolved

Complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome and wishes to proceed to Stage 2

Signed _____ Date _____

Complainant

Signed _____ Date _____

Investigating Officer

Checklist for a Panel Hearing

- The hearing is as informal as possible
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence
- After introductions, the Chair will invite the complainant to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses
- The Chair will invite the Chief Executive Officer/Head Teacher/Head of School/Governor/Trustee/Independent person to question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken
- The Chief Executive Officer/Head Teacher/Head of School/Governor/Trustee/Independent person is then invited to explain the Trust/schools' actions and be followed by the academy's witnesses
- The complainant may question the Chief Executive Officer/Head Teacher/Head of School/Governor/Trustee/Independent person and the witnesses after each has spoken
- The panel may ask questions at any point
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint
- The Chief Executive Officer/Head Teacher/Head of School/Governor/Trustee/Independent person is then invited to sum up the academy's actions and response to the complaint
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues
- The Chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within 10 working days
- The Chair to explain the list of potential outcomes available to the Panel.

Policy Unreasonable Complaints and Unreasonable Behaviour

The Trust recognises that it is the last resort for complainants. They also have a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of pupils, parents and staff.

Swift Academies is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening. This applies to unacceptable behaviour on any part of the Trust's premises, including the yard.

If the Head Teacher/Head of School considers that a complainant's behaviour is unacceptable the complainant will be told why their behaviour is deemed to be unreasonable and will be asked to change it. If the unacceptable behaviour continues the Head Teacher/Head of School will take action to restrict the complainant's contact with the school. (See Barring from School Premises)

Swift Academies defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the Complaints Procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the Complaints Procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome

- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Head Teacher/Head of School, Chief Executive Officer, Chair of Governors or Chair of Trustees will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an ‘*unreasonable*’ marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Head Teacher/Head of School, Chief Executive Officer, Chair of Governors or Chair of Trustees will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact a Trust School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from Swift Academies schools.

Decision to Restrict Access

The decision to restrict access to the school will be taken by the Head Teacher/Head of School, Chief Executive Officer, Chair of Governors or Chair of Trustees and will normally follow a prior warning to the complainant. Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. The options we are most likely to consider are:

- requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only);
- requiring contact to take place with a named member of staff;
- restricting telephone calls to specified days and times; and/or asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their future contacts with us.

In all cases where we decide to treat someone as an unreasonably persistent complainant, we will write to tell the complainant why we believe his or her behaviour falls into that category, what action we are taking and the duration of that action. We will also tell them how they can challenge the decision if they disagree with it. If we decide to carry on treating someone as an unreasonably persistent complainant and we are still investigating their complaint six months later, we will carry out a review and decide if restrictions will continue.

Where a complainant whose case is closed persists in communicating with us about it, we may decide to terminate contact with that complainant. In such cases, we will read all correspondence from that complainant, but unless there is fresh evidence which affects our decision on the complaint we will simply acknowledge it or place it on the file with no acknowledgement.

New complaints from people who have come under the unreasonably persistent complainant's policy will be treated on their merits.

Decision to Stop Responding

The decision to stop responding will not be taken lightly. The Trust would need to be able to say 'yes' to all of the following:

- The Trust has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs;
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any); and
- They are contacting the Trust repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time.

The case is stronger if the Trust agrees with one or more of the following:

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

The Trust will not stop responding just because an individual is difficult to deal with or asks complex questions. In most circumstances the subject matter is what the Trust can refuse to respond to, not the correspondent.

The Trust will provide parents with the information they are entitled to under [The Education \(Pupil Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2005](#). However, where an individual's behaviour is causing a significant level of disruption the Trust may implement a tailored communication's strategy such as restricting them to a single point of contact via an email address or by limiting the number of times they make contact, for example, a fixed number of contacts per term.

Complainants have a right to have any new complaint heard and failure to respond at all to a complainant could mean that the trust is failing to comply with its legal obligations. The Trust will ensure that we are acting reasonably and that any genuine complaint will still be heard.

If Trust staff find it difficult to deal directly with the complainant because of their unreasonable behaviour and other strategies are not working, staff will be able to approach the Head Teacher/Head of School, Chief Executive Officer, Chair of Governors or Chair of Trustees for assistance. If this is agreed complainants can be advised not to contact the school directly, but instead the Head Teacher/Head of School, Chief Executive Officer, Chair of Governors or Chair of Trustees who will co-ordinate any response.

Complainants who may have been restricted in their communications with the school can also be advised to ask a third party to act on their behalf, such as the local Citizen's Advice Bureau.

Ultimately, if a complainant persists to the point that the Trust considers it to constitute harassment, legal advice will be sought as to the next steps. In some cases, it may lead to injunctions and other court orders.

Different procedures apply to Freedom of Information (FOI) and GDPR/Data Protection correspondence. The Trust will seek advice from the FOI and DPO Officer with regards to this.

Once the Trust has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, we will let the complainant know in writing.

Persistent correspondence

If complainants frequently contact the school, causing a significant level of disruption, but refuse to engage with the complaints procedure, schools within Swift Academies can:

- restrict the complainant to a single point of contact via an email address; and/or
- limit the number of times the complainant can make contact.

This restriction will be limited to the complainant's capacity to complain. For all other issues the complainant can contact the school as normal.

Barring from School Premises

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Trust schools will therefore act to ensure they remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community. (See also, Advice on School Security: Access to, and barring of individuals from school premises)

If a parent's behaviour is a cause for concern, a Trust school can ask him/her to leave the school premises. In serious cases, the Head Teacher/Head of School or Chief Executive Officer can notify the parent in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make.

Our Trust schools will always give the parent the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing. The decision to bar will then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent will be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of the school's staff, 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.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the Head Teacher/Head of School, Chief Executive Officer, Chair of Governors or Chair of Trustees. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the Department for Education. Once the school's own Complaints Procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought at the complainant's expense.

Please note the guidance was issued by the DfE on the 15th September 2020.

Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures 2020

Updated 15 September 2020

Handling complaints during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

From the start of the autumn term, DfE expects schools to respond to new and existing complaints. However, we do not expect schools to respond if a tier 4 local restriction is in place or school access is restricted due to localised cases of coronavirus (COVID-19). Schools should still, however, engage with parents and pupils where possible.

[Contact your local council](#) or call the police on 101 if you're told a child is at risk. Schools and complainants can [contact DfE](#) for more information about school complaints.