

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Presented to Full Trustees
3 July 2025

Date approved: ¹	3 October 2018 Trustees Standards Committee
Date reviewed: ²	3 July 2025
Date of next review: ³	Summer 2028

¹ This is the date the policy was approved by the meeting

² This is the date the policy was reviewed prior to its approval above

³ This is the date as set by the policy review clause or the date approved plus three years

Footnote:

- Headteacher also means Head of College and Principal
- School also means College, Academy or Academies
- MAT refers to Multi-Academy Trust

COMPLAINTS POLICY

The Four Cs Multi Academy Trust sets policy on how its schools deal with complaints. They believe that in the first instance it is advisable to speak to the relevant member of staff as soon as there is a concern. This will mostly likely be the class teacher. This informal approach is nearly always the quickest and most effective way of resolving concerns.

If it is felt that the concern has not been resolved, then it is important to speak to a Line Manager within the school (for example Head of Year, Head of Department, Phase Leader) who will look into the concern. Please contact the Headteacher's PA via the school's main switchboard to arrange this.

Stage two of the complaints procedure should only be used once all avenues to resolve the concern have been exhausted.

Complaint Procedures

1. The following procedures are to be applied in considering complaints about the School.

It is a condition of this Procedure that, unless the Trust Board agrees that special circumstances exist, no complaint may be brought after a period of three (3) months has elapsed since the circumstances giving rise to the complaint first came to the notice of the complainant.

2. If, in the course of consideration of a complaint, it is decided that disciplinary proceedings should be initiated, separate action will be taken as appropriate.
3. Where appropriate, steps will be taken to ensure that information is available to complainants in languages other than English and arrangements made for an interpreter to be present during any oral representations.
4. The procedures consist of 4 main stages:

Stage 1	Complaint is looked into and dealt with informally by the classroom teacher / Head of Department / Head of Year / Pastoral Leader with the aim of resolving the issue as soon as possible. This stage should be completed within 15 school days of receipt.
Stage 2	<p>If the complainant feels they have grounds to escalate beyond stage 1, the complainant uses school complaint form (a), addressed to the Headteacher and automatically cc'd to the Chair of Governors.</p> <p>This form can be found on each school's website, under 'Contact Us'.</p> <p>The Headteacher instructs a member of SLT to investigate the complaint (Investigating Officer IO). The IO interviews complainant / staff / pupils / students and gathers evidence as appropriate. On the completion of the investigation, the IO presents their report to the Headteacher along with any recommendations.</p> <p>The Headteacher / Investigating Officer writes to the complainant with the outcome of the investigation. This stage should be completed within 15 school days of the submission of the stage 2 complaint form.</p>
Stage 3	If the complainant feels they have grounds to escalate beyond stage 2, the complainant uses Trust complaint form (b) (available on the Four Cs MAT

	<p>website) addressed to the Clerk to Trustees, explaining their reasons. Escalation from the previous stage should take place within 10 school days.</p> <p>Form link: https://www.fourcsmat.org.uk/form/?pid=5&form=16 (This form is also available on the Four Cs MAT website, under 'Contact Us')</p> <p>A Trust representative (TR) reviews complaint form (a), the investigation report and complaint form (b). The TR speaks to the complainant and the IO and reviews the investigation.</p> <p>If the TR upholds the Stage 3 complaint, this is communicated to the complainant in writing and the IO may be asked to reinvestigate the Stage 2 complaint under the guidance of the TR, rewrite the investigation report and provide updated response.</p> <p>If the Stage 3 complaint is rejected, the TR writes to the complainant giving the reasons and referring to the appeal process (stage 4) if the complainant is still dissatisfied with the process that has been followed.</p> <p>Communication of the Stage 3 outcome (whether upheld or rejected) should be made to the complainant within 15 school days of the submission of the stage 3 complaint form.</p>
Stage 4	<p><u>Appeal Process</u></p> <p><i>Please note: the appeal process does not investigate the complaint again. The panel's role will be to consider whether correct processes have been followed, whether matters have been dealt with within the law and whether a fair and reasonable response has been provided.</i></p> <p>If the complainant is still dissatisfied with <u>the process</u> that has been followed they should write to the Four Cs Trust within 10 school days of the Stage 3 response to request a panel hearing. The complainant must outline the grounds they have for the appeal in writing.</p> <p>The Trust will then take the following action:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Arrange a panel hearing to take place within 15 school days, comprising at least 3 people (at least one Trustee/Governor and Trust Leadership staff) who are impartial and have not been involved in the complaint previously. 2. The complainant to be invited to attend; they may be accompanied, if they wish, by one other person. This may be a relative or friend. 3. All parties to be provided with a copy of the written complaint, and any correspondence between the school and complainant during Stages 2 and 3. 4. The agenda to be followed to be as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Welcome and introductions ii. Complainant to be invited to state their case and to outline the grounds for appeal. iii. Panel to ask questions of the complainant. <i>(Complainant and companion then leave the meeting)</i> iv. Stage 3 TR to be invited to explain the outcome of their investigation. v. Panel to ask questions of the TR. <i>(TR then leaves the meeting)</i>

	vi. Panel deliberation and decision made as to whether the complaint is upheld or whether the matter should be closed. Consideration to be given as to whether correct processes have been followed, whether matters have been dealt with within the law and whether a fair and reasonable response has been provided. The Clerk shall inform the complainant, and where relevant, the person complained about, in writing of the decision reached by the Stage 4 panel and the reasons for the decision within 5 school days.
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Further recourse beyond Stage 4 then lies with the Department for Education (DfE).

It should be noted, however, that the DfE will not consider complaints or matters covered by the procedure until the previous stages have been exhausted.

5. In respect of complaints relating to the school, parents / carers should use the formal complaints policy, and should not air any grievances or concerns on Social Media sites, as this could be potentially damaging to the School and the students.
6. The school to retain a copy of all complaint paperwork on the school premises and keep a written record of all complaints that are made, the outcome reached, and action taken (regardless of whether they are upheld).
7. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

APPENDICES

8. Appendix 1 – Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

REVIEW

9. The Trust will review this policy in line with the procedure for policy review.

Date for Review

If no other reason for review, this policy will be reviewed every three years.

Appendix 1

Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

The Four Cs Trust 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 our schools. 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.

The Trust defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with schools, 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 Trust'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.

NB: please note the above list is not exhaustive.

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 Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact a school, causing a significant level of disruption, schools may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. Any further complaints made (not in accordance with the communication plan) will only be responded to if the Headteacher considers there is reasonable justification. Any such arrangements would be reviewed after six months.

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