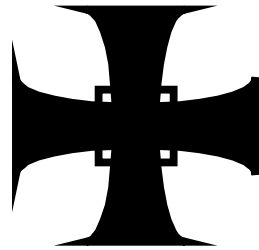


TRINITY SCHOOL CARLISLE



A CHURCH OF ENGLAND ACADEMY

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Full Governing Body

Reviewed: September 2024

Ratified by the Governing Body: September 2024

Next review: September 2026

Trinity School Complaints Procedure

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the Complaints Procedure. Trinity School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Headteacher or Complaints Administrator, will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher or Complaints Administrator, 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, Trinity School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this Complaints Procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a Complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so. A complaint must be made on the Complaint Form in this Procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

If you require help in completing the form, please contact the Complaints Administrator. You can also ask a third-party organisation for example 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.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Timescales

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.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This Procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Trinity School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions to schools 	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exclusion/Suspension of children from school* 	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion/suspension can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions/exclusions . <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's Complaints Procedure, which can be found on the school website.</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this Procedure or result in the Procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

If a Complainant commences legal action against Trinity School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the Complaints Procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the Procedure, Trinity School 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 explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a complaint

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

Stage 1 – Informal complaints

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

Complaints should be raised with the person most suitable to deal with the complaint. This could be the class teacher, year head / subject head or a member of the Senior Leadership Team. If you are unsure who to raise your complaint with, then the Complaint Administrator will be able to help. It is unlikely at this stage that your complaint will be dealt with directly by the Headteacher. The Headteacher may become involved at a later stage if your complaint is not resolved. Complainants should not approach individual governors 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 3 of the Procedure.

All possible evidence should be considered as part of the investigation, including CCTV where it is relevant. At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide an informal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If there are any agreed actions, these must also be verified as undertaken within 10 school days.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Stage 2 – Formal complaints

Formal complaints must be made to the Complaints Administrator and they **must** be on the Complaint Form. Please contact the Complaints Administrator if you would like a paper copy of the Complaint Form.

The Complaints Administrator will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days and explain what action will be taken.

The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's Senior Leadership Team, known as the "Investigator", but not the decision to be taken, and 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 Headteacher will provide a formal written response to the Complainant within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint, a copy of which will be held by the Complaints Administrator.

If the Headteacher 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 Trinity School will take to resolve the complaint.

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

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2. Complaints about the Headteacher should be made to the Chair of Governors.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If the Complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – 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 school. This is the final stage of the Complaints Procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk to the Governing Body, via main reception, within 7 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 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 3 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.

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 committee meeting. 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.

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 (Human Resources) staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 5 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 to be submitted to the Committee.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 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, the Chair of Governors and Trinity School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, or by email within 10 school days, making sure that the findings and recommendations are given to the Complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher.

The letter to the Complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Trinity 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 Trinity School will take to resolve the complaint.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision for a period of three years.

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Next Steps

If the Complainant believes the school 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 ESFA after they have completed Stage 3.

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

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

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Trinity School Complaints Administrator, via main reception, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

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

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 complaint received:

Date acknowledgement sent and by who:

Complaint referred to:

Action taken:

Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The Complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible.
- co-operate with the 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.

Investigator

The Investigator'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 Administrator as appropriate to clarify what the Complainant feels would put things right.

The Investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting.
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal.
- be mindful of the timescales to respond.
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Headteacher or Complaints Committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The Headteacher 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 Administrator

The Complaints Administrator should:

- ensure that the Complainant is fully updated at each stage of the Procedure.
- liaise with staff members, the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors or the Clerk to the Governing Body 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 Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the Complainant and the Committee and should:

- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: Stage 1 paperwork, school and Complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale.
- record the proceedings.
- circulate the minutes of the meeting.
- notify all parties of the 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.
- the Committee is open-minded and acts independently.
- no member of the Committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the Procedure.
- the meeting is minuted.
- they liaise with the Clerk (and Complaints Administrator).

Committee Member

Committee Members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so.
No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the Complainant.

We recognise that the Complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

- many Complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting.
Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- extra care needs to be taken when the Complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting.

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

The Committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the Complainant, the Committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the Complainant, the Committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the Committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.