

Complaints Policy

3.1



Version Control 3.1

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3.0	Removed references to the ESFA and reviewed to ensure alignment with Roles and Responsibilities. This policy has been reviewed by Forbes Solicitors LLP in line with government legislation and guidance for the academic year 2025/2026.	Trust Clerk	December 2025
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Contents

1.	Statement of Intent	3
2.	Legal framework.....	3
3.	Definitions	4
4.	Who can make a complaint.....	5
5.	Issues outside the remit of this policy.....	5
6.	How to make a complaint	6
7.	Time scales.....	8
8.	Roles and responsibilities.....	8
9.	Resolving complaints.....	11
10.	Stages of the Complaint Process	12
	9.a Stage 1 – Informal complaints	12
	9.b Stage 2 – Formal complaints	13
	9.c Stage 3 – Panel Hearing.....	15
11.	Interviewing witnesses	18
12.	Recording a complaint.....	18
13.	Exceptional circumstances.....	19
14.	Managing unreasonable or serial complaints	19
15.	Complaints campaigns	23
16.	Anonymous complaints.....	23
17.	Withdrawal of a complaint	23
18.	Complaints received outside of term time	23
19.	Barring from the premises.....	23
20.	Transferring data.....	24
21.	Availability	24
22.	Scope of this Procedure	24
23.	Monitoring and review.....	24
24.	Next Steps- Complain to the DfE.....	25
25.	Complaint Form.....	26

1. Statement of Intent

Horizon Academy Trust aims to resolve complaints at the earliest possible stage and, where possible, informally, and is dedicated to continuing to provide the highest quality of education possible.

This policy has been created to handle complaints relating to any aspects of the provision of facilities or services that we provide.

It is designed to ensure that the complaints procedure is straightforward, impartial, non-adversarial, allows a full and fair investigation, respects confidentiality, and delivers an effective response and appropriate redress.

This policy outlines the procedure that the complainant and the Trust will follow. Once a complaint has been made, it can be resolved or withdrawn at any stage.

2. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Education Act 2002
- Equality Act 2010
- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014
- Immigration Act 2016
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- HM Government 'Code of Practice on the English language requirement for public sector workers'
- Ofsted 'Best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures'
- Ofsted 'Academy Trust handbook 2025'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Admissions Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Relational Behaviour Policy
- Suspension and Exclusions Policy

- Whistleblowing Policy
- Grievance Policy and Procedure
- Data Protection Policy
- Records Management Policy

3. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, a “complaint” is defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction’ towards the actions taken or a perceived lack of action. Complaints can be resolved formally or informally.

A “concern” is defined as ‘an expression of worry or doubt’ where reassurance is required. For the purpose of this policy, concerns will be classed and addressed as complaints.

Any complaint or concern will be taken seriously, whether raised formally or informally, and the appropriate procedures will be implemented.

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 formal stages of the complaints procedure. Any concerns will be taken seriously and every effort will be taken to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If an individual has difficulty discussing a concern with a particular staff member, the Trust will respect the views of this individual. In these cases, the person managing the complaint will refer the complainant 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.

The Trust understands, however, that there will be occasions where people would prefer to raise their concerns formally. In this case, the Trust will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

The definition of “**unreasonable complaints**” is outlined in the [‘Managing unreasonable complaints’](#) section of this policy.

For the purpose of this policy, “**duplicate complaints**” are identical complaints e.g. complaints regarding the same matter received from a complainant’s spouse, partner or child. These complaints will not be addressed again and the individual making the second complaint will be informed that the complaint has been dealt with on a local level. If the individual is dissatisfied with the result, they can appeal to the DfE, as outlined in [‘The Role of the DfE’](#) subsection of this policy.

Any new details provided by a complainant's spouse, partner or child, however, will be investigated and managed in line with the complaints procedure.

For the purpose of this policy, "**complaints campaigns**" are where the Trust, or an academy within the Trust, receives large volumes of complaints that are all based on the same subject.

For the purposes of this policy, having "**independence**" from the Trust and its academies is defined as having no association with the Trust, including through being a member, Trustee or employee, and having no clear connection with any of the Trust's academies, including through being an employee or solicitor. A local governing body at a different school within the Trust, who has no conflict of interest or prior knowledge of the complaint, can be an independent panel member. This is because such person would have no direct involvement with the management and running of the school being complained about.

4. Who can make a complaint

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Horizon Academy Trust about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures, we will use this complaints procedure (the **Complaints Policy** or the **Procedure**).

You may find the following [Parent guide to school complaints](#) from ParentKind useful.

5. Issues outside the remit of this policy

Individuals making complaints about issues relating to separate statutory procedures will be referred as follows:

- Admissions – referred to the appeals process outlined in the Admissions Policy.
- Statutory assessments of SEND – referred to the LA to raise this issue directly with them.
- Child protection – referred to safeguarding procedures outlined in the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.
- Exclusion – referred to the procedures outlined in the Behaviour Policy and Suspension and Exclusion Policy.

- Whistleblowing – referred to the internal whistleblowing procedures outlined in the Whistleblowing Policy.
- Staff grievances – referred to the internal grievance procedures outlined in the Grievance Policy.
- Staff conduct – referred to the internal disciplinary procedures.
- Third-party suppliers using school premises or facilities – referred to separate complaints procedures. The school will ensure any third-party supplier using school premises or facilities to offer community facilities or services has its own complaints procedures in place and such complaints do not fall within the scope of this policy.
- Withdrawal from the curriculum – referred to separate complaints procedure dealing with parent or carers withdrawing their child from any aspect of religious education, including the daily act of collective worship.

All other complaints will be directed towards the procedures laid out in this policy.

6. How to make a complaint

Any parent and/or carer of a pupil in an academy will be able to make a complaint about the provision of facilities or services that the academy provides. Any complaints made by other parties may be handled via different procedures to those outlined in this policy. This includes complaints made by a third party on behalf of a parent or carer of a pupil.

Complainants may make complaints in person, in writing or by telephone. Complaints should be made using the appropriate channels of communication. 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.

A complaint can progress to the next stage of the procedure even if it is not viewed as “justified”. All complainants will be given the opportunity to fully complete the complaints procedure.

Complaints about a school will:

- Be dealt with in the first instance by the headteacher via the school office. Such complaints must be marked as private and confidential.
- Follow the complaints procedure, including a panel hearing where applicable.

Complaints that involve or are about a headteacher will:

- Be dealt with by an independent investigator appointed by the CEO. These should be marked for the attention of the Trust Clerk via the school office. Such complaints must be marked as private and confidential.
- Follow the complaints procedure, including a panel hearing where applicable.

Complaints against the chair of Trustees, any individual Trustee or the whole Trust board will:

- Be made in writing to the Trust Clerk, via the Trust office. Such complaints must be marked as private and confidential.
- Follow the complaints procedure, and involve a panel hearing where applicable.

Complaints against the chair of Trustees, will:

- Be made in writing to the Trust Clerk, who will appoint an appropriate person to investigate the complaint.

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) will:

- Be made in writing to the Trust Clerk and be dealt with by the Chair of Trustees.
- Involve a panel hearing where applicable.

Complaints against the Trust will:

- Be dealt with by the CEO.
- Begin with stage two of the '[Complaints procedure](#)' outlined in this policy, i.e. via a formal, written complaint made in writing to the Trust Clerk.

Anyone requiring help in raising a complaint can contact the Trust office. It is also possible to ask a third-party such as Citizens Advice for help.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this Procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

7. Time scales

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.

8. Roles and responsibilities

The **complainant** is responsible for:

- Cooperating with the Trust in seeking a solution to the complaint.
- Expressing the complaint and their concerns in full at the earliest opportunity.
- Promptly responding to any requests for information and meetings.
- Asking for assistance as needed.
- Treating anyone involved in the complaint with respect.
- Respecting confidentiality.

The role of the **investigator** will differ depending on the nature of the complaint and who it is directed at. This means that:

- For complaints against academies in the Trust, the investigator will be the headteacher, another senior leader, or appropriately trained governor.
- For complaints against headteachers of academies in the Trust, the investigator will be appointed from the central Trust staff by the CEO.
- For complaints against local governors, the investigator will be the chair of the LGB.
- For complaints against Trustees, the investigator will be the chair of Trustees.
- For complaints against the chair of Trustees or an entire LGB, the clerk will appoint an appropriate person to be the investigator.
- For complaints against the CEO, the investigator will be the chair of Trustees.

The **investigator** of the complaint is responsible for:

- Providing a sensitive and thorough interviewing process of the complainant to establish what has happened and who is involved.
- Considering all records, evidence and relevant information provided.
- Interviewing parties that are involved in the complaint, including staff and pupils as relevant.
- Conducting interviews with an open mind and being prepared to persist in the questioning of those involved.

- Analysing all information in a comprehensive and fair manner.
- Liaising with the complainant and clarifying what they consider to be an appropriate resolution to the problem.
- Identifying and recommending solutions and courses of actions to take where appropriate.
- Being mindful of timescales and ensuring all parties involved are aware of these timescales.
- Responding to the complainant in a clear and understandable manner.

Where complaints are escalated to a panel hearing, all complaints **panel members** will be aware that:

- The review panel hearing is independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so.
- No individual with prior involvement in the complaint, or the circumstances surrounding it, is permitted to sit on the panel.
- The aim of the panel is to achieve a reasonable resolution and, ultimately, attain reconciliation between the parties involved where practicable.
- Reconciliation between the Trust and complainant is not always achievable, and that it may only be possible to establish facts and make recommendations to reassure the complainant that their case has been taken seriously.

The panel can:

- Dismiss or uphold the complaint, in whole or in part.
- Decide on appropriate action to be taken.
- Recommend changes that the Trust can make to prevent reoccurrence of the problem.
- Complainants may feel nervous or inhibited in a formal setting and, therefore, the proceedings should be as welcoming as possible.

It will not be usual for a child to be present at the panel meeting, and their views and opinions will be collected at the investigation stage if appropriate.

The **Trust Clerk** will:

- Ensure that minutes of the hearings are taken on every occasion, this can be done via minute taking software.
- Explain the remit of the panel to the complainant.
- Ensure that all issues are addressed and that outcomes are reached based on facts and evidence.

- Help to put at ease and console individuals involved who are not used to speaking at such hearings.
- Conduct the hearing in a manner that ensures everyone is treated with respect and courtesy, and is not adversarial.
- Ensure that the room's layout and setting is non-adversarial, yet still sets the appropriate tone.
- Confirm that no member of the panel has previously been involved in the earlier stages of the procedure or has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings.
- Ensure the panel is open-minded and acts independently.
- Give both the complainant and the Trust the opportunity to state their case and seek clarity without undue interruption.
- Ensure that both parties are asked to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting.
- Provide copies of any written material or evidence to everyone in attendance of the meeting, ensuring that everyone has seen the necessary material provided that it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or UK GDPR.
- Be mindful that, if a contentious topic arises, everyone should be given the opportunity to consider and comment upon it, and that this may require a short adjournment of the meeting.
- Continuously liaise with the chair to ensure the procedure runs smoothly.
- Ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure.
- Liaise with all individuals involved with the complaint to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure.
- Be aware of issues regarding sharing third party information and additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint, including interpretation support.
- Maintain accurate and up-to-date records.
- Ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the DPA and the UK 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.

- Circulate the minutes of the meeting.
- Notify all parties of the panel's decision.

The role of the DfE

If a complainant remains dissatisfied once the complaint procedure has been completed, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State. If a complainant wishes to escalate a complaint, the Trust will refer them to the relevant [contact form](#), and prompt them to follow the instructions on this form to submit a complaint to the Secretary of State.

The DfE will not overturn the Trust or panel's decision about a complaint or re-investigate the original complaint. The DfE will only intervene following a complaint if it believes the Trust has:

- Breached a clause in its funding agreement.
- Failed to comply with education law or acted unreasonably when exercising related education functions.

When making a final decision about a complaint, the Trust reserves the right to seek advice from the DfE on whether they are acting reasonably and lawfully; however, they will not be able to advise on how to resolve the complaint.

9. Resolving complaints

This policy is implemented on a Trust-wide level. The Trust will ensure that the complaints procedure is:

- Easily accessible and publicised on its website.
- Simple to understand and put into practice.
- Impartial and fair to all parties involved.
- Respectful of confidentiality duties.
- Continuously under improvement, using input from the SLTs of all individual academies within the Trust.
- Fairly investigated, by an independent person where necessary.
- Used to address all issues to provide appropriate and effective responses where necessary.

At each stage in the Procedure, Horizon Academy 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 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.

10. Stages of the Complaint Process

1. **Informal** – which will usually come in the form of a meeting between a representative of the Trust or individual academy and the complainant.
2. **Formal** – where the complaint is put in writing to the Trust.
3. **Panel hearing** – where the panel includes at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and one person who is independent of the management and running of the Trust.

9.a STAGE 1 – INFORMAL COMPLAINTS

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

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, year head / subject head or Headteacher by letter, by telephone, by email or in person. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints as it may prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the Procedure.

Within 10 school days of notification of the complaint, the complainant and the relevant member of staff should discuss the issue in a respectful and informal manner to seek a mutual resolution.

At this initial communication stage of the complaint, the complainant will be asked for their input as to what they believe may resolve the issue about which the complaint has been made to avoid further escalation where possible.

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.

In line with DfE guidance, complainants should note that any acknowledgement by the Trust that it could have handled the situation better is not an admission of unlawful or negligent action.

If an appropriate resolution cannot be sought at this informal level, or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome following the initial response, the person managing the response to the complaint will inform the complainant about the next level of the procedure.

9.b STAGE 2 – FORMAL COMPLAINTS

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the school office.

An appointment with the appropriate person for managing the complaint should be made, as soon as reasonably practical, to avoid any possible worsening of the situation. This will usually be the Trust Complaints Manager who is usually the Trust Clerk.

When making a formal complaint, it is important to include all details which might assist the investigation, such as dates and times of events as well as any relevant documents.

The Headteacher, or complaints manager, will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 5 school days. Within this response, The Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

Where the situation is recognised as complex, and it is deemed to be unable to be resolved within this timescale, the person managing the complaint will contact the complainant to inform them of the revised target date via a written notification.

During the investigation, the Headteacher (or appropriately appointed investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish; and

- 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 within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

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 Horizon Academy Trust 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, or a member of the local governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor unconnected with the complaint will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the local governing body must be made to the Trust Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair; or the entire local governing body; or the majority of the local governing body then stage 2 will be carried out by the CEO of the Trust.

Where the appropriate person has made reasonable attempts to accommodate the complainant with dates for a complaint meeting and they refuse or are unable to attend, the meeting will be convened in their absence and a conclusion will be reached in the interests of drawing the complaint to a close.

In terms of a complaint being made against a member of staff, the headteacher, will discuss the issue with the staff member in question. Where necessary, the headteacher will conduct interviews with any relevant parties, including witnesses and pupils, and take statements from those involved. All discussions shall be recorded by the headteacher, and findings and resolutions will be communicated to the complainant either verbally or in writing.

Once all facts are established, the person handling the complaint shall contact the complainant in writing with an explanation of the decision. The complainant will be advised of any escalation options (e.g. escalation to stage three) and will be provided with details of this process.

Any further action the Trust plans to take to resolve the issue will be explained to the complainant in writing.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome suggested, the procedure will progress to stage three. A request to escalate to stage three will be made to the clerk to the board of Trustees within 5 school days of the end of stage two, i.e. communication of an outcome. Requests made outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

9.c 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. In line with the DfE's guidance, a local governor serving on the LGB of a different academy within the Trust may occupy this role, as they will be sufficiently separate from the academy being complained about. This is the final stage of the complaints Procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Trust Clerk, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The Trust Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 5 school days.

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

The Trust Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 10 school days of acknowledging receipt of the complaint. If this is not possible, the Trust 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 Trust 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.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair; or

- the entire governing body; or
- the majority of the governing body.

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.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

Five days' notice will be given to all parties attending the panel hearing, including the complainant. 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.

Prior to the hearing, the clerk will have written or spoken to the complainant informing them of how the review will be conducted. The clerk will request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 10 school days before the meeting. Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 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 one of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are allowed with the prior consent of all parties. This consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

At the hearing, all participants will be given the opportunity to put their case across and discuss any issues. The meeting will allow for:

- The complainant to be present and accompanied at the hearing if they wish.
- The complainant to explain their complaint and the individual handling the complaint to explain the reasons for their decision.
- The complainant to question the individual handling the complaint, and vice versa, about the complaint.

- Any evidence, including witnesses who have been prior approved by the chair of the panel, to be questioned.
- Members of the panel to question both the complainant and the individual about whom the complaint was made.
- Final statements to be made by both parties involved.

Neither the complainant nor the Trust will bring legal representation to this hearing, unless in exceptional circumstances, where this will be agreed beforehand. A member of staff who may be a witness to the complaint may bring a union representative or legal representative if desired; this will be agreed before the hearing.

The purpose of the hearing will be reconciliation and ensuring that things that may have gone wrong are corrected.

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 complainant will receive a written response explaining the panel's findings and recommendations within 15 school days. This letter will also explain whether there are any further rights of appeal and to whom they need to be addressed.

The panel will make findings and recommendations, and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be made available for inspection on the academy premises by the board of Trustees and the headteacher. The committee can uphold the complaint in whole or in part or 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 and where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

Where relevant, the person complained about will receive a summary of the panel's findings and

recommendations. They will also receive a copy of the minutes, subject to any necessary redactions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK GDPR.

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.

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.

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

11. Interviewing witnesses

When interviewing pupils to gather information regarding a complaint, the interview should be conducted 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. All pupils interviewed will be made fully aware of what the interview concerns and their right to have someone with them.

The Trust will ensure that the conduction of interviews does not prejudice an investigation by the LA designated officer (LADO) or the police.

The Trust understands the importance of ensuring a friendly and relaxed area which is free from intimidation. 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. The interviewer will not express opinions in words or attitude, so as to not influence the interviewee. The interviewee will sign a copy of the transcription of the interview.

12. Recording a complaint

A written record shall be kept of any complaint made, whether made via phone, in person or in writing, detailing:

- The main issues raised, the findings and any recommendations.
- Whether the complaint was resolved following an informal route, formal route or panel

hearing.

- Actions taken by the Trust as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint was upheld).

All records are made available for inspection on the academy premises by the Trust. The Trust holds the right to use recording devices, where appropriate, to ensure all parties involved are able to review the discussions at a later date. Where there are communication difficulties or disabilities, the Trust may provide recording devices to ensure the complainant is able to access and review the discussions at a later point.

Recording devices will not be used without the prior consent of all parties.

13. Exceptional circumstances

The DfE expects complainants to have completed the Trust's complaints procedure before directing a complaint to them. The exceptions to this include when:

- Pupils are at risk of harm.
- Pupils are missing education.
- A complainant is being prevented from having their complaint progressed through the Trust's complaints procedure.
- The DfE has evidence that the Trust is proposing to act or is acting unlawfully or unreasonably.

If a social services authority decides to investigate a situation, the board of Trustees may postpone the complaints procedure.

14. Managing unreasonable or serial complaints

The Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. The Trust will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the Trust itself or any of its academies; however, the Trust does not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening. The unreasonable complaint judgement will be made against the subject or complaint itself rather than the complainant.

For the purposes of this policy, **"unreasonable complaints"** include:

- Vexatious complaints, which:
 - Are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, or repetitious.
 - Insist upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.
 - Insist upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.
 - Are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
 - Demand for redress which lacks any serious purpose or value.
 -
- Serial or persistent complaints, which:
 - Are duplicated, sent by the same complainant once the initial complaint has been closed.
 - Are new complaints that are submitted additionally, as part of an existing open complaint, by the same complainant.

A complaint may also be regarded as unreasonable when 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 cooperate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on, or 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 complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including

referral to the DfE.

- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the complainant:

- Acts maliciously or aggressively.
- Uses threats, intimidation or violence.
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language.
- Knows the complaint to be false.
- Uses falsified information.
- Publishes unacceptable information in media such as social media websites and newspapers.

The above applies regardless of the method the complaint is made, e.g. face-to-face, by telephone, in writing or electronically.

Complainants should limit the number of communications with the Trust while a 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 member of staff, governor or Trustee or complaints manager leading the response to a complaint will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

Serial or persistent complaints will only be marked as 'serial' once the complainant has completed the complaints procedure. It is the complaint that will be marked as 'serial', meaning the complainant can complain about a separate issue if necessary. A complaint will not be marked as serial where a complainant has exercised their right to refer their complaint to their MP.

If the behaviour continues, the individual handling the complaint will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the Trust or any of its academies causing a significant level of disruption, the Trust may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a

communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after six months. Any action taken to manage a complainant's involvement, prior to stopping all contact will be appropriate and proportionate to the nature and frequency of their contact. The following options may be applied—singly or in combination—depending on the specific circumstances and local context:

- Placing time limits on telephone conversations and personal meetings.
- Restricting the number of telephone calls that will be taken, for example, by specifying a particular morning or afternoon each week for contact.
- Limiting the complainant to one medium of contact, such as letter or email only.
- Requiring the complainant to communicate only with one named member of staff.
- Requiring any personal contact or meetings to take place in the presence of a witness.
- Refusing to register and process further complaints about the same matter where the process has already been exhausted.
- Providing the complainant with acknowledgements only for correspondence relating to a closed complaint.
- Informing the complainant that, while future correspondence will be read and placed on file, it will no longer be acknowledged or responded to unless new and relevant information is provided.

A decision to stop responding will only be considered in circumstances where all of the following statements are true:

- Every reasonable step has been taken to address the complainant's concerns
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the Trust's position and their options
- The complainant contacts the Trust or any of its academies repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.

If the above criteria are met, the Trust will also consider if the complainant is often or always abusive or aggressive in their communication, makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff, or if the Trust believes their intent is to disrupt or inconvenience the Trust or its academies.

The Trust will not stop responding to a complainant on the basis that they are difficult to deal with or they ask complex questions.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from the premises.

15. Complaints campaigns

Where the Trust becomes the subject of a complaints campaign from complainants who are not connected with the Trust, a standard, single response will be published on the Trust's website.

If the Trust receives a large number of complaints about the same subject from complainants who are connected to the Trust, e.g. parents, each complainant will receive an individual response.

If complainants remain dissatisfied with the Trust's response, they will be directed to the DfE.

16. 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.

17. Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, they can do so at any time by informing the Clerk.

18. 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.

19. Barring from the premises

School premises are private property and therefore any individual may be barred from entering the premises.

If an individual's behaviour is cause for concern, the headteacher of the relevant academy will ask the individual to leave the premises.

The headteacher will notify the parties involved in writing, explaining that their implied license for access to the premises has been temporarily revoked and why, subject to any representations that the individual may wish to make. The individual involved will be given the opportunity to formally express their views regarding the decision to bar them.

This decision to bar will be reviewed where escalated, taking into account any discussions following the incident. If the decision is made to continue the bar, the individual will be contacted in writing, informing them of how long the bar will be in place, and when the decision will be reviewed.

Anyone wishing to make a complaint regarding a barring order can do so in writing, including via email, to the headteacher or chair of governors, via the clerk.

20. Transferring data

The Trust will hold records of complaints separate to pupil records while a complaint is ongoing, so that access to these records can be maintained. Information that the Trust retains relating to a complaint will be stored securely and in line with its [Records Management Policy](#).

21. Availability

A copy of this policy will be made available on request. It will also be published on the Trust website, and the websites of individual academies within the Trust, as recommended by the DfE.

22. Scope of this Procedure

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 Horizon Academy Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the Complaints Procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

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.

23. Monitoring and review

The complaints procedure will be reviewed annually, taking into account any legislative changes and the latest guidance issued by the DfE. The next scheduled review date for this policy is December 2026.

Responsibility for reviewing the procedure belongs to the board of Trustees. All projected review dates will be adhered to.

Information gathered through reviewing the complaints procedure will be used to continuously improve and develop the process. Any changes to this policy will be communicated to all relevant stakeholders.

The monitoring and reviewing of complaints will be used to help evaluate each academy's performance, and the performance of the Trust as a whole.

24. Next Steps- Complain to the DfE

If a complainant has exhausted the Trust's complaints procedure, they will be advised that they can submit a complaint to the DfE. The DfE will consider whether the academy followed the correct process. They will not investigate the substance of the complaint or the academy's decision. They will not normally consider complaints received over 12 months after a decision or the academy's last action. You can submit a complaint to the DfE via their [webpage](#) or by writing to:

Complaints Team
Cheylesmore House
Coventry
Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

25. Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the school office for the attention of the Headteacher (or appropriate person as outlined in the Complaints Procedure) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (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 acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Action taken:
Date: