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|  The Talentum Learning Trust | | Trust Policy Document | | | |
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| | Parents <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | General Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | |

Complaints Policy and Procedure

PURPOSE

All schools are required by law to have a complaints policy. An academy's complaints procedure must comply with Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (the regulations).

At The Talentum Learning Trust, our schools aim to resolve all complaints at the earliest possible stage and are dedicated to providing the highest quality of education possible throughout the procedure.

This policy should help resolve problems and provide a means for issues of concern to be raised and subsequently addressed. All complainants will be treated respectfully during and after the course of any complaints investigation and will receive a written response to their complaint, unless appropriate and reasonable measures have been put in place as a result of the 'Persistent and/or Vexatious Complainants' policy set out below.

DEFINITION

For the purpose of this policy, a "complaint" can be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction' which can be regarding actions taken or a perceived lack of action. A "concern" can be defined as an 'an expression of worry or doubt' for which reassurance is sought.

For the purpose of this policy, "concerns" will be classed and addressed as complaints. Any further references to "complaints" will include "concerns".

COMPLAINT CAMPAIGNS

If a Trust school becomes the focus of a campaign and receives a large volume of complaints on the same subject, by complainants not connected with the school, that school will issue a template response to all of those complainants.

EXPRESSING CONCERNS (STAGE 1)

There are inevitably issues that arise that, if dealt with promptly and in a considerate manner, will avoid the need for a formal complaint. Any problem or concern should be raised promptly with the class teacher or member of staff responsible for the area you are concerned about. If your concern is more serious you may prefer to make an appointment to discuss it with the Headteacher or a member of the school's leadership team. All staff will make every effort to resolve your problem promptly at this informal stage.

The senior staff best placed to resolve problems are:

- Heads of Year
- Heads of Sixth Form
- Heads of House
- Heads of Department

- Assistant Headteachers
- Deputy Headteachers
- School Support Services Managers

FORMAL COMPLAINTS

Formal procedures will be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further. The complaint will be dealt with in line with the complaints procedure.

The school will keep up-to-date records of all complaints throughout the procedure, their outcomes and state any action taken by the school (regardless of whether they were upheld). The records will be kept securely on the school's ICT system and retained in line with the school's Records Management Policy. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except in so far as they need to be shared with people who might contribute to their resolution except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 162A of the 2002 Act requests access to them.

In most cases it will be your choice as to whether to mount a formal complaint, but the school reserves the right to utilise the formal complaint procedures where the school feels that 'informal' methods of resolving concerns have been exhausted but a complainant clearly remains dissatisfied.

It should be noted that some outcomes of a complaint may lead to action being initiated under other formal procedures, such as safeguarding or disciplinary matters. Where this is the case you will be advised and informed of the procedures that are to be followed. It should be noted, however, that the school will not necessarily be able to provide you with the details of the outcome of those procedures for data protection reasons or otherwise, depending on the circumstances.

If a formal complaint is made to the school you will be provided with a copy of this complaints policy. It is not a requirement that a formal complaint is made in writing, but the school will need to be clear what the complaint is about, and may therefore request clarification from you before investigating the complaint.

Please be aware that the school reserves the right not to review a complaint made by a complainant that has not been brought to the attention of the school within 8 weeks of the alleged incident occurring. However, the school will consider any complaint outside of that timescale in certain circumstances.

STAGE 2 (Headteacher or Chair of the Local Governing Body)

It may be that the Headteacher has not been aware of the concern raised prior to this point. At this stage the Headteacher will seek to investigate your concerns, as well as attempting to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of all concerned. This may involve having a discussion/meeting with you.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher it will be considered by the Chair of the Local Governing Body ("the Chair") at this stage. The Chair will seek to resolve the matter through discussion with the Headteacher and you. In doing so and, if considered appropriate, the Chair may wish to meet with you in person.

The Headteacher will endeavour to respond, in writing to a Stage 2 complaint within 15 school days after receiving the complaint. If the situation is recognised as complex, the Headteacher will contact you in writing to inform you of the revised target response date.

STAGE 3 (Local Governing Body Complaints Appeal Panel (CAP))

Following receipt of a Stage 2 outcome, the complaint should be made in writing to the Chair of Governors within 10 school days. If the complaint was considered by the Chair of Governors at Stage 2, then the complaint should be sent to the Chief Executive Officer.

A written acknowledgment of the complaint will be made within 3 school days. This will inform you that the CAP will hear the complaint within 20 school days.

The Chair of Governors, or Chief Executive Officer, will arrange for the CAP to meet to consider the complaint. They will ensure that the panel comprises of three people not involved in the complaint, one of whom is independent of the management and running of the school. The Headteacher and Chair of the Local Governing Body will not be members of this panel, which will elect its own chair, although one or both may be present at the meeting held to consider the complaint.

You will be given the opportunity to attend the CAP meeting to make representations in person, and you will have the right to bring a friend/family member or other supporter. The Panel will therefore meet at a time and a venue convenient to all parties. If you decide not to attend the complaints meeting, it may be held in your absence.

The Panel may request the services of a Clerk and will endeavour to provide you with their findings and recommendations within 5 school days after the meeting. These will be sent by:

- electronic mail or otherwise given to you and, where relevant, the person complained about; and
- will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Trust Board and the Headteacher.

LOCAL GOVERNING BODY COMPLAINTS APPEAL PANEL PROCEDURE

The Panel will want to ensure that the nature of the complaint is understood and, where possible, will seek to establish from you what actions you feel might resolve the problem. In helping to reach a conclusion, the Panel will seek to identify possible sources of information and advice to help collate the necessary evidence.

As indicated above, you will be given the opportunity to attend the complaints meeting and will have the right to bring a friend/family member or other supporter. Neither the school nor the complainant should bring legal representation to the CAP proceedings; however, there are occasions where legal representation will be necessary, for example where a school employee is a witness in a complaint, they may be entitled to bring union or legal representation.

In normal circumstances the Headteacher and/or Chair of the Local Governing Body may also attend the meeting, but will not take any part in the decision-making process. A typical complaints meeting may adopt the following structure:

- The meeting will be as informal as possible.
- Witnesses may be required to attend but only for the part of the meeting in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, you will be invited to explain your complaint, and you will be followed by your witnesses (if any).

- The Headteacher / Chair of LGB may ask questions of both you and your witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Headteacher / Chair of LGB will then be invited to explain the school's actions and will be followed by the school's witnesses.
- You may ask questions of both the Headteacher / Chair of LGB and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Panel may ask questions at any point.
- You will then be invited to sum up your complaint.
- The Headteacher / Chair of LGB will be invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- The panel chair will explain that both parties will hear from the Panel in writing within a set time scale.
- Both parties leave together while the panel remains to decide on the issues and reach a conclusion.

The above procedures for the complaints meeting may vary with the approval of all parties, for example you may wish to meet the Panel without the Headteacher being present. Where this is the case you should be aware that it will still be necessary for the Panel to meet with the Headteacher as part of the process.

OUTCOMES OF INVESTIGATIONS

Whether the complaint has been investigated by the Headteacher, Chair of the LGB or a complaints appeals panel, a written response will be sent to you outlining the outcome of the investigation, detailing how the conclusion has been reached, any action that has resulted, and enclose a copy of the minutes. The letter will also tell you where to next take the complaint, if you are not satisfied with the response provided.

The Complaints Committee may reach the following conclusions:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur

The aim of the investigation or review will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between you and the school. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that sometimes you may not be satisfied with the outcome if matters are not found in your favour.

FINAL STAGE – APPEAL

If you remain dissatisfied and feel that the school has not followed the appropriate procedure, any relevant policies, or has failed to discharge a statutory duty, you may wish to refer your complaint to the ESFA using the online form or in writing to:

Ministerial and Public Communications Division
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Please note that they will not re-investigate the substance of the complaint as this remains the responsibility of the school, but if legislative or policy breaches are found, they will report them to the school and, if necessary require the school to take remedial action.

COMPLAINTS NOT COVERED BY THIS PROCEDURE

Complaints regarding the following topics should be directed to Staffordshire Local Authority:

- Statutory assessments of SEND
- School re-organisation proposals
- Admissions to schools

Complaints about child protection matters will be handled in line with the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with the relevant statutory guidance. Any child protection complaints should be directed to the LA Designated Officer (LADO).

PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

You may remain dissatisfied despite all the procedures having been followed and reasonable responses being provided. It may be the case that it is not possible to resolve all your concerns and meet all your wishes.

If you do continue to make representations to the school on the same issues, the Local Governing Body reserves the right to inform you, in writing, that the appropriate procedures have all been followed, that all reasonable actions have been taken to try to resolve the issue and that the matter is now closed. Should you then write to the school again on the same issue(s), there is no obligation on the school to respond to you in that case.

Correspondence received from any complainant subsequent to closure will be kept on file, indefinitely, as will notes of telephone calls and any further personal calls referring to the matter. These records will be kept securely on the school's ICT system and retained in line with the school's Records Management Policy. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except in so far as they need to be shared with people who might contribute to their resolution except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 162A of the 2002 Act requests access to them.