



Complaints Policy

Date Agreed **September 2020**

To be review **September 2023 (or sooner if required)**

Signed 

Mr M Snait
Chair of Directors

Complaints Policy – Vision Learning Trust

Introduction

Academies are required to have published a procedure for dealing with complaints. This procedure must provide for complaints to be managed within clear timescales. If initial informal consideration does not resolve the complaint then the procedure must also include steps to escalate a complaint through a formal mechanism.

Most complaints will be from parents of pupils who attend the academies and this procedure is primarily focused on the resolution of these complaints. It is nevertheless possible that there will be complaints from other parties in relation to the academies and in general the principles of this procedure will apply to all complainants although inevitably the issues which are raised may differ and will be treated appropriately.

Aims and Objectives

The Academy will give careful consideration to all concerns/complaints and deal with them fairly and honestly. We will provide sufficient opportunity for any concern/complaint to be fully discussed, and aim to resolve it through open dialogue and mutual understanding. The Academy will respect people's desire for confidentiality, wherever possible although some information sharing may be necessary to carry out a thorough investigation.

Procedures

Stage 1 - Informal Stage

Any problem or concern should be raised promptly. Concerns should be discussed initially with a class teacher or other relevant member of the academy staff responsible for the area or action you are concerned about.

The Academy considers any concerns very seriously and most problems can be resolved at this informal stage, however it is important that you tell us straight away.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

If you feel that your concern has not been resolved at the informal stage, you need to follow the formal complaint process as detailed below.

If you would like the concern formally investigated by an appropriate person from the Academy, please submit your complaint in writing to the head teacher of the Academy. If you would like help to submit a written complaint, the Academy will be happy to provide the assistance of someone unconnected with the complaint.

If the matter is about:

- the day-to-day running of the Academy
- the interpretation of Academy policies
- the actions of staff at the Academy

it will be initially investigated by the Head teacher or other senior member of staff.

If the matter is about:

- the Head teacher of the Academy

it will be investigated by the CEO or a person nominated by the CEO.

If the matter is about:

- Academy policies
- the actions of the Local Governing Body
- the actions of the Chief Executive Officer

the matter will be considered by the Chair of the Directors of Vision Learning Trust or one or more other Directors of Vision Learning Trust.

The person(s) carrying out the investigation will review the way in which the complaint has been handled by the Academy and ensure that the issues have been dealt with properly and fairly. He/she/they will normally write to you with the outcome of this process within 15 Academy days of receiving the complaint.

Stage 3 – Formal complaint to the next level (consideration by a Panel)

If you are not satisfied with the result from Stage 2, you may choose to refer your complaint to Stage 3 of the procedure. This must be done in writing to the Business & Finance Manager at the Company's Registered Office within 15 Academy days of the completion of Stage 2.

At this Stage, the complaint will be considered by a panel comprising Directors or members of the Local Governing Body (depending on who undertook the initial investigation at the previous stage).

At this stage the Local Governing Body / Directors will consider the manner in which the complaint was addressed and decide whether it has been properly dealt with. They will make a final decision about the case and will determine whether the complaint has received fair and proper consideration within the Academy's procedure. If they have any concerns, they may direct that further investigation takes place. The complainant will be kept informed of any delay.

Where the complaint is considered by a panel of Directors/Local Governing Body members this will comprise of persons who have no detailed prior knowledge of the complaint, and will have no connection with the complainant. There will also be one independent person who is independent of the management or governance of the academy.

The meeting will normally take place within 15 Academy days of your request.

Complainants will have the opportunity to submit written evidence on the complaint prior to the meeting of the panel and also to attend, accompanied by a friend/partner if they wish, to present their case. The Headteacher or CEO will be given the same opportunities.

The complainant will be informed of the date, time and place of the meeting. The letter will also explain what will happen at the meeting. As a general rule, no new evidence or witnesses previously undisclosed should be introduced into the meetings by the complainant at this stage.

The decision of the panel will normally be communicated to the complainant within 15 Academy days of the meeting.

The decision taken at Stage 3 is final. For most complaints this decision will be the last step in the process.

Secretary of State

If you are still not satisfied and feel that your complaint has not been investigated fairly, you may wish to put your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education clearly stating your grounds for your appeal. Contact details for the Secretary of State can be found at www.education.gov.uk

The Secretary of State will not usually investigate complaints until the Academy's own complaints procedures have been exhausted.

General Principles of dealing with complaints

Written records will be kept of all complaints and their outcomes, whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage, when a complaint is submitted in writing or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing.

The person(s) who will investigate the complaint may take statements from other persons where it is considered helpful or where their evidence would be material to the complaint. All correspondence, statements and records of complaints will be kept confidential but will be available for inspection by the Proprietors of the Academy (i.e. the Academy Trust) or the Headteacher. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are also to be made available, upon request, to the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 162A of the 2002 Act.

Complaints from employees, where they concern employment matters, will be treated as a grievance or will be dealt with through other procedures where they fall outside the scope of these complaints procedures.

This procedure does not cover concerns about the following, for which there are separate arrangements laid down by law:

- Matters relating to the exclusion of pupils from the academy where there are separate arrangements in place
- Pupil admissions
- Home to school Transport
- Certain matters concerning provision for special educational needs provision (e.g. the making of Statements of special educational needs)

If it becomes apparent that the complaint warrants the use of a disciplinary or capability procedure, then the matter will be dealt with in the appropriate manner. Complainants are not entitled to know which procedure is used in such instances or the final outcome.

Any third parties that use academy premises for any purpose are encouraged to adopt their own complaints procedures.

The outcome of any complaint could include:

- To dismiss the complaint in whole or part
- To uphold the complaint in whole or part
- To decide on appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- To recommend changes to systems or procedures

Note to Complainants

In making your complaint, please try to ensure clarity in your statement of complaint concerning: -

- the issues that you wish to complain about;
- who or what you are complaining about;
- the steps that you have already taken in an attempt to resolve the matter;
- what the academy has done to try to address your complaint;
- your desired outcome (i.e. how you think that the academy could resolve the matter to your satisfaction)

Once the complaint has been received and is to be progressed, some cases may be allocated a Single Point of Contact (SPoC) who will become the person who will receive and distribute communications to and from the complainant. The Academy Trust will be responsible for identifying this SPoC and will notify the complainant accordingly.

Appendix - Policy on Vexatious Complaints

Vision Learning Trust is fully committed to the improvement of the academies. We welcome feedback from parents/carers and will always try to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible.

Sometimes, however, parents/carers or others pursuing complaints or other issues treat staff and others in a way that is unacceptable. Whilst it is recognised that some complaints may relate to serious and distressing incidents, the academy trust will not accept threatening or harassing behaviour towards any members of the academy community.

An unreasonably persistent complainant may be anyone who engages in unreasonable behaviour when making a complaint. This will include persons who pursue complaints in an unreasonable manner.

Unreasonable behaviour may include actions that are;-

- out of proportion to the nature of the complaint, or
- persistent – even when the complaints procedure has been exhausted, or
- personally harassing, or
- unjustifiably repetitious
- an insistence on pursuing unjustified complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes to justified complaints
- an insistence on pursuing justifiable complaints in an unreasonable manner (e.g. using abusive or threatening language; or
- making complaints in public; or
- refusing to attend appointments to discuss the complaint.

If the complainant behaves unreasonable as outlined above the Trust will write to the complainant explaining that the complaint has been through all the stages of the procedure, is now exhausted and the case is now closed.