



COMPLAINTS POLICY

**Presented to Full Trustees
27 June 2024**

Date approved: ¹	3 October 2018 Trustees Standards Committee
Date reviewed: ²	16 March 2023
Date of next review: ³	Spring 2027

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

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

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

Footnote:

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

COMPLAINTS POLICY

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

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

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

Complaint Procedures

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

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

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

Stage 1 Complaint is looked into and dealt with informally by the classroom teacher / Head of Department / Head of Year / Pastoral Leader with the aim of resolving the issue as soon as possible.

Stage 2 Complainant uses school complaint form (a), addressed to the Headteacher and automatically cc'd to the Chair of Governors.

This form can be found on each school's website, under 'Contact Us'.

The Headteacher instructs a member of SLT to investigate the complaint (Investigating Officer IO). The IO interviews complainant / staff / pupils / students and gathers evidence as appropriate. On the completion of the investigation, the IO presents their report to the Headteacher along with any recommendations.

The Headteacher writes to the complainant with the outcome of the investigation.

Stage 3 If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of stage 2, the complainant uses Trust complaint form (b) (available on the Four Cs MAT website) addressed to the Clerk of Trustees, explaining why they were unhappy with the Stage 2 investigation.

Form link: <https://www.fourcsmat.org.uk/form/?pid=5&form=16>

(This form is also available on the Four Cs MAT website, under 'Contact Us')
A Trust representative (TR) reviews complaint form 1, the investigation report and complaint form 2. The TR speaks to the complainant and the IO and reviews the investigation.

If the TR upholds the Stage 3 complaint, this is communicated to the complainant in writing and the IO may be asked to reinvestigate the Stage 2 complaint under the guidance of the TR and rewrite the investigation report.

If the Stage 3 complaint is rejected, the TR writes to the complainant giving the reasons and that there is no further recourse under the Trust Complaints Policy.

Complaints will be dealt with within a reasonable timeframe and as soon as possible dependent upon the complexity of the complaint.

Further recourse beyond Stage 3 then lies with the Department for Education (DfE).

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

5. In respect of complaints relating to the school, parents / carers should use the formal complaints policy, and should not air any grievances or concerns on Social Media sites, as this could be potentially damaging to the School and the students.

APPENDICES

19. Appendix 1 – Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

REVIEW

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

Date for Review

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

Appendix 1

Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

The Four Cs Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our schools. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

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

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the Trust's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

NB: please note the above list is not exhaustive.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

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

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

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