

COMPLAINTS POLICY

This section should be completed following ratification of the Policy.

Audience	All school staff, Trustees, Members, parents and school community
Ratified	October 2024
Other Related Policies	Whistleblowing Policy, Grievance Policy, Code of Conduct & Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy
Policy Owner	Trust Board
Review Frequency	Within two years

Ownership

Preston Hedges Trust is responsible for the production and maintenance of this document. It is issued by the clerk, clerk@prestonhedges.org to whom any change requests or queries should be directed.

Contents:

Page	Content
3	Statement of Intent
3	Legal Framework
4	Definitions
4	Scope and Application
5	Roles and Responsibilities
7	Principles of Investigation
7	Timescales
8	Management of Complaints
9	Unreasonable and Persistent Complaints
12	Record Keeping and Confidentiality
12	Complaints to Ofsted
13	Training
14	Appendix 1: Stage 1 – Informal Complaint
15	Appendix 2: Stage 2 – Formal Complaint in writing
17	Appendix 3: Stage 3 – Complaints Panel
22	Appendix 4: Complaints about Senior Leaders or Trust Board
23	Appendix 5: Assistance with making a complaint

1. Statement of Intent

Our trust aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Make sure any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school and trust improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The trust will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on our Trust website, hard copies can be made available on request.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

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 and Skills Act 2008
- Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage
- Childcare Act 2006
- Equality Act 2010
- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018

- ESFA (2021) ‘Best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures’
- ESFA (2023) ‘Academy trust handbook 2023’

3. Definitions

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- 3.1 A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”
- 3.2 A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”
- 3.3 References to **Parent**, in relation to a child or young person, includes any person who is not a parent but who has parental responsibility, or has care of the child.
- 3.4 **Principal**, is the Principal of the school
- 3.5 References to the **Trustees** are references to the Trust Board
- 3.6 References to **school days** mean Monday to Friday, when the school is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the school’s website. In the event that the application of this definition is likely to introduce excessive delays, due to intervening School holidays, the School’s and Trust’s approach is to take sensible and reasonable steps so as to minimise any hardship or unfairness arising from such delays.
- 3.7 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.

4. Scope and Application

This policy applies to the whole Trust and each school including the Early Years Foundation Stage. It applies to any expression of dissatisfaction however made about actions taken, or a lack of action, by the School or Trust where a parent seeks action by the School or Trust.

- 4.1 This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:
 - Admissions
 - Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
 - Safeguarding matters

- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline
- Withdrawal from the curriculum (parents and carers can withdraw their child from any aspect of religious education, including the daily act of collective worship. They do not have to explain why)

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint:

- 4.2 Complaints about services provided by other providers who use trust premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.
- 4.3 This policy applies only to complaints from each of the following:
- parents of current pupils;
 - parents of former pupils if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was registered at the School.
 - members of the public. However, kindly note that in respect of complaints made by those who are not parents of students at the school, there is no obligation to follow the complaints policy in its entirety. Such complaints will be dealt with at Stage 2 of this procedure.
- 4.4 Requests for financial awards, such as claims for compensation, damages or fee refunds, are beyond the scope of the Trust's complaints procedures.
- 4.5 All parents should be aware that, regardless of the nature of a complaint and whether or not it is upheld, parents are not entitled to details of any related sanctions imposed on staff, pupils or parents.
- 4.6 The Trust has separate grievance and whistleblowing policies and procedures for staff concerns.
- 4.7 The School will not investigate anonymous complaints under the procedure in this Complaints Policy. Anonymous complaints will be referred to the Principal who will decide what, if any, action should be taken.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Complainant

- Cooperate with the school or 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
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

5.2 Investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. The person investigating the complaint will vary and depend on the nature of the complaint and who it is directed at. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Analyse all information in a comprehensive and fair manner
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the relevant person responsible for the complaint, which includes the facts and potential solution

5.3 Principal (or other individual responsible for hearing the complaint)

- Be mindful of timescales and ensuring all parties involved are aware of these
- Responding to the complainant in a clear and understandable manner

5.4 Clerk

- Be the contact point for the complainant and those involved in the complaint, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaint panel hearings
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

5.5 Chair of the Complaints Panel Hearing

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the panel, and are allowed to present their case

6. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

7. Timescales

- 7.1 Whenever possible, in the interests of a prompt resolution of issues a complaint should be raised within three months of the incident, or where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. The Trust will however consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply. A complaint raised outside this timescale should therefore include details of the issues which led to a delay. If this is not included the complaint will not be considered.
- 7.2 Timescales for each stage of the complaint's procedure are set out below in the relevant paragraphs.
- 7.3 It is expected that the management of every complaint will progress in a timely manner.
- 7.4 The Trust aims to resolve all complaints efficiently and promptly and parents are encouraged to bring any matter causing concern to the school's attention as soon as possible.
- 7.5 Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay to the timescales for a stage of the complaints procedure, the Trust or School will notify the parents and inform them of the reasons for the delay and the new timescales as soon as possible.

8. Management of complaints

- 8.1 The Trust's policy allows for complaints to be considered at three stages:
- **Stage 1:** Informal raising of a complaint. Further details of this procedure are set out in Appendix 1.
 - **Stage 2:** A formal complaint in writing. Further details of this procedure are set out in Appendix 2.
 - **Stage 3:** Reference to a complaints panel. Further details of this procedure are set out in Appendix 3.
- 8.2 Further details about how to make a complaint about the Principal, a Trustee, the Trust Board, a member of the executive team or members are set out in Appendix 4.
- 8.3 Separate statutory procedures apply to issues including child protection, admissions, exclusions, statutory assessments of special educational needs and the content of any resulting statutory plan (though concerns about the provision of SEN support at the school can be raised through this policy), school reorganisation proposals, whistleblowing, staff grievances and conduct dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary process, services by other providers who may use school premises or facilities (who should have their own complaints policy), matters dealt with by regulatory bodies such as the JCQ and the Education and Skills Funding Agency, as well as National Curriculum content .
- 8.4 Where a complaint is made against a member of staff, depending upon the nature and seriousness of the complaint, the matter may be dealt with under separate HR procedures which are strictly confidential, rather than under this Complaints Policy.
- 8.5 Parents requiring assistance with making a complaint at any stage of the procedure, for example because of a disability, should contact the person identified in Appendix 5 who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

9. Unreasonable and Persistent Complaints

9.1 Unreasonable Complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- 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 school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the ESFA
- 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

Please note: the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It is at the discretion of the trust what is deemed to be unreasonable.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school/trust 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.

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's comments, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

Whenever possible, the school/trust will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues, the school/trust will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#)
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary
- In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from school premises and ensuring appropriate measures of support are provided to staff where they are the subject of aggression and/or violence.

9.1 Serial/persistent complaints

If the complainant contacts the school/trust again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. We may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:

- We have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts the school/trust repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

The case to stop responding is stronger if:

- The complainant's communications are often or always abusive or aggressive
- The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school/trust with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

When we decide to stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will consider any new complaints they make provided the concerns raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern

9.2 Duplicate complaints

If the school/trust has resolved a complaint under this procedure and received a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, the school/trust will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information that needs to be taken into account.

If the school/trust is satisfied that there are no new aspects, it will:

- Tell the new complainant that the issue has already been investigated and responded to, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the original handling of the complaint

If a duplicate complaint is raised which in the view of the school warrants further consideration, the procedure outlined in section 8 (as appropriate) will be repeated.

9.3 Complaint campaigns

Where the school/trust receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school/trust may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school/trust website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's/trust's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

10. Record keeping and confidentiality

- 10.1 All records created in accordance with this policy are managed in accordance with the Trust's policies that apply to the retention and destruction of records.
- 10.2 The Trust keeps a written record of all formal complaints, including the following:
- whether they were resolved at Stage 2 or Stage 3.
 - the action taken by the School or Trust as a result of the complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).
- 10.3 In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will be kept only for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in the circumstances.
- 10.4 Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of an inspection or under other legal authority or court order.
- 10.5 A complaint about the fulfilment of the School's EYFS requirements will be made available to Ofsted on request.
- 10.6 The records created in accordance with this policy may contain personal data. The Trust has a number of privacy notices which explain how the Trust and school will use personal data about pupils and parents. The privacy notices are published on the Trust and school websites. In addition, staff must ensure that they follow the Trust's data protection policy and procedures when handling personal data created in connection with this policy. This includes the Trust's data protection policy and information security and sharing data guidance.
- 10.7 Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Complainants should make sure they obtain informed consent from all parties present before recording conversations or meetings.

11 Complaints to Ofsted

- 11.1 Parents have the right to contact Ofsted to complain but only when all the steps in the school's complaints procedure have been fulfilled.
- 11.2 Ofsted can be contacted on 0300 123 4666 or at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk]

12. **Training**

- 12.1 The Trust ensures that regular guidance and training is arranged on induction and at regular intervals thereafter so that leaders understand what is expected of them by this policy and have the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out their roles.
- 12.2 The level and frequency of training depends on the role of the individual leaders.

Appendix 1

Stage 1 - Informal complaint

1. Informal resolution of a complaint

1.1 The Trust expects that most complaints can be resolved informally. For example, dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care or a billing error should be able to be resolved by the relevant member of staff.

Who to contact

1.2 Where appropriate, complaints should initially be raised as follows:

- **educational issues:** if the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, please speak or write initially to: the Class Teacher.
- **pastoral care:** for complaints relating to matters outside the classroom, please speak to a member of the Senior Leadership Team.
- **staff issues:** for complaints relating to members of staff, including members of the Trust central function, please speak or write to: the Principal.
- **disciplinary matters:** a problem over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised first of all with: a member of the Senior Leadership Team or Principal.

1.3 An informal complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within 3 school days of receipt, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely timescales. Such action may include an investigation and / or a meeting with the parent.

1.4 Wherever appropriate, the school will ask the parent at an early stage what they think might resolve the issue.

1.5 The parent will receive a response to the complaint within 15 school days.

1.6 If the parent is dissatisfied with the response to the informal complaint or in the event that the complaint cannot be resolved by informal means, the parent may make a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure as set out in Appendix 2.

Appendix 2

Stage 2 - Formal complaint in writing

1 How to make a formal complaint

- 1.1 Complaints will usually only progress to Stage 2 after first being considered at the informal stage and only then if the parent indicates that they wish to escalate a matter to the formal stage.
- 1.2 The formal complaint must be made in writing. This should be returned in an envelope addressed to the Principal and should include:
 - a copy of all relevant documents and full contact details; and
 - details of all the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired.
- 1.3 The complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within 5 school days of receipt, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely timescales.

2 Investigation

- 2.1 The subject matter of the complaint will be investigated in the most appropriate manner, which may include some or all of the following steps:
 - delegation of the investigation to a senior member of staff;
 - request for additional information from the parent, including what they think might resolve the issue (if not already requested under Stage 1); and
 - request for a conversation and / or a meeting with the parent personally and / or others with relevant knowledge of the circumstances;
 - the Chief Executive Officer will be made aware of all stage 2 formal complaints (this can be in the form of a generic termly update or a specific notification if a complaint is serious. Where a specific notification of a complaint is made, it will not be appropriate for the Chief Executive Officer to sit on any subsequent Stage 3 panel).
- 2.2 Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. Where the investigation has been delegated to a senior member of staff, they will prepare a report on the investigation which will be considered by the Principal. Personal data may be redacted, and names anonymised or cyphered in line with data protection principles.

3 Decision

- 3.1 The Principal will notify the parent by email or letter of their Stage 2 decision and the reasons for it within 20 school days from the receipt of the formal complaint in writing.
- 3.2 If the parent is dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response to the complaint, the parent can request that the complaint be referred to a Complaints Panel under Stage 3 using the procedure set out in Appendix 3.
- 3.3 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS): Parents of pupils in the EYFS setting will be notified of the outcome of the investigation within 20 school days of the complaint being received.

Appendix 3

Stage 3 - Complaints Panel

1 Complaints Panel hearing

- 1.1 If a parent is dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response to the formal complaint, the parent can request a Complaints Panel hearing.
- 1.2 A Complaints Panel Hearing (Hearing) is a Hearing to consider those elements of the Stage 2 response to the parent's formal complaint with which the parent remains dissatisfied. The Complaints Panel (Panel) is not obliged to consider any new complaints which have not been previously raised.
- 1.3 The purpose of the hearing will be reconciliation and ensuring that things that may have gone wrong are corrected.

2 How to request a Hearing

- 2.1 A request for a Hearing must be put in writing via clerk@prestonhedges.org within 5 school days of receiving the Stage 2 decision letter and will only be considered if the procedure at Stage 2 has been completed. It is expected that the complaints procedure will progress in a timely manner.
- 2.2 The written request should include:
 - full contact details
 - details of all the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired
 - a copy of all relevant documents or evidence
- 2.3 The clerk will acknowledge the request for a Hearing in writing within 3 school days of receipt.
- 2.4 Every effort will be made to enable the Hearing to take place within 20 school days of receipt of the request, unless there are exceptional circumstances. If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Trust 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.
- 2.5 Parents may withdraw their request for a Hearing at any point up to and including the intended date of the Hearing.

3 Planning the Hearing

- 3.1 The Trust will send written notification to each party of the date, time and place of the Hearing at least 10 school days before the date of the Hearing.
- 3.2 Copies of any documents (additional to those specified in 2.2) that the parent wishes the complaints panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk and be received at least 5 school days prior to the Hearing.
- 3.3 The Trust will circulate a copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the complaints panel to all parties at least 3 school days prior to the Hearing.
- 3.4 The names of individuals other than the Complainant, the Complainant's family, members of the school's staff and Trustees, will be redacted and replaced with a letter relevant to that particular individual (for example "Jane Brown" will be replaced with "A" throughout, "John Jones" will be replaced with B throughout) unless they have provided their written consent for their name to be disclosed.
- 3.4 The parent may be accompanied at the Hearing, for example by a relative or friend. The Hearing is an internal proceeding, not legal proceedings. Legal representation is not necessary, and will not normally be appropriate, and the role to be played by any legal representative will be at the discretion of the Panel Chair. The Trust must be given 5 school days' notice if the parents wish to be accompanied by a person who is legally qualified.
- 3.5 Neither the complainant nor the academy 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 can bring a union representative or legal representative if desired; this will be agreed before the hearing.
- 3.6 A person will be appointed to take a minute of the Hearing.

4 Witnesses

- 4.1 The Chair of the Complaint Panel will decide, at his or her absolute discretion, which witnesses will be permitted to attend the Complaint Panel Hearing to give a verbal statement rather than relying on a written statement or record of meeting which have been signed by the witness.
- 4.2 If the Complainant wishes to rely on the account of a witness, they should ask the witness to write down, sign and date their account and forward it to the Trust **at least 5 school days** before the Complaint Panel Hearing, to enable the Trust to forward it to the Complaint Panel members.

- 4.3 Witnesses under the age of eighteen other than the Complainant's own family will only be allowed to attend the Complaint Panel Hearing at the discretion of the Chair of the Complaint Panel, and then only if they are accompanied by one of their parents or carers. Any written accounts provided by the Complainant relating to witnesses under the age of eighteen must be signed and dated by the witness **and** one of the witness' parents or carers.

5 Composition of the Complaints Panel

- 5.1 The Panel will comprise at least three individuals, selected by the Trust who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint and will include Trustees and at least one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the School and Trust.
- 5.2 The parent may ask the Trust to inform them who has been appointed to sit on the Panel ahead of the Hearing. Fair consideration will be given to any reasonable objection to a particular member of the Panel.
- 5.3 The Panel members will appoint one of themselves to be the Chair of the Panel throughout the proceedings.

6 Role of the Complaints Panel

- 6.1 The role of the Panel is to review the process and the decision reached at Stage 2, and to consider on the balance of probabilities, whether or not to uphold each complaint.

7 The Hearing

- 7.1 The Hearing will proceed notwithstanding that the parent may decide not to attend. In these circumstances, the Panel should consider the parent's complaint in their absence and make findings on the substance of the complaint.
- 7.2 During the Hearing, the parties shall have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. The Trust Representative(s) will be asked to attend to explain the process followed, the investigation conducted and the reason for the decision at Stage 2. There will be an opportunity for the complainant to question the Trust Representative(s) the complaint and visa versa, about the complaint.
- 7.3 The Hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and / or may take written statements into account at its discretion.

- 7.4 All statements made at the Hearing will be unsworn. The parties will be entitled to write their own notes for reference purposes.
- 7.5 All those present during the Hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the Hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair of the Panel. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the Hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and their comment will be minuted.
- 7.5 The Chair of the Panel may, at their discretion, adjourn the Hearing if they consider it appropriate to do so. This may include an adjournment for the parties to take legal advice on a specific issue arising.
- 7.6 A Hearing before the Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.
- 7.7 When the Chair of the Panel is satisfied that sufficient consideration has been given to the documentation provided and any representations made by the parties, they will conclude the Hearing.

8 Decision

- 8.1 The Panel will make findings about each complaint on the balance of probabilities and may make recommendations to the school and/or Trust.
- 8.2 The Complaint Panel will decide which facts are established to be true, on a balance of probabilities (i.e. more likely than not). If a fact is not deemed relevant, the Complaint Panel will not consider it further. The Complaint Panel will make a written record of the facts that have been established, those which have not been established and those which are not relevant, with their reasons for making these findings.
- 8.3 It is not within the powers of the Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils or parents, although the complaints panel may make recommendations.
- 8.4 The Trust will write within 10 school days of the Complaint Panel Hearing to the:
- Complainant;
 - The Trust's Representative(s);
 - Any person complained about.
- 8.5 The letter will identify each of the issues complained about, summarise how the

Complaint Panel Hearing proceeded, and confirm each of the Complaint Panel's findings of fact and recommendations, if any, with reasons. The letter will also confirm that, if the Complainant believes that this Complaints Policy does not comply with the Regulations, or that the School has not followed the procedure outlined in this Complaints Policy, the Complainant may refer their complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency for further consideration. Copies of Complaint Panel hearing minutes will also be provided on request to the complainant.

8.7 The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the Trust's complaints procedure.

9 Referral to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)

9.1 If the Complainant believes that this Complaints Policy does not comply with the Regulations, or that the Trust has not followed the procedure in this Complaints Policy, the Complainant can refer the complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency for consideration.

9.2 The Complainant can find further information about referring a complaint to the ESFA by pasting this page into an Internet browser:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/schoolperformance/b00212240/making-complaint-school/complaints-free-schools-academies>

9.3 The Complainant should be aware that the ESFA will not usually investigate the complaint itself, or interfere with the findings of the Complaint Panel, unless the decision made was manifestly unreasonable.

Appendix 4

Complaints about the Executive Principal, Principal, a Trustee, the Trust Board, a member of the executive team or members

1. Complaints against a Principal will:
 - Be dealt with by the Executive Principal, Chief Operating Officer or Chief Executive Officer.
 - Follow the complaints procedure, including a panel hearing where applicable.
2. Complaints against trustees will:
 - Be made in writing to the clerk, who will arrange for them to be heard.
 - Be dealt with by the chair of trustees.
 - Potentially involve escalation to conduct an investigation – this will be handled by the COO or CEO.
 - Involve a panel hearing where applicable.
3. Complaints against the chair of trustees will:
 - Be made in writing to the clerk, who will determine the most appropriate course of action dependent on the nature of the complaint.
4. Complaints against the board of trustees will:
 - Be dealt with by the COO or CEO.
 - Follow the complaints procedure, including a panel hearing where applicable.
5. Complaints against the Executive Principals will:
 - Be made in writing to the clerk, who will arrange for them to be heard.
 - Be dealt with by the COO or CEO
 - Follow the complaints procedure, including a panel hearing where applicable.
6. Complaints against the Chief Operating Officer will:
 - Be made in writing to the clerk, who will arrange for them to be heard.
 - Be dealt with by the CEO
 - Potentially involve escalation to conduct an investigation – this will be handled by an Executive Principal.
 - Follow the complaints procedure, including a panel hearing where applicable.
7. Complaints against the CEO will:
 - Be dealt with by the chair of trustees, with a panel hearing where applicable.
 - Potentially involve escalation to conduct an investigation – this will be handled by the COO.
 - Follow the complaints procedure, including a panel hearing where applicable.

Appendix 5
Assistance with making a complaint

Please contact our Clerk via clerk@prestonhedges.org for assistance with making a complaint.