

Document:

Complaints Procedure

APPROVED

Approved by:	Board of Trustees
Date:	Summer Term 2026
Review Date:	Summer Term 2027
This policy applies to:	 DURHAM SIXTH FORM CENTRE

Contents

1. Introduction and Purpose Statement	3
Which procedure do I need?	3
Raising concerns	3
Safeguarding	3
Social Media	3
Complaints that result in staff capability or disciplinary	3
2. Legislation and Guidance	4
3. The Procedure	4
Who can make a complaint?	4
The difference between a concern and a complaint	4
How to raise a concern or make a complaint	4
Anonymous complaints	5
Time scales	5
Complaints received outside of term time	5
Scope of this Complaints Procedure	5
Resolving complaints	6
Withdrawal of a Complaint	6
Stage 1 - Informal complaints	6
Stage 2 - Formal complaints	6
Stage 3 - Panel hearing	7
Unreasonable complaints	9
4. Complaint Form	11
5. Roles and Responsibilities	12
Complainant	12
Investigator	12
Assigned Complaints Coordinator	12
Governance Professional to the Local Governing Board/Trust Board	12
Committee Chair	13
Committee Member	13
6. Monitoring Arrangements	14
7. Appendix A: Complaints about the Trust, CEO or Trustees	15
Exceptions	15
8. Appendix B: Referring Complaints on Completion of the School and Trust procedures	17

1. Introduction and Purpose Statement

- 1.1. Our Trust endeavours to provide the best education possible for all of its students in an open and transparent environment. We welcome any feedback from parents/carers, students and third parties and we accept that not all of this will be positive. Where concerns are raised, the school intends for these to be dealt with promptly and effectively.
- 1.2. In order to do so, the Trust Board has approved the following procedure which explains what you should do if you have any concerns. All members of staff will be familiar with the procedure and will be able to assist you.

Which procedure do I need?

- 1.3. Sometimes, when concerns are more specific, there are alternative and more appropriate policies for dealing with them. The following list details specific topics of complaints and the correct policy to refer to. You can either access these policies on the school/Trust website or ask for a copy from the school's main reception:
 - Student admissions - please see the school's Admissions Arrangements.
 - Student exclusions - please see the school's Climate for Learning Policy.
 - Staff grievance, capability or disciplinary - these are covered by the school's Grievance/Disciplinary/Capability Policies.
 - Where the complaint concerns a third party used by the school, you should complain directly to the third party themselves.
 - Anonymous complaints - please refer to the Confidential Reporting Code (Whistle-Blowing Policy).
 - Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information Requests - see the Data Protection Policy.

Raising concerns

- 1.4. The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the Complaints Procedure. Where you have a concern about any aspect of the school or your child's education or wellbeing, we would ask that you raise this with your child's Pastoral Support Manager via email or telephone or in person in the first instance (please make an appointment in advance of arrival). Ideally, they will be able to address your concerns on the spot, or can arrange a meeting with you to discuss the issue further.
- 1.5. All concerns will be handled with confidentiality although the staff member may need to take notes if they feel that the matter may need to be taken further or it may arise again in the future. Any such notes will be kept in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018. Such notes would be able to be used as evidence if further investigation was required, or if the concern became a formal complaint.

Safeguarding

- 1.6. Wherever a complaint indicates that a student's wellbeing or safety is at risk, the school is under a duty to report this immediately. Any action taken will be in accordance with the school's Safeguarding (Child Protection) Policy and Procedures (available on the website).

Social Media

- 1.7. In order for complaints to be resolved as quickly and fairly as possible, the Trust requests complainants do not discuss complaints publicly via social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp and X. Complaints will be dealt with confidentially for those involved and we expect complainants to observe confidentiality also. If confidentiality is breached, there could be potential implications such as the complaint being discredited.

Complaints that result in staff capability or disciplinary

- 1.8. If at any formal stage of the complaint it is determined that staff disciplinary or capability proceedings are necessary in order to resolve the issue, the details of this action will remain confidential to the Principal and/or the individual's line manager. The complainant is entitled to be informed that action is being taken and the eventual outcome of any such action, but they are not entitled to participate in the proceedings or

receive any detail about them.

2. Legislation and Guidance

- 2.1. This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents/carers of students.
- 2.2. It is also based on [best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

3. The Procedure

Who can make a complaint?

- 3.1. This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of students that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Durham Sixth Form Centre about any provision of facilities or services that we provide.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

- 3.2. A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.
- 3.3. A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.
- 3.4. It is in everyone's interests that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. The school takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.
- 3.5. If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Principal will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Principal will refer you 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.
- 3.6. We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Durham Sixth Form Centre will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

- 3.7. A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. 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.
- 3.8. Concerns should be raised with the relevant member of staff or the Principal. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.
- 3.9. Complaints against school staff (except the Principal) should be made in the first instance to the Principal via the school's main office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- 3.10. Complaints that involve or are about the Principal (in their operational role running the school) should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school's main office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

- 3.11. Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual Governor or the whole Local Governing Board should be addressed to the Governance Professional via the school's main office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- 3.12. For ease of use, a template complaint form is included in **Section 4**. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school's main office. You can also ask third party organisations like Citizens Advice to help you.
- 3.13. In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Anonymous complaints

- 3.14. We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Principal or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

- 3.15. 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.

Complaints received outside of term time

- 3.16. We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

- 3.17. There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This document outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.
- 3.18. This document does not cover complaints procedures relating to:
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs.
 - Safeguarding matters/matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation.
 - Whistle-blowing/confidential reporting.
 - Staff grievances.
 - Staff conduct.
- 3.19. Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaints.
- 3.20. Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.
- 3.21. 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.
- 3.22. If a complainant commences legal action against Durham Sixth Form Centre in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

- 3.23. At each stage in the procedure, we want 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.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

- 3.24. If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Stage 1 - Informal complaints

- 3.25. It is hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.
- 3.26. Concerns should be raised with the relevant member of staff or the Principal. Complainants should not approach individual Governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure. If the issue remains unresolved in the timeframe outlined by the Principal (or delegated member of staff) at this stage then the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Stage 2 - Formal complaints

- 3.27. Formal complaints must be made to the Principal (unless they are about the Principal), via the school's main office or by email. This should be done in writing using the Complaint Form (see **Section 4**).
- 3.28. The Principal will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) usually within 2 school days.
- 3.29. Within this response, the Principal will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Principal can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.
- 3.30. Note: The Principal may delegate the investigation to another member of staff but not the decision to be taken.
- 3.31. During the investigation, the Principal (or investigator) will:
- If necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.
 - Keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.
- 3.32. At the conclusion of their investigation, the Principal will provide a formal written response normally within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.
- 3.33. If the Principal is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.
- 3.34. 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 Durham Sixth Form Centre will take to resolve the complaint.

- 3.35. The Principal will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.
- 3.36. If the complaint is about the Principal (in their operational role running the school), or a member of the Local Governing Board (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled Governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.
- 3.37. Complaints about the Principal (in their operational role running the school) must be addressed to the Chair of Governors. Complaints about a member of the Local Governing Board must be made to the Governance Professional, via the school's main office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- 3.38. If the complaint is:
- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors, or
 - the entire Local Governing Board, or
 - the majority of the Local Governing Board,

then Stage 2 will be escalated to the Chair of the Trust Board.

Stage 3 - Panel hearing

- 3.39. 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 direct management and running of the school. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.
- 3.40. A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Principal or the Governance Professional, via the school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.
- 3.41. The Principal or the Governance Professional will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the appeal in writing (either by letter or email) normally within 2 school days.
- 3.42. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.
- 3.43. The Principal or the Governance Professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Principal or the Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.
- 3.44. If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Principal or the Governance Professional 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.
- 3.45. If the complaint is:
- about the Principal
 - jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors, or
 - the entire Local Governing Board, or
 - the majority of the Local Governing Board,

then Stage 3 will be heard by the Trustees and an independent panel member.

- 3.46. The Committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

- 3.47. If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along 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.
- 3.48. *Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under the Staff Disciplinary Policy, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.*
- 3.49. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.
- 3.50. At least 7 school days before the meeting, the Governance Professional will:
- Confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
 - Request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the Committee in advance of the meeting.
- 3.51. 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.
- 3.52. 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 1 of the procedure.
- 3.53. The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any Minutes taken.
- 3.54. The Committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The Committee can:
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part, or
 - dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- 3.55. 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.
- 3.56. The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Durham Sixth Form Centre with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.
- 3.57. The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Trust if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Durham Sixth Form Centre.
- 3.58. 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 the school will take to resolve the complaint.
- 3.59. The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Principal.

- 3.60. 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.
- 3.61. 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.

Unreasonable complaints

- 3.62. Durham Sixth Form Centre 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 the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and so complaints that are abusive, insulting or aggressive in nature will not be accepted at any stage.
- 3.63. Durham Sixth Form Centre defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, 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 cooperate 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 a complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral procedures followed.
 - 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.
- 3.64. Please note: the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It is at the discretion of the school/Trust what is deemed to be unreasonable.
- 3.65. Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school/Trust 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.
- 3.66. 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 in this document) wherever possible.

- 3.67. Whenever possible, the school/Trust will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' determination.
- 3.68. If the behaviour continues, the Principal will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Durham Sixth Form Centre 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.
- 3.69. 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 Trust premises and ensuring appropriate measures of support are provided to staff where they are the subject of aggression and/or violence.

Serial/persistent complaints

- 3.70. 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.
- 3.71. The case to stop responding is stronger if we have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school/Trust with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience.
- 3.72. The Trust will not refuse to accept further correspondence or complaints from an individual we have had repeat or excessive contact with. The application of a 'serial or persistent' marking will be against the subject or complaint itself, rather than the complainant.
- 3.73. Where 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.

Duplicate complaints

- 3.74. 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 considered.
- 3.75. 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.
- 3.76. If a duplicate complaint is raised which in the view of the school warrants further consideration, the procedure outlined (as appropriate) will be repeated.

4. Complaint Form

- 4.1. Please complete and return (marked Private and Confidential) to the appropriate member of staff, as outlined, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:	
Student's name (if relevant):	
Your relationship to the student (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:	

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

5.1. The complainant should:

- Explain the complaint in full as early as possible.
- Cooperate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint.
- Respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint.
- Ask for assistance as needed.
- Treat all those involved in the complaint with respect.
- Not approach individual Governors/Trustees about the complaint.
- Refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

5.2. The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- Providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - Sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved.
 - Interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint.
 - Consideration of records and other relevant information.
 - Analysing information.
 - Liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

5.3. The investigator should:

- Conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.
- Keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record Minutes of the meeting.
- Ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal.
- Be mindful of the timescales to respond.
- Prepare a comprehensive report for the Principal or Complaints Committee that sets out the facts, identifies possible solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

5.4. The lead or Complaints Committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Assigned Complaints Coordinator

5.5. The assigned complaints co-ordinator should:

- Ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure.
- Liaise with staff members, Principal/CEO, Chair of Governors, Chair of Trustees or the Governance Professional (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure.
- Be aware of issues regarding:
 - Sharing third party information.
 - Additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person;
- Keep records.

Governance Professional to the Local Governing Board/Trust Board

5.6. The Governance Professional is the contact point for the complainant and the Committee and should:

- Ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the DPA 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (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 (for example stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale.
- Record the proceedings.
- Circulate the Minutes of the meeting.
- Notify all parties of the Committee's decision.

Committee Chair

- 5.7. The Committee's Chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:
- Both parties are asked (via the Governance Professional) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting.
 - The meeting is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy.
 - Complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person.
 - The remit of the Committee is explained to the complainant.
 - Written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.
 - Both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself.
 - The issues are addressed.
 - Key findings of fact are made.
 - The Committee is open-minded and acts independently.
 - No member of the Committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure.
 - The meeting is minuted.
 - They liaise with the Governance Professional (and complaints coordinator, where appropriate).

Committee Member

- 5.8. Committee members should be aware that:
- The meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so.
 - No Governor/Trustee may sit on the Committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
 - The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.
 - We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
 - Many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting.
 - Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
 - Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated. The Committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
 - If the child/young person is the complainant, the Committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent/carer is the complainant, the Committee should give the parent/carer the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend. However, the parent/carer should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent/carer wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the Committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
 - The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

6. Monitoring Arrangements

- 6.1. This procedure will be reviewed on an annual basis, or sooner if appropriate. At every review, the Board of Trustees will be responsible for approving the procedure.

APPROVED

7. Appendix A: Complaints about the Trust, CEO or Trustees

- 7.1. Providence Learning Partnership is a small Trust. As a result the staff associated specifically with the Trust operations are limited. In order to simplify the complaints process, all complaints should follow the Complaints Procedure for Durham Sixth Form Centre.

Exceptions

- 7.2. **Any member of the Trust support staff team/ the Chief Operating and Finance Officer (COFO):** It is hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis. Where there is a concern about any member of the Trust support staff team or the COFO, the concern should be raised in the first instance with the Chief Executive Officer via the Durham Sixth Form Centre main office.
- 7.3. Where it is felt the concern has not been resolved, a formal complaint can be raised through the Complaints Procedure addressed as Private and Confidential to the Chair of the Trust Board via the Durham Sixth Form Centre main office.
- 7.4. A panel will hear the complaint, 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 direct management and running of the Trust. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.
- 7.5. **Chief Executive Officer (CEO):** It is hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis. Where there is a concern about the CEO (in their strategic role running the Trust), the complaints should be raised with the Chair of the Trust Board via the Durham Sixth Form Centre main office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- 7.6. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Governance Professional asking for the complaint to be heard before a complaint panel. Please mark it as Private and Confidential.
- 7.7. A panel will hear the complaint, 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 direct management and running of the Trust. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.
- 7.8. **Trustee (including the Chair and Vice Chair):** It is hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis. Where there is a concern about a member of the Trust Board, the concern should be raised in the first instance with the Chair of the Trust Board via the Durham Sixth Form Centre main office. Please mark it as Private and Confidential.
- 7.9. If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair of the Trust Board, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation.
- 7.10. Where it is felt the concern has not been resolved, a formal complaint can be raised through the Complaints Procedure addressed as Private and Confidential to another member of the Trust Board e.g. Chair/Vice Chair via the Durham Sixth Form Centre main office.
- 7.11. 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 direct management and running of the school. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.
- 7.12. The panel will be entirely made up of independent members if the complaint is:
- Jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
 - The entire Trust Board or
 - The majority of the Trust Board.

- 7.13. Complainants should not approach individual Trustees to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints.

APPROVED

8. Appendix B: Referring Complaints on Completion of the School and Trust procedures

- 8.1. If the complainant believes the school/Trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the DfE after they have completed Stage 3.
- 8.2. The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school/Trust. They will consider whether the school/Trust has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).
- 8.3. The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE online at: [Complain about a school to the Department for Education](#).

APPROVED



Providence Learning Partnership is a company limited by guarantee [Companies House Number: 11652271] and an exempt charity registered in England and Wales.