Cabot Learning Federation

Complaints Policy

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History of most recent Policy changes

Version	Date	Page	Change	Origin of Change e.g. TU request, Change in legislation
V1.0	November 2012	Whole document	Adoption by the Cabot Learning Federation & Implementation	Following consultation and development of a harmonised Employee Handbook
V2.0	June 2015	Whole document	Annual review of full document.	Annual review including feedback received from Academies
V2.1	October 2015	4 and 5	Minor changes to clarify the stage 1 process	Request for clarity from Academies
V2.2	September 2016	Whole document	Amended to reflect policy covers parents/carers and members of the public	Following review
V3.0	September 2017	Whole document	Change of process	Following legal advice
V4.0	October 2019	Whole document	Full review	Bi-annual review
V5.0	October 2021	Whole document	Full review	Bi-annual review
V5.2	October 2021	Whole document	Amendments implemented following EQIA	
V5.3	December 2021	Stage 2 panels	Detail added about the composition of panels.	
V5.4	October 2022	Timescales for informal complaints and retaining records in academies		Feedback from ESFA
V5.5	December 2023	Stage 2 panels	Amendment to composition of panels Addition of a Complaints Form – Appendix 1	
V6	October 2024	Whole document	Full review	
V6.1	March 2025	7	Addition of new Stage 2 process	
V6.2	March 2026	10 and 11	Addition of campaign complaints process and timescales for raising complaints	

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1 Policy Statement

1.1 Aim

1.1.1 This policy outlines the process for complaints from parents, carers and members of the public. The aim of this policy is to ensure that any complaint, including a complaint against a member of staff, is handled by the Cabot Learning Federation (the Federation) sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is:

- Good for relationships.
- Good education practice.
- Good business practice.

1.2 Statement

1.2.1 The Federation needs to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. Parents, carers and members of the public should never feel - or be made to feel - that a complaint, made in a reasonable and appropriate way, will be taken amiss or will reflect adversely on any student or his/her opportunities at any Academy within the Federation. The Federation / Academy will investigate and try to resolve every complaint in a positive manner and will treat every complaint as an opportunity:

- To put right any matter which may have gone wrong.
- To review systems and procedures in light of the relevant circumstances.

1.2.2 The Federation recognises that a complaint which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, damaging to relationships and also to the Federation's internal culture.

1.2.3 This policy can be made available in larger print or more accessible format if required. Support will be given in translating this policy where required by contacting the Academy Complaints Co-ordinator named in Annex 1 of this document.

1.2.4 The Head of Governance is the nominated Complaints Officer of the Federation and has responsibility for the operation and management of the Federation complaints procedure.

1.3 Who this policy applies to

1.3.1 Parents or carers of students at any Academy within the Federation and members of the general public. This policy is available on the Federation's website and can also be made available upon request.

2 Roles and Responsibilities

2.1 The board are responsible for the approval of this policy.

2.2 The Academy Council are responsible for monitoring the implementation and application of this policy.

2.3 The Principal is responsible for the implementation and application of this policy.

3 Legislation

3.1 This policy is written in accordance with The Independent Schools Standards April 2019 (part 7).

4 Data Protection

4.1 The academy will keep records of complaints in line with the Records Retention Policy. Complaints will be shared with Ofsted on request. Anonymised data will be shared with the central team, Academy Council and board.

5 Equalities Impact Assessment

5.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and can be obtained from the Governance Team.

6 Procedures

6.1 The Federation is clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

6.2 Informal Stage – Initial complaints and Minor Concerns

6.2.1 The Federation is keen to resolve concerns and complaints quickly and informally. In most cases an individual member of Academy or central team staff will receive the first approach. It is helpful when staff are able to resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary and appropriate.

6.2.2 Concerns relating to individual academies should be raised with the Academy directly. Academies will discuss the concern or complaint in person or by telephone wherever possible in order to fully understand it and resolve it as soon as possible.

6.2.3 Should the matter not be resolved informally within a 30 school days (, or where parents, carers and members of the public are not satisfied with the response to the complaint raised informally, they may proceed with Stage 1 of this procedure.

6.3 Stage 1

6.3.1 The Principal of each Academy will nominate a named Academy Complaints Coordinator for their Academy. This information can be found at Appendix 1.

6.3.2 Whilst it is the Federation's aspiration to resolve concerns informally, there will be parents, carers and members of the public that choose to invoke Stage 1 when initial attempts to resolve the issue at the Informal Stage are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further. The Federation reserves the right to redirect

concerns to be dealt with under the informal procedure where appropriate and where this has not already taken place.

6.3.3 A Stage 1 complaint should be made in writing to the Academy Complaints Coordinator who will consider, and where appropriate, investigate (or delegate the investigation to another senior member of staff) and offer a written resolution to the issue. Support is available to anyone who requires help in setting out their complaint in writing by contacting the Academy Complaints Coordinator. For complaints about Federation issues not specific to an Academy, the complaint should be made in writing to the CLF Complaints Officer, details of whom can be found at Appendix 1. If the complaint is about the Principal, in whole or in part, the Academy Complaints Co-ordinator will liaise with the CLF Complaints Officer to ensure it is dealt with appropriately. Where an investigation is appropriate the Academy Complaints Coordinator or CLF Complaints Co-ordinator will ensure that the investigation:

- Reviews the informal complaint and how it was handled (if applicable);
- Establishes what has happened so far and who has been involved;
- Clarifies the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- Meets with the complainant or contacts them to clarify information if necessary;
- Clarifies what the complainant feels would put things right;
- Formally meet with persons involved in the matter (allowing them to be accompanied if they wish);
- Keep detailed written records of their investigation.

6.3.4 When they are satisfied that, so far as is reasonably practicable, they have all the necessary information, give a decision in writing. The complainant will be informed of this decision together with written reasons for the decision in accordance with the timeframe identified below. The Academy Complaints Co-ordinator should inform the Information Governance Officer of a summary of the complaint as soon as it is received and its resolution when complete.

The complaint at Stage 1 can be:

- Dismissed in whole or in part;
- Upheld in whole or in part;
- Not substantiated (where there is insufficient evidence to prove one way or the other).

6.3.5 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) – In accordance with the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework, persons making a complaint about an academy with EYFS will be notified of the outcome of an investigation within 28 working days of having received the complaint.

6.3.6 The following timeframes will be adhered to for complaints at Stage 1:

- A formal complaint in writing will be acknowledged as soon as possible in writing and within a maximum of 3 school days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays.
- The Academy will endeavour to respond as soon as possible and wherever practicable within a maximum of 30 school days of receipt of the stage 1 complaint. The maximum time should only be necessary for particularly complex complaints, or, where there are other exceptional circumstances that cause unavoidable delays. If it is not possible to respond to the complainant within this timeframe, a letter explaining the reasons for this and an expected full response date will be issued.

6.4 Stage 2 – Executive Review

6.4.1 If the complainant believes that their complaint has not been fully addressed at Stage 1, they may progress their complaint to Stage 2. A Stage 2 complaint should be made in writing, within 10 school days of receipt of the outcome letter at Stage 1 and emailed to Governance@clf.uk Support is available to anyone who requires help in setting out their complaint in writing by contacting the Academy Complaints Coordinator.

6.4.2 A member of the Governance Team will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 3 school days of receipt or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays.

6.4.3 The complainant will be invited to meet/talk with an Executive Principal at the outset of the process to discuss what remains unresolved from the Stage 1 investigation. The purpose of this meeting is to enable the Executive Principal to understand the full scope of the complaint and the desired outcomes before their review. The Executive Principal will evaluate the process at Stage 1 and will not consider any new issues that were not included in the initial complaint.

6.4.4 The Executive Principal will consider all relevant evidence; this may include but is not limited to:

- All evidence and outcome letter from Stage 1;
- A meeting with/statement from the complainant;
- A meeting with/statement from any individual who is the subject of the complaint;
- Relevant policies and whether they were followed

The Executive Principal will keep detailed written notes of their investigation.

6.4.5 The complaint at Stage 2 can be:

- Dismissed in whole or in part;
- Upheld in whole or in part;
- Not substantiated (where there is insufficient evidence to prove one way or the other)

6.4.6 The Executive Principal will endeavour to inform the complainant of their decision in writing within 15 school days of receipt of the complaint. They should explain clearly how they have come to their decision. They should set out, in detail, any agreed actions to be undertaken as a result of their decision. Finally, they should provide the complainant with details of how to progress the complaint to Stage 3 if they believe their complaint has not been fully addressed.

If it is not possible for the Executive Principal to respond to the complainant within this timeframe, a letter explaining the reasons for this and including an expected full response date will be issued.

If a complaint cannot be resolved through our internal processes, it may be escalated to Stage 3. We take the escalation to Stage 3 very seriously.

6.5 Stage 3 – Panel review

6.5.1 If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the response and wishes to escalate the complaint, they should write to the Clerk to the Academy Council giving full details of the complaint,

enclosing all relevant supporting documentation within 10 school days of receipt of the decision under Stage 2.

A request for a panel hearing will only be considered if the complainant has invoked Stages 1 and 2 of the complaints process.

6.5.2 The Chair or a nominated Councillor from the academy concerned will, once in receipt of the complaint, schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 20 school days.

6.5.3 The Chair or a nominated Councillor (supported by the Clerk) will convene a Complaints Panel of three people who have not been involved in previous consideration of the complaint. The composition of the Complaints Panel will depend on the nature and level of the complaint. For complaints about:

- the Principal (in whole or part);
- a member of the Executive Team;
- more than one academy;
- the federation;
- or governance;

the panel will comprise of:

- The Chair or nominated Councillor from the relevant academy (or another academy within the CLF);
- A member of the CLF Board of Trustees;
- A person that is independent of the management and running of both the academy and the federation.

For any other complaint the panel will comprise of:

- The Chair or nominated councillor from the relevant academy;
- Two additional Chairs or Academy Councillors from within the Trust;
- The complainant may ask the Clerk to the Academy Council to inform them who has been appointed to sit on the Complaint Panel ahead of the Panel Hearing. Fair consideration will be given to any reasonable objection to a particular member of the panel.

Where there are exceptional circumstances, the Federation Complaints Officer will determine the make-up of the panel (for example, where a complaint is made about the Academy Council or another aspect of governance).

The Chair should liaise with the Clerk to Academy Council who will facilitate this process.

6.5.4 The complainant may be accompanied to the hearing if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be necessary. All access needs will be supported wherever possible, including the provision of a translator if required.

6.5.5 The agenda for the panel will be determined by the nature of the complaint and may include time to speak with the complainant or academy individually if appropriate.

6.5.6 The aim of the hearing is to consider those elements of the Stage 2 response to the complaint with which the complainant remains dissatisfied and to achieve reconciliation between the Academy and the complainant. The panel will not consider any new complaints that have not been raised as part of the initial complaint. If the Complaints Panel deems it necessary, the Chair will arrange for the complaint to be further investigated. If such further investigation is required, the panel will be suspended and will reconvene at the conclusion of those investigations. After due consideration of all facts the panel considers relevant, the panel will reach a decision on the balance of probabilities as to whether or not the complaint is upheld.

The panel can:

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- Decide the complaint is not substantiated (where there is insufficient evidence to prove one way or the other);
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- Recommend changes to systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

6.5.7 It is recognised that the complainant may not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which satisfy the complainant that their complaint has been taken seriously.

6.5.8 The Chair of the Complaints Panel will write to the complainant informing them of the panel's decision and the reasons for this decision. The panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise confirmed in writing to the complainant (where applicable), the Principal and Executive Principal of the Academy, the Head of Governance and, where relevant, the person complained of.

6.5.9 The following timeframes will be adhered to for complaints heard by a panel under stage 3:

- A formal complaint in writing will be acknowledged as soon as possible in writing and within a maximum of 3 school days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays.
- A panel will be convened as soon as possible and normally within 15 school days.
- Formal response will be provided within 20 school days of receipt of the complaint escalation wherever practicable.

If it is not possible to respond to the complainant within this timeframe, a letter explaining the reasons for this and an expected full response date will be issued.

The formal response must state that the panel's decision is final and that there is no further avenue for appeal within the Federation's internal complaints procedure. If a complainant remains unsatisfied, they may seek advice from the following government webpage: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complain-about-an-academy/complain-about-an-academy

7 Complaints Campaigns

7.1 7.1 Where the Trust receives a large number of complaints which are the same or substantially similar, or where complaints are made as part of an organised campaign, the Trust will acknowledge receipt and deal with the issues raised collectively. A single response may be issued on behalf of the Trust and published on the Trust's website or shared directly with complainants. This response will be considered to represent the Trust's final position on the matter.

8 Resolving Complaints

8.1 At each stage in the procedure the Federation will keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- An apology.
- An explanation.
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better.
- An explanation of what steps have been taken to ensure that the situation will not recur.
- An undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint.

8.2 It is useful if complainants are able to state what actions the feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the situation could have been handled better is not an admission of negligence.

9. Timescales for Raising Complaints

9.1 Cabot Learning Federation believes that concerns and complaints are best resolved at the earliest possible opportunity. Early resolution supports open dialogue, fair investigation and, where possible, the restoration of positive relationships.

9.2 As a general guide, complaints should be brought within three months of the incident(s) concerned.

9.3 Where a complaint is raised outside this timeframe — for example, where a child has left the school — the academy/trust will consider whether there are **exceptional or compelling reasons** for the delay before deciding whether the complaint can be investigated. In deciding whether to accept a late complaint, the academy/trust will take into account:

• the reasons given for the delay

• the seriousness and nature of the issues raised

• the availability and reliability of evidence

• whether staff or others involved are still accessible

• whether a fair, proportionate and meaningful investigation remains possible

Where it is not possible to investigate a matter fully due to the passage of time, the school/trust will explain this clearly and sensitively to the complainant and, where appropriate, may offer alternative forms of response, such as a reflective review or learning outcome.

10 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

10.1 In respect of children within the Early Years Foundation Stage of academies with EYFS:

- records of complaints will be kept for at least three years; and
- parents or carers may make a complaint to Ofsted online at https://contact.ofsted.gov.uk/online-complaints-schools or by phoning 0300 123 4666

11 Vexatious complaints

11.1 The CLF are fully committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, in a friendly, respectful and professional way. Complainants are asked to understand the need to behave in a similar way as it is in everyone's best interest to help ensure the matter can be resolved as quickly and informally as possible. However the CLF does not expect its staff, Members of the Board or Academy Councillors to tolerate behaviour by complainants which is unacceptable, for example, which is abusive, offensive or threatening, and they will take action to protect staff, Members of the Board or Academy Councillors from any such behaviour if it occurs. Also, there may be complainants who, because of the frequency of their contact with the Academy, hinder our consideration of their, or other people's, complaints and potentially the running of the academy.

11.2 It is anticipated that such behaviour will be a very rare occurrence, but if it is considered that a complainant's behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, they will be told why and ask them to change it. If the behaviour continues, action may be taken to restrict the complainant's contact with the academy.

11.3 The decision to restrict access to the academy will be taken by the Principal, Executive Principal or Head of Governance. Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. They may include:

- requesting contact in a particular form (for example, emails only);
- requiring contact to take place only with a named member of staff;
- restricting telephone calls, meetings or emails to specified days and times;
- asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their conduct.

11.4 In all cases the complainant will be told why it is believed his or her behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, what action will be taken, the duration of that action and how they can challenge the decision if they disagree with it.

11.5 Where a complainant continues to behave in a way which is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, the academy (or CLF) may decide to terminate contact with that complainant and discontinue any investigation into their complaint. If the academy (or CLF) decides to carry on treating someone as an unreasonably persistent complainant and the investigations are still ongoing six months later, a review will be carried out to determine if restrictions will continue.

11.6 Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, members of the Board or Academy Councillors, the academy (or CLF) will consider other options, for example banning the person/s from site, reporting the matter to the police and/or taking legal action. In such cases, the complainant may not be given prior warning of that action.

11.7 Where a complainant whose case is closed persists in communicating with the Academy or CLF about it, the academy (or CLF) may decide to terminate contact with that complainant. In such cases, the academy (or CLF) will read all correspondence from that complainant, but unless there is fresh evidence which affects the decision on the complaint it will simply be acknowledged or placed on file with no acknowledgement.

11.8 New complaints from people who have come under the unreasonably persistent complainant's policy will be treated on the merit of that new complaint.

12 Managing and Recording Complaints

12.1 The Federation and its Academies will keep a written record of all formal complaints (including whether resolved at stage 1, proceeded to a stage 2 or a stage 3 panel hearing). This written record will include:

- basic information about each complaint including the date on which they were received.
- the status (and dates) of each complaint including whether it proceeded to stage 2 or stage 3.
- all paperwork relating to any investigation carried out and their final outcome and associated letters.
- findings and recommendations from any stage 3 panels.

12.2 Brief notes of meetings and telephone calls should be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record. Written records will be kept for at least three years. The Academy Complaints Coordinator is responsible for records and their safe storage. All correspondence, and statements and records of complaint must be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act (for example Ofsted) requests access to them. A copy of findings and recommendations from panels must be available for inspection on the school premises by the Cabot Learning Federation (proprietor) and the Principal.

12.3 The Academy Councils and Federation Board should monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure.

12.4 The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) introduced in May 2018 provided individuals with the legal Right to complain to a Supervisory Authority (i.e. the Information Commissioner (ICO)) if they "consider that the processing of personal information relating to him / her infringes . . ." GDPR. The ICO expects organisations to resolve complaints directly with individuals without the need for individuals to engage them.

12.5 Any complaints received which relate to the processing of personal information processed by CLF, or third party 'processors' acting on our behalf, should be referred to the CLF Data Protection Officer (DPO) for advice and guidance.

12.6 Similarly, any formal complaints received from the ICO (known as Requests for Assessment) must be referred to the CLF DPO immediately because the ICO applies relatively short time limits by which organisations must respond to the points raised with them.

12.7 All colleagues involved in managing complaints must remember that individuals have a Right to Access personal information we hold about them, including complaints information, unless one of the narrow exemptions available in the law apply. Therefore, personal information held in relation to complaints should be factual, accurate and necessary for the purpose of investigating and responding to the complaint.

13 Publicising the Procedure

13.1 There is a legal requirement for the Complaints Procedure to be published. The Complaints Policy will be published on the CLF website and that of all CLF academies.

Annex 1 – Local Academy Procedures

Each CLF Academy will publish their local arrangements (including details of who their complaints coordinator is) within this Annex of the policy published on their Academy website.

Academy Name:

Complaints Coordinator:

Contact details for Academy Complaints Coordinator:

CLF Details

The Head of Governance is the nominated Complaints Officer of the Federation and has responsibility for the operation and management of the Federation complaints procedure.

Head of Governance:	Elizabeth Tincknell
Contact details:	Cabot Learning Federation, King's Oak Academy, Brook Road, Bristol BS15 4JT Governance@clf.uk

Appendix 1

Cabot Learning Federation Complaint Form

The Federation is keen to resolve concerns and complaints quickly and informally.

Concerns relating to individual academies should be raised with the Academy directly. Academies will discuss the concern or complaint in person or by telephone wherever possible in order to fully understand it and resolve it as soon as possible.

Should the matter not be resolved informally within 30 school days, or where parents, carers and members of the public are not satisfied with the response to the complaint raised informally, they may proceed with Stage 1 of this procedure. As part of the Stage 1 process, we would ask you to fill in all sections of this form and **return it to the Complaints Coordinator at the Academy**.

Your Name	
Child's Name (if applicable)	
Main Contact Telephone Number	
Email Address	

We collate your personal information to allow us record, investigate and respond to your complaint, and also for quality control purposes. We use the information provided to verify your identity where required, contact you by post, email or telephone and to maintain our records.

Please provide details of your complaint, including as much detail as possible eg dates, description of what happened, names of those involved if known
If needed, please continue on a separate sheet

Date you reported the incident/issue to the Academy?	
Who did you report the incident/issue to?	
What response did you receive?	

Have you already made a complaint about this incident/issue to the Academy?	YES/NO **Please delete as applicable*
If Yes, please confirm when and who you reported it to:	

Please detail below what you feel would be the best way to resolve your complaint and the outcome you are looking for to bring the matter to an acceptable conclusion for both yourself, and the Academy/CLF.

Signed:	
Dated:	

Academy Use:

Date received	
Date of acknowledgement	
Response due by	
Date logged	