



# Guidance to Support the Complaints Policy

## Handling Initial Concerns

Guidance date: \_\_\_\_\_ October 2019 \_\_\_\_\_

To be reviewed on: \_\_\_\_\_ As necessary \_\_\_\_\_



## Introduction

This guidance aims to provide staff with information to support them with handling initial concerns/informal complaints from parents/carers and members of the public.

The guidance contained within this document should be used in accordance with the Complaints Policy. All staff across the Trust and our schools should have read and be aware of the Exceed Academies Trust Complaints Policy.

The aim of our Complaints Policy is to achieve a satisfactory outcome for all parties in a friendly and amicable way.

## Handling Concerns Informally

Exceed Academies Trust believes that it is in the best interests of everyone to make every effort to handle concerns without the need for formal procedures. The requirement for the Trust and our schools to have a complaints procedure need not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern informally.

In most cases, the class teacher will receive the first approach. Whilst it is understood that it will not always be possible, it would be helpful if staff were able to resolve issues on the spot in a calm and polite manner. It is acknowledged that there will be times when a person raising a concern will be difficult and potentially loud and aggressive; however, members of staff representing the Exceed Academies Trust are expected to act professionally and sensibly at all times.

Every effort should be made to quash concerns/complaints informally and quickly. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the number that develop into formal complaints. People may wish to ask questions or express an opinion, and schools should aim to create an environment that supports, welcomes and respects the involvement of others.

It is easier said than done but staff need to avoid taking any concerns raised personally and try to appease the person raising the concern where possible. Quite often, this may be achieved by offering an expression of regret that someone is concerned about an issue, or that he or she has been inconvenienced by an incident through the use of a simple statement such as “I’m sorry that you feel like that” or “I’m sorry to hear what has happened”. This is not an admission of liability but creates a sympathetic environment and may make the person raising the concern calmer and more willing to discuss their concern in a polite and reasonable manner.

When a concern is raised, please keep in mind ways in which it can be resolved quickly and calmly. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the concern raised 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 assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking that the school will review any related policies in light of the complaint.

It will usually help with determining how to resolve any issue if complainants are encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem.

## **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality must be maintained at all times. All conversations and correspondence must be treated with discretion. Parents must feel confident a complaint will not disadvantage their child. All parties to a complaint will need to accept that some sharing of information will be inevitable if the complaint is to be investigated fully. However, the sharing of information should be kept to a minimum so not to compromise subsequent stages of the complaints process. Discussing a complaint with other members of staff should be avoided, unless information specific to the complaint is required from that person.

## **Dealing with Unreasonable/Irrational Complainants**

Exceed Academies Trust does not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour. If anyone raising a concern is abusive, offensive or threatening, staff should politely advise them that their concerns will not be listened to unless they express them in an appropriate manner. If they do not alter their behaviour, they should be asked to leave and the member of staff should move away to a safe place and seek assistance if required. If the complainant returns, they should be given the opportunity to raise their concerns but advised that the discussion will be ended if their behaviour becomes unacceptable again. In these circumstances, staff may wish to be supported by a colleague or request that a more senior member of staff hears the concerns.

## **Formal Complaints**

If after all efforts have been made to resolve concerns informally, a complainant wishes to formalise their complaint, they should be advised to follow the Complaints Policy commencing at stage 1. Staff should offer to provide a copy of the Complaints Policy as well as advising that it can be accessed on the Trust's website as well as on each school's website.

## **Further guidance**

Further guidance on dealing with complaints can be provided by the Trust's Clerk and Projects Officer.