



Complaints Policy & Procedure

This policy is reviewed biennially or earlier if there is a relevant change in legislation

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Directors:	This document should be received by the SENDAT Full Trust Board

Aims

SENDAT aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of students at all SENDAT Schools / Alternative Provisions (APs).

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
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school 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 *school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

*The term "school" applies to any SENDAT school or Alternative Provision..

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to the school about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters (Child protection allegations)
- Exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

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

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

It is in everyone's interest 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. SENDAT [Directors and Leadership Teams](#) take concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Headteacher / Head of School/AP will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, he/she will refer you to another staff colleague. The colleague may be more senior but not necessarily if somebody at a less senior level is more appropriate.. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is the most important consideration.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns more formally. In this case, the Headteacher / Head of School/AP will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing (including by email) or by telephone. The complaint may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or Headteacher / Head of School/AP. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual SENDAT Directors or Local Academy Board (LAB) members to raise concerns or complaints. SENDAT Directors and LAB members have no power to act on an individual basis and involvement at this stage may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher / Head of School/AP) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher / Head of School/AP either directly or via the SENDAT HR Manager, marked "PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL"

Email: hr@sendat.academy

Postal address: HR Manager, SENDAT, Ask House, 2 Northgate Avenue, Bury St Edmunds IP32 6BB

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher / Head of School/AP should be addressed to the Chair of the SENDAT Full Trust Board, via the SENDAT HR Manager, marked "PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL".

Complaints about the Chair of the SENDAT Full Trust Board, any individual Director or the whole Trust Board should be addressed to the Clerk to the Trust Board, marked "PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL".

Email: graham.cowles@sendat.academy

Postal address: SENDAT, Ask House, 2 Northgate Avenue, Bury St Edmunds IP32 6BB.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the SENDAT HR Manager.. You may also wish to ask third party organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this Complaints procedure. This may include providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher / Head of School/AP or Chair of the SENDAT Board of Directors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

Complaints should normally be made 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

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

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by the school, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions to SENDAT Schools /APs • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals 	<p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with the Headteacher.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can</i></p>

	<i>be made through the school's Complaints procedure.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Curriculum - content 	<p>Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus</p>

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 a complainant commences legal action against the school 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

At each stage in the procedure, the school wants 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

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

Stage 1 – Informal complaints

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or a member of the School's Leadership team. Complainants should not approach individual Directors or Local Academy Board (LAB) members 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.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide an informal written response within 10 school working days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Stage 2 – Formal complaints

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher / Head of School/AP (unless they are about the Headteacher / Head of School/AP), either directly or via the SENDAT HR Manager. . This may be done in person, in writing (including email) (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by telephone.

The recipient will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days.

Within this response, the Headteacher / Head of School/AP / HR Manager will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher / Head of School/AP will then consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of resolving the matter..

Note: The Headteacher / Head of School/AP may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but the final decision regarding the outcome of the complaint will be taken by the Headteacher / Head of School/AP. In making this decision, the Headteacher / Head of School/AP will consider the evidence contained in the investigation and any other relevant information.

During the investigation, the Investigating Officer will:

- Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied by a work colleague or TU representative if they wish.
- Keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the Investigating Officer will provide a written report to the Headteacher /

Head of School/AP. If possible The Headteacher / Head of School/AP will consider the report and any other relevant information, before providing a formal written response to the complaint, normally within 20 school days of the date of receipt of the original complaint.

If the Headteacher / Head of School/AP is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

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.

The Headteacher / Head of School/AP will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher / Head of School/AP, or a member of the Trust Board (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled SENDAT Director will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the Headteacher / Head of School/AP or member of the Trust Board must be made to the Trust Clerk, via the SENDAT HR Manager.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Trust Board or
- the majority of the Trust Board

Stage 2 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Trust Board. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

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 meeting with members of the Trust Board’s complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial SENDAT Directors who are available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk, via the SENDAT HR Manager, within five school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The Trust Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Trust Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Trust Clerk 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.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three SENDAT Directors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three SENDAT Directors available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent Directors / Governors through another local school or partner Trust in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 3.

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.

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 normally allow either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting.

If a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their TU representative or staff colleague.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not normally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Trust Clerk 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 at least five school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least five school days before the date of the meeting. 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.

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.

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.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld as a 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.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and the school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within five school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Trust Board or
- the majority of the Trust Board

Stage 3 will be heard by a committee of independent, co-opted governors.

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.

A written record will be kept of all formal complaints, and of whether they are resolved at Stage 2, or proceed to a panel hearing.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school 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 Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Joy Kent, SENDAT Priory School, Mount Road, Bury St Edmunds IP322 7BH or by email to joy.kent@sendat.academy, 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:
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:

Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate 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
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigating Officer

The investigating Officer'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.

The investigating officer 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 Headteacher / Head of School/AP or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The Headteacher / Head of School/AP 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.

Complaints Co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, Headteacher / Head of School/AP, Chair of SENDAT Directors and Clerk to FTB, 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.

Clerk to the Trust Board

The Clerk 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 Data Protection Act (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

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, 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.

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- 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 Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so

No governor 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 is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent 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.