Pickwick Academy Trust

Complaints Policy

Policy Group:	**Staffing & HR**
Policy Ref:	**SHR/04**
Responsible Reviewing Officer and Job Title:	**James Passmore Chief Executive Officer**
Date Written:	**March 2026**
Date Approved by the Board:	**21/07/2026**
Date of Next Review:	**March 2027**

1. Introduction

a. Pickwick Academy Trust recognises that at times things can and do go wrong. We take all concerns seriously. We are committed to working in partnership with parents/carers to resolve issues quickly and effectively, and tackle concerns with genuine dignity and respect. The Trust Board, Governors, leaders and staff in all the Trust's schools believe that it is in everyone's best interest to resolve concerns and complaints at the earliest possible stage.

b. There is an expectation on parents/carers and the school/Trust that all parties involved in a concern/complaint will spend time and effort in partnership on resolving issues informally before they are considered for an escalation to our more formal complaints stages. Our experience is that the majority of concerns/complaints can be satisfactorily resolved informally.

c. Pickwick Academy Trust is dedicated to continuing to provide the highest quality of education possible in all of its schools throughout the informal and formal stages of this policy.

d. This policy seeks to help parents understand how to resolve concerns about their child's education and to provide a framework to respond to complaints from parents, students and members of the wider public.

e. This policy 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 of pupils at the Trust's schools.

f. It is also based on guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE) on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations and refers to good practice guidance on setting up a complaints procedure from the Department for Education (DfE).

2. Purpose and Scope

a. The scope of this policy covers most concerns and complaints that the schools and the Trust are likely to receive from parents, pupils, or members of the wider public. However, it is not intended to cover aspects for which there are specific statutory requirements, such as

SEND, data protection, curriculum and admissions. This policy will be applied to all complaints except in the cases summarised in the table at Appendix A.

b. At any stage within the complaints procedure a decision may be made, based upon details of the complaint, to refer it to a different Pickwick or school policy/procedure. These policies/procedures may run concurrently with a complaint under this policy, or may replace this policy completely, depending on the nature of the complaint/concern.

c. We request that complainants do not discuss complaints or concerns publicly, including but not limited to via social media, such as Facebook or X (formerly Twitter), before, during or after use of this Policy

d. Complaints should be lodged promptly, or at least within 3 months of the incident. If a complaint is received after this time, the Trust will take no further action, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

e. The Pickwick Academy Trust complaints policy will:
   - Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible.
   - Be easily accessible and publicised.
   - Be simple to understand and use.
   - Involve management that will be impartial and non-adversarial.
   - Allow swift handling with established time limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress.
   - Ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary.
   - Respect people's desire for confidentiality.
   - Address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress where necessary.
   - Provide information to the Trust and its leadership teams so that services can be improved.
   - Not investigate an anonymous concern or complaint under this policy unless there are exceptional circumstances. The CEO (for Trust level complaints) or Headteacher (for School level complaints) will determine whether an anonymous complaint warrants an investigation.

3. Responsibilities and Accountabilities

a. The Board of Trustees is responsible for:

- Reviewing and approving this policy
- Appointing an investigator to deal with a complaint against the CEO

b. The CEO is responsible for:

- The broadcast of this policy across the Trust and for its promulgation
- Appointing an investigator to deal with a complaint against a member of the Trust's central team

c. Headteachers are responsible for:

- The policy's implementation in his/her school and for ensuring staff are aware of its content.
- Appointing an investigator to deal with a complaint against a member of staff in their school.
- Being committed to working in partnership with the school community, keeping open communications with the aim of minimizing concerns/complaints and resolving any that do occur at an informal/early stage.

Who to raise a concern/lodge a complaint with:

Complaint about	Address your complaint to (Complaint Lead Officer)	Contact information
Member of staff (apart from Head)	Head	Contact the Head via the School admin email address: see school website or contact school office
Head	Chair of Governors	Contact the Chair of Governors via the clerk email address: see school website or contact school office and/or use governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk
Governor (apart from Chair of Governors)	Chair of Governors	Contact the Chair of Governors via the clerk email address: see school website or contact school office and/or use

		governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk
Clerk to the Governors	Chair of Governors	Contact the Chair of Governors via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance: governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk
Chair of Governors	CEO	Contact the CEO via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance : governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk
Member of Pickwick central staff team (apart from CEO)	CEO	Contact the CEO via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance : governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk
CEO	Chair of Trust Board	Contact the Chair of the Trust Board via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance : governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk
Trustee (not Chair of Trustees)	Chair of Trust Board	Contact the Chair of the Trust Board via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance : governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk
Chair of Trustees	Chair of the Member group	Contact the Chair of the Member Group via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance : governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk
Member (not Chair of Member group)	Chair of the Member group	Contact the Chair of the Member Group via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance : governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk

Chair of the Member group	Chair of Trust Board	Contact the Chair of the Trust Board via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance : governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk

d. The complainant is responsible for:

- Explaining the concern/complaint in full and as early as possible.
- Being committed to working in partnership with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint, with the aim of resolving it at an informal stage.
- Explaining clearly what they want to achieve by raising a concern/complaint, i.e. what outcome they are seeking.
- Responding to requests within the timescales set out in the policy.
- Treating all those in the complaint with respect.
- Asking for assistance if/when needed.

e. The Complaint Lead Officer (See Table above) is responsible for:

- Contacting the complainant to clarify details of the complaint and to explain the process which will be used to investigate the complaint.
- Being committed to working in partnership with the complainant in seeking a solution to the complaint, with the aim of resolving it at an informal stage.
- Providing a sensitive and thorough interviewing process of the complainant to establish what has happened and who is involved.
- Ensuring clear and comprehensive records are kept at every stage of the investigation.
- Considering all records, evidence and relevant information provided
- Interviewing all parties involved in the complaint, including staff and pupils.
- Analysing all information in a comprehensive and fair manner
- Liaising with the complainant and clarifying an appropriate resolution to the complaint
- Identifying and recommending solutions and courses of action to take.
- Adhering to the timescales set out in the policy and ensuring all parties are aware of those timescales.
- Responding to the complainant in a clear and understandable manner.
- Being, or appointing, the Investigating Officer at Stage 2

f. Where a Stage 3 Appeal Panel meeting is required, the Clerk to the Trust Board/School is responsible for:

- Organising the time, date and venue of the panel meeting and inviting all attendees.
- Ensuring all relevant material is distributed to all parties in advance of the meeting date in accordance with the timescales set out in the policy.
- Taking minutes of the meeting, circulating the minutes of the meeting to the panel (complainant on request) and notifying all parties of the outcome of the hearing, within 5 working days of the hearing.

g. Where a Stage 3 Appeal Panel meeting is required, the Panel Chair is responsible for:

- Ensuring that minutes of the panel are taken.
- Explaining the remit of the panel to the complainant.
- Ensuring all issues are addressed and that outcomes are reached based on facts and evidence.
- Conducting the hearing in a manner that ensures everyone is treated with respect and courtesy.
- Confirming that no member of the panel has been involved in the earlier stages of the procedure or has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings
- Giving the complainant and the Trust the opportunity to state their case and seek clarity without undue interruption.
- Providing copies of any written material or evidence to all those in attendance at the panel meeting and ensuring that everyone has seen the necessary material.
- Ensuring the procedure runs smoothly, in liaison with the Clerk.
- Ensuring that a copy of the Stage 3 panel outcome findings and recommendations is provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about
- Ensuring that a copy of the Stage 3 panel outcome finding and recommendations is available for inspection on the school premises by the Trust and the Headteacher

h. Where a Stage 3 Appeal Panel meeting is required, Panel Members are responsible for:

- Ensuring the review panel meeting is independent and impartial.
- Ensuring that no individual with prior involvement in the complaint, or the circumstances surrounding it, sits on the panel.
- Being aware that the aim of the panel is to achieve a reasonable resolution and attain reconciliation between the parties involved.
- Ensuring the complainant is made to feel welcome and at ease at the panel meeting.

4. Definitions / explanations of terms used.

a. The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:
   - A concern is defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought". The Trust will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.
   - A complaint is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action".

b. The term 'parent/carer' has been used throughout this document to include parents, legal guardians and full-time carers.

c. A 'school day' is defined as a weekday during term time. It does not include weekends, school holidays and bank holidays.

5. Procedure

a. The Trust's complaints procedure consists of three stages:
   - Stage 1 – Concerns and complaints dealt with informally (the aim is that the vast majority of concerns can be resolved at this stage working in partnership with parents/carers without having to escalate to the more formal Stage 2 and Stage 3 part of the process)
   - Stage 2 – Complaints formally investigated by an Investigating Officer appointed by the Complaints Lead Officer (See Table above)
   - Stage 3 – Complaint Panel Hearing to Appeal against the outcome of the formal investigation carried out at Stage 2.

6. Time Limits

a. Time limits for each stage of the procedure are set out under each individual stage. Although every effort will be made to comply with the time limits specified, it may not always be possible to do so, for

example, due to the complexity of the matter raised or due to the unavailability of the complainant or a key staff member, for example to attend a meeting if one is offered. However, where a time limit cannot be complied with, the School or the Trust will write to the complainant within the specified time limit, setting out the reasons why the time limit cannot be complied with and confirm the new time limit which will apply.

7. Retention of records

a. The School/Trust will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, the final outcome and any action taken by the school. This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally in line with our data retention policy, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel. This is except where the Secretary of State (or someone acting on their behalf) asks to see it, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

b. Records of Stage 2 complaints investigated by the Head are kept by the school for a period of three years from the date the complaint is resolved and then securely destroyed.

c. Records of Stage 3 complaint appeals, investigated at Stage 2 by the Head but then escalated to a Stage 3 appeal run by the Trust, are kept centrally by the Trust for a period of three years from the date the complaint is resolved and then securely destroyed.

d. Records of Stage 2 or Stage 3 complaints made about a Head or a member of Pickwick's Central/Executive Team, are kept centrally by the Trust for a period of six years from the date the complaint is resolved and then securely destroyed.

e. Records of Stage 2 or Stage 3 complaints that refer to negligence are kept centrally by the school/Trust for a period of fifteen years from the date the complaint is resolved and then securely destroyed.

f. Records of Stage 2 or Stage 3 complaints that relate to a pupil with an Educational Health Care Plan, are kept by the school/Trust until the pupil reaches the age of 31 years.

g. Records of Stage 2 or Stage 3 complaints that relate to a pupil with

child protection or safeguarding plans, are kept by the school/Trust until the pupil reaches the age of 75 years.

8. Confidentiality

a. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access is requested by the Secretary of State, a school inspector or under another legal authority.

9. Making a complaint - The Three Stages

At Pickwick Academy Trust, we reaffirm our expectation that complainants and the School/Trust will work in partnership to resolve the vast majority of concerns raised at Stage 1. Time, commitment and effort will need to be expended and evidenced by both parties to resolve the concern. If, despite everyone's best efforts, the matter remains unresolved and there is a stalemate between the complainant and the School/Trust, the School will write to the complainant to confirm that they will need to progress to the formal Stage 2 investigation to seek a formal resolution (described below).

10. Making a complaint – Stage 1 – informal resolution

a. A concern or complaint should be made either in person, in writing (including email), or by telephone, to the appropriate Lead Complaint Officer (see Table below). They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, if they have appropriate consent to do so. This consent to act on behalf of another must be evidenced to the school/Trust before any progress is made towards a resolution.

11. Complaint about	Address your complaint to (Complaint Lead Officer)	Contact information
Member of staff (apart from Head)	Head	School admin email address – see school website or contact school office.

Head	Chair of Governors	School governors clerk email address – see school website or contact school office or via governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk
Governor (apart from Chair of Governors)	Chair of Governors	School governors clerk email address – see school website or contact school office.
Clerk to Governors	Chair of Governors	Contact the Chair of Governors via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance : governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk
Chair of Governors	CEO	Contact the CEO via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance : governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk
Member of Pickwick central staff team (apart from CEO)	CEO	Contact the CEO via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance : governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk
CEO	Chair of Trust Board	Contact the Chair of the Trust Board via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance: governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk
Trustee (not Chair of Trustees)	Chair of Trust Board	Contact the Chair of the Trust Board via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance : governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk
Chair of Trustees	Chair of the Member group	Contact the Chair of the Member Group via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance : governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk
Member (not Chair of Member group)	Chair of the Member group	Contact the Chair of the Member Group via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance : governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk

Chair of the Member group	Chair of Trust Board	Contact the Chair of the Trust Board via Pickwick's Head of Governance and Compliance: governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk

a. A complaint form template is included as Appendix B which may be used. If help is required in completing the form, please contact the school office or the central Pickwick Academy Trust office. Alternatively, help can be sought from third party organisations such as Citizens Advice.

b. Any complaint correspondence that is received by Trust or school leaders that is addressed to the incorrect Complaints Lead Officer, copies in multiple leaders/external bodies, or does not follow this complaint process in any other way, will be forwarded onto the Trust's Head of Governance and Compliance who will reinforce the Trust's commitment to resolution and will signpost/advise as appropriate to the correct stage and recipient as detailed in this policy.

c. The school or Trust will aim to resolve a concern raised under Stage 1 within 15 school days of the date it was raised, however the Stage 1 process can be repeated multiple times to achieve a resolution.

d. If, despite the best efforts of both the school and the complainant, no resolution can be found, the School/Trust will issue written confirmation to the complainant that deadlock at Stage 1 has been reached, and that the School/Trust will acknowledge that the complaint should proceed to the formal investigation under Stage 2.

e. At Stage 1, the Complaint Lead Officer may investigate the concern themselves or ask another school leader to do this if appropriate.

f. The member of staff dealing with a concern will make a written record of the issues raised, the action taken and, if applicable, the resolution reached, which will be retained in a central record by the Trust/School.

12. Making a complaint – Stage 2 – formal complaint

Stage 2 is for complaints which have already been considered under Stage 1 of the complaints policy where both the school and the complainant have agreed that despite their best efforts, it cannot be resolved informally, or that the school is treating the matter as a serious matter which requires formal investigation from the outset. Complaints which do not have written confirmation will be directed back to Stage 1.

a. If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1, they should submit a request to escalate their complaint to Stage 2 by writing to the Complaints Lead Officer as applicable to their complaint (see table above) outlining the reasons for a formal investigation. The complainant should set out clearly the nature of their complaint, any unresolved issues, including relevant dates and full names of persons involved, and clarify what action they believe would resolve the issue. Any supporting documentation should be attached to/ included with the complaint.

b. A further attempt to resolve at Stage 1 will be considered at this point with the aim of finding a resolution without a formal Stage 2 investigation.

c. The complaint will be acknowledged in writing within 5 school days of date of receipt. The acknowledgement letter will confirm the date that the formal complaint was received, the action to be taken and the specified time limit. It will also specify who has been appointed by the Complaints Lead Officer as the Investigating Officer.

d. The Investigating Officer will be a senior School/Trust leader or Governor/Trustee who has no prior involvement with the complaint, who may or may not also be the Complaints Lead Officer depending on the circumstances of the complaint.

e. The Investigating Officer will contact the complainant to clarify the details of the complaint and the methodology that will be used to investigate the complaint.

f. The complainant will be offered the opportunity to meet with the Investigating Officer and can be accompanied by a friend or relative (not acting in a legal capacity) to speak on their behalf or help them make their case. The notes from this meeting with the complainant by the Investigating Officer will be shared with the

complainant who will have 5 school days to request any amendments to the notes taken. If no request is received within this timescale then these notes will be accepted as agreed by all parties and will be relied upon in resolving the complaint.

g. The Investigating Officer will always meet with the person the complaint is about and take a statement from them as part of the Stage 2 investigation.

h. The Investigating Officer will interview relevant witnesses and take statements from those involved. These will be dated and signed.

i. If the complaint involves a pupil, they should also be interviewed, normally with a parent/carer present. In some cases, however, this may not be possible and a member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable will attend the interview.

j. The Investigating Officer will keep written records of all meetings, telephone conversations and any other communication throughout the investigation.

k. A full written response confirming the outcome of the investigation will be made to the complainant within 20 school days of the written complaint being received.

l. If any recommendations are made for actions by the school as a result of the Stage 2 investigation, these will be drawn up into a Stage 2 Action Plan, to be overseen until completion, by the Director of Education responsible for the school concerned.

m. The letter will set out the individual matters raised by the complainant, the findings made by the Investigating Officer and the conclusion reached.

n. The letter will inform the complainant that, if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation, they should write to the Complaints Lead Officer within 5 school days of receipt of the letter asking for the complaint and the Stage 2 investigation to be reviewed by a Stage 3 Appeal panel hearing as set out below. For complaints about Pickwick Academy Trust central team, the complainant should write to the Chair of the Trust Board.

o. Outcomes to a complaint may include:

- A finding that the complaint as a whole or any element of the complaint can be upheld, partially upheld or dismissed.
- A finding that the complaint requires no further action;
- A finding that there is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion such that the complaint cannot be upheld;
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better but this is not the same as an admission of negligence;
- An apology;
- An explanation of the steps taken that have been taken, or will be taken, to 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 or Trust procedures in the light of the complaint.

p. Where the complaint was received during a school holiday or within 20 days from the start of the Christmas, Easter or summer holidays the Complaints Lead Officer will endeavour to expedite the investigation wherever possible.

13. Making a complaint – Stage 3 – formal appeal to a panel

a. If an Action Plan was recommended as part of the Stage 2 resolution, an additional 5 school days will be added to this timeframe to allow for resolution of these actions, before the complainant can request a Stage 3 appeal.
b. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint under Stage 2 of the Complaints Policy, the complainant may write to the Complaints Lead Officer within 5 school days (10 days in the case of a Stage 2 Action Plan) of receiving the letter confirming the outcome of Stage 2 requesting a Stage 3 Appeal Panel hearing. Any requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

c. The complainant should not repeat the matters raised in their original letter or supporting documentation which has already been provided, but should clearly set out how and why they do not accept the findings made under Stage 2, what they would like the Panel to consider, and state what their desired outcome is of this final appeal. These items will be known as the Terms of Reference for a Stage 3 appeal, and no other matters apart from these Terms of Reference will be considered by the Appeal Panel.

d. The appropriate School/Trust Clerk will fulfil the role of Clerk to the Panel, organising the time and date of the appeal panel meeting, inviting all the attendees, collating all the relevant documentation and distributing these 5 school days in advance of the meeting. The Clerk will also record the proceedings in the form of minutes and circulate these with the outcome of the meeting.

e. The Complaints Lead Officer will write to the complainant within 5 school days of receipt to acknowledge receipt of their request for an appeal panel hearing.

f. The Appeals Panel will consist of at least three people with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. This could include members of the Trust executive team, governors from other schools and/or Trustees. One of the 3 panel members will be independent of the management and running of the school. Prior to the meeting, a Chair will be appointed. The Chair will ensure that the appeal hearing is minuted.

g. The acknowledgement letter will confirm the date that the formal request to review the decision was received, the action to be taken and the specified time limit. It will also include the names of the Appeal Panel members. If the complainant objects to any of the named persons being appointed to the Appeal Panel, they should notify the Clerk within 3 school days of receipt of the letter. Fair consideration will be given to any bona fide objection to a particular member of the Panel.

h. The Clerk 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 Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

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

j. The panel will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations if a meeting is not possible, but in making their decision, they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

k. The Panel may also choose to contact the complainant to seek clarity over the Terms of Reference, and/or the outcomes sought. This may lead to the Panel letting the complainant know that a Stage 3 panel is not appropriate, if the outcome that they are seeking is unachievable.

l. If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a friend, relative or colleague but they will not play any part in the proceedings unless invited to do so by the Chair. There may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate, such as 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.

m. If attendance of any pupils is required at the hearing, parental permission will be sought if they are under the age of 18 years. Extra care will be taken to consider the vulnerability of children where they are present at a complaints appeal hearing.

n. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

o. At least 10 school days before the meeting, the 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. The Clerk will also request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the Panel.

p. Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, any recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties concerned. The panel will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint.

q. 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 the minutes.

r. The decision of the panel is final and will be communicated in writing to the complainant, the Head of School/Headteacher/CEO and the Chair of Governors/Trustees within 5 school days from the date of the Appeal hearing.

s. There is no further right of appeal in respect of the decision of any panel of the Trust Board other than to the Secretary of State at the Department for Education on the grounds that the Trust Board has not followed the complaints process.

t. The appeal panel can make the following decisions:
- Dismiss or uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- Recommend changes to the school's or Trust's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

u. If the subject of the appeal is the Chief Executive Officer, the appeal should be lodged with the Chair of the Trust Board within 10 school days of the receipt of the stage 2 decision. Where there is a delay in submitting an appeal without good reason, the Chair of the Trust Board may decide that the appeal is out of time and will not be heard further. The Chair of the Trust Board will appoint a panel of two independent Trustees who have had no prior involvement in the matter and a panel member who is entirely independent of the management of the school or the Trust Board. The Panel will appoint its own chair who will ensure that the meeting is minuted.

v. The decision of the Panel is final and will be communicated in writing by the Chair of the Panel to the complainant, the Chief Executive Officer and the Chair of the Board within 5 school days.

w. There is no further right of appeal in respect of the decision of any panel of the Trust Board with regard to complaints about the Chief Executive Officer other than to the Secretary of State at the Department for Education on the grounds that the Trust Board has not followed the complaints process.

14. Withdrawal of a complaint

a. If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint at any point, they will be asked to do so in writing. If the complaint is not withdrawn in writing, the

Complaints Lead Officer will email the complainant stating that it is understood that the complaint has been withdrawn and that the matter is closed.

15. Habitual (persistent) or vexatious (unreasonable) complaints

a. Habitual and/or vexatious complainants can be a problem for staff, Governors and Trustees. The difficulty in handling such complaints can place a strain on time and resources. Whilst the school and Trust endeavours to respond with patience and sympathy to the needs of all complainants, there are times when there is nothing further which can reasonably be done to assist or to rectify a real or perceived problem.

b. Where a complainant tries to raise an issue, which has already been dealt with through the Trust's complaints procedure, and everything that could be reasonably done in response to the complaint has been done, the school or Trust will not reinvestigate the complaint except in exceptional circumstances, such as if new evidence has come to light.

c. If a complainant persists in raising the same issue, the Complaints Lead Officer will write to them to explain that the matter has been dealt with fully in line with the Trust's complaints procedure and that the matter is closed.

d. Whilst this list is not exhaustive, habitual or unreasonable complaints may include:
   - The complainant refuses to co-operate with the Trust's/school's relevant procedures;
   - The complainant changes the basis of the complaint as the complaint progresses by raising further concerns or questions;
   - The complainant is unwilling to accept the final decision and seeks an unrealistic outcome;
   - The complainant refuses to accept documented evidence of action taken or denies receiving information in spite of correspondence specifically answering their questions;
   - Excessive demands are made on the time of staff, governors and/or trustees and it is clearly intended to aggravate;
   - The complainant acts in a way that is threatening, abusive or offensive;
   - The complainant contacts the school on an excessive number of occasions.

16. Dealing with habitual or vexatious complaints

a. In cases of persistent or unreasonable complaints, or harassment, the school/Trust may take the following steps as appropriate:
    - Inform the complainant that their behaviour is now considered to be unreasonable or unacceptable and request a changed approach;
    - Restrict contact with the complainant to one form of communication either in person, by telephone or by email;
    - Restrict contact to liaison through a designated member of staff;
    - Notify the complainant that they have received a full response to their complaint and the school, or Trust, has tried to resolve the complaint and there is nothing more to be added.
    - Inform the complainant that any form of contact in relation to their complaint, or similar issues to their complaint, will be acknowledged but not answered;
    - Place restrictions on the complainant's access to the school or Trust site.

b. When a complainant has been determined as habitual or vexatious, that status will be regularly reviewed and, where appropriate, withdrawn. This action may be appropriate when the individual demonstrates a more reasonable approach or submits a further complaint which will be dealt with as a new complaint.

c. A panel, convened by the Lead Complaint Officer, will review a decision to categorise a complainant as habitual or vexatious every six months and decide if that category can be amended or withdrawn. The CEO will be kept informed of all such decisions.

17. Equal Opportunities

a. An Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment has been completed in order to ensure it complies with equality obligations outlined in discrimination legislation. The policy positively reflects the aims and ambitions of Pickwick Academy Trust.

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

18. Learning Lessons

The Pickwick Board of Trustees will review any underlying issues raised by complaints, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, will determine whether there are any improvements that can be made to procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

19. References, acknowledgements and associated documents

a. This policy will be implemented in conjunction with other Pickwick Academy Trust polices in the same group of policies including:
   - Grievance Policy
   - Behaviour Policy
   - Whistleblowing Policy
   - Data Protection and Secure Data Handling Policy
   - Parental Behaviour Policy
   - Safeguarding

20. Appendices

a. Appendix A: Exceptions – Complaints not covered by this policy
b. Appendix B: Complaint form template
c. Appendix C: Flowchart Summary of this policy

Appendix A: Exceptions – Complaints not covered by this policy

Subject of Complaint	How to complain and to whom
Admissions to school	Admissions authority – details will be provided on the admission sections of the relevant school's website. Please contact the school if you cannot access the information on the website.
Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs and Disability	Local Authority carrying out the assessment
Matters likely to require a Child Protection investigation	Designated Safeguarding Lead at the relevant school or via the relevant Local Children's Safeguarding Board – please see the safeguarding section on the relevant school's website. Please contact the school if you cannot access the information on the website. Complainants are not informed of the outcomes of actions under these procedures
Exclusion from school	Parents and carers may use school procedures to challenge permanent and fixed-term exclusions. Details of the processes to follow will be provided in the documentation provided at the time of the exclusion. In the event of queries, please contact the school for further details.
Whistleblowing	A copy of the Whistleblowing Policy is on the Trust's website. Please contact the school/Trust if you cannot access the information on the website.
Data Protection	Please see the Trust's Data Protection Policy for details on how to make a specific data protection complaint

Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures	The Trust has a Grievance Policy, a Staff Disciplinary Policy and a Professional Behaviours, Expectations and Standards Policy. Complainants are not informed of the outcomes of actions under any of these procedures.
Complaints about services provided by external bodies using a school's premises or facilities	Providers should be contacted directly and have their own procedures in place.

Appendix B: Complaint form template

Please complete and return to the School Office or Pickwick Academy Trust central office. You will receive an acknowledgment with details of what action will be taken.

Your Name:
Pupils Name:
Your relationship to the pupil:
Address:
Postcode:
Telephone No:
Please give details of your complaint:

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint. (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details
Signature:
Date:

Appendix Three : Flowchart Summary of this Policy

If you are in any doubt about who to complain to, please contact the relevant school office or governance@pickwickacademytrust.co.uk.

We are here to help

Stage 1 - Informal

Concerns and complaints dealt with informally (the aim is that the vast majority of concerns can be resolved at this stage working in partnership with parents/carers without having to escalate to the more formal Stage 2 and Stage 3 part of the process). The school or Trust will aim to resolve a concern raised under Stage 1 within 15 school days of the date it was raised, however the Stage 1 process can be repeated multiple times to achieve a resolution.

Resolved

Concern/complaint is resolved

No further action required

Unresolved

The stage 2 process is only where significant effort has been expended to resolve a problem and no solution can be found. We will only ~~move to / engage in Stage 2 where we can see both sides have worked hard to find a solution~~ in the best interests of the child, & that hasn't been successful..

Stage 2 - Formal

Despite repeating efforts at Stage 1, The school/Trust issues a "deadlock" confirmation to the complainants, confirming that despite the best efforts of all parties, no resolution can be found and the matter can proceed to a formal investigation by the Lead Complaint Officer relevant to the subject of the complaint. Complainant should write to the relevant Officer~~, see Table in the Policy for contact details.~~ The complaint will be acknowledged in writing within 5 school days of date of receipt. The acknowledgement letter will confirm the date that the formal complaint was received, the action to be taken and the specified time limit. It will also specify who has been appointed by the Complaints Lead ~~Officer as the Investigating Officer~~.

Resolved

Complaint is resolved

Unresolved

Stage 2 cannot be repeated and if the complainant remains unhappy, writes to the Complaint Lead Officer within 5 days of Stage 2 decision, to request a Stage 3 appeal.

Stage 3 Appeal against the decisions made at Stage 2 – Final Stage of Process.

The decision of the panel is final and will be communicated in writing to the complainant, the Head of School/Headteacher/CEO and the Chair of Governors/Trustees within 5 school days from the date of the Appeal hearing.

There is no further right of appeal in respect of the decision of any appeal panel of the Trust Board than to the Secretary of State at the Department for Education on the grounds that the Trust Board has not followed the complaints process.