

COMPLAINTS POLICY 2020

The Link Academy Trust is a company limited by guarantee and an exempt charity, regulated by the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). All Members of the Board of Directors are also Trustees of the exempt charity; the term 'Director' used in this Policy also means Trustee. This Policy applies to all staff employed by the Link Academy Trust.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Policy and Procedure sets out the framework for how concerns and complaints are managed within all the academies in the Link Academy Trust. The Trust reserves the right to alter this process, in exceptional circumstances.
- 1.2 We ensure that all complaints are dealt with confidentially for those involved and we expect complainants to observe confidentiality also
- 1.3 The Trust's complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at our schools. Any person, including members of the public, may raise a concern or make a complaint to an academy about any provision of facilities or services that the academy provides. Please refer to Section 7 which outlines complaints that would be not captured by this policy. Concerns or complaints must be directed to the academy they relate to in the first instance.
- 1.4 Complaints should be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and within 3 months from the date of the original incident, or of the last of a series of incidents (if this applies). Complaints received after 3 months may be considered only in exceptional circumstances.
- 1.5 We value our relationship with parents, carers and our local community and our academies are happy to receive suggestions and comments which help us identify areas of success and where we could make improvements. We believe it is important that anyone who raises a concern is treated seriously and that their concerns and complaints are dealt with promptly, courteously and fairly. We will provide a simple parent-friendly guide to support parents embarking on this process
- 1.6 A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry of 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 lack of action'*.
- 1.7 You are encouraged to discuss your concerns with staff in the academy so that they can be addressed in partnership. This would normally be with the class teacher in the first instance. If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff we will respect your views and the Academy Head will refer you to another member of staff. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern you may be referred to another staff member. That member of staff may be more senior and could be the Academy Head but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

1.8 Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. Governors have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at later stages of the procedure.

1.9 We understand that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case the academy and the Trust will attempt to resolve the issue using stage 2 of this procedure. The complainant should be given clear information about how to proceed along with a copy of this procedure.

1.10 We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, we may determine exceptionally that the complaint warrants investigation.

2. Definition

2.1. For the purpose of this document:

- a. The Link Academy Trust is referred to as The Trust;
- b. Academy refers to all academies within the Trust;
- c. Pupils refers to all pupils being educated or on site at any one of the academies within the Trust.
- d. School days are normally those on which the academy is open and are days on which the academy could reasonably be expected to receive, progress and respond to a complaint. We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

3. Investigating Complaints

3.1. The aim is to address concerns, wherever possible without the need for formal procedures and whilst this policy outlines the complaints procedure, it does not in any way undermine efforts to resolve concerns informally. Formal procedures are invoked when initial attempts to resolve a concern have been unsuccessful and the complainant has communicated that they wish to take the matter further.

3.2. When investigating a concern or a complaint the aim is to:

- a. Seek to establish what has happened and who has been involved.
- b. Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved.
- c. Speak to the complainant or contact them if further information is required.
- d. Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.
- e. Interview those involved in the matter.
- f. Conduct any interviews with an open mind but be prepared to persist in the questioning.
- g. Keep notes of interviews and include a clear chronology of events.

3.3. At every stage of the procedure, the ways in which a complaint can be resolved is at the forefront; and it is understood that it may be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part and, as a result, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following

- a. An apology;
 - b. An explanation;
 - c. An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
 - d. An assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur;
 - e. 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;
 - f. An undertaking to review Trust policies in the light of the complaint.
- 3.4. Following an investigation of events sometimes no clear conclusion may be drawn and we accept that this may be frustrating for all parties concerned.
- 3.5. If following investigation, the complaint is considered to be vexatious the complainant will be informed in writing and no further action will be considered.

4. Complaints Procedure

4.1 The complaints procedure follows a three-stage process, which is detailed below. The relevant forms can be found at Appendix A & B:

- Stage 1 – Informal
- Stage 2 – Formal
- Stage 3 – Complaints Committee Meeting

4.2 Stage 1 - Concern or Informal Complaint

- a. A concern or informal complaint submitted in person or by telephone should be recorded using Appendix 1. To ensure it is properly managed it must be lodged with the Academy Head. It is not acceptable to initiate any complaint via social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter.
- b. It is in all parties' interests to resolve a complaint at the earliest possible stage. The aim will be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the academy and the complainant.
- c. The concern or complaint will be heard by the Academy Head or a senior member of staff within the academy it relates to, who is not subject to or had any involvement with the subject matter. The CEO may be involved if it is considered appropriate.
- d. If a complaint is made to a local governor it will be passed to the Academy Head's administrator, as the local governor may need to be involved at a later stage in the process.
- e. Complaints about Academy Heads will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer.
- f. The aim is to resolve all informal complaints within ten school days.
- g. If the complaint remains un-resolved the complainant can make a request for their complaint to be dealt with under the formal stage 2 of the complaints process (see section 4.3). For this to be considered, the complainant must submit their request within 10 school days of receipt of the outcome at the informal stage, preferably using the form at Appendix 2, giving details of the complaint, action already taken to resolve it and proposed further actions to resolve the problem. At this point the CEO may become involved
- h. A complaint can be escalated straight to stage 2 of the complaints procedure, by the academy if it has been initially assessed as needing investigation or is a more

serious dissatisfaction with some aspect of the school's policies, procedures, administration or management.

4.3 Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

- a. An unresolved concern or informal complaint under Stage 1, or a complaint which is a more serious dissatisfaction with some aspect of the school's policies, procedures, management or administration will be dealt with under Stage 2.
- b. The complainant must set out their complaint in accordance with section 4.2.g. Formal complaints must be made to the Academy Head in the first instance (unless they are about the Academy Head – see section c below), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably using the Complaint Form at Appendix B), or by telephone- it must be clearly lodged with the Academy Head. Failure by the complainant to provide the required information within the timeframe specified may result in a delay or the dismissal of the complaint.
- c. Complaints about the Academy Heads will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer.
- d. Complaints about a member of the Local Board must be made to the Clerk and will be referred to the Chair of the Trust Board, who will appoint a Trustee independent to academy to investigate.
- e. The Academy Head or other Responsible Officer will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt in writing (by letter or email) normally within 3 school days. If full information has not been provided by the complainant the acknowledgement will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant seeks. A face-to-face meeting to clarify these points may be the most appropriate way of doing this. If full information has been provided the acknowledgement will indicate the action being taken and the likely timescale for resolution.
- f. The Academy Head or other Responsible Officer may delegate the investigation to another appropriate senior leader, including the CEO. .
- g. The Academy Head or other Responsible Officer, including the CEO may where appropriate nominate a suitably skilled member of the Local Board to be a Co-Investigator.
- h. The person(s) investigating the complaint will, if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those being complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish and keep a written record of any meetings/interviews related to the investigation.
- i. At the conclusion the Academy Head or other Responsible Officer will provide a formal written response of the outcome and proposed resolution within 15 school days from the receipt of the complaint. If the complaint is received within 15 days of a school holiday it may take longer to resolve.
- j. If it is not possible to meet this deadline, the complainant will be provided with an update and a revised response date.
- k. 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 academy will take to resolve the complaint.
- l. The Academy Head or other Responsible Officer will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

4.4 Stage 3 – Complaints Committee Meeting

- a. If the complainant remains dissatisfied following Stage 2 and wishes to take the complaint further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3, a complaints committee

meeting consisting of at least 3 governors/trustees with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

- b. A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be put in writing within 15 school days of the outcome at Stage 2, addressed to the Clerk to the Board of Trustees. Requests received outside this timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.
- c. The written complaint should state clearly the reason for the complaint, explain clearly what steps have been taken to resolve the complaint so far by the academy and why this has not been satisfactory and outline the desired outcome from the complaint.
- d. The aim of the complaints committee will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the academy/school and the complainant.
- e. At least one member of the committee must be independent of the management and running of the academy (i.e. not a governor of the academy concerned, a member of the trust board, or an employee of the academy/trust). Prior to the meeting they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee.
- f. The complaint will be acknowledged in writing, which could include email, normally within 3 school days of receipt. The acknowledgement will indicate the next steps in the process.
- g. The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to the meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.
- h. At least 10 school days before the complaints committee meeting the Clerk to the Board of Trustees should write to the complainant to inform them 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 notification will also include a request that copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee is provided at least 5 school days before 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.
- i. The complaints committee meeting should normally take place no later than 20 school days after the date of receipt of the complaint under Stage 3 and, if this is not possible, the Clerk will keep the complainant informed.
- j. At this stage the committee will not review any new complaints or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.
- k. If the complainant is invited to the meeting and rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting and it will proceed in the complainant's absence with written submissions from both parties.
- l. If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when this is appropriate. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.
- m. Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under the 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.
- n. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

- o. 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, in which case, prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought and such consent recorded in any minutes taken.
- p. The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee may uphold the complaint in whole or in part or dismiss the complaint in whole or in part. If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint and where appropriate, recommend changes to school/academy systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.
- q. The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant, the academy and the Chair of the Trust Board with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days. The decision reached is final.
- r. 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.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response if they behave reasonably within the course of their complaint and:

- 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, meetings or to agree details
- ask for assistance as needed.
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect.
- refrain from publicising their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

We define unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of the complaint. This is outlined in Section 8 along with our approach in response to such behaviour.

Investigator

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

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
- sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish full facts.
 - interviewing staff and children/young people/others relevant to the complaint.
 - consideration of records and other relevant information.
 - analysing information.
- liaising with the complainant to clarify what they feel would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes.
- ensure that papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal.
- be mindful of the timescales to respond.
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Academy Head/Responsible Officer or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The Academy Head, complaints committee or CEO will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Academy Head, other Responsible Officer or CEO

The Academy Head, other responsible officer or CEO should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure.
- liaise with all stakeholders to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure.
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information.
 - additional support to the complainant e.g. if they are a child or young person.
- keep records.

Clerk

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 and/or 2 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 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 academy 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.

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent, 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.

5. Record Keeping

A copy of the Committee's findings and recommendations will be available for inspection on school premises by the complainant and the Academy Head or other Responsible Officer. A written record will be kept of all complaints that are made under Stages 2 or 3 and

- whether they were resolved following a formal procedure, or proceeded to a Committee and
- action taken by the Academy/Trust as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld) and
- Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

7. Exempt Complaints

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by the Trust and its schools/academies, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below:

Exceptions	Further Information
Complaints previously dealt with	This means a complaint raised by a complainant which has already been dealt with using the procedures outlined in this policy, and which raises no new matter and presents no new information. This may include a complaint which differs slightly from the original complaint, but which is substantially the same as the complaint previously dealt with.
Serial/persistent and unreasonable complaints	This means a complaint which may be substantially different from complaints previously received but is submitted by a complainant who may be considered unreasonably persistent. A complainant will not be considered unreasonably persistent solely on the basis that he or she has submitted previous complaints. However, matters such as volume of correspondence, the effect on the Trust's resources of dealing with the complainant, the importance or triviality of the complaint, and the direct impact of the matter complained of on the complainant will be considered factors in determining whether the complaint is an exempt complaint. For further information see Section 8 – Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

Admissions to schools Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with the relevant local authority
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. 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).
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions . <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure</i>
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for public interest disclosure in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus . Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. 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.
Complaints about matters outside of the Trust's control	This means a complaint about the activities of persons or organisations not under the direct control of the Trust (for example, complaints by one parent against another).

Complaints about decisions of the Board of Trustees	Decisions made by the Board of Trustees are not subject to review by Trust employees or individual trustees, and any dissatisfaction in respect of any such decision should be addressed to the Board of Trustees (c/o the Chair of Trustees). The Board will consider such representations at a duly convened meeting but shall not be obliged to reconsider their decision.
Complaints about Trustees or Committees of the Board acting under their delegated powers	This means a complaint about the activities of trustees or committees of the Board, who are acting under the powers delegated to them by the Board of Trustees. These are subject to the Code of Conduct and other policies adopted by the Board, and subject to review by the full Board of Trustees; concerns in respect of such matters should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees (or the Vice Chair if the concern is in relation to the activities of the Chair), who will take such action within his/her powers as s/he considers to be appropriate.

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 academy/trust 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.

8. Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints*

The Trust and its academies are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will act to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

We define unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process.
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure.
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice.

- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be considered and commented on.
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeking them replaced.
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed).
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into their complaint where the complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education.
- seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
- uses threats to intimidate.
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence.
- knowingly provides falsified information.
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Academy Head, Chair of Governors or Chair to the Trust Board will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Academy Head will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the school/academy/trust causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

The Trust also reserves the right to conclude an investigation without further involvement from the complainant, or choose not to conclude an investigation, if the complainant's behaviour remains unreasonable.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the school or taking legal action.

*** This approach will also be adapted to manage unreasonable or persistent contact not directly associated with, or resulting from, formal complaints.**

9. The Role of Other Bodies

A complaint about the Trust or an individual Academy within the Trust can be referred by a member of the public to the ESFA.

9.1 The role of the ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency) on behalf of the Secretary of State:

If a complaint is referred to the ESFA, the ESFA will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the Trust. The ESFA will only consider complaints that fall into the following three areas:

- a. Where there is undue delay, or the Trust did not comply with its own procedure when considering a complaint
- b. Where the Trust is in breach of its funding agreement with the Secretary of State
- c. Where a Trust has failed to comply with any other legal obligation.

It is unlikely that the ESFA will overturn a Trust's decision about a complaint.

However, the ESFA will request that the complaint is looked at again from the appropriate stage, if there has been a breach in its own complaints procedure. If the procedure does not meet the regulation the Trust will be required to rectify any aspects that do not meet the regulations.

Complaints can be referred to the ESFA via their online form:

https://form.education.gov.uk/submitform.php?self=1&form_id=cCCNJ1xSfBE&type=form&ShowMsg=1&form_name=Contact+the+Department+for+Education&noRegister=false&ret=%2Fmodule%2Fservices&noLoginPrompt=1.

9.2 The role of the (DfE) Department for Education

You may complain to the DfE if you have remain dissatisfied and have followed the Link Academy Trust Complaints Policy and Procedure and followed all of the 'Make a Complaint' steps on the DfE website <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school/state-schools>.

You may do this via the online via school complaints form

<https://www.education.gov.uk/form/school-complaints-form> or at the

postal address below:

Department for Education

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

9.3 The role of Ofsted

You can complain to Ofsted if you think a school is not run properly.

<https://contact.ofsted.gov.uk/online-complaints>

You must have already followed the Trust's Complaints Policy and Procedure.

Appendix 1 Record of Concern or Informal Complaint

Name of the School/Academy:

Complainant name:

In person or by
phone?

Address:

Contact Numbers & Email:

Date & Time:

Complaint

Details of the complaint:

Complaint Recorded by:

Who the complainant wishes to speak to:

Acknowledge that the person will be contacted, and by when

Office Use:

Who complaint has been passed on to:

Date and time:

Appendix 2 - Formal Complaint Form

Name of the School/Academy:

Surname:	First Name:	Address:
Contact Numbers & Email:	If applicable – name of pupil and relationship to the pupil:	

Complaint – to be completed by the complainant

Details of the complaint:

Action already taken to resolve the complaint:

What actions do you feel will resolve the problem at this stage?

Details of additional information or evidence attached:

Signature (Form sent by email is classified
as the signature):

Date:

An acknowledgement of the complaint will be sent within 3 working days

Office Use:

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Appendix 3

Parent-friendly Guidance to raise a Complaint- to be used alongside the Link Academy Trust Complaints Policy

School Resolution

If you are concerned or unhappy with the way the school or a member of its staff has treated you, or you are concerned or unhappy with the way the school is operating its policies and procedures, then you can raise your concerns or make a complaint.

Usually the best way to deal with a concern or complaint is to approach the member of staff or Academy Head, who will talk with you so that they can understand what your concern or complaint is about, and take any appropriate action to put things right. It is not acceptable to initiate your complaint via social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter. We ensure that all complaints are dealt with confidentially for those involved and we expect complainants to observe confidentiality also.

This way of dealing with your concern or complaint means solving, explaining, clearing up or settling your concern or complaint directly with you. It will not result in conduct or capability action being taken against an individual member of staff, and the complaint will be closed after the process is completed.

For your part, you will need to:

- tell the school what happened and how you felt about it
- say how you think the situation could be resolved
- agree the process for resolving your concern or complaint

This School Resolution process is not about apportioning blame or about staff being dealt with through formal conduct or capability procedures – schools are centres of learning for everyone, and it is about learning from what has happened and working with you to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Most concerns or complaints are not likely to involve extensive or lengthy enquiries, and therefore you should expect an approach that is proportionate to the issue you have raised.

As the School Resolution process is aimed at quickly resolving your concern or complaint and learning from it, it won't lead to conduct or capability proceedings against a member of staff. However, where appropriate, the member of staff might receive further support or training as a result.

If your concern or complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with something the school has either done or not done, and not about somebody - for example, about the way the school operates its policies or is directed to fulfil its statutory obligations - then it will still be resolved using this 'School Resolution' approach.

Sometimes during the handling of a complaint, communication between parents and the school can become difficult. Mediation can be a very useful way of helping people to resolve their differences and find an agreed way forward. Both parties need to agree to mediation. The school (or the parent) may suggest mediation, if communication becomes a problem.

School Investigation- The formal complaints procedure.

If following the school resolution stage, you, or the person dealing with your concern

considers that your concern needs a more detailed investigation, or where the School Resolution has not delivered a satisfactory conclusion, a School Investigation will follow.

Although this is a formal investigation into your complaint, it will still be in the spirit of quickly reaching an effective outcome and maintaining positive and productive relationships. All parties need to work together to maintain productive relationships, and establish a way forward in partnership. This investigation may call for more information to be gathered before the person investigating can explain what has happened from the perspective of the school or the staff member involved. This way of dealing with your concern or complaint means solving, explaining, clearing up or settling your complaint directly with you, but doing so with a more detailed investigation than at a School Resolution level.

Some concerns or complaints may demand more detailed and perhaps time consuming enquiries, and therefore you should expect an approach that is proportionate to the complaint you have made. The person investigating your concern should keep in regular contact to keep you informed of progress on the matter.

Nevertheless, the School Investigation process aims to quickly resolve your concern or complaint and identify any learning from it.

Appeal against the decision made following the School Investigation

The School Investigation stage of this complaints procedure includes an appeal process should you not be satisfied with the outcome of the investigation at Stage 3.

If you decide you would like to appeal, we will invite you to attend an appeal meeting and if the date is inconvenient we will provide an alternative date.

Whilst this is part of the formal complaints procedure, we aim to make the meeting as informal as possible so that all parties can put forward their views in a positive and respectful manner.

Following the appeal panel meeting the complaints procedure is complete. If you are still unhappy with the way the school has managed your complaint, you can submit a complaint to the Department for Education online at www.gov.uk/complain-about-school