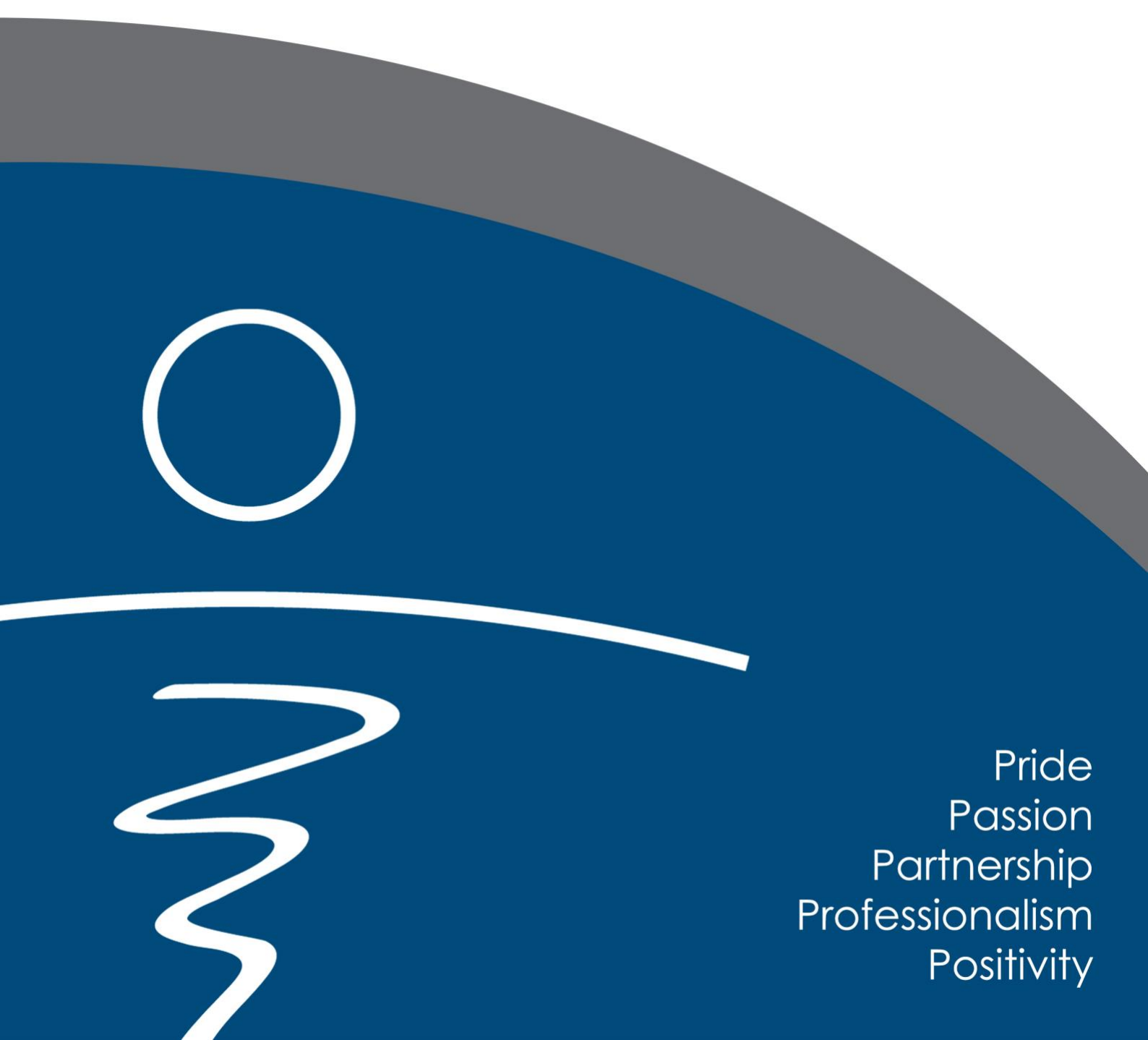


Complaints Framework Policy

A large decorative graphic on the left side of the page, consisting of a dark blue curved shape with a white circle and a white wavy line inside, and a grey curved shape above it.

Pride
Passion
Partnership
Professionalism
Positivity

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Policy Owner	Hermann Farrington, Chief Executive
Policy Author	Matt Lake, Trust Governance Professional
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Should you have any queries regards this policy, note an omission or wish to propose an amendment, please email matt.lake@thebridgetrust.academy

Contents

1. Purpose	3
2. Scope.....	3
3. Guiding Principles	3
4. Expectations of Complainants	4
5. Matters Covered by Other Procedures.....	4
6. Resolution at the Earliest Opportunity	4
7. Roles and Responsibilities.....	5
8. Complaints Stages.....	5
9. Complaints Review Panels	5
10. Complaints About Senior Leaders and Trust Directors.....	6
11. Support and Representation.....	6
12. Equality and Accessibility	7
13. Record Keeping	7
14. Confidentiality.....	7
15. Anonymous Complaints	7
16. Persistent, Serial and Unreasonable Complaints.....	7
17. Monitoring and Reporting	8
18. Publication and Availability.....	8
19. Final Stage	8
20. Delegation.....	8
Appendix 1: Appropriate Complaints Procedure to Use.....	9

Complaints Framework Policy

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The Bridge Trust is committed to working openly and constructively with pupils, parents, carers, staff, stakeholders and members of the wider community.
- 1.2. The Trust welcomes feedback and recognises that concerns and complaints provide valuable opportunities to improve services, strengthen relationships and ensure accountability.
- 1.3. The purpose of this Framework Policy is to:
 - establish a consistent approach to handling complaints across the Trust;
 - ensure that complaints are handled fairly, proportionately and promptly;
 - support the effective resolution of concerns at the earliest possible stage;
 - provide clear governance arrangements for the investigation and review of complaints;
 - ensure compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements applicable to academy trusts; and
 - promote public confidence in the Trust's arrangements for handling complaints.

2. Scope

- 2.1. This Framework applies to complaints concerning:
 - individual schools within The Bridge Trust;
 - Trust-wide services;
 - central support functions;
 - executive leaders;
 - trustees;
 - decisions made by the Trust in exercising its responsibilities.
- 2.2. This Framework applies to complaints made by:
 - parents and carers;
 - pupils;
 - former pupils where the complaint relates to matters occurring while they attended a Trust school;
 - community members;
 - service users;
 - other stakeholders.
- 2.3. Separate operational procedures shall set out how complaints are investigated and determined in relation to:
 - individual schools; and
 - Trust central services and governance functions.
- 2.3.1. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action by the Trust, its schools or those acting on its behalf.

3. Guiding Principles

- 3.1. The Trust will ensure that complaints are handled in accordance with the following principles.
 - **Accessibility** – Complaints procedures shall be clear, easy to understand and publicly available.

- **Fairness** – All parties will be treated fairly, consistently and without prejudice.
- **Timeliness** – Complaints will be handled as quickly as reasonably possible.
- **Transparency** – The Trust will provide clear explanations of decisions and outcomes.
- **Confidentiality** – Information will be shared only where necessary and in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements.
- **Proportionality** – The level of investigation will be proportionate to the nature and seriousness of the complaint.
- **Learning and Improvement** – Complaints will be used to identify trends, improve practice and support organisational learning.

4. Expectations of Complainants

4.1. The Trust expects complainants to:

- Treat staff, Trust Directors and representatives with courtesy and respect;
- Provide information honestly and accurately;
- Engage constructively with the complaints process;
- Comply with reasonable timescales and requests for information.

4.2. The Trust acknowledges that individuals may be distressed when raising complaints and will seek to support engagement with the process wherever possible.

5. Matters Covered by Other Procedures

5.1. Some concerns are subject to separate statutory or Trust procedures and will not ordinarily be considered under the complaint arrangements.

These include:

- Admissions appeals;
- Exclusion reviews;
- Special educational needs and EHCP assessment decisions;
- Safeguarding and child protection concerns;
- Whistleblowing disclosures;
- Staff grievances
- Disciplinary matters;
- Complaints relating to data protection legislation;
- Complaints concerning employment matters;
- Matters being considered by courts, tribunals or other formal legal processes.

5.2. Where a complaint concerns elements falling under both this Framework and another procedure, the Trust will determine the most appropriate route and advise the complainant accordingly.

6. Resolution at the Earliest Opportunity

6.1. The Trust encourages concerns to be raised informally wherever possible. Most concerns can be resolved quickly through discussion, clarification, explanation or apology without the need to enter a formal complaints process.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

7.1. Chief Executive

Responsible for:

- Ensuring effective operation of the policy;
- Monitoring complaints across the Trust;
- Reporting complaint trends and significant complaint outcomes to the Trust Board of Directors.

7.2. Governance Professional

Responsible for:

- Administering complaints review panels;
- Maintaining central records;
- Supporting governance oversight.

7.3. Trust Board

Responsible for:

- Approving the Framework Policy;
- Reviewing complaint trends;
- Ensuring lessons learned are acted upon.

8. Complaints Stages

8.1. All complaints procedures operating under this framework shall include:

Stage One – Informal resolution.

Stage Two – Formal investigation and written outcome.

Stage Three – Review by a Complaints Review Panel. The Review Panel stage shall represent the final stage of the Trust's internal complaints process.

8.2. Detailed timescales are set out within the School Complaints Procedure and Trust Complaints Procedure. Any departure from those timescales will be communicated to the complainant.

9. Complaints Review Panels

9.1 Composition

9.1.1. A Complaints Review Panel shall:

- Consist of three individuals drawn from members of the Trust's Board of Directors, Senior Executives, members of a Local Governing Body of a school within the Trust and appropriate independent third parties;
- Include no individual who has had prior involvement in the matter;
- Include at least one individual who is independent of the management and running of the Trust;
- Act impartially and objectively.

- 9.1.2. For the purposes of this policy an independent panel member is a person who is independent of the management and running of the Trust and has had no prior involvement in the complaint. They may have a connection with the Trust but must not be involved in its management or running and must be capable of demonstrating independence and impartiality.

9.2. Role of the Panel

- 9.2.1. The role of the review panel is to review:

- Whether the complaint was investigated appropriately;
- Whether all relevant evidence was considered;
- Whether the conclusions reached were reasonable and supported by the evidence;
- Whether the Trust followed its published procedures;
- Whether any further action is required.

- 9.2.2. The review panel may:

- Uphold all or part of a complaint;
- Dismiss a complaint;
- Recommend actions for improvement;
- Recommend changes to policies, procedures and practices.

- 9.2.3. The review panel will not normally reinvestigate matters from the beginning unless exceptional circumstances make this necessary.

- 9.2.4. The Trust will seek to resolve complaints through explanation, clarification, apology, corrective action, service improvement or other appropriate remedies in relation to the specific circumstances arising in individual cases. Financial compensation will not normally be available through the Trust's complaints procedures.

10. Complaints About Senior Leaders and Trust Directors

- 10.1. Separate operational procedures shall provide clear arrangements for complaints concerning:

- Headteachers;
- Senior Executives;
- Chief Executive;
- Trust Directors;
- Chair of Trust Board of Directors.

- 10.2. No individual who is the subject of a complaint shall have any role in determining its outcome. Appropriate alternative decision makers shall be appointed where conflicts of interest arise.

11. Support and Representation

- 11.1. Complainants may be accompanied at formal meetings by:

- A friend;
- A relative;
- An advocate;
- An interpreter or translator where necessary.

- 11.2. The Trust will make reasonable adjustments where required to ensure accessibility and equality of access.

12. Equality and Accessibility

- 12.1. The Trust will make reasonable adjustments where required to enable complainants to access the complaints process. Information will be provided in alternative formats where reasonably requested.
- 12.2. Interpreting, translation or other support arrangements may be provided where appropriate.

13. Record Keeping

- 13.1. The Trust shall maintain appropriate records of:
 - Formal complaints received;
 - Investigations undertaken;
 - Correspondence;
 - Meeting notes;
 - Decisions and outcomes;
 - Recommendations arising from complaints.
- 13.2. Records shall be retained in accordance with the Trust's records management and data protection arrangements, as detailed in the Data Retention Schedule contained in the Trust's Data Retention Policy. Complaint records shall be held separately from pupil educational records.

14. Confidentiality

- 14.1. All parties are expected to maintain an appropriate level of confidentiality throughout the complaints process. Information will be shared only where necessary to investigate, consider or determine a complaint.
- 14.2. The Trust will process personal data in accordance with applicable data protection legislation.

15. Anonymous Complaints

- 15.1. Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated. However, the Trust reserves the right to investigate anonymous complaints where:
 - Safeguarding concerns are raised;
 - There is evidence of significant misconduct;
 - There appears to be a serious risk to the Trust, its schools, pupils or staff.
- 15.2. The decision whether to investigate an anonymous complaint shall rest with the Chief Executive or, where appropriate, the Chair of the Trust's Board of Directors.

16. Persistent, Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

- 16.1. The Trust is committed to dealing fairly with all complainants. However, a complaint may be considered unreasonable where an individual:
 - Pursues matters that have already been fully considered;
 - Refuses to accept a final outcome;
 - Makes excessive demands on staff time and resources;
 - Behaves aggressively, abusively or unreasonably;
 - Persistently submits repetitive correspondence without presenting significant new information.

16.2. When this occurs, the Trust may:

- Limit methods of communication;
- Require communications to be made through a single point of contact;
- Decline to reopen matters already concluded;
- Implement reasonable restrictions necessary to protect staff and resources.

16.3. Any decision to apply restrictions shall be approved by the Chief Executive or the Chair of the Trust's Board of Directors and communicated in writing.

17. Monitoring and Reporting

17.1. The Trust will monitor complaints received across its schools and services in order to:

- Identify recurring themes;
- Improve service delivery;
- Inform governance oversight;
- Support continuous improvement.

17.2. The Trust Board of Directors shall receive at least annual reports regarding:

- Number of complaints received;
- Complaints escalated to panel;
- Themes and trends;
- Lessons learned;
- Resulting policy or operational changes.

17.3. Individual complainants and pupils will not be identifiable within governance reports.

18. Publication and Availability

18.1. This Framework Policy shall be:

- Published on the Trust website;
- Made available on request;
- Reviewed regularly by the Trust Board.

18.2. School Complaints Procedures and Trust Complaints Procedures shall be published alongside this Framework and operate in accordance with its provisions.

19. Final Stage

19.1. Once the Complaints Review Panel has concluded its consideration and issued its written decision, the Trust's internal complaints process is exhausted. Where a complainant believes that the Trust has not followed its published complaints procedure or has acted unreasonably, they may refer the matter to the Department for Education (DfE) in accordance with the arrangements applicable to academy trusts.

20. Delegation

20.1. The Trust Board of Directors may delegate functions arising from this Framework to committees, panels, individual Directors, the Chief Executive or other officers of the Trust, except where legislation, the Trust's Scheme of Delegation or this Framework require otherwise.

Appendix 1: Appropriate Complaints Procedure to Use

In order to assist in identifying which of the Trust's Complaints Procedures is appropriate to be used depending on the nature and focus of an individual complaint, please note the guidance in the table below.

Complaint Subject or Focus	Procedure to Use
School Issue	School Complaints Procedure
School Staff Member	School Complaints Procedure
Headteacher	School Complaints Procedure
Local Governor or Governing Body	School Complaints Procedure
Trust Central Service	Trust Complaints Procedure
Senior Executive Leader	Trust Complaints Procedure
Chief Executive	Trust Complaints Procedure
Trust Director	Trust Complaints Procedure
Chair of Trust Board of Directors	Trust Complaints Procedure
Trust Board (acting as collective)	Trust Complaints Procedure
Trust Governance Professional	Trust Complaints Procedure
Complaint about a Trust policy or Trust-wide decision	Trust Complaints Procedure