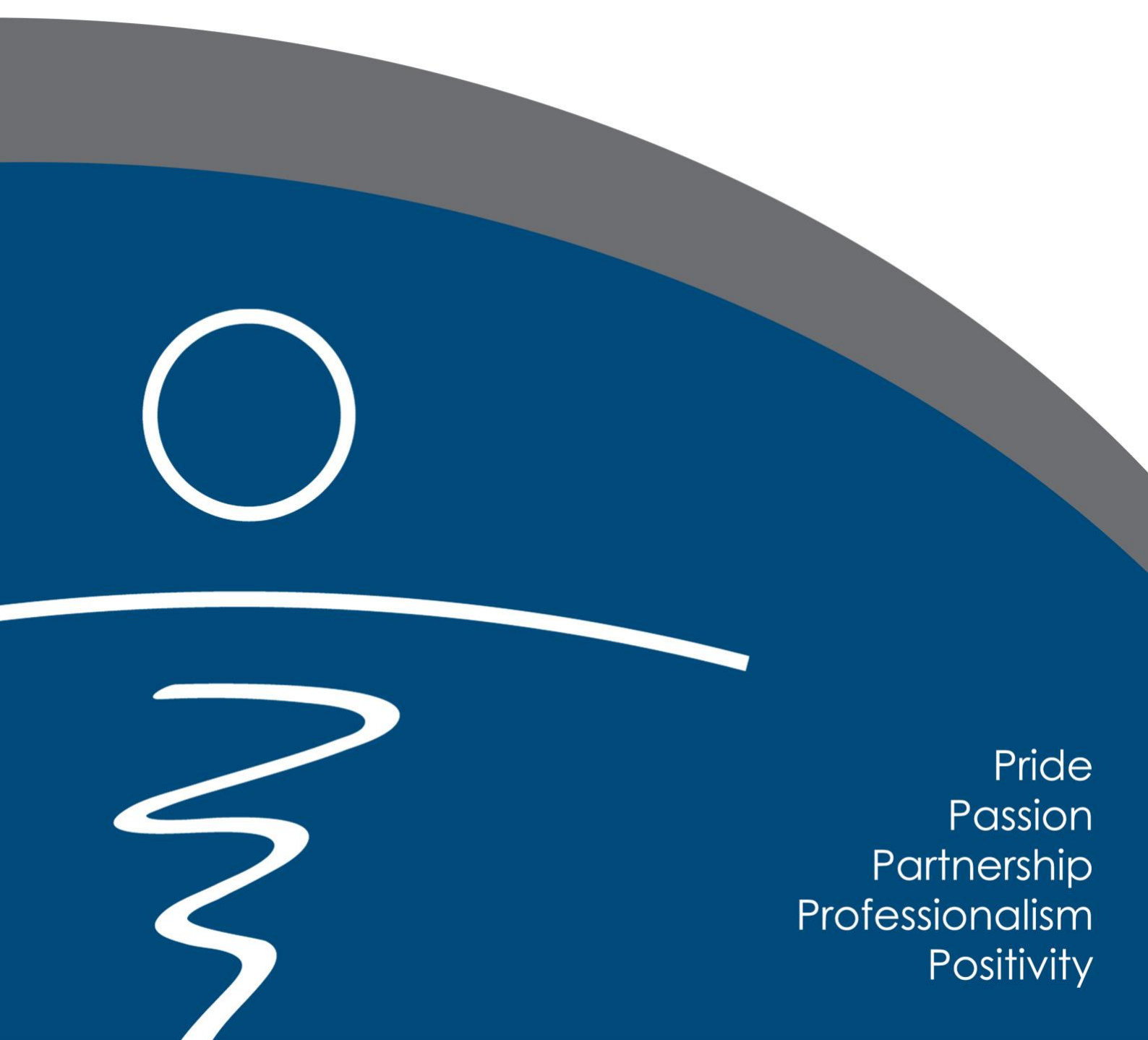


School Complaints Procedure

A large decorative graphic on the right side of the page, consisting of a dark blue curved shape with a white circle and a white wavy line inside, resembling a stylized face or a landscape feature.

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.	Matters Covered by Other Procedures.....	3
4.	Time Limits	4
5.	Informal Resolution (Stage One).....	4
6.	Formal Complaint (Stage Two)	4
7.	Alternative Investigators and Conflicts of Interest	5
8.	Responsibility Matrix	6
9.	Complaints Review Panel (Stage Three)	6
10.	Role of the Complaints Review Panel	7
11.	Panel Hearing Arrangements.....	7
12.	Panel Decision	7
13.	Persistent, Serial or Unreasonable Complaints	8
14.	Record Keeping	8
15.	Final External Route	8

School Complaints Procedure

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This procedure applies to complaints about the operation of an individual school within The Bridge Trust, including concerns relating to pupils, staff, educational provision and school leadership.
- 1.2. The Trust is committed to resolving concerns fairly, promptly and proportionately, and encourages concerns to be raised at the earliest possible opportunity.
- 1.3. This procedure should be read in conjunction with the Trust's Complaints Framework Policy which establishes the principles, governance arrangements and expectations that apply to all complaints handled by The Bridge Trust.

2. Scope

- 2.1. This procedure applies to complaints concerning:
 - Teaching and learning;
 - Pupil welfare and pastoral support;
 - Behaviour and discipline;
 - School communication;
 - School activities and events;
 - The conduct of school staff;
 - Decisions of the Headteacher;
 - School policies and procedures;
 - Any other aspect of the operation of an individual school within The Bridge Trust.

3. Matters Covered by Other Procedures

- 3.1. The following matters are not normally considered under this procedure:
 - Complaints about Trust central services;
 - Admissions appeals;
 - Exclusion reviews;
 - Safeguarding concerns;
 - SEND assessments and EHCP decisions;
 - Staff grievances;
 - Whistleblowing disclosures;
 - Data protection complaints;
 - Matters subject to legal proceedings;
 - Complaints about Trust-wide policies or decisions.
- 3.2. 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.
- 3.3. Where appropriate, complainants will be directed to the relevant procedure.
- 3.4. Anonymous complaints will be considered at the discretion of the Headteacher, Chief Executive or Chair of Trust Board depending upon the nature and seriousness of the concerns raised.

4. Time Limits

- 4.1. Complaints should normally be raised:
- Within three months of the event occurring;
 - Within three months of the complainant becoming aware of the matter.
- 4.2. The Trust may consider complaints outside these timescales where exceptional circumstances apply.

5. Informal Resolution (Stage One)

- 5.1. The Trust encourages complainants to raise concerns informally before making a formal complaint.
- 5.2. Concerns should be raised with the relevant member of staff, a line manager, a senior leader or the Headteacher depending on the nature of the concern.
- 5.3. The Trust will seek to resolve concerns through:
- Discussion;
 - Clarification;
 - Explanation;
 - Informal meetings;
 - Agreed actions where appropriate.
- 5.4. Where concerns remain unresolved, the complainant may progress to Stage Two.

6. Formal Complaint (Stage Two)

6.1. Submitting a Complaint

- 6.1.1. Formal complaints should normally be submitted in writing to the Headteacher. Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher, the complaint should be submitted to the Trust Governance Professional. The Trust may provide a standard complaint form to support complainants, although its use is not mandatory.
- 6.1.2. The complaint should include:
- The complainant's name and contact details;
 - Details of the complaint;
 - Relevant dates;
 - Any supporting evidence;
 - The outcome being sought.

6.2. Acknowledgement

- 6.2.1. The Trust will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five school days (excluding days outside of school term dates when the school is closed).
- 6.2.2. The acknowledgement will confirm:
- Who will investigate the complaint;
 - The next steps in the process;
 - The anticipated timescale for responding.

6.3. Investigation

- 6.3.1. The complaint will be investigated by an appropriate individual who has had no prior involvement in the matter.
- 6.3.2. Investigations may include:
- Reviewing documentation;
 - Meeting relevant individuals;
 - Obtaining witness accounts;
 - Reviewing correspondence;
 - Considering relevant policies and procedures.
- 6.3.3. Where appropriate, the investigator may meet with the complainant to clarify the nature of the complaint and to discuss the outcome being sought.
- 6.3.4. The investigator may seek additional information from the complainant where required before reaching a conclusion.

6.4. Outcome

- 6.4.1. The Trust will normally provide a written response of acknowledgement within ten school days (excluding days outside of school term dates when the school is closed), although more complex complaints may require additional investigation time.
- 6.4.2. Where this is not possible, the complainant will be informed of:
- The reasons for the delay;
 - The revised timescale.
- 6.4.3. The outcome letter will explain:
- The findings of the investigation;
 - The reasons for the decision;
 - Any actions to be taken;
 - How to request a Stage 3 review.
- 6.4.4. Outcomes may include explanation, clarification, apology, service improvement, corrective action or any other remedy considered appropriate by the Trust.

7. Alternative Investigators and Conflicts of Interest

- 7.1. Where necessary, the Headteacher, Chief Executive, Chair of Trust Board or Trust Board may nominate an alternative investigator in order to avoid conflicts of interest or to ensure the effective administration of this procedure.

8. Responsibility Matrix

Complaint Relates To	Investigated By
School staff member	Headteacher
Senior leader below Headteacher level	Headteacher
Headteacher	Chief Executive
Local Governor	Trust Governance Professional or nominee
Local Governing Body Decision	Chief Executive or nominee
Chief Executive (arising from a school matter)	Chair of Trust Board or nominated Trust Director
School policy or operational decision	Headteacher

9. Complaints Review Panel (Stage Three)

9.1. Requesting a Review

9.1.1. If dissatisfied with the Stage Two outcome, the complainant may request a review by a Complaints Review Panel.

9.1.2. Requests must:

- Be made in writing;
- Be submitted within ten school days of the Stage Two outcome (excluding days outside of school term dates when the school is closed) outcome being received;
- Explain why the complainant remains dissatisfied.

9.2. Convening a Panel

9.2.1. The Trust Governance Professional will arrange a Complaints Review Panel.

9.2.2. The Panel will:

- Consist of three members;
- Have had no prior involvement in the complaint;
- Include at least one independent member.

9.3. The Complaints Review Panel shall normally consider the actions and decisions of the school rather than making findings regarding the conduct or capability of individual members of staff.

10. Role of the Complaints Review Panel

10.1. The role of the Panel is not normally to reinvestigate the complaint.

10.2. The Panel will consider:

- Whether the complaint was investigated appropriately;
- Whether all relevant evidence was considered;
- Whether procedures were followed;
- Whether the outcome was reasonable;
- Whether further actions should be recommended.

10.3. The Panel may:

- Uphold the complaint in full;
- Uphold part of the complaint;
- Dismiss the complaint;
- Recommend service improvements;
- Recommend policy or procedural changes;
- Recommend that the complaint be referred for consideration under another Trust policy or procedure where appropriate.

11. Panel Hearing Arrangements

11.1. The hearing will normally be held within twenty school days (excluding days outside of school term dates when the school is closed) of the request for a Stage 3 review being received.

11.2. The complainant may:

- Attend the hearing;
- Submit written representations;
- Be accompanied by a friend, relative, advocate or interpreter.

11.3. Attendance is not mandatory and the Panel may consider written submissions where a complainant does not wish to attend.

11.4. Relevant documentation will normally be circulated no later than five school days (excluding days outside of school term dates when the school is closed) before the hearing.

12. Panel Decision

12.1. The Panel's decision will normally be issued in writing within ten school days (excluding days outside of school term dates when the school is closed) of the hearing.

12.2. The decision letter will:

- Summarise the complaint;
- Summarise the Panel's findings;
- Explain the decision reached;
- Set out any recommendations or actions.

12.3. The decision of the Panel represents the final stage of the Trust's internal complaints process.

13. Persistent, Serial or Unreasonable Complaints

- 13.1. The Trust may place reasonable restrictions on communication where an individual:
- Repeatedly pursues matters already concluded;
 - Makes excessive demands on resources;
 - Behaves in an abusive, aggressive or threatening manner;
 - Submits persistent and repetitive correspondence without significant new information.
- 13.2. Any restrictions will be communicated in writing.

14. Record Keeping

- 14.1. The school and Trust will retain records of:
- Complaints received;
 - Investigations undertaken;
 - Correspondence;
 - Hearing papers;
 - Panel decisions;
 - Resulting actions.
- 14.2. Records will be stored in accordance with the Trust's data protection and records management requirements.

15. Final External Route

- 15.1. Once the Complaints Review Panel has issued its written decision, the Trust's internal complaints process is complete.
- 15.2. If a complainant believes that the Trust has not followed its published complaints procedures or has acted unreasonably, they may refer the matter to the Department for Education in accordance with the arrangements applicable to academy trusts.