



# MERCHANT TAYLORS' OXFORDSHIRE ACADEMY TRUST

## COMPLAINT PROCEDURE POLICY

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## 1. Statement of Intent

MTOAT aims to resolve complaints at the earliest possible stage and, where possible, informally, and is dedicated to continuing to provide the highest quality of education possible in all of its academies throughout the procedure.

This policy has been created to handle complaints relating to any aspects of the provision of facilities or services involving:

- Any member of staff.
- Any school within the trust.
- Individual governors or governing body (GB) of the trust.
- Individual trustees or the board of trustees.
- The trust as a whole.

It is designed to ensure that the trust's complaints procedure is straightforward, impartial, non-adversarial, allows a full and fair investigation, respects confidentiality, and delivers an effective response and appropriate redress.

This policy outlines the procedure that the complainant, the trust and its schools will follow. Once a complaint has been made, it can be resolved or withdrawn at any stage. The individual who receives the complaint will delegate an appropriate person to be the first point of contact during the complaints procedure and a complaint manager/investigator where appropriate.

This policy is applicable for all schools within the Merchant Taylors' Oxfordshire Academy Trust (MTOAT): Aylesbury UTC, Brightwell Primary School and Wallingford School.

MTOAT aims to handle all complaints via the procedures outlined in this policy. However, there may be circumstances where it is necessary to deviate from the procedure. For example, reasonable adjustments may need to be made, in accordance with equality law, to enable those involved to access and complete this complaints procedure and to participate in the process. This may involve providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint, holding meetings in accessible locations, or making other adaptations, including to the procedure itself. Any such deviation will be appropriately documented. Similarly, timescales provided in this policy are estimates; MTOAT aims to resolve complaints at the earliest possible stage and to keep complainants informed of the progress of their complaint.

DfE guidance for best practice in school complaints policies:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/setting-up-an-academies-complaints-procedure/best-practice-guidance-for-academies-complaints-procedures>

School complaints and whistle blowing guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/education/school-complaints-and-whistleblowing>

## 2. Legal Framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Education Act 2002
- Equality Act 2010
- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014
- Immigration Act 2016
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- HM Government (2016) 'Code of Practice on the English language requirement for public sector workers'
- ESFA (2021) 'Best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures'
- ESFA (2024) 'Academy trust handbook 2024'
- The School Admissions Code 2021

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Admissions Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Policy (including Suspension and Exclusion Policy)

Also, the following trust policies:

- MTOAT Whistleblowing Policy
- MTOAT Grievance Policy
- MTOAT Data Protection Policy
- MTOAT Management and Retention of Records Policy

## 3. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, a “**complaint**” is defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction’ towards actions taken or a perceived lack of action. Complaints can be resolved formally or informally.

A “**concern**” is defined as ‘an expression of worry or doubt’ where reassurance is required. For the purpose of this policy, concerns will be classed and addressed as complaints.

Any complaint or concern will be taken seriously, whether raised formally or informally, and the appropriate procedures will be implemented.

The definition of “**unreasonable complaints**” is outlined in the **Managing Unreasonable Complaints** section of this policy.

For the purpose of this policy, “**duplicate complaints**” are identical complaints received from a complainant’s spouse, partner or child. These complaints will not be addressed again and the individual making the second complaint will be informed that the complaint has been dealt with on a local level. If the individual is dissatisfied with the result, they can appeal to the ESFA, as outlined in **The role of the EFSA** subsection of this policy. Any new details provided by a complainant’s spouse, partner or child, however, will be investigated and managed in line with the complaints procedure.

For the purpose of this policy, “**complaints campaigns**” are where the trust, or school within the trust, receives large volumes of complaints that are all based on the same subject.

For the purposes of this policy, having “**independence**” from the trust and its schools is defined as having no association with the trust, including through being a member, trustee or employee, and having no clear connection with any of the trust’s schools, including through being an employee or solicitor. Independent panel members will meet the trust’s and ESFA’s definition of independence.

## 4. Making a Complaint

### i. Who can make a complaint

Any person, including a member of the public, is able to make a complaint about the provision of facilities or services that the trust provides. Complaints may also be made by a third party on behalf of a complainant, contingent on appropriate consent having been obtained to do so. MTOAT aims to handle all complaints via the procedures outlined in this policy. However, there may be circumstances where it is necessary to deviate from the procedure. For example, reasonable adjustments may need to be made, in accordance with equality law, to enable those involved to access and complete this complaints procedure and to participate in the process. Any such deviation will be appropriately documented.

The trust will not normally investigate anonymous complaints.

Individuals making complaints about issues relating to separate statutory procedures will be referred as follows:

- **Admissions** – referred to the appeals process outlined in the Admissions Policy.
- **Child protection** – referred to safeguarding procedures outlined in the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.
- **Exclusion** – referred to the procedures outlined in the Behaviour Policy and Suspension and Exclusion Policy.
- **Whistleblowing** – referred to the internal whistleblowing procedures outlined in the Whistleblowing Policy.
- **Staff grievances** – referred to the internal grievance procedures outlined in the Grievance Policy.
- **Staff conduct** – referred to the internal disciplinary procedures.

- **Third-party suppliers using school premises or facilities** – referred to separate complaint procedures. The school will ensure any third-party supplier using school premises or facilities to offer community facilities or services has its own complaints procedures in place and such complaints do not fall within the scope of this policy.

All other complaints will be directed towards the procedures laid out in this policy.

Complainants may make informal complaints in person, in writing or by telephone. Formal complaints should be made in writing, although reasonable adjustments can be requested. Complaints should be made using the appropriate channels of communication.

Complaints are expected to be made as soon as possible after an incident arises to address the issue in an appropriate timescale. The trust upholds a time limit of **60** school days in which a complaint can be lodged regarding an incident. Complaints made outside this time limit will be considered in exceptional circumstances. In the case of any timescales changing, all parties involved will be informed of the changes in a timely manner. Complaints received outside of term time will be treated as being received on the first school day after the holiday period.

A complaint can progress to the next stage of the procedure even if it is not viewed as “justified”. All complainants are given the opportunity to fully complete the complaints procedure.

## **ii. Who receives the complaint**

Complaints involving staff of a school in the trust will:

- Be received by the headteacher / principal of the school or somebody they delegate.
- Follow the complaints procedure, including a review panel where applicable.

Complaints involving a headteacher / principal of school in the trust will:

- Be received by the CEO and / or a member of the trust leadership team.
- Follow the complaints procedure, including a review panel where applicable.

Complaints involving governors, trustees or an entire governing body will:

- Be made in writing to the governance team, who will determine the most appropriate course of action dependent on the nature of the complaint.
- Follow the complaints procedure, including a review panel where applicable.

Complaints involving the board of trustees will:

- Be received by the CEO.
- Follow the complaints procedure, including a review panel where applicable.

Complaints involving the CEO will:

- Be made in writing to the governance team.
- Involve a review panel where applicable.

Complaints involving the trust will:

- Be made in writing to the governance team.
- Be received by the CEO.
- Begin with stage two of the complaints procedure outlined in this policy, i.e. via a formal, written complaint.

The individual who receives the complaint will delegate an appropriate person to be the first point of contact during the complaint procedure and a complaint manager/investigator where appropriate.

### **iii. Complaints escalated to the trust**

Where a complainant, or the trust, wish to escalate a complaint to the trust, the complaint will be received by the CEO. The resolution may involve sourcing an independent investigator to deal with the complaint. In exceptional circumstances, where it is necessary to deviate from the complaint procedure, this deviation will be appropriately documented.

## **5. Roles and Responsibilities**

The complainant is responsible for:

- Cooperating with the trust, or school within the trust, in seeking a solution to the complaint.
- Expressing the complaint and their concerns in full at the earliest opportunity.
- Promptly responding to any requests for information and meetings.
- Asking for assistance as needed.
- Treating anyone involved in the complaint with respect.

The role of the investigator will differ depending on the nature of the complaint and who it is directed at. This might typically be a member of the school or trust leadership team.

The complaint manager/investigator of the complaint is responsible for:

- Providing a sensitive and thorough interviewing process of the complainant to establish what has happened and who is involved.
- Considering all records, evidence and relevant information provided.
- Interviewing all parties that are involved in the complaint, including staff and students.
- Analysing all information in a comprehensive and fair manner.
- Liaising with the complainant and clarifying an appropriate resolution to the problem.
- Identifying and recommending solutions and courses of actions to take.



- Being mindful of timescales and ensuring all parties involved are aware of these timescales.
- Responding to the complainant in a clear and understandable manner.

Where complaints are escalated to a review panel, all panel members will be aware that:

- The review panel is independent and impartial.
- No individual with prior involvement in the complaint, or the circumstances surrounding it, is permitted to sit on the panel.
- The aim of the panel is to achieve a reasonable resolution and, ultimately, attain reconciliation between the parties involved.
- Reconciliation between the trust and complainant is not always achievable, and that it may only be possible to establish facts and make recommendations to reassure the complainant that their case has been taken seriously.
- The review panel can:
  - Dismiss or uphold the complaint, in whole or in part.
  - Decide on appropriate action to be taken.
  - Recommend changes that the trust can make to prevent reoccurrence of the problem.
- Complainants may feel nervous or inhibited in a formal setting and, therefore, the proceedings should be as welcoming as possible.
- When a child is present at the review panel, extra care needs to be taken to ensure that the child does not feel intimidated, as well as ensuring the child's view is represented equally.

The review panel chair will:

- Ensure that minutes of the review panel are taken on every occasion.
- Explain the remit of the review panel to the complainant.
- Ensure that all issues are addressed and that outcomes are reached based on facts and evidence.
- Help to put at ease and console individuals involved who are not used to speaking at such review panels, particularly any students involved.
- Conduct the review panel in a manner that ensures everyone is treated with respect and courtesy.
- Ensure that the room's layout and setting is non-adversarial, yet still sets the appropriate tone.
- Confirm that no member of the panel has previously been involved in the earlier stages of the procedure or has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings.
- Give both the complainant and the trust the opportunity to state their case and seek clarity without undue interruption.
- Provide copies of any written material or evidence to everyone in attendance of the meeting, ensuring that everyone has seen the necessary material.
- Organise a short adjournment of the review panel if required.
- Continuously liaise with the clerk to ensure the procedure runs smoothly.

- Help to provide the support necessary where the complainant is a child.

## 6. The Role of the ESFA

If a complainant remains dissatisfied once the complaint procedure has been completed, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State. If a complainant wishes to escalate a complaint, the trust will refer them to the relevant contact form ([https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact\\_the\\_Department\\_for\\_Education](https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact_the_Department_for_Education)) and prompt them to follow the instructions on this form to submit a complaint to the Secretary of State.

The ESFA will not overturn the trust or panel's decision about a complaint or re-investigate the original complaint. The ESFA will only intervene following a complaint if it believes the trust has:

- Breached a clause in its funding agreement.
- Failed to comply with education law or acted unreasonably when exercising related education functions.

When making a final decision about a complaint, the trust reserves the right to seek advice from the ESFA on whether they are acting reasonably and lawfully; however, the ESFA will not be able to advise on how to resolve the complaint.

## 7. Complaint Procedure

### i. General Principles

This policy is implemented on a trust-wide level. The trust will ensure that the complaint procedure is:

- Easily accessible and publicised on its website.
- Simple to understand and put into practice.
- Impartial and fair to all parties involved.
- Respectful of confidentiality duties.
- Continuously under improvement, using input from all schools within the trust.
- Fairly investigated, by an independent person where necessary.
- Used to address all issues to provide appropriate and effective responses where necessary.

It is a statutory requirement for academies to have the first three stages (informal, formal and review panel) in their complaint procedure.

- **Informal** – which will usually come in the form of a meeting between a representative of the trust or individual school and the complainant.
- **Formal** – where the complaint is put in writing and investigated.

- **Review Panel** – where the panel includes at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, including one person who is independent of the management and running of the trust.

At each stage, complainants will be informed of their options for escalation if they are unsatisfied with the outcome of their complaint. The appropriate person will communicate the details of the next stage of the process when delivering the outcome of the current stage, where applicable.

To prevent later challenge or disagreement over what was said in in-person meetings or telephone conversations, notes will be kept for all formal complaints and a copy of any written response will be added to the record of the complaint, which is kept securely.

## ii. **Stage one – informal complaint**

An informal complaint may be made in person, by telephone or in writing/email; however, it is preferred that initial, informal complaints are explored and discussed via an in-person meeting.

Where a complaint has been made about a member of staff, the complainant can discuss the concern with the headteacher / principal, or a person delegated to hear the complaint on their behalf, to seek support. If the concern is about the headteacher / principal / the CEO of the trust, the governance team should be informed, and will ensure an appropriate person is assigned to manage the complaint. If the complainant is unsure of any aspect of this, they should contact the governance team for advice at [governance@mtoat.co.uk](mailto:governance@mtoat.co.uk).

Where a complaint is made initially to a governor or trustee, the complainant will be referred to the appropriate person by the governance team. No governor or trustee will act alone on a complaint outside of the procedure; if they do, they cannot be involved if the complaint is subject to a review panel at a later stage of the procedure.

Within **20** school days of notification of an informal complaint, the complainant and the relevant member of staff should discuss the issue in a respectful and informal manner to seek a mutual resolution.

At this initial communication stage of the complaint, the complainant will be asked for their input as to what they believe may resolve the issue about which the complaint has been made to avoid further escalation where possible.

In line with ESFA guidance, complainants should note that any acknowledgement by the trust that it could have handled the situation better is not an admission of unlawful or negligent action.

If an appropriate resolution cannot be sought at this informal level, or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome following the initial discussions, the person managing the response to the complaint will inform the complainant about the next level of the procedure.

### iii. Stage two – formal complaint

Formal complaints must be made in writing.

Stage two of the process will be completed within **40** school days. Where the situation is recognised as complex, and it is deemed to be unable to be resolved within this timescale, the person managing the complaint will contact the complainant to inform them of the revised target date via a written notification.

An appointment with the appropriate person for managing the complaint/investigator should be made, as soon as reasonably practical, to avoid any possible worsening of the situation.

If the complaint involves a headteacher / principal, the complainant will initially need to write, in confidence, to the CEO, who will attempt to resolve the issue e.g. by arranging a meeting with the complainant within **30** school days, before moving directly to stage three of the procedure. If the complaint is about the CEO, (or headteacher / principal, and the CEO & headteacher / principal is the same person), or the complainant is unsure of any aspect of this, they should contact the governance team for advice at [governance@mtoat.co.uk](mailto:governance@mtoat.co.uk).

Where the appropriate person has made reasonable attempts to accommodate the complainant with dates for a complaint meeting and they refuse or are unable to attend, the meeting will be convened in their absence and a conclusion will be reached in the interests of drawing the complaint to a close.

In terms of a complaint being made against a member of staff, the headteacher / principal will discuss the issue with the staff member in question. Where necessary, the headteacher / principal will conduct interviews with any relevant parties, including witnesses and students, and take statements from those involved. All discussions shall be recorded by the headteacher / principal, and findings and resolutions will be communicated to the complainant either verbally or in writing.

Once all facts are established, the person managing the complaint shall contact the complainant in writing with an explanation of the decision and invited to meet to discuss the findings. The complainant will be advised of any escalation options (e.g. escalation to stage three) and will be provided with details of this process.

The complainant can also be provided with copies of minutes, on request, subject to any necessary redactions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK GDPR. Any further action the trust plans to take to resolve the issue will be explained to the complainant in writing.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome suggested, the procedure will progress to stage three. A request to escalate to stage three will be made to the governance team within **10** school days of the end of stage two, i.e. communication of an outcome.

#### iv. Stage three – review panel

Where the complaint progresses to stage three, a review panel will be constituted to hear the complaint, consisting of at least three individuals who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, including at least one independent panel member. Where the complaint concerns an individual school, the independent panel member will have no clear connection with that school, such as having conducted work for the school. Where possible, the independent panel member will also have no association with the trust. Where this is not possible, however, and the complaint concerns an individual school, in line with the ESFA's guidance, a governor serving on the governing body of a different school within the trust may occupy this role, as they will be sufficiently separate from the school being complained about.

The governance team will record the date the escalation request was received, acknowledge receipt of the complaint, and inform the complainant of the scheduled time and date of the review panel in writing. The meeting will be convened within **30** days of the receipt of the escalation request where possible. Where this is not possible, the governance team will provide an anticipated date and ensure the complainant is kept up to date.

**5** days' notice will be given to all parties attending the review panel, including the complainant.

\*If reasonable attempts are made to accommodate complainants with dates for complaint meetings, or the review panel, and they refuse or are unable to attend, the trust can:

- Convene meetings in their absence.
- Reach a conclusion in the interests of drawing the complaint to a close.

Prior to the review panel, the clerk will have written to the complainant informing them of how the review panel will be conducted. The headteacher / principal of the school in question will also have a copy of this letter.

At the review panel, all participants will be given the opportunity to put their case across and discuss any issues. The meeting will allow for:

- The complainant to be present and accompanied at the review panel if they wish\*.
- The complainant to explain their complaint and the individual managing the complaint to explain the reasons for their decision.
- The complainant to question the individual managing the complaint, and vice versa, about the complaint.
- Any evidence, including witnesses who have been prior approved by the chair of the panel, to be questioned.
- Members of the panel to question both the complainant and, where relevant, the individual about whom the complaint was made.
- Final statements to be made by both parties involved.

Neither the complainant nor the trust will bring legal representation to this review panel, unless in exceptional circumstances, where this will be agreed beforehand. A member of staff who may be a witness to the complaint can bring a union representative or legal representative if desired; this will be agreed before the review panel.

The purpose of the review panel will be reconciliation and ensuring that things that may have gone wrong are corrected.

The complainant will receive a written response explaining the panel's findings and recommendations within **30** school days. This letter will also explain whether there are any further rights of appeal and to whom they need to be addressed.

The panel will make findings and recommendations, and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be made available for inspection on the school premises by the board of trustees and the headteacher / principal.

Where relevant, the person complained about will receive a summary of the panel's findings and recommendations. They will also receive a copy of the minutes, on request, subject to any necessary redactions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK GDPR.

#### **v. Complaints to the ESFA**

If a complainant has exhausted the trust's complaint procedure, they will be advised that they can submit a complaint to the ESFA via their webpage (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure>) or by writing to:

Complaints Team,  
Education and Skills Funding Agency,  
Cheylesmore House,  
Coventry,  
Quinton Road,  
Coventry,  
CV1 2WT.

#### **vi. Resolving complaints**

At each stage of the complaint procedure, the trust is committed to resolving the complaint. Where appropriate, the trust will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, and may offer one of the following:

- An explanation.
- An admission that the situation could have been handled better.
- An assurance that the trust will try and ensure the incident will not occur again.
- An outline 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 changes will be made.
- An undertaking to review trust policies in light of the complaint.

- An apology.

### **vii. Withdrawal of a complaint**

Where a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, the trust will ask them to confirm this in writing. Despite the complaint having been withdrawn, the trust and school will still take the complainant's voice seriously and attempt to avoid causing similar distress to others in the future. The trust and school will not under any circumstances ask or pressure an individual to withdraw a complaint.

### **viii. Record keeping**

A written record will be kept of all formal complaints that are made, regardless of the stage at which they are resolved. This shall detail the following:

- The main issues raised, the findings and any recommendations.
- Whether the complaint was resolved following an informal route, formal route or review panel.
- Actions taken by the trust as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint was upheld).

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or an inspectorate requests access to them. Information that the trust retains relating to a complaint will be stored securely and in line with its records management policy.

Academies are data controllers in their own right and must decide for themselves how long to keep records, unless statutory regulations apply, e.g. attendance records must be kept for three years.

The trust will hold records of complaints separate to student records while a complaint is ongoing, so that access to these records can be maintained. Thereafter, the trust will retain records of complaints and related documents in line with the data protection policy and records management policy. Personal data will only be kept for as long as necessary.

## **8. Interviewing Witnesses**

When interviewing students to gather information regarding a complaint, the interview should be conducted in the presence of another member of staff or, in the case of serious complaints, e.g. where the possibility of criminal investigation exists, in the presence of their parent or carer. All students interviewed will be made fully aware of what the interview concerns and their right to have someone with them.

The trust will ensure that the conduction of interviews does not prejudice an investigation by the local authority designated officer (LADO) or the police.



The trust understands the importance of ensuring a friendly and relaxed area which is free from intimidation. Staff are allowed a colleague to support them at their interview. The colleague must not be anyone likely to be interviewed themselves, including their line manager. The interviewer will not express opinions in words or attitude, so as to not influence the interviewee. The interviewee will agree a copy of the notes of the interview.

## 9. Recording Devices

The trust holds the right to use recording devices, where appropriate, for the purposes of a reasonable adjustment.

Recording devices will not be used without the prior consent of all parties.

Where the trust allows complainants to record meetings, the following will be considered:

- How any decision to allow recordings may affect any third parties called to act as witnesses.
- The impact and consequences on the individuals involved in the complaint in the event that recordings are lost or leaked.

The trust will not accept as evidence any recordings that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

Details of any complaint made shall not be shared with the entire governing body and / or board of trustees. The exception to this is when a complaint is made against the whole governing body and / or board of trustees and they need to be aware of the allegations made against them to respond to any independent investigation.

Complainants have a right to request access copies of these records under the UK GDPR and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The trust will hold all records of complaints from each school, as well as those regarding the trust itself, centrally. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection, requests to access them.

## 10. Exceptional Circumstances

The ESFA expects complainants to have completed the trust's complaint procedure before directing a complaint to them. The exceptions to this include when:

- Students are at risk of harm.
- Students are missing education.
- A complainant is being prevented from having their complaint progressed through the trust's complaint procedure.
- The ESFA has evidence that the trust is proposing to act or is acting unlawfully or unreasonably.



If a social services authority decides to investigate a situation, the MTOAT may postpone the complaint procedure.

## 11. Managing Unreasonable Complaints

The trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. The trust will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the trust itself or any of its schools; however, the trust does not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

For the purposes of this policy, “**unreasonable complaints**” include:

- Vexatious complaints, which:
  - Are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitious.
  - Insist upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.
  - Insist upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.
  - Are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
  - Demand for redress, which lacks any serious purpose or value.
- Serial or persistent complaints, which:
  - Are duplicated, sent by the same complainant once the initial complaint has been closed.
  - Are new complaints that are submitted additionally, as part of an existing open complaint, by the same complainant.

A complaint may also be regarded as unreasonable when 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 cooperate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaint procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaint procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on, or 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 seeks to have 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 that complaint where the trust's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the ESFA.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the complainant:

- Acts maliciously or aggressively.
- Uses threats, intimidation or violence.
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language.
- Knows the complaint to be false.
- Uses falsified information.
- Publishes unacceptable information in media such as social media websites and newspapers.

The above applies regardless of the method the complaint is made, e.g. face-to-face, by telephone, in writing or electronically.

Complainants should limit the number of communications with the trust while a 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 individual leading the response to a complaint will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

Serial or persistent complaints will only be marked as 'serial' once the complainant has completed the complaint procedure. It is the complaint that will be marked as 'serial', meaning the complainant can complain about a separate issue if necessary.

If the behaviour continues, the individual managing the complaint will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the trust or any of its schools causing a significant level of disruption, the trust may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after six months.

A decision to stop responding will only be considered in circumstances where one or more of the following statements are true:

- Every reasonable step has been taken to address the complainant's concerns.
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the trust's position and their options.
- The complainant contacts the trust or any of its schools repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.

If the above criteria are met, in making a decision to stop responding, the trust will also consider if the complainant is often abusive or aggressive in their communication, makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff, or if the trust believes their intent is to disrupt or inconvenience the trust or its schools.

The trust will not stop responding to a complainant on the basis that they are difficult to deal with or they ask complex questions.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from the premises.

## 12. Complaints Campaigns

Where the trust becomes the subject of a complaints campaign from complainants who are not connected with the trust, **a standard, single response will be published on the trust's website.**

If the trust receives a large number of complaints about the same subject from complainants who are connected to the trust, e.g. parents, each complainant will receive an individual response.

If complainants remain dissatisfied with the trust's response, they will be directed to the ESFA.

## 13. Barring from the Premises

School premises are private property and therefore any individual may be barred from entering the premises.

If an individual's behaviour is cause for concern, the headteacher / principal of the relevant school will ask the individual to leave the premises.

The headteacher / principal will notify the parties involved in writing, explaining that their implied licence for access to the premises has been temporarily revoked and why, subject to any representations that the individual may wish to make. The individual involved will be given the opportunity to formally express their views regarding the decision to bar them.

This decision to bar will be reviewed by the CEO and the chair of governors / the chair of trustees where escalated, taking into account any discussions following the incident. If the decision is made to continue the bar, the individual will be contacted in writing, informing them of how long the bar will be in place, and when the decision will be reviewed.

Anyone wishing to make a complaint regarding a barring order can do so in writing, including via email, to the headteacher / principal or CEO, chair of governors / trust.

## 14. Standard of Fluency Complaints

As members of a public authority, all staff are subject to the fluency duty imposed by the Immigration Act 2016, which requires staff members to have an appropriate level of fluency in English in order to teach students.

The trust is free to determine the level of spoken communication necessary in order for staff members to develop effective performance, but it will be matched to the demands of the role in question.

The trust will be satisfied that an individual has the necessary level of fluency appropriate for the role they will be undertaking, whether this is an existing or potential new member of staff.

If a member of the school community feels that a staff member has insufficient proficiency in spoken English for the performance of their role, they are required to follow the complaint procedure outlined in this policy.

For the purpose of this policy, a **“legitimate complaint”** is one which is about the standard of spoken English of a member of staff; complaints regarding an individual’s accent, dialect, manner or tone of communication are not considered legitimate complaints. All legitimate complaints regarding the fluency duty will be handled in line with the processes detailed in this policy.

In addition to the processes outlined in this policy, the trust will assess the merits of a legitimate complaint against the necessary standard of spoken English fluency required for the role in question.

To assess the merits, the school at which the staff member works will undertake an objective assessment against clear criteria set out in the role specification or against the level of fluency descriptors relevant to the role in question.

If the complaint is upheld, the trust will consider what action is necessary to meet the fluency duty. This may include:

- Specific training.
- Specific re-training.
- Assessment.
- Redeployment.
- Dismissal.

Appropriate support will be provided to staff to ensure that they are protected from vexatious complaints and are not subjected to unnecessary fluency testing.

Records of complaints regarding fluency will be kept in accordance with the processes outlined in the ‘Recording a Complaint’ section of this policy.

## 15. Availability

A copy of this policy will be made available on request. It will also be published on the trust website, and the websites of individual schools within the trust, as recommended by the ESFA.

## 16. Monitoring and Review

The complaint procedure will be reviewed **annually**, taking into account any legislative changes and the latest guidance issued by the DfE or ESFA. Responsibility for reviewing the procedure belongs to the board of trustees. All projected review dates will be adhered to.

Information gathered through reviewing the complaint procedure will be used to continuously improve and develop the process. The monitoring and reviewing of complaints will be used to help evaluate each school's performance, and the performance of the trust as a whole.

## 17. Key Contacts

### **AUTC:**

Principal: [principal@aylesburyutc.co.uk](mailto:principal@aylesburyutc.co.uk)

Governance team: [governance@mtoat.co.uk](mailto:governance@mtoat.co.uk)

### **Wallingford School:**

Headteacher:

[head.4140@wallingfordschool.com](mailto:head.4140@wallingfordschool.com)

Governance team: [governance@mtoat.co.uk](mailto:governance@mtoat.co.uk)

### **Brightwell School:**

Headteacher:

[head.3221@brightwell.oxon.sch.uk](mailto:head.3221@brightwell.oxon.sch.uk)

Governance team: [governance@mtoat.co.uk](mailto:governance@mtoat.co.uk)

### **MTOAT:**

CEO email: [marstonj@mtoat.co.uk](mailto:marstonj@mtoat.co.uk)

Governance team: [governance@mtoat.co.uk](mailto:governance@mtoat.co.uk)

If you have any queries, please contact the governance team: [governance@mtoat.co.uk](mailto:governance@mtoat.co.uk)