Coppice

Primary Partnership

Growing Together, Striving for Excellence.

# Complaints Policy

**Approved:** Term 6 2025/26

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## 1. Introduction

Coppice Primary Partnership (CPP) endeavours to provide the best possible education for all its pupils in an open and transparent environment. We welcome any feedback that we receive from parents, pupils and third parties, and we accept that not all of this will be positive. Where concerns are raised the Trust intends for these to be dealt with fairly, openly, promptly and without prejudice.

Parents and others are encouraged to approach the academy directly and refrain from airing concerns about the academy and its staff on social media sites. Posting negative comments on social media can cause unnecessary damage and upset and is often counterproductive.

This procedure is intended to allow you to raise a concern or complaint relating to the Trust or to one or more of the schools, or the services that are provided. It seeks to:

- Respect people's desire for confidentiality.
- Addresses all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary.
- Provide information to the trust and school senior leaders so that services can be improved.

CPP operates a three-stage complaints procedure:

- Stage 1 – Informal Concern and Resolution: early discussion with the person best placed to understand and resolve the matter.
- Stage 2 – Formal Complaint and Investigation: a formal, scoped investigation where the concern has not been resolved at Stage 1, or where CPP has agreed that direct entry to Stage 2 is appropriate.
- Stage 3 – Panel Hearing: the final internal stage, at which a panel considers how the formal complaint was handled and whether the conclusions and any remedy were reasonable

All 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 or we are legally required to release them.

An anonymous concern or complaint may not be investigated under this procedure, unless the Headteacher, Trust Leader, Chair of the Local Governing Body or Chair of Trustees accepts that there are exceptional circumstances, for example a Child Protection issue. Anonymous complaints will not be automatically disregarded as they may relate to a serious issue which may subsequently resurface.

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.

It is also based on good practice guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE) on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations.

## 2. Scope of this Policy

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to CPP about any of the facilities or services that we provide.

We will use this complaints procedure, unless the complaint falls under the exceptions listed below and are dealt with under separate statutory procedures. In addition, where complaints are deemed to be vexatious, they will be dealt with using the Persistent Complaints and Harassment Policy.

| **Exceptions** | **Who to contact** |
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| Admissions to schools | Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the 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.<br>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). LADO – 03000 410888/MASH – 03000 420004. |
| Exclusion of children from school | Complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure. However, further |

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| | information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. |
| National Curriculum content | Please contact the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk/contactus |
| Statutory assessments of special educational needs | Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with the local authority. |
| Whistleblowing | We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.<br>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.<br><br>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. |
| Staff grievances | Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures. |
| Trustee/Governor grievances | Complaints from trustees and/or governors will be dealt with by either the chair of trustees or the relevant LGB chair under the Trust's internal governance procedures. This does not preclude them from raising complaints in their capacity as a parent. |
| Staff conduct | Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.<br>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member because of a complaint. However, they will be notified that the matter is being addressed. |
| Data protection matters | Complaints about how CPP, or one of its schools, has handled personal data will be managed under the Trust's Data Protection Policy and the Data Protection Complaints process set out in this policy. Where a complaint includes both data protection issues and wider school/trust complaint issues, CPP may separate the issues and respond under the most appropriate procedure. The |

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| | complainant will be informed how each part of the complaint will be handled. |
| Freedom of information matters | Complaints about our compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 are handled under our freedom of information policy and in accordance with relevant guidance from the ICO. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the ICO directly, but the ICO will usually expect you to have raised your concerns with us in the first instance. |
| 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 directly. |
| School re-organisation proposals | Where concerns are not adequately addressed by the academy, complaints can be raised directly with the Department for Education. |

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 this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

## 3. Concerns and Formal Complaints

CPP distinguishes between a concern and a formal complaint. Both form part of the complaints procedure, but they are considered at different stages.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many concerns can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaint's procedure.

### 3.1. Concern

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt about an action, decision, lack of action or other issue considered important, for which reassurance, explanation or early resolution is sought. Concerns are considered through Stage 1 of the complaints procedure. The Stage 1 procedure is set out in Section 5.1.

### 3.2. Formal Complaint

A formal complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about an action taken, a decision made or a lack of action, which remains unresolved following Stage 1, or which CPP has agreed may proceed directly to Stage 2. Formal complaints are considered through Stage 2 of the complaints procedure. The Stage 2 procedure is set out in Section 5.2.

If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing. If a complainant commences legal action against CPP in relation to their complaint, CPP will consider whether it is appropriate to suspend the complaints procedure until the legal proceedings have concluded.

### 3.3 Multiple Complaints

For the purposes of this policy, multiple complaints are defined as a complaint from 3 or more separate individuals which are all based on the same subject. Depending on the subject of the complaints we may deviate from this policy and instead:

- Send a template response to all complainants and/or
- Publish a single response on the academy's website.

Where a complainant submits multiple complaints, forms or correspondence arising from substantially the same facts, events or issues, CPP may consolidate them and respond through a single complaints process. Repeated or overlapping correspondence will not restart Stage 1 or Stage 2 timescales or create separate complaint processes unless CPP determines that the matters are genuinely distinct

Where repeated, overlapping, excessive or unreasonable correspondence hinders CPP's consideration of the concern or complaint, or places unreasonable demands on staff time, CPP may consider whether the Persistent Complaints and Harassment Policy applies.

## 4. How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A Stage 1 concern may be raised in person, by telephone or in writing. It may also be raised by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant where appropriate consent has been provided. A Stage 2 formal complaint must normally be submitted in writing using the Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form at Appendix 1. Where a complainant requires support or a reasonable adjustment, CPP will assist them to record the complaint in an accessible form.

Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. The three-month time limit applies to the date on which the concern is first raised at Stage 1. Where CPP agrees that a matter may proceed directly to Stage 2, it applies to the date the formal complaint is received. CPP will consider complaints made outside this timeframe where exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints made outside of term time will be deemed to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

The Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form (Appendix 1) must clearly identify:

- the action, decision or lack of action being complained about;
- when the matter occurred;
- who was involved, where relevant;
- who the concern was raised with at Stage 1;
- the response or resolution offered at Stage 1;
- why the complainant remains dissatisfied; and
- the outcome or resolution being sought.

Where Stage 1 has not been attempted, the complainant should explain why they believe informal resolution would be inappropriate. CPP will determine whether the matter should first be considered at Stage 1 or may proceed directly to Stage 2.

### 4.1. Concern and Complaint Matrix

Panel hearings may include Headteachers or Governors from other Trust schools as required.

Please see Appendix 2 for contact details.

The person responsible for considering a Stage 1 concern should be the person best placed to seek an early resolution and must be able to consider the matter objectively. Where Stage 1 would be inappropriate, CPP may direct the matter to Stage 2 in accordance with Section 5.1.

| Concern or complaint involving | Stage 1 – Informal Concern and Resolution | Stage 2 formal complaint sent to | Stage 2 investigated by | Stage 2 written outcome issued by | Stage 3 Panel Hearing |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A member of school staff, other than the Headteacher** | The member of staff concerned, their line manager, or an appropriate school leader | Headteacher | Headteacher, local senior leader or Trust senior leader with no material prior involvement | Headteacher, local senior leader or Trust senior leader, as appropriate | Three eligible trustees and/or governors with no prior involvement, including at least one member independent of the management and running of the school |
| **The Headteacher** | The Headteacher, where the concern relates to a school matter rather than the Headteacher personally. Where the concern is about the Headteacher personally, the Chair of the Local Governing Body | Chair of the Local Governing Body | Chair of the Local Governing Body, an eligible trustee, or a Trust senior leader with no material prior involvement | Trust Leader or an eligible trustee with no material prior involvement | Three eligible trustees and/or governors with no prior involvement, including at least one member independent of the management and running of the school |
| **The Chair of the Local Governing Body, an individual governor, or the Local Governing Body as a whole** | Trust Leader or Governance Professional, depending on the nature of the concern | Trust Leader | An eligible trustee, Trust senior leader or other suitably independent person | Trust Leader or an eligible trustee with no material prior involvement | Three eligible trustees and/or governors with no prior involvement, including at least one member independent of the management and running of the school |
| **A member of the Trust Central Team, other than the Trust Leader** | The relevant line manager or Trust Leader | Governance Professional | Trust Leader, Trust senior leader or other suitably independent person | Trust Leader or an eligible trustee, as appropriate | Three eligible trustees and/or governors with no prior involvement, including at least one member independent of |

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| | | | | | the management and running of the school |
| **The Trust Leader** | Chair of Trustees, where informal resolution is appropriate | Chair of Trustees | Chair of Trustees, an eligible trustee or an external investigator with no material prior involvement | Chair of Trustees or an eligible trustee not involved in the investigation | Two eligible trustees with no prior involvement and at least one independent panel member from outside CPP |
| **The Chair or Vice-Chair of Trustees, or an individual trustee** | Governance Professional or another eligible trustee, depending on the nature of the concern | Governance Professional | An eligible trustee or external investigator with no material prior involvement | Trust Leader or an eligible trustee with no material prior involvement | Two eligible trustees with no prior involvement and at least one independent panel member from outside CPP |
| **The Trust Board as a whole, or the majority of trustees** | Governance Professional, who will seek advice from an appropriate independent person | Governance Professional | An external investigator or other suitably independent person | An independent person appointed for this purpose | A panel of at least three people who are independent of CPP and have had no prior involvement |
| **A whole-Trust policy, decision, service or operational matter** | Trust Leader or the Trust senior leader responsible for the relevant area | Trust Leader | Trust Leader, Trust senior leader, eligible trustee or external investigator with no material prior involvement | Chair or Vice-Chair of Trustees, or another eligible trustee | Two eligible trustees with no prior involvement and at least one independent panel member from outside CPP |

*The individual appointed at each stage will depend on the nature and circumstances of the concern or complaint. CPP may appoint a different suitably senior or independent person where this is necessary to ensure fairness, impartiality, appropriate expertise or manageable leadership capacity. Where a complaint concerns more than one person or level of the organisation, it will normally be directed to the most senior appropriate recipient identified in the matrix.*

### 4.2 Formal Complaint Template and Accessibility

A Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form is included at Appendix 1. If a complainant requires help to complete the form, they should contact the relevant school office or Trust office. CPP will consider reasonable adjustments to enable complainants to access and complete the procedure.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. Where a complainant is unable to complete the form because of disability, language, literacy or accessibility needs, CPP will make reasonable adjustments. This may include helping the complainant to record the complaint, accepting the complaint in another written format, or arranging a meeting to clarify the complaint..

To support a fair and efficient Stage 2 investigation, complainants are expected to summarise the formal complaint clearly and concisely. The complaint summary should normally be no more than 500 words and the requested outcome should normally be no more than 200 words. Relevant supporting documents may be attached, but the complainant should identify which documents are directly relevant and what point each document supports.

### 4.3 Incomplete or Unclear Stage 2 Formal Complaints

Where a Stage 2 formal complaint does not clearly identify the complaint, the matters to be investigated, the outcome sought or why the complainant remains dissatisfied following Stage 1, CPP will ask the complainant to clarify this before the formal investigation proceeds. The Stage 2 timescale will normally begin once Stage 1 has concluded, where applicable, and the formal complaint is sufficiently clear to investigate.

Where a formal complaint does not clearly identify the complaint, the matters to be investigated, or the outcome sought, CPP will ask the complainant to clarify this before the complaint proceeds. The timescale for Stage 1 will normally begin once the complaint is sufficiently clear to investigate. If the complainant does not provide clarification within 10 school days, CPP may either proceed on the basis of the information available or close the matter where it is not possible to identify a complaint capable of investigation. CPP will confirm this decision in writing.

### 4.4 Data Protection Complaints

We take concerns about how personal data is handled seriously. If you believe that your personal data has been processed inappropriately, you have a statutory right to raise a complaint under Section 164A of the Data Protection Act 2018. Complaints relating to personal data handling will be managed in accordance with our Data Protection Policy and the Data Protection Complaints process set out below.

**Raising a concern**

In the first instance, please contact us directly via the school office so that we can investigate your concern. Please provide as much detail as possible about your concern to help us respond effectively.

**How we will handle your complaint**

We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 30 days
We will investigate your concerns fairly and impartially
We will respond to you without undue delay, setting out our findings and any actions taken

Where appropriate, we may contact you to request further information or clarification.

We will keep a record of data protection complaints for audit and monitoring purposes. We will also use them to inform improvements to our data protection practices and procedures.

**Escalation**

If you are not satisfied with our response, you have the right to escalate your complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) at https://ico.org.uk or by calling 0303 123 1113.

## 5 The Complaints Procedure

CPP's complaints procedure begins with Stage 1 informal resolution. A Stage 2 formal complaint will normally only be considered once Stage 1 has concluded, unless CPP determines that informal resolution would be inappropriate. Stage 3 is the final internal review by an independent panel.

At the conclusion of each stage, CPP will tell the complainant how to proceed to the next stage if they remain dissatisfied. A complainant who remains dissatisfied must be given the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

### 5.1 Stage 1 – Informal Concern and Resolution

CPP expects concerns to be raised and considered at Stage 1 before a formal complaint is submitted. Early discussion provides the best opportunity to understand the issue, correct misunderstandings and agree a practical resolution without the need for a formal investigation.

A Stage 1 concern may be raised in person, by telephone or in writing and should normally be raised with the member of staff best placed to understand and resolve the matter. This may be the class teacher, phase leader, line manager or another appropriate school leader.

The person considering the concern will seek to:

- understand the specific concern;
- clarify the outcome being sought;
- consider any readily available information;
- correct misunderstandings where appropriate;
- identify any action or resolution that may address the concern; and
- confirm the outcome and next steps.

If the complainant has difficulty discussing the concern with a particular member of staff, or that member of staff is directly involved and cannot consider the matter objectively, the concern will be referred to another appropriate person. This person may be more senior, but the ability to consider the concern fairly is more important than seniority.

The concern will be acknowledged and a discussion or meeting will normally be arranged within 5 school days. CPP will seek to resolve the concern and confirm the Stage 1 outcome within 15 school days. Where this is not possible, CPP will explain the delay and provide a revised date.

At the conclusion of Stage 1, CPP will normally confirm in writing:

- its understanding of the concern;
- the steps taken to consider it;
- the response, action or resolution offered;
- any agreed next steps; and
- how the complainant may proceed to Stage 2 if they remain dissatisfied.

Where the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may proceed to Stage 2 by completing the Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form within 10 school days of receiving the Stage 1 outcome.

A formal complaint will normally only proceed to Stage 2 once Stage 1 has been attempted and concluded. Where a Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form is submitted without Stage 1 having been attempted, CPP will normally refer the matter to the appropriate person for informal consideration before the formal investigation begins. CPP may allow a matter to proceed directly to Stage 2 where it considers that Stage 1 would be inappropriate. This may include circumstances where:

- the matter is particularly serious, urgent or sensitive;
- safeguarding or risk of harm is raised;
- the concern is about the person who would ordinarily consider Stage 1;
- reasonable attempts at informal resolution have already been made;
- there has been a significant breakdown in the relationship;
- a reasonable adjustment is required;
- delay could cause disadvantage; or
- another exceptional circumstance applies.

CPP will confirm whether Stage 1 is required or whether the matter may proceed directly to Stage 2.

### 5.2 Stage 2 – Formal Complaints

Where a concern has not been resolved at Stage 1, or where CPP has agreed that direct entry to Stage 2 is appropriate, the complainant may submit a Stage 2 formal complaint. The complaint must be sent to the appropriate person identified in the Concern and Complaint Matrix and should normally be submitted using the Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form.

The date the Stage 2 formal complaint is received will be recorded and receipt acknowledged in writing within 5 school days. Before the investigation begins, CPP will confirm that Stage 1 has concluded or that direct entry to Stage 2 has been approved. Where the complaint is sufficiently clear, the acknowledgement will confirm:

- the complaint points to be investigated;
- the outcome sought;
- the identity or role of the investigator; and
- the date by which the Stage 2 response is expected.

Where the complaint is unclear, overly broad, does not identify the issue to be investigated, does not state the outcome sought or does not explain why the complainant remains dissatisfied following Stage 1, CPP will request clarification before the Stage 2 investigation begins.

An investigator with an appropriate level of experience and seniority will be appointed. CPP may appoint an external investigator or independent person where the complaint is complex, sensitive or high-risk, or where this would support objectivity, capacity or staff wellbeing.

The investigator will be provided with the Stage 1 concern record and outcome, where applicable. These provide context and evidence of the steps already taken but do not bind the Stage 2 investigator. The investigator must consider the formal complaint independently and reach findings based on the evidence within scope.

The investigator will determine the scope of the investigation by reference to the Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form, any clarification provided and the scope confirmed by CPP. The investigator is not required to investigate matters outside that scope, matters addressed through another procedure or material that is not relevant to the complaint being considered.

An investigator with an appropriate level of experience and seniority will be appointed. The investigator will determine the scope of the investigation by reference to the complaint submitted and any clarification provided. The investigator is not required to investigate matters that are outside the scope of the complaint, matters already addressed through another procedure, or material that is not relevant to the complaint being considered.

During the investigation, the investigator may interview the complainant, the person complained about and any relevant witnesses. Those interviewed may be accompanied where appropriate. The investigator will keep a written record of relevant meetings, interviews, evidence and decisions.
A formal written Stage 2 response will normally be provided within 15 school days of the Stage 2 timescale beginning. If this deadline cannot be met, the complainant will be informed of the reason and given a revised response date.

The Stage 2 response will address each complaint point within scope, state whether it is upheld, partly upheld or not upheld, explain the evidence and reasons for the decision and identify any action or remedy where appropriate.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the Stage 2 outcome, they may request a Stage 3 Panel Hearing by completing the Stage 3 Panel Hearing Request Form and returning it to the Trust Governance Professional within 10 school days of receiving the Stage 2 response.

### 5.3 Stage 3 – Panel Hearing - The final internal stage of the complaints procedure

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the Stage 2 outcome, they may request a Stage 3 Panel Hearing. The panel will consist of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters complained about. At least one panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school.

The Stage 3 panel will consider:

- whether the Stage 2 process was fair and followed the policy;
- whether the Stage 2 conclusions were reasonable based on the evidence within scope;
- whether the Stage 2 response addressed each scoped complaint point; and
- whether any remedy or action offered was reasonable.

The panel will not reinvestigate the complaint from the beginning, consider new complaints or consider evidence unrelated to the original Stage 2 formal complaint. New complaints must normally begin at Stage 1.

A request for a Stage 3 Panel Hearing must be made to the Trust Governance Professional within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 outcome, using the Stage 3 Panel Hearing Request Form. The request must explain why the complainant remains dissatisfied, identify the grounds for the request and state the outcome sought from the panel.

The Trust Governance Professional will record the date the Stage 3 request is received and acknowledge it in writing within 5 school days. Requests received outside the published timeframe will only be considered where exceptional circumstances apply.

### 5.3.1 Preparations for the Panel Hearing

CPP will aim to convene the panel hearing within 20 school days of receipt of a sufficiently clear Stage 3 request. Where this is not possible, the Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

The Governance Professional will notify the parties of the date, time, location and panel membership and circulate the relevant papers at least 5 school days before the hearing.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, or despite best efforts, it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date and time for a hearing within a reasonable timeframe, the Governance Professional may determine that the hearing proceeds on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

A complainant may be accompanied to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend, and in addition an interpreter if required. If a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union. Media and legal representatives are not permitted to attend.

It is requested that any written material is available for circulation to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

### 5.3.2 The Panel Hearing

The Chair will confirm the purpose and scope of the Stage 3 hearing at the outset. The hearing will be held in private and conducted as informally and non-adversarially as possible.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

### 5.3.3 Next Steps

The panel may uphold the complaint in full or in part, or not uphold it. Where the complaint is upheld in full or in part, the panel may recommend appropriate action and changes to systems, policies or procedures.

The Panel Chair will provide the complainant and CPP with the panel's findings, recommendations and reasons in writing within 10 school days of the hearing.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled.

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 CPP will take.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent in writing (either by letter or email) to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

### 5.3.4 Contacting the Department for Education

If the complainant believes the school / trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the DfE after they have completed Stage 3.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE through the link here.

## Appendix 1 – Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the person identified in Section 4.1 Complaint Matrix of this policy who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

| |
|---|
| **Your name:** |
| **Pupil's name (if relevant):** |
| **Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):** |
| **Address:**<br>**Postcode:**<br>**Day time telephone number:**<br>**Evening telephone number:**<br>**Email address:** |
| **Stage 1 – Informal Concern and Resolution**<br>- Who did you raise your concern with?<br>- Date the concern was raised:<br>- Date the Stage 1 response was received:<br>- What response or resolution was offered?<br>- Why do you remain dissatisfied?<br>- If Stage 1 has not been attempted, please explain why you believe informal resolution would be inappropriate: |

**Summary of complaint (usually no more than 500 words)**

- what specific action, decision or lack of action is your complaint about?
- When did this happen? Please include key dates.
- Who have you already spoken to and what was the response?

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| **What outcome are seeking to resolve the complaint at this stage (usually no more than 200 words)** |
| **What evidence are you attaching/including and why is it being included?** |
| I confirm that I have attempted to resolve this matter through Stage 1, or have explained why I believe Stage 1 would be inappropriate. I understand that CPP will use the information provided on this form to define the scope of the Stage 2 formal complaint. I confirm that I have identified the complaint I want investigated and the outcome I am seeking. I understand that CPP may request clarification before the Stage 2 investigation begins. |
| **Signature:**<br><br>**Date:** |
| **Official use** |
| **Date acknowledgement sent:** |
| **By whom:** |

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| **Complaint referred to:** |
| **Action taken:** |
| **Date:** |

## Appendix 2 – Stage 3 Panel Hearing (Escalation) Request Form

Use this form if you wish to request a Stage 3 Panel Hearing after receiving a Stage 2 complaint outcome.

**Important**
Stage 3 is not a reinvestigation of the complaint from the beginning. The panel will consider whether the Stage 2 process was fair and followed, and whether the conclusions and any remedy were reasonable based on the evidence already in scope.

**Complainant details**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name** | |
| **Relationship to pupil / school, if relevant** | |
| **Pupil name, if relevant** | |
| **Preferred contact email** | |
| **Preferred contact telephone** | |

**Stage 2 details**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Complaint reference, if known** | |
| **School / Trust matter** | |
| **Date Stage 2 outcome was received** | |
| **Name/role of Stage 2 responder, if known** | |

**Grounds for escalation**

Please tick the main reason(s) why you are requesting a Stage 3 Panel Hearing.

| | |
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| ☐ | I believe the Stage 2 process was not followed. |
| ☐ | I believe the Stage 2 process was unfair. |
| ☐ | I believe the Stage 2 conclusions were unreasonable based on the evidence considered. |
| ☐ | I believe the remedy or action offered at Stage 2 was unreasonable. |
| ☐ | I believe one or more points within the agreed Stage 2 scope were not addressed. |
| ☐ | Other in-scope reason, explained below. |

**Why do you remain dissatisfied with the Stage 2 outcome?**

Please explain clearly and concisely. This section should normally be no more than 500 words.

**What outcome are you seeking from the Stage 3 panel?**

Please state what you would like the panel to consider as an appropriate outcome. This should normally be no more than 200 words.

## Appendix 3 – Contact Details for Complaints

| Role | Email Address | Postal Address |
|---|---|---|
| Chair of Trustees | office@coppicepp.org | c/o The Trust Office<br>Loose Primary School<br>Loose Road,<br>Loose,<br>Maidstone,<br>Kent ME15 9UW |
| Trust Leader / CEO | | |
| Governance Professional | governance@coppicepp.org | |
| Headteacher | office@coxheath.kent.sch.uk | Coxheath Primary School<br>Stockett Lane,<br>Coxheath,<br>Maidstone,<br>Kent ME17 4PS |
| Headteacher | office@loose-primary.kent.sch.uk | Loose Primary School<br>Loose Road,<br>Loose,<br>Maidstone,<br>Kent ME15 9UW |
| Headteacher | office@st-katherines.kent.sch.uk | St Katherine's School & Nursery<br>St Katherine's Lane,<br>Snodland,<br>Kent ME6 5EJ |
| Data Protection Officer | Contact relevant school or trust office who will refer to the Trust DPO | |

## Appendix 4 - Roles and Responsibilities

### Introduction

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 panel should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

### A3.1 Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they

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

If the child/young person is the complainant, the panel 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 panel 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 panel considers is not in the child/young person's best interests. The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

The complainant is expected to engage constructively with Stage 1 informal resolution unless CPP has agreed that Stage 1 would be inappropriate.

### A3.2 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 what has happened and who has been involved
    - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
    - consideration of records and other relevant information
    - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels 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 of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the head teacher or complaints panel that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The head teacher or complaints panel will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

The Stage 2 investigator should review the Stage 1 record as relevant context but must reach independent findings based on the evidence within the agreed scope of the formal complaint.

### A3.3 Trust Governance Professional

The Trust Governance Professional is the contact point for the complainant and the panel 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 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 meetings and keep records
- notify all parties of the panel's decision.

### A3.4 Panel Chair

The panel's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Trust Governance Professional) 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 panel 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 school 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 panel is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the panel 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 Trust Governance Professional

### A3.5 Panel Member

Panel members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so
- No governor / trustee may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- The trust may use governors from other school's Local Governing Boards from within the Trust to ensure impartiality.
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

## Appendix 5 – Concerns and Complaints Timeline Summary

| | |
|---|---|
| Stage 1 – Informal Concern and Resolution | Concern raised with the appropriate member of staff |
| | Concern acknowledged and discussion or meeting normally arranged within 5 school days |
| | Written Stage 1 outcome normally confirmed within 15 school days |
| | If dissatisfied, complainant may submit a Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form within 10 school days |
| | |
| Stage 2 – Formal Complaint and Investigation | Formal complaint submitted using the Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form |
| | Receipt acknowledged within 5 school days |
| | Scope clarified and investigator appointed |
| | Formal response normally issued within 15 school days of the Stage 2 timescale beginning |
| | If dissatisfied, complainant may submit a Stage 3 Panel Hearing Request Form within 10 school days |
| | |
| Stage 3 – Panel Hearing | Request acknowledged within 5 school days. |
| | Hearing normally convened within 20 school days of receipt of a sufficiently clear request |
| | Papers circulated at least 5 school days before the hearing |
| | Written decision issued within 10 school days of the hearing. |

## Appendix 6 – Panel Hearing Agenda and Procedure

The Chair will confirm the scope of the Stage 3 Panel Hearing at the outset. The panel will consider the grounds submitted by the complainant and will not consider new complaints or matters outside the scope of the original Stage 2 formal complaint. Unless otherwise notified the Agenda for a Panel Hearing is:

a) The parent and academy representative will enter the hearing together.
b) The chair of the panel will introduce the committee members and outline the process.
c) The complainant will explain why they remain dissatisfied with the Stage 2 outcome, within the agreed scope of the hearing.
d) The academy representative and panel members will question the complainant.
e) The academy representative will explain how the Stage 2 formal complaint was investigated, the conclusions reached and any remedy or action offered.
f) The complainant and the panel members will question the academy representative.
g) The complainant will sum up their complaint.
h) The academy representative will sum up the academy/Trust's actions.
i) The Chair will confirm that the panel's written decision will be issued within 10 school days of the hearing.
j) Both parties will leave together while the panel arrives at its decision.

Questions from either party will normally be directed through the Chair, who may intervene where questions are repetitive, irrelevant, inappropriate or outside the agreed scope.

The Governance Professional and/or any legal advisor assisting the panel, will stay to assist the panel in its decision making.

The Clerk and/or the panel reserves the right to modify the above agenda at their sole discretion, for example requiring the complainant and the academy representative to present their complaint/actions separately to the panel in the absence of the other party.

If the complainant has not arrived by the start of the panel, the Clerk will attempt to contact them via telephone to ascertain if they are delayed, have chosen not to attend, or wish to withdraw their complaint. If the Clerk is unable to speak with the complainant,

or if they confirm that they have chosen not to attend, the hearing will proceed in their absence 30 minutes after the scheduled start time. Findings and recommendations will be based on the written submissions previously provided.

The panel may be adjourned if they require further evidence, or in exceptional circumstances (for example, if clarification sought by them is essential to the proceedings). The adjourned date will be arranged as soon as possible.