HISP Multi Academy Trust

HISP Complaints Policy 2026-2028

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Our Trust's Complaints Policy 2026-2028

1. Introduction

1.1. The aim of this policy is to resolve complaints or concerns about Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Southampton and Portsmouth (HISP) Multi Academy Trust, any Academy within the Trust or any individual connected with the Trust, in a fair, thorough and transparent way. The Trust takes complaints seriously and views them as a chance to learn and improve for the future. Our ethos is to maintain a supportive environment where young people receive the best possible education. All staff are committed to this aim, with any issues raised by parents or carers to be responded to appropriately, allaying concerns and achieving a timely resolution.

The policy is guided by the Trust value "Pupils First," ensuring that the child's wellbeing and experiences remain central throughout the complaints process.

The policy also reflects the values of Excellence (high standards of communication), Courage (addressing concerns openly), Ambition (seeking improvement), Sustainability (building trust through consistent practice), and Equity (ensuring fairness for all complainants).

1.2. Anyone can make a complaint, but a different process applies depending on whether the person raising the complaint is a parent/carer[1] of a current pupil at an Academy within the Trust. Please refer to **Part A** below if you are a parent of a current pupil, otherwise please see **Part B**.

1.3. Please note that complaints about matters where an alternative complaints/appeal process exists will not be generally dealt with under this policy. These are set out below in **Part C**.

1.4. Requests for reasonable adjustments to the process set out below will be considered to ensure that Complainants can access and complete the process. At every stage, staff will consider whether complainants require additional support, including accessibility needs, cultural sensitivities, or communication barriers.

1.5. Investigations will be conducted in a fair, open and impartial manner, reflecting the Trust's values of Excellence and Equity. Investigators should consider cultural or communication needs and ensure interviews are accessible and non-discriminatory.

1.6. The complaint procedures set out in this policy do not apply to and are not intended for use by pupils.

[1] References to 'parents' in this policy include carers.

1.7. The Trust recognises that complainants may choose to use artificial intelligence (AI) tools to help draft correspondence or organise their concerns. Where AI is used, complainants remain responsible for ensuring that all information submitted is accurate, relevant and reflects their own genuine concerns.

Complaints should be concise, proportionate and focused on the matters being raised. The Trust may ask a complainant to clarify, summarise or resubmit a complaint where the use of AI has resulted in lengthy, repetitive, speculative or irrelevant material that makes it difficult to identify the issues requiring investigation. The timescales within this policy may be paused until sufficient clarification has been provided.

Part A – Complaints procedure for parents/carers of current pupils[2]

2. Stage 1 – Informal resolution

2.1. Any matter of concern or complaint should be raised, and attempted to be resolved, on an informal basis. Generally, it is expected that, where the matter relates to a pupil, it will have been raised with the pupil's form tutor before a request is made to deal with it under the formal stages of this policy.

2.2. The concern or complaint should be raised with the Academy or Trust within **3 months** of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within **3 months** of the last of these incidents. Complaints made outside of this time frame may not be considered unless exceptional circumstances apply.

2.3. Parents/carers may request meetings in person, by phone or online, depending on accessibility needs or personal circumstances. Staff should consider whether the complainant requires communication support (e.g. interpreter, advocate, alternative format documents) at this stage.

2.4. The Academy will seek to resolve matters at the informal stage within **15** school days[3] of the issue being raised by the parent.

2.5. Where the matter is not resolved at the informal stage, it may be progressed to the formal stage as set out below.

[2] Where the complaints process has been started (but not completed) whilst parents/carers have children at the Academy, but the children have since left, the procedure for current parents should continue to be used.
[3] School days in this policy refers to days when the Academy is open to pupils for teaching and does not include INSET days.

3. Stage 2 – Formal resolution: investigation by Headteacher

3.1. Stage 2 complaints must be set out in writing, which can be through the form available at **Appendix 1,** within **10** school days of the Stage 1 response and addressed to the Academy Headteacher (unless the complaint relates to the Headteacher, in which case please refer to the section headed '**Complaints against specific role-holders**' below). If a complainant finds it difficult to set out their concerns in writing, the Academy will offer support or allow verbal submission for transcription. The complaint should set out briefly the grounds of the complaint, stating what it is that the parent considers should have been done or where the Academy or Trust has not met reasonable expectations and confirming the outcome sought.

3.2. An investigation will be carried out by a nominated individual identified by the Headteacher as appropriate, who will acknowledge the complaint within **5** school days and may offer the parent a meeting. The Academy will ensure impartiality by selecting an investigator without conflicts of interest. The investigator will speak to others involved. Whenever reasonably possible, any meeting with the parent will take place within **15** school days of the written complaint being received. Parents/carers may request meetings in person, by phone or online, depending on accessibility needs or personal circumstances.

3.3. The investigator will put their findings in writing and will indicate what, if any, steps should be taken to resolve the matter. Whenever reasonably possible, this will be done within **15** school days of any meeting with the parent; if no meeting is arranged it will be within **25** school days of the written complaint being received. For complex issues where more time may be required this timescale may be extended following discussion with the complainant.

3.4. Where the parent remains dissatisfied, they may request that the complaint be progressed to Stage 3.

4. Stage 3 – Formal resolution: Complaints Panel Meeting

4.1. Stage 3 complaints must be set out in writing, stating where the parent remains dissatisfied and the outcome sought, and lodged with the Clerk to the Academy Committee (details are available on the Academy website in the Governors section) within **10** school days of the Stage 2 response.

4.2. The Clerk to the Academy Committee will acknowledge the Stage 3 complaint within **5** school days and will convene a Complaints Panel.

4.3. The Complaints Panel must comprise at least three people, which will include one person who is independent of the management and running of the Academy.

4.4. The Complaints Panel may include, but is not limited to, one or more persons from the following categories:

(i) a member of the Academy Committee of the Academy where the complaint emanated from;
(ii) a member of a Academy Committee from another Academy within the Trust;
(iii) a member of the Board of Trustees from the Trust;
(iv) a member of a Academy Committee or Trustee of another Academy Trust; and/or
(v) a person not connected with the Academy or the Trust.

4.5. None of the members of the Complaints Panel will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.

4.6. The independent panel member may be a member of an Academy Committee from another Academy within the Trust as long as they have no conflict and no prior knowledge of the complaint.

4.7. The Clerk will invite the Academy to put in writing its response to the Stage 3 complaint within **15** school days of receiving the request. Whether or not the Academy has responded, the Clerk will convene a meeting of the Complaints Panel within **15** school days of the request. That meeting will be held on Academy premises as quickly as practicable given the need to find a date that is reasonably convenient for the parent, the Academy and the members of the Complaints Panel. The meeting date, time and location will be confirmed to all parties at least **10** school days in advance. When arranging a complaints panel, the Clerk will offer the complainant two reasonable dates on which the panel can be convened. If the complainant is unable or unwilling to attend either of these dates, the panel will proceed on the final date offered, and the complaint will be considered based on the available evidence.

4.8. The panel will consider the complainant's access needs, including interpreters, disability adjustments, cultural sensitivities and the right to bring an advocate or supporter. The Clerk is responsible for ensuring complainants are offered reasonable adjustments and that communication is inclusive.

4.9. The meeting is not a court case, it will be held in private and will be as informal as circumstances allow. For this reason, electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted unless a parent's disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before the

recording of the meeting takes place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. The chair must actively ensure the process is inclusive and sensitive to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) considerations, such as language needs, disability support and cultural respect. The parent will have the opportunity to put forward their reasons for dissatisfaction and to enlarge on them, but may not introduce reasons that were not previously put in writing. The Complaints Panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded. The parent and the Academy/Trust will have the opportunity to put forward their respective version and views of events and each side, and the Complaints Panel members will be able to ask questions. The parent will have the opportunity to make final comments to the Complaints Panel.

4.10. The Complaints Panel may make findings and recommendations, and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be:

(vi) sent by electronic mail or otherwise provided in writing to the parent and, where relevant, the Academy or person complained about; and
(vii) available for inspection on the Academy premises by the Trust, the Headteacher and the Chief Executive Officer.

4.11. The Complaints Panel will formulate its response as quickly as reasonably possible, aiming to do so within **10** school days, and the Clerk will notify all concerned. Decision letters will be written in clear, accessible language, with alternative formats provided on request.

4.12. At any meeting, the parent will be entitled to bring a companion along to provide support. Legal representation will not normally be permitted. It will only be allowed where the Chair of the Complaints Panel is satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances and that refusing legal representation would be unfair or would place a party at a substantial disadvantage.

Where legal representation is permitted for one party, the Chair will consider whether equivalent arrangements are required to ensure that the proceedings remain fair to all parties

4.13. If the parent fails to attend the Complaints Panel Meeting on the day without compelling reasons, the Complaints Panel will still proceed in their absence, and the process will continue to its conclusion. Any further attempt to re-open the matter will be considered as falling under the “Serial or persistent Complainants” section as set out below.

5. Department for Education

5.1. Once the complaints process is concluded (or a complaint has been terminated due to undue delay or failure to lodge a request for a Stage 3 Complaints Panel Meeting within the time stated in the policy) the matter is closed. If the Complainant is still not satisfied, then they may contact the Department for Education (DfE). There is an online procedure at:

https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe

5.2. The Complainant may also write to the DfE at:

Ministerial and Public Communication Division
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

6. Complaints against specific role-holders

6.1. Complaints against the Headteacher

Any complaint relating to the Academy Headteacher must be raised in the first instance with the Academy Committee Chair who will, if an informal resolution cannot be reached, designate a member of the Academy Committee to investigate the complaint as per **Stage 2**.

6.2. Complaints against the Academy Committee

Where a complaint is brought against a member of the Academy Committee, it should be raised with the Chair of the Academy Committee, who will investigate the complaint (or appoint another member of the Academy Committee to do so) in the same way as in the first stage of the formal process at **Stage 2**.

If the complaint is against the Chair of the Academy Committee, then the Vice Chair of the Academy Committee will investigate the complaint (or appoint another member of the Academy Committee to do so) in the same way as in the first stage of the formal process at **Stage 2.**

In exceptional circumstances the Chair of Trustees may at their absolute discretion determine that a complaint against a member of the Academy Committee should be dealt with at Trust Board level and, if so determined, the Chair of Trustees will oversee **Stage 2.**

6.3. Complaints against individual Trustees/the Board of Trustees

If the complaint is against a Trustee, then it should be raised with the Chair of Trustees by writing to the Trust Governance Professional. In the case of a complaint against either the Chair or the Board of Trustees as a whole, then it should be put in writing to the Trust Governance Professional who will refer it to the Members.

In such cases, the Chair of Trustees/the Members will investigate the complaint or appoint an appropriate person to do so in the same way as in the first stage of the formal process at **Stage 2**.

Where the complaint moves to **Stage 3,** the Chair of Trustees/the Members (as applicable) will determine how the Complaint Panel is to be constituted but will ensure that at least one person is independent of the management and running of the Academy.

6.4. Complaints against the Chief Executive Officer, The Executive Team or One Trust Services Staff

If the complaint is against a member of Trust staff, then it should be raised with the Chief Executive Officer, (or, in the case of a complaint against the Chief Executive Officer, the Chair of Trustees), who will investigate the complaint (or appoint another member of the Board of Trustees to do so) in the same way as the first stage of the formal process at **Stage 2**.

Part B – Complaints raised by those who are not parents/carers of current pupils

7. Complaints made by those who are not parents of current pupils, which includes complaints made by parents of former pupils after they have left the Academy, will be dealt with as follows:

7.1. Complainants should first attempt to address their complaint to the relevant Academy or the Trust (as appropriate) informally by raising the matter with a relevant member of Academy or Trust staff, within **3** months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within **3** months of the last of these incidents. The Academy/Trust (depending on the nature of the complaint) will seek to resolve the matter informally within **15** school days.

7.2. If it is not possible to resolve the matter informally, the complaint may be submitted in writing, using the form available at **Appendix 1**, to the Chief Executive Officer, or, where the complaint relates to the Chief Executive Officer, to the Chair of Trustees.

7.3. The complaint will be acknowledged within **5** school days and a final written response will be issued within **15** school days.

7.4. The general provisions set out in Part C below apply.

Part C – General provisions

8. Complaints that will not be considered under this policy

8.1. Usually, complaints relating to the matters set out in the table below will not be considered under this policy as they have their own appeal or complaint processes. Where necessary, the Trust will exercise its discretion.

8.2. Complaints may be raised under this policy about staff conduct, however, any action taken under the Trust's internal disciplinary procedures is confidential and Complainants will not be provided with information about this.

Matter	Route for raising concern/complaining
Admissions	Admissions Appeal – see Admissions Policy and Statutory Admissions Appeal Code, or complaint to Department for Education
Suspensions	Statutory review process – see school Suspension and Exclusions Policy
Statutory Special Educational Needs (SEN) assessments	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Tribunal (and see SEN Code of Practice)
Matters likely to require child protection investigation	Raise with Designated Safeguarding Lead or a direct referral can be made to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and/or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) ○ Hampshire County Council ○ Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) ○ Southampton ○ Isle of Wight See Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy
Data protection/Freedom of Information Act	Raise with Data Protection Officer (DPO) Dr Kevin Thurlow-Criss. Our DPO can be contacted via info@hispmat.org in the first instance – see General Data Protection Policy, and Privacy Notices HISP Multi Academy Trust - Policies & Other Information

	Complaints may also be raised with the Information Commissioner's Office but the Trust asks that you try to resolve these via the DPO first.
Staff Grievances and Disciplinary matters[4]	Staff Grievance & Disciplinary Policy
Whistleblowing	Whistleblowing Policy Whistleblowing is the process by which a member of staff, volunteer or other worker raises concerns about suspected wrongdoing, malpractice, illegal activity or risks to the health, safety or welfare of others within the Trust. Whistleblowing concerns are made in the public interest and are different from complaints, which are expressions of dissatisfaction about actions, decisions or services that have directly affected an individual or their child. Concerns that meet the definition of whistleblowing will be managed under the Trust's Whistleblowing Policy rather than this Complaints Policy.
Third party contractors/suppliers	Third party complaints process

9. Complaints relating to fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage ("EYFS") requirements

9.1. In order to comply with the statutory framework, written concerns or complaints relating to the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be dealt with in accordance with the following process:

(i) The written concern/complaint will be acknowledged within **5** school days;
(ii) The Headteacher will investigate the concern or complaint, which may include meeting with the Complainant and the Head of Early Years. A written response notifying the Complainant of the outcome of the investigation will be sent within **28** school days of the complaint being received.
(iii) Where the Complainant remains dissatisfied, the Clerk will ensure that a formal Complaints Panel will be convened in accordance with **Stage 3** of this policy.

[4] Note that where complaints relate to staff conduct, these may be dealt with under both this Complaints Policy and the Staff Grievance & Disciplinary Policy. In such circumstances Complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any Staff disciplinary investigation or processes.

9.2. A record of the written complaints and their outcome will be maintained and made available to Ofsted on request.

9.3. Parents are further advised that, where they have concerns regarding the Academy meeting EYFS requirements, they may contact Ofsted on 0300 123 4666.]

10. Complaints received outside of term time

The Academy/Trust (as appropriate) will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

11. Withdrawal of a complaint

If a Complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm the withdrawal in writing.

12. Record keeping and confidentiality

12.1 A written record will be kept of all complaints that reach the formal stage, whether they are resolved following Stage 2, or proceed to a Panel hearing (Stage 3), and any action taken by the Academy as a result (regardless of whether they are upheld). Complaint records will be maintained securely and in line with the [data protection and retention policy] by the Academy Committee Clerk or Trust Governance Professional. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection requests access to them.

12.2 The Complainant should also keep all correspondence, statements and records relating to their complaint confidential, and should not disclose (by way of electronic communication, social media or otherwise) any information or documents relating to their complaint.

13. Anonymous complaints

Where an anonymous complaint is received, the Academy/Trust will use its reasonable endeavours to consider the complaint as best as it reasonably can. However, the

Academy/Trust will not be required to consider the complaint pursuant to any specific process and will handle anonymous complaints on a case-by-case basis.

14. Complaint campaigns

14.1 Where the Academy/Trust receives a number of complaints all based on the same subject which, in its reasonable opinion, may be deemed a 'complaint campaign', it will deal with the complaints in the following way: individual responses will not be sent to Complainants in such cases. Instead, either a template response will be sent to all Complainants, or a single response will be published on the Academy/Trust's website at the discretion of the Headteacher /Chair of Trustees.

14.2 Where the complaint campaign involves Complainants who are parents, they will be entitled to escalate the complaint to a Panel hearing if they are dissatisfied with the Academy/Trust's response. The Academy/Trust will consider how best to manage Panel hearings in such circumstances.

15. Serial or persistent Complainants

If at any level a Complainant or connected party attempts to reopen an issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this Complaints Policy, the Chair of Trustees may write to the Complainant to inform them that the procedure has been exhausted, the matter is closed and that the Trust will therefore not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

16. Vexatious complaints

16.1. Complaints with the following characteristics may be deemed to be vexatious:

- obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
- insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
- insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance;
- complaints that rely on AI-generated material to such an extent that they become repetitive, speculative, irrelevant or so disproportionate in length that the substantive issues cannot reasonably be identified or investigated
- demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value.

16.2. In such cases, the Chair of Trustees may write to the Complainant to inform them that the complaint is deemed to be vexatious and that the Trust will not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

17. Legal proceedings

If a Complainant threatens or commences legal action against the Academy/Trust (including the issuing of a letter before claim) in relation to their complaint, the Trust will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

18. Appendix 1 – HISP Multi Academy Trust Complaints form

This form should be used to raise a formal complaint only after a matter has been raised informally under either **Part A** or **Part B** of the Complaints Policy and you are not satisfied with the response. Please refer to the Complaints Policy when completing this form.

Please summarise your complaint as clearly and concisely as possible. In most cases, a description of no more than two to four pages (or approximately 1,500 words) should be sufficient. If you wish to provide additional supporting evidence, please attach it separately and clearly identify the documents you wish the investigator to consider.

Your details	
Name	
Email	
Address	
Name of pupil, year group and your relationship to them *(if applicable)*	
Complaint details	
Academy name *(if complaint relates to a specific Academy)*	
Please describe your complaint *(including dates / times of any incidents and names of staff and pupils involved.)*	

What steps have been taken to resolve the complaint informally *(including details of who the matter was raised with, when and what solution was offered)*	
Why have the steps taken so far failed to resolve the complaint? ***(including what you consider should have been done/where the Academy or Trust has not met reasonable expectations in its response)***	
Outcome sought	
What action would you like taken to resolve the matter?	

Signed ……. Date ……

Please send completed forms to the main contact email address on the school website or hand in to the Academy office/reception in a sealed envelope marked for the attention of the relevant addressee (*generally, this will be the Headteacher for complaints about a specific Academy, or the Trust Governance Professional for complaints about the Trust, however, please refer to the Complaints Policy and in particular paragraph 6, 'Complaints about specific role-holders', for further information).*