



Complaints Policy

Nominated Lead Member of Staff:	Rachael Lees/Janet Ratcliffe
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INTRODUCTION:

- 1.1 The Altius Trust is committed to having a clear, fair, and efficient procedure for dealing with any complaints to or against any school or academy within the Trust, so that any issues that arise can be dealt with as swiftly and effectively as possible. All schools and academies within the Trust are expected to follow this standard complaints procedure.
- 1.2 All school staff will be made aware of our complaints procedures and are expected to be familiar with our process of dealing with complaints so that they can be of the most assistance when an issue is brought to their attention. The school expects ALL complaints to be taken seriously and to be dealt with comprehensively and as far as possible in confidence.
- 1.3 This policy explains that procedure and the steps that it outlines should be referred to and followed by all stakeholders whenever an issue arises that causes them concern.
- 1.4 As far as possible all concerns should be dealt with as informally as possible.
- 1.5 This policy does not apply to complaints about:
 - Student admissions
 - Student exclusions
 - Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs
 - Whistleblowing

Each of these follows its own process of complaints and appeals which are outlined in their relevant policies which can be found on the school website.

- 1.6 If there is an allegation or concern about physical or sexual misconduct towards a child, or there is a belief that a child may be at risk of serious harm, the 'designated person' responsible for child protection and the Principal should be informed immediately. The school may immediately refer the case to appropriate child protection and welfare services. If it is decided that there is cause for an official investigation, the decisions by these authorities will supersede those made by the school and outlined in this policy.
- 1.7 For more information on our school's provision for protecting our students, read our Safeguarding Policy, which can be found on the school website.
- 1.8 Anonymous complaints will not be examined under this policy.

2 WHEN AN ISSUE OR CONCERN FIRST ARISES:

- 2.1 If you have a concern that you would like to take up with the school you should initially inform a member of staff either in person, over the telephone or in writing. You may then be invited to an informal meeting with the member of staff most appropriate for dealing with your concern.

- 2.2 We encourage parents to approach staff with any concerns they may have, and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding.
- 2.3 Parents may wish to approach their child's Form Tutor or Character & Culture Manager (CCM) first as they will be best placed to help them either directly or by figuring out which other member of staff they should be speaking to.
- 2.4 It is helpful if a written explanation of your concern is given to the staff member that you speak to, so that it is easy to see, when complaints are taken further or referred back to in the future, what the initial problem was.
- 2.5 If your complaint is about a member of staff, you should first raise this with the Principal either in person or in writing, and a meeting can be arranged with an appropriate Senior Leader to discuss the issue at hand.
- 2.6 If your complaint is about the Principal, you should raise your concern in writing with the Chair of Governors.
- 2.7 If your complaint is about a governor, you should raise your concern in writing with the Clerk to the Governing Body.
- 2.8 The Chair of Governors may refer complaints that are taken straight to them back to the appropriate member of staff if they do not warrant the Governing Body's involvement at that point.

3 INITIAL INFORMAL PROCEDURE:

- 3.1 Once a concern has been raised you may be invited to attend an informal meeting with the appropriate member of staff to discuss your concerns.
- 3.2 School staff members will listen carefully and patiently to your complaint, recognising that it is a matter of concern to you as an individual.
- 3.3 You are welcome to bring a friend, partner or, in the case of a pupil who has raised a concern, a parent to this meeting. It may be appropriate for a pupil to attend the meeting if their parent has raised a concern, depending on the nature of the issue.
- 3.4 If a serious complaint is made by a student, this should be brought to the attention of the student's Character & Culture Leader (CCL). It will be the responsibility of the CCL to determine whether he/she can deal with the issue, or in consultation with Senior Leaders what the next course of action should be, including referring the matter to the formal complaints procedure.
- 3.5 If the matter is within the ability of the member of staff to resolve quickly this should be done, otherwise advice will be sought from a member of Senior Staff.
- 3.6 School staff members have a responsibility to ensure that you understand any future points of action that are agreed upon in this meeting and should make a record of what has been discussed, as well as any outcomes and a plan of action, if one has been agreed.

- 3.7 There is no suggested time-scale for resolution at this stage given the importance of dialogue through informal discussion although it would be expected that most issues would be resolved within 5 school days.
- 3.8 All staff will do their best to ensure that your concerns are dealt with appropriately and efficiently but if you cannot come to an agreement, or are dissatisfied with the outcome of your meeting, you can make a formal complaint, in writing, to the Principal.

4 FORMAL COMPLAINTS:

- 4.1 If you do not feel that your concern has been dealt with as you would like, are unhappy with the outcome of your informal meeting or feel that the issue is serious enough that it warrants it, you can make a formal complaint in writing to the Principal.
- 4.2 Your complaint should include the following information:
- What has happened and who was involved
 - What has already taken place to resolve the complaint informally
 - What you would like to happen to resolve your complaint
- 4.3 In order to ensure that complaints are processed efficiently and effectively the school deals with formal complaints in three stages:

STAGE 1 - FORMAL PROCEDURE (Senior Leadership Team)

- 4.4 Any formal written complaint should be addressed to the Principal. The complaint at this stage will be managed by the school's nominated 'Complaints Coordinator', on behalf of the Principal, who will allocate it to the appropriate member of the Senior Leadership Team to investigate and respond appropriately.
- 4.5 The Complaints Coordinator will work with the person assigned to manage the complaint to ensure timescales are adhered to and to offer any additional support needed to help resolve the complaint.
- 4.6 The school should acknowledge your complaint in writing within 3 full school days.
- 4.7 If the matter can be resolved quickly this should be done and therefore potentially a full response will be included in this letter. Otherwise you will be reassured that the complaint will be taken seriously and investigated further.
- 4.8 You may be invited in for a meeting to discuss the issue, possible solutions, or to explain what has or will happen as a result of your complaint.
- 4.9 The school will keep a record of all interactions with you and other staff, meetings and decisions made in reference to your complaint. This record will be kept

confidentially by the school but may be inspected where appropriate by the Secretary of State or any inspection body.

- 4.10 If the complaint is against a member of staff, the school will talk to that employee and they will be given the opportunity to write a response, which will be sent to the appropriate Senior Leader within 2 school days of the complaint being lodged with them.
- 4.11 The school will aim to respond to you in writing within 10 school days outlining their response to your concern, and any action that has or will be taken. Where this is not possible, all parties will be informed of the action being taken, and when a further update will be provided possible, all parties will be informed of the action being taken, and when a further update will be provided.
- 4.12 If the school has decided not to take any further action on the issue, they will explain what they have decided, how they have reached this decision, and will outline your right to take the matter further and the steps to be taken.

STAGE 2 - FORMAL PROCEDURE (Principal)

- 4.13 If, having spoken to the appropriate member of the Senior Leadership Team, you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint; you may lodge your complaint to be formally heard by the Principal. You should write to the Principal explaining your concern and the steps that have lead up to you taking this course of action.
- 4.14 If the complaint is against a member of staff, that employee will be given the opportunity to write a response, which will be sent to the Principal within 2 school days of the complaint being lodged with them.
- 4.15 The Principal will then review the complaint and the action taken to date to resolve the complaint. They may request the support of a member of the Senior Leadership Team to complete any further investigation but this should be someone who has not previously been directly involved.
- 4.16 The Principal will respond to you in writing within 10 school days outlining their response to your concern, and any action that has or will be taken. Where this is not possible, all parties will be informed of the action being taken, and when a further update will be provided.
- 4.17 If they have decided not to take any further action on the issue, they will explain what they have decided, how they have reached this decision, and will outline your right of appeal and how you can start your appeal.

STAGE 3 - FORMAL PROCEDURE (Appeal)

- 4.18 If you would like to lodge an appeal following the outcome of a formal complaint at Stage 2, this will be taken to the appeals panel. You should write to the Chair of the

Governing Body to exercise this right within 10 school days of the outcome at Stage 2, documenting why you are not satisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 of the process. If no request for an appeals panel hearing is received within 10 school days it will be deemed that the decision is accepted and the complaint will be closed.

- 4.19 If an appeals panel is requested, the Chair of Governors will acknowledge your appeal and make the necessary arrangements, and will usually convene the appeals panel within 15 school days from the acknowledgement being sent. Where it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date within that timescale, the school will take reasonable steps to agree a time and date mutually convenient to all parties.
- 4.20 A clerk will be appointed to support the panel. This may be a member of staff who has not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.
- 4.21 The clerk will ensure that all parties to the appeal have access to the same documentation and set out a timetable to support the collation and circulation of documents. You should be given at least 5 school days' notice of the appeals panel hearing date and every effort should be made to support you to attend the hearing. Any supporting documentation relevant to the complaint must be submitted to the appeals panel by both parties at least 5 days before the appeals panel hearing.
- 4.22 You will be entitled to be accompanied to the appeals panel hearing and should notify the clerk in advance if you attend to bring anyone.

The Appeals Panel

- 4.23 The appeals panel will be made up of a minimum of three members. Two of the members will be Governors or members of the Trust Board, one person will be appointed to the panel that is independent of the management and running of the school.
- 4.24 No person can sit on the appeals panel if they have had any former knowledge or involvement in the case that is being dealt with at that time. The chair of the panel will be nominated from within the group of panel members. All panel members will be familiar with and have access to the complaints policy.
- 4.25 The panel will give careful consideration to how the complainant can be made to feel most comfortable presenting to the panel, especially in the case of a young child having to present or explain information.
- 4.26 The panel will hear the appeal(s), consider all the views expressed and decide the outcome in private.

The Appeals Procedure

- 4.27 The procedure for an appeal is usually as follows:
- The complainant and Principal will enter the hearing together.
 - The chair will introduce the panel members and outline the process.
 - The complainant will explain the complaint.
 - The Principal and panel will question the complainant.

- The Principal will explain the school's actions.
- The complainant and panel will question the Principal.
- The complainant will sum up their complaint.
- The Principal will sum up the school's actions.
- The chair will explain that both parties will hear from the panel within 5 working days.
- Both parties will leave together while the panel decides.
- The clerk will stay to assist the panel with its decision making.

4.28 The chair of the panel/clerk to the panel will notify you of the panel's decision in writing within 5 school days of the appeal hearing. The letter will set out the decision of the panel together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The letter may set out recommendations which will be made to the governing body and will set out any further rights of appeal.

4.29 The appeals panel may:

- dismiss all or part of the complaint
- uphold all or part of the complaint
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- evaluate all the evidence available and recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures as a preventative step against similar problems arising in the future.

4.30 The panel's decision is final.

5 FAILURE TO FOLLOW THE COMPLAINTS POLICY:

5.1 In the event that you feel that this policy has not been followed, or that the school is breaching its Funding Agreement or any other legal obligation, a complaint can be raised with the Education Funding Agency:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/schoolperformance/school-complaints-form>

You should note that the EFA will expect any complaints to have first been raised through the school's Complaints Policy.

6 UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS:

6.1 The Altius Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

- 6.2 The Altius Trust defines unreasonable complainants as ‘those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people’s complaints’.
- 6.3 A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:-
- 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 co-operate 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 complaints procedure;
 - insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
 - introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects 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 school’s complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education;
 - 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.
- 6.4 A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone, in writing or electronically:-
- maliciously;
 - aggressively;
 - using threats, intimidation or violence;
 - using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
 - knowing it to be false;
 - using falsified information;
 - publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

- 6.5 Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school 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.
- 6.6 Whenever possible, the Principal or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.
- 6.7 If the behaviour continues the Principal will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. Where further correspondence is received on the same matter, the school will be under no obligation to respond to that correspondence.
- 6.8 For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.
- 6.9 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 school premises.

7 REPORTING AND RECORDING:

- 7.1 All staff should receive periodic training regarding the handling and management of complaints.
- 7.2 A written record should be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the informal stage or proceed to the formal process. Informal complaints should be recorded on the Electronic Complaints Log. Formal complaints should be recorded on the standard Complaints Form which should be returned to the Principal.
- 7.3 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 162A of the 2002 Act requests access to them.
- 7.4 The Principal and Complaints Coordinator will review the handling of complaints on a termly basis, and will discuss issues with staff as necessary.
- 7.5 The Principal will report to the Governing Body on a termly basis of the number and type of complaints received and their outcomes.
- 7.6 Complaints will generally be retained for 24 months unless the complaint raised safeguarding concerns and in this case the complaint will be retained for 60 months.

8 COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE TRUST:

- 8.1 The Trust has overall responsibility for both academies and some complaints may be about the Trust rather than one of the academies.
- 8.2 The procedure that will be followed if your complaint is about the Trust is the same, however at the formal stage the complaint should be addressed to the CEO of the Trust.
- 8.3 If you would like to lodge an appeal following the outcome of this formal complaint, this will be taken to the appeals panel. You should write to the Chair of the Governing Body and the same process outlined for Stage 3 of the formal procedure above will be followed.

9 STAFF COMPLAINTS:

- 9.1 Staff who have a concern about a colleague or a volunteer member of staff should refer to the school's whistleblowing policy.
- 9.2 The procedure for dealing with any other staff complaints or employment grievances is set out in the school's staff disciplinary & dismissal policy, and the school's grievance policy.
- 9.3 School policies can be found on the school's staff shared resource area.

APPENDIX 1: RESPONSIBILITIES:

Trust Board: for approving the policy, procedures, and guidelines across the Trust.

Governing Body: for hearing and deciding on appeals, receiving reports, and advising the Head of each individual academy. The Governing Body will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a termly basis.

Chair of the Governing Body: to receive complaints at Stage 3, to nominate a panel to hear the appeal, and to check that the correct procedure is followed.

Nominated Chair of the Panel at Stage 3: To ensure that:

- the parties understand the procedure;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are established;
- complainants are put at ease;
- the hearing is conducted as informally as possible;
- the panel is open-minded and acts independently;
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome, or has been involved in the issues previously;
- all parties have the chance to be heard;
- any written material is seen by all parties.

Clerk to the Complaints Panel: The Clerk must act as the reference point for the complainant at Stage 3. The Clerk must:

- set convenient dates and times and venues for hearings;
- collate any written material and forward it to the parties;
- meet and welcome the parties;
- record the proceedings; and
- notify the parties of the decision.

CEO: for the overall management of the procedures, for hearing complaints about the Trust and for ensuring that the procedures are monitored and reviewed.

Principal: for the overall internal management of the procedures, for hearing complaints at Stage 2, and ensuring termly reports are made to the Governing Body.

Complaints Coordinator (normally a nominated Vice Principal): for the efficient operation and management of the policy and procedures, for training staff on how to deal appropriately with complaints, for keeping parents, students and others informed of the procedures and for compiling reports for the Principal as required.

Senior Leadership Team: supporting Middle Leaders in resolving complaints, hearing complaints at Stage 1 and ensuring this policy is adhered to at all times.

Middle Leaders: for dealing with and where possible resolving complaints about academic matters/programmes of study/teaching methods, overall student progress, discipline issues, pastoral care.

Administration Leaders / Business Managers: for dealing with complaints linked to operational and administrative matters.

Designated Senior Member of Staff: for child protection issues.

All staff: for hearing any concerns brought to them by parents and students and reassuring them that they will be dealt with as soon as possible by the appropriate member of staff, and for informing the relevant staff of the concerns.

Appendix 2: Complaint Form

Name of Student:		Form:	
Complainant:			
Date received:		Format: <i>(e.g. letter, phone call, email etc.)</i>	
Outline of complaint:			
Investigated by:			
Actions - Informal Process:			
Resolved Yes/No			
Actions - Stage 1: (Formal Procedure: SLT)			
Resolved Yes/No			
Actions - Stage 2: (Formal Procedure: Principal)			
Resolved Yes/No			
Summary of Outcomes:			
Signed:		Date:	

Please return promptly to the Principal for record keeping