Empowering children and young people to live their best lives.

FORWARD EDUCATION TRUST

Complaints Policy

Date of Approval:	**September 2026**
Approved by:	**Trust Board**
Review Date:	**September 2028**

Policy Information:

Date of last review	March 2026 (interim review) September 2026	**Review period**	Two years
Date approved	September 2026	**Approved by**	Board of Trustees
Policy owner	Chief Executive	**Date of next review**	September 2028

Updates made since the last review:

Review date	Changes made	By whom
February 2022	Update to policies	Chief Executive
March 2023	The Heights Academy added	Director of Governance & Development
August 2025	Updated to new version using another Trust example guided by DfE complaints guidance	Chief Executive Officer
March 2026	Stage 3 updated to provide additional clarity and include that the findings will be made available for inspection on school premises by the proprietor and Headteacher	Director of Governance and Development
September 2026	Update to recognise creation of Resolutions Team	Chief Executive Officer

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1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide a robust process for dealing with complaints relating to the Trust, a school or an employee, including the provision of facilities or services.

This policy also includes a provision for dealing with vexatious, malicious or repetitive unfounded complaints.

This policy adheres to the principles under data protection law. For further information please review our Data Protection Policy published on our website.

2.0 Scope

This Complaints Policy is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at a school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory policies (see Appendix 4 for a full list), we will use this Complaints Policy. This Policy is not to be used when considering complaints from staff. In such instances, the Trust's Grievance Policy should be applied.

Every attempt has been made to refer to the correct entity throughout this policy. This is a Forward Education Trust policy, which applies to the trust itself and any school (from time to time) which is part of the Trust. In most cases, we have expressly stated relevant roles to the process i.e. Headteacher, Chair of Local Academy Council, Chief Executive Officer, Chair of the Board of Trustees, but in cases of uncertainty, commonsense should be applied to interpret the relevant role/person to which a part of the process applies.

Within the Policy, Forward Education Trust may be abbreviated to FET or referred to as "the Trust".

3.0 Aims of Policy

The aim of this policy is to:

- Achieve informal resolution wherever possible at an early stage
- Resolve general complaints efficiently and effectively
- Provide a fair and transparent process for dealing with complaints, both formally and informally, with clear timelines for resolution
- Ensure that all stages of the policy will be investigatory rather than adversarial
- Ensure that every complaint is heard and handled appropriately
- Deal with complaints with sensitivity, impartiality and confidentiality
- Allow redress where necessary and provide information for the Trust and School Management teams to improve services.
- Explain how vexatious, persistent, duplicate or unreasonable complaints, or unreasonable behaviour by complainants, are dealt with.

We believe that complaints should be kept to a minimum by forging strong, positive relations with everyone connected with the Trust and/or a school, and by having in place good lines of communications which are clearly explained and accessible. As a Trust and school community we have a commitment to equality. We believe that in the best interests of all concerned, especially a child attending one of our schools, positive relationships should be maintained.

4.0 Legal Context

We are obliged under the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014 Schedule 1, Part 7 to have in place clear procedures to deal with complaints made by parents against our schools or individuals connected with them. We are aware that under the Education Act 1996 parents have the right to complain about any matter relating to the school's curriculum and any issue relating to the general education that we provide.

This complaints procedure is published on the Trust and each school's website within our trust with hard copies available from the school office.

The Policy is based on guidance published by the Department for Education.

The Trust will deal with concerns, difficulties and complaints in accordance with its duty under the Equality Act 2010. An equality impact assessment has been undertaken, and we believe this policy is in line with the Act.

4.1 Data Protection/UK GDPR and DPA Complaints

Complaints sometimes include requests for information or documentation. Such requests will either be a 'subject access request' under the Data Protection Act 1998 (where the information requested relates to an identifiable individual) or a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (where the information is general and not related to an identifiable individual).

Please refer to the Trust's Data Protection Policy and the Trust's Freedom of Information Policy for further details.

Should a complaint related to the Data Protection Officer be brought to the attention of a member of staff the complainant should be directed to the Trust's Data Protection Lead, referred to in the Data Protection Policy. They will direct a complainant to the Complaints Policy for our service provider.

When a complaint is escalated to Stage 2 (as detailed in this policy) the complainant will be asked to give consent to share personal data that is relevant to the complaint with the investigator and with any panel that may be convened to deal with the complaint.

If the complainant does not give consent to share information, it is important to note that the scope of the complaint may be limited and, therefore, the actions available to conclude the complaints process may also be limited. In some instances, the complaint may not be able to proceed. The complainant will be informed if this is the case to give an opportunity to consider consent to share the material again.

5.0 Complaints Policy

The majority of issues raised by parents, carers, the community, visitors, volunteers or pupils, are concerns rather than complaints.

A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

It is in everyone's interest that all concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints policy. FET takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, please contact a member of the school's Senior Leadership Team who will refer you to an alternative member of staff. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, a member of the school's Senior Leadership Team may refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, each school and Forward Education Trust will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this Complaints Policy.

5.1 How to Raise a Concern or Make a Complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing (by letter or email) or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, or appropriate member of the staff team, in the first instance. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual Trustees or Academy Community Council members to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis, and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the policy.

Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher, using the appropriate email address as below. Please mark them as Private and Confidential. Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Trust CEO using the relevant email address for Trust complaints as below. If a complaint is made by letter, they should be marked as Private and Confidential, handed into the school office to be passed to the CEO, or mailed directly to the Trust Office.

Brays School complaints@brays.fet.ac

Bridge School complaints@bridge.fet.ac

Hallmoor School complaints@hallmoor.fet.ac

The Heights Academy complaints@heights.fet.ac

High Point Academy complaints@highpoint.fet.ac

Leycroft Academy complaints@leycroft.fet.ac

Complaints about the Academy Community Council, any individual member or the whole ACC should be addressed to Trust Chair, via email to complaints@fet.ac . Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Central Trust should be addressed to the Trust CEO via email to complaints@fet.ac Please mark them as Private and Confidential and for the attention of "CEO at Forward Education Trust".

Complaints that involve or are about the CEO should be addressed to the Chair of the Board of Trustees via email to complaints@fet.ac Please mark them as Private and Confidential and for the attention of "Chair of the Board of Trustees at Forward Education Trust".

Complaints that involve or are about a Trustee should be addressed to the Chair of The Trust of Trustees (see information above). Complaints about the Chair of the Trust Board or about the Board itself, should be addressed to the Chair of Members using the contact information above.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included with this document (Appendix 1). If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations, such as Citizens Advice to help you. Using the template complaint form is a recommended part of the process, as using a form like this will often positively support a complainant to distil and clarify their own thinking, as well as drawing out thoughts regarding a possible resolution. Complainants should be aware that if they raise a complaint in another way, they may be asked to complete this form as well.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this Complaints Policy. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

5.2 Anonymous Complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints unless there are exceptional circumstances, for example if there were serious child protection concerns or bullying allegations where the school would either involve appropriate external agencies or else conduct its own internal review to test whether there is any corroborative evidence which might trigger a formal investigation. The Headteacher, CEO or Chair of Trustees, as appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

5.3 Timescales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

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 policy or result in the policy being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Forward Education Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints policy in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

It should be noted that at all stages, where possible, the Trust will seek an informal resolution to the complaint. In complex cases, it might take longer to investigate a matter that has been brought to our attention, meaning the timings of the complaints process might be extended. The complainant will be informed should this happen.

Schools will always try to resolve any complaint as quickly as possible, but all involved must be mindful that teachers and support staff have many demands on their time. In complex cases, it might take longer to investigate than is provided for generally within this policy – the investigating officer will communicate this to the complainant as soon as possible. A complaint will not be upheld solely because a deadline has been missed.

5.4 Complaints Policy Outside of Term Time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If a complaint is already going through the policy and this is interrupted by a holiday the policy will be paused until the holiday has ended. If the complaint is close to concluding as the holiday approaches, we will make reasonable attempts to get the complaint to an end prior to the holiday period but this may not always be possible.

5.5 Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the process, FET wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review the relevant school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

When we inform you of the outcome of your complaint, we will tell you as much of the details as we can, but possibly not everything. Telling you all the details may prejudice any employee complained about and affect their ability to carry out their job effectively. The release of too much information might prevent us from the use of our Disciplinary or Capability policies or contravene the employee's employment or data protection rights.

The policy is designed to resolve any concerns with the minimum of conflict. To do this it is important that everyone has confidence in it and that it secures the "closure" of any complaint or concern.

It is unhelpful if a complaint is broadcast to the school community. Therefore, the Trust and/or school will make it clear to any person who raises a concern, that the Trust and/or school will treat the matter confidentially and will ask the complainant to do the same. The complainant must refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media.

5.6 Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing (by letter or email).

5.7 Safeguarding

Where a complaint highlights a clear child protection or safeguarding concern, a referral to the School's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will take place immediately.

5.8 The Three Stages of the Complaints Policy

Forward Education Trust has a clear policy for receiving enquiries, concerns and complaints so that they are directed to the appropriate people to be dealt with.

Informal attempts to resolve the situation should have been made including, if needed, mediation, before a complaint is escalated to the formal stages.

Stage 1 – Informal Concerns

It is hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised with the relevant member of staff. Complainants should not approach Academy Community Council members/Trustees to raise concerns. Those involved in governance of the Trust/school have no power to act on an individual basis, and it may prevent them from considering complaints at am subsequent stage of the process.

Once a concern has been raised, a complainant may be invited to attend an informal meeting with a member of staff or the Headteacher (or member of the leadership team) to discuss concerns.

A complainant is welcome to bring a friend, partner or companion to this meeting. It may be appropriate for a pupil to attend the meeting if their parent/carer has raised a concern, depending on the nature of the issue.

Staff have a responsibility to ensure that a complainant understands any future points of action that have been agreed upon in this meeting, and to make and then circulate a record of what has been discussed, as well as any outcomes and a plan of action, if one has been agreed.

All staff do their best to ensure that a complainant's concerns are dealt with appropriately and efficiently, but if an agreement cannot be reached, or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the meeting, they are able to make a formal complaint.

There is no suggested timescale 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 10 school days**.**

Stage 2 – Formal Investigation into a Complaint

If a complainant does not feel that their concern has been dealt with as they would like, is unhappy with the outcome of their informal meeting or feels that the issue is serious enough that it warrants it, they can make a formal complaint, in writing, in accordance with the detail in Section 5 above.

Formal complaints must be made, in writing, preferably using the template complaint form which is included as Appendix 1 to this document. Assistance to complete the form can be provided upon request.

A written complaint should provide enough detail of the issues to allow the recipient to investigate and respond to the complaint. The complainant should also set out what they would see as a fair resolution to the complaint.

The recipient of the formal complaint records the date the complaint is received and acknowledges receipt of the complaint in writing, either by letter or email, within 5 school days. Within this response, the recipient of the formal complaint seeks to clarify the nature of the complaint, asks what remains unresolved and what outcomes the complainant would like to see, if that detail has not already been provided.

The recipient of the formal complaint considers whether a meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

The recipient of the formal complaint may delegate the investigation of the complaint to an independent investigator or to a member of the Trust/School's Senior Leadership Team (SLT). They use the report from this investigation to make a decision on the complaint. Note that, whilst responsibility for the investigation may be delegated, responsibility for the decision is not delegated.

During the investigation, the investigator:

- if necessary, interviews those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- if necessary, interviews any person who may have information useful to the investigation
- keeps a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the recipient of the formal complaint provides a formal written response within 30 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.
If the Trust/School is unable to meet this deadline, they provide the complainant with an updated and revised response date.

The recipient of the formal complaint responds to the complainant, in writing, outlining their response to the concern raised, and any action that has or will be taken. If they have decided not to take any further action on the issue, they explain what they have decided, how they have reached this decision, and outline the complainant's right to take the matter further and the steps to be taken. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Forward Education Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

If the complaint is against a member of staff, depending on the nature of the complaint, the Trust/School may decide to deal with the complaint under the Trust's Disciplinary Policy or Grievance Policy. If that is the case, the content of this will remain confidential.

Stage 3 – Complaints Panel Hearing (now dealt with by the Trust Resolutions Team)

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, the complaint can be escalated to Stage 3. Stage 3 is the final stage of the Complaints procedure, and involves a panel hearing consisting of, at least, three people, who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the Trust or School, as relevant.

All complaints at this stage will dealt with by the Trust Resolutions Team, operating under a Terms of Reference agreed by the Trust Board. The panel formed from the Resolutions Team will be supported by an experienced Governance Professional

Prior to the meeting, the panel will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Panel. All panel members must be familiar with and have access to the Trust's Complaints Policy and Procedure.

If the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Trust Board, or the entire Academy Community Council, Trust Board or the majority of the Academy Community Council or Trust Board, stage 3 will be heard by a Panel of independent people. Note that all independent panel members are required to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement prior to receiving any papers related to any Stage 3 panel hearing.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk to the Trust Board, or the Clerk to the Trust Board, in the case of a complaint against the Trust, via the Trust complaints email address, within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response. The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

If no request for a Stage 3 Complaints Panel is received, it is deemed that the decision is accepted, and the complaint is closed (unless there are very exceptional circumstances to explain the delay).

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the Panel meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.
If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

A complainant may be accompanied by someone at the panel meeting, to provide support. This can be a relative, companion or friend. Generally, neither party is encouraged to bring legal representatives to the panel meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct are not, generally, handled under this Complaints Policy. Complainants are advised that any staff conduct complaints are considered under the Trust Disciplinary Policy, if appropriate, and that outcomes are not shared.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk:

- confirms and notifies the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- requests copies of any further written material to be submitted to the panel, at least, five school days before the meeting.

Any written material is circulated to all parties, at least three school days before the date of the meeting. The panel does not accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded. The panel also does not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the process.

The meeting is held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless there are extraordinary reasons such as 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 must consider how the complainant can be made to feel most comfortable presenting to the panel.

Panel Procedure

The panel determines the procedure to be followed to ensure that it is best placed to deal with the issues arising from the complaint. The procedure for an appeal is usually as follows:

1. The complainant and the recipient of the Stage 2 complaint enter the hearing together.
2. The Chair introduces the panel members and outlines the process.
3. The complainant explains the complaint.
4. The recipient of the Stage 2 complaint and panel members question the complainant.
5. The recipient of the Stage 2 complaint explains the Trust's/School's actions.
6. The complainant and the panel members question the recipient of the Stage 2 complaint.
7. The complainant sums up their complaint.
8. The recipient of the Stage 2 complaint sums up the Trust's/School's actions.
9. The Chair explains that both parties can expect to hear the outcome of the Stage 3 meeting within five school days.
10. Both parties leave together while the panel members discuss their decision.
11. The Clerk stays to assist the panel with the decision-making process.

The Clerk to the panel ensures that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken, or actions agreed.

The Clerk notifies the complainant and the Trust/School of the panel's decision, in writing, within five school days of the panel hearing. The letter details the decision of the panel together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The letter may set out recommendations, which will be made to the Trust/School. It also includes details of how to contact the Department for Education, if the complainant is dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Forward Education Trust.

The Complaints Panel may:

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

If the complaint is upheld, in whole or in part, the panel:

- decides on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- evaluates all available evidence and, where appropriate, recommends changes to the Forward Education Trust/School systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher.

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.

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.

6.0 Next Steps for the Complainant

If the complainant believes the Trust/school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published Complaints Policy or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 3.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Forward Education Trust. They will consider whether Forward Education Trust has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The DFE online complaints service: Complain about a school to the Department for Education - GOV.UK explains how to contact them.

You can send additional information and evidence by post to:

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

7.0 Policy for managing serial, vexatious, persistent or unreasonable complaints or contact

FET is committed to dealing with all concerns or complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who raise them. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our schools. 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.

FET defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of concerns or complaints because of the frequency or nature of the contact with the school, such as, if the person contacting the school:

- refuses to articulate their concern or complaint or specify the grounds of a concern or complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the concern or complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints policy
- insists on the concern or complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints policy or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- 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 raise the same concern or complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the concern or complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint policy 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 and complicated contact with staff regarding the concern or complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while it is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Those contacting the school should try to limit their communication with the school while their concern or 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.

If the school feels the contacts are unreasonable, have made this clear and the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the person raising the concern or complaint explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For people who excessively contact FET as described above and cause a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing (by letter or email). This may include barring an individual from FET/school premises.

Where a complainant attempts to re-open an issue, which has already been dealt with under the Complaints Policy, the CEO will contact them to inform them that the matter has already been dealt with, and that either that stage of the process has been exhausted or that the Complaints Policy has been exhausted and the matter is considered closed. Where further correspondence is received on the same matter, this may be considered vexatious, and the Trust is under no obligation to further respond to that correspondence.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the Trust/school again about the same issue, the Trust/School can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which the Trust/School does not respond is if:

- The Trust/school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, and the Trust/school position has been clearly set out in writing together with the complainant's options
- the complainant is contacting the Trust/school repeatedly, but making, substantially, the same points each time
- the complainant refuses to follow the Complaints Policy or insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways that are not in line with this Policy, or with good practice;
- the Trust/school reasonably believes the aim of the contact is to cause disruption or inconvenience
- the complainant acts or communicates in an inappropriate way* towards the trust/school staff.

*acting in an inappropriate way may include, but is not limited to:

- using language that might be considered offensive, unnecessarily accusatory or rude
- using language that calls into question professional conduct and/or integrity without reasonable cause to do so
- using threats to intimidate
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly providing falsified information
- publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

If aggressive or abusive behaviour takes place, the Trust may write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the trust/school, causing a significant level of disruption, the trust/school may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This would normally be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the trust/school can inform the police and communicates actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from a trust/school site.

If the trust/school decides that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant is informed in writing. Whenever possible, attempts will be made to discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before deciding to stop responding.

The trust/school ensures, when making this decision, that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the trust/school acts reasonably.

8. Complaint Campaigns

For the purposes of this document, a complaint campaign is defined as a complaint from three or more separate individuals (whether or not connected with FET/School), which are all based on the same subject. Depending on the subject in question, FET/School may deviate from the process set out in this Policy, and instead:

- send a template response to all complainants; and/or
- publish a single response on the FET/School website (as applicable).

9. Monitoring and Storage of Information in relation to Complaints

FET and its Schools record the progress of complaints at all stages, including information about actions taken, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the outcome. The records also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls. This material is treated as confidential and is viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or members of the review panel.

Records of complaints are kept securely and then disposed of in line with FET's Record Management Policy. Complaint records may be inspected by the Secretary of State or any inspection body.

The FET Trust Board monitors all complaints that reach Stage 3, and the outcomes, at Trust Board meetings via the CEO Report. This enables the Trust Board to identify any emerging patterns, to ensure that similar problems are avoided in the future or to identify if they could have been managed more effectively. The Trust Board does not receive any personal data that is not relevant to the monitoring process.

This Policy is reviewed every two years (biennially). However, should there be any updates from DfE, or from lessons learned of complaints received, this Policy is amended accordingly. At each review, the Policy is approved by the Trust Board.

Appendix 1 Complaint Form

Complaint Form

Please complete and return this form to the relevant email address as indicated in the Policy above. You will then receive an acknowledgment which will explain what action will be taken next. Please note that complaints can NOT be made on behalf of somebody else if your complaint is with regards to a specific child as you will need to have Parental Responsibility to do this.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: **Postcode:** **Day time telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:** **Email address:**

Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the Trust/school about it.

What actions, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint (please include who you spoke to and the response from them)?
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature: **Date:**
Official Use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By whom:
Complaint referred to:
Action taken
Date:

Appendix 2: Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

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

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible and 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
- provide clear grounds for escalating the complaint to Stage 2 if this should happen.

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 and evaluating information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints administrator as appropriate, to clarify what actions the complainant feels would rectify the situation.

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 Headteacher/CEO or complaints Panel that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The Headteacher/CEO 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.

Nominated Complaints Administrator

This could be the Headteacher but it might be more appropriate if it were a designated staff member with senior administrator responsibilities. In the case of Stage 3 complaints, this role will be taken by the Clerk to the Complaints Panel that has been formed from the Resolutions Team.

The complaints administrator should, either directly or by delegation:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the policy
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, CEO, Chair of trustees, Clerk and the LA (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints policy
- ensure that all people involved in the complaints policy 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 meetings with the complainant, 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 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- make a full and accurate record of the proceedings; circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the decision.
- be aware of issues regarding:
    - sharing third party information
    - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person

Complaints Panel Chair

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

- both parties are asked (via the Complaints Administrator) 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.

- 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 clear; 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 policy

- minutes of the meeting are taken

- they liaise with the Clerk.

If a new but related 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.

Panel Member

No person may sit on the Panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. Panel members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

- 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 be given to 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

Supporter of the complainant

The complainant is entitled to bring a supporter with them to any meeting of the Panel. The supporter should:

- provide emotional support for the complainant, should they need it

- provide informal guidance to the complaint, where appropriate

- address the Panel if requested

- act discreetly and allow the Panel to go about work without undue interruption

- regard all information discussed as confidential.

The supporter is not there to speak for the complainant or to represent them in any way unless there is a clear reason why a complainant is unable to fully express for themselves.

Mediation

Mediation can be a good way to resolve a complaint because:

- It gives both complainant and Headteacher another opportunity to hear each other's points of view (with a third party facilitating)
- It gives the third party an opportunity to help a Headteacher and complainant explore and build on areas of agreement
- It gives a Headteacher and complainant a structure within which they can resolve remaining differences.
- If both complainant and Headteacher emerge from the mediation satisfied, that is the best foundation for a continuing positive relationship between them.
- Even if the complaint continues to a Complaints Panel, the issues to be considered should be much clearer.

Mediation may elicit one or more of the responses listed below from either party:

- An acknowledgement that the complaint is valid in whole or in part.
- An apology
- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- Assurance that the event complained about will not recur
- An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- A commitment to review school policies in the light of the complaint.

Recourse to mediation must be with the agreement of both parties and is intended to help arrive at a mutually agreeable solution - it is not possible to impose this on either party. Nor does it prevent a complainant having recourse to formal appeals procedures as detailed.

Appendix 3: Types of complaint excluded from the policy and dealt with under other statutory policies

This policy covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by schools, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory policies, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions or statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs should be raised with the local authority. Concerns about school re-organisation proposals should be referred to the Forward Education Trust Chief Executive Officer
• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy. The Trust has such a policy. Each school has a local policy detailing guidance relevant to their local authority. If you are worried about a child you can telephone the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding, or contact the Multi-Agency safeguarding hub (MASH Team) for advice and consultation.
• Exclusion of children from school	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/schooldiscipline-exclusions/exclusions Please refer to the Trust's Suspensions & Permanent Exclusions Policy Note – complaints about the application of our Behaviour & Relationships Policy can be made through this Complaints Policy.

• Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing policy for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus You may also be able to complain direct to the Local Authority 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 Trust Grievance Policy.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the Trust Disciplinary Policy, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken, or the nature of any investigation, against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified and reassured that the matter is being addressed.
• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints policy to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.
• National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus