



COMPLAINTS POLICY

Version control	
AAT Complaints Policy 2019-11-19	Updates to reflect change of governance arrangements and to rename the procedural stages
AAT Complaints Policy 2019-03-22	New interim policy based on template policy provided by The Key pending review September 2019
AAT Complaints Policy August 2018	Updated based on the Trust's original policy template

Date of next review:	September 2021	Owner:	Director of HR & Compliance
Type of policy:	Network/Statutory	Approving Body:	Board

1. Aims

Rivers Academy West London aims to meet its statutory obligations in accordance with the policies and practice of the Aspirations Academies Trust when responding to complaints from parents of its pupils, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into the Academy's improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The Academy will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the Academy's website.

2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the Academy. It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on [creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations](#), and refers to [good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

3. Definitions and scope

3.1 Definitions of *concerns* and *complaints*

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint.

- A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”.
- A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”.

The Academy will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.

The Academy intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage. This Policy sets out the procedures for doing so while also setting out how complainants may escalate their concerns if they remain dissatisfied.

3.2 Exceptions

This Complaints Procedure covers all concerns/complaints about any provision of facilities or services at the Academy. However, the exceptions listed below are not covered because separate procedures exist.

Where the Academy's actions are pursuant to specific requirements of an external body (e.g. local authority or Department for Education), complainants will be asked to refer their concern directly to that authority.

Exceptions	Further information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allegations of child abuse /other child protection issues Other safeguarding issues 	<p>Immediately report your concern to the class teacher, Designated Safeguarding Lead or Principal. Refer to the Academy's Safeguarding Policy.</p> <p>You can also report concerns about how child protection issues are being handled in your own or another organisation to the NSPCC's whistleblowing advice line on 0800 028 0285 or at help@nspcc.org.uk.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statutory Assessment of SEN 	<p>Check the Academy's SEND offer and report your concern to the SENCO or Principal.</p> <p><i>Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with SEN about the Academy's support are within the scope of the Complaints Policy.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School Admissions including appeals 	<p>Refer to the Academy's Admissions Policy available on the Academy's website.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupil Exclusions 	<p>Refer to the Academy's Behaviour Policy available on the Academy's website.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing (for financial or other regulatory malpractice) 	<p>Refer to the Whistleblowing Policy available from the Principal or otherwise contact info@aspirationsacademies.org</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff grievances /disciplinary procedures 	<p>Staff of the Academy wishing to raise concerns (other than those for which the Whistleblowing Policy would be applicable) should refer to the Grievance Policy. The Disciplinary Policy sets out how the Academy will address matters relating to staff conduct. These policies are available from the Principal or otherwise contact info@aspirationsacademies.org</p>

If your concern relates to services of the Academy provided by an external service provider, this should be raised with the Principal, but it might be that you or the Academy will have to follow the provider's own complaints policy thereafter.

3.3 Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

We also intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits are set out in each of the procedural stages as set out in section 5 of this Policy. References made to timescales generally refer to “term time days”. These are days within the Academy’s term time dates as shown on its website. Therefore, if a complaint is made on the last day of the Academy’s spring term and a response is required within 5 term time days, the response should be made no later than the fifth day of the summer term.

Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set, and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline with an explanation for the delay.

The Academy expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and no later than 3 months afterwards.

We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

4. Pre-complaint: resolution of concerns

Our expectation is that the vast majority of concerns can be raised and dealt with informally without the need to make a complaint under the procedures set out in section 5.

Parents, carers and others who have a concern that is appropriate to raise through this Policy (see section 3.2 for exceptions) are encouraged to make their concerns known to the Academy informally at an early stage so that they can be addressed in the spirit of partnership.

In the first instance, a concern should normally be raised with the member of staff most closely involved, such as the class teacher. The person wishing to raise a concern may ask the Principal to confirm which member of staff they should liaise with in order to raise their concern.

Such concerns will generally be raised and responded to orally and a written record of the concern will not necessarily be kept.

5 Stages of complaint (see section 6 concerning complaints against the Principal or members of the Regional Board)

5.1 Stage one complaint

5.1.1. If a concern is raised as set out in section 4 above but the person raising the concern is dissatisfied by the response and/or outcome then they may make a complaint to the Principal. This may be communicated orally (e.g. in a meeting or telephone conversation) or in writing to the Principal. However, if the complaint is against the Principal the provisions set out in section 6 are applicable.

- 5.1.2. If complainants have queries about how to raise a stage one complaint, these may be raised with the Principal. Otherwise such queries can be raised by emailing info@aspirationsacademies.org .
- 5.1.3. Written correspondence to the Principal should be sent to the Academy's postal address or emailed to general@rivers-aspirations.org and marked for the Principal's attention.
- 5.1.4. Where a complaint is raised with the Principal without the matter having first been raised as set out in section 4, the Principal may propose to the complainant that the matter is addressed with reference to the informal arrangements set out in section 4. Nevertheless, if the complainant continues to assert their wish for the matter to be considered as a complaint then the stage one complaint procedure should be progressed.
- 5.1.5. On establishing that the matter raised will be considered as a stage one complaint, the Principal will normally delegate to a suitable member of staff the role of Complaint Officer. In exceptional circumstances, the Principal may decide to undertake the Complaint Officer role her/himself. In all circumstances, the Complaint Officer will be no less senior to the staff member who considered the initial concern¹.
- 5.1.6. Where the matter is progressed as a stage one complaint, the complainant should be notified of this and invited to attend a meeting with the Complaint Officer within 5 term time working days of the informal complaint being received by the Principal. This notification should be confirmed in writing. In circumstances where for good reason a meeting within 5 term time working days cannot be offered, this should be explained in writing to the complainant and an alternative date identified with minimum delay. If jointly agreed by the Complaint Officer and the complainant, instead of meeting, they might discuss the matter in a telephone conversation.
- 5.1.7. In the discussion with the complainant, the Complaint Officer will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint (e.g. what happened and who was involved) and what the complainant feels would put things right. The Complaint Officer will also identify the date by which they expect to communicate the outcome to the complainant. For less complex matters the Complaint Officer should aim to be in a position to communicate an outcome within 5 term time working days of the discussion with the complainant and in all circumstances where an outcome has not been reached within 10 term time working days, a further written communication should be made to the complainant to provide explanation of the delay and advise of the expected timescale.
- 5.1.8. After conducting appropriate enquiries, the Complaint Officer should write a summary note outlining details of:
- the complaint raised
 - how the investigation was undertaken
 - the findings of the investigation
 - the conclusions drawn and outcome (including actions to be taken)
- 5.1.9. The summary note will be referred to by the Complaint Officer when communicating the outcome to the complainant. The outcome communication may be made through a telephone conversation or meeting or in writing. Where the communication is made through a telephone conversation or meeting and the complainant requests written confirmation of the conclusions and outcome to be provided in writing, this will be sent to them within 5 term time working days of the initial communication of outcome. In all circumstances, when notifying the complainant of the outcome, the Complaint Officer

¹ In some circumstances it could be the same person.

should advise that if the complainant remains dissatisfied they may make a stage 2 complaint (see paragraph 5.1.11 and section 5.2).

- 5.1.10. Any written confirmation of outcome will be appended to the summary note and to any other written correspondence about the investigation (e.g. letter of invitation to attend the meeting with the Complaint Officer and, where applicable, witness interview notes). The collective documentation is to be kept in a confidential filing system as maintained under the authority of the Principal in accordance with section 9 of this Policy.
- 5.1.11. If the complainant is dissatisfied by the response and/or the outcome then they may make a stage two complaint as set out in section 5.2. **Any such stage 2 complaint must be submitted in time to be received within 10 term time working days of the stage 1 outcome having been notified.**

5.2 Stage two complaint

- 5.2.1. Stage two complaints must be made in writing and should be addressed to the Principal unless the complaint is against the Principal or is progressing a complaint in which the Principal acted as the Complaint Officer in the stage one procedure. In those circumstances the provisions of section 6 are applicable.
- 5.2.2. If complainants have queries about how to raise a stage two complaint, these may be raised with the Principal. Otherwise such queries can be raised by emailing info@aspirationsacademies.org.
- 5.2.3. Written correspondence to the Principal should be sent to the Academy's postal address or emailed to general@rivers-aspirations.org and marked for the Principal's attention.
- 5.2.4. The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents, and what they feel would resolve the complaint. The complainant should clarify whether or not the complaint relates to one or more matters raised previously either in accordance with section 4 or 5.1.
- 5.2.5. The Principal shall initially review the complaint and, if there is good reason, may determine that the matter be addressed with reference to 5.1 of the Policy. This would only be the case where the matter has not been considered under the stage one procedure and there is no exceptional reason presented that makes it appropriate for the complaint to be considered in the first instance in accordance with the stage two procedure. Where a complainant has indicated their complaint is submitted as a stage two complaint but the Principal determines the matter will be addressed as a stage one complaint, the Principal will confirm this in writing.
- 5.2.6. Where the Principal determines that the complaint is to be progressed as a stage two complaint, she/he may take on the responsibility of being Complaint Manager her/himself or otherwise delegate the matter to a member of the senior leadership team. In all circumstances, the Complaint Manager will be no less senior to the staff member who considered the matter as Complaint Officer.²
- 5.2.7. The Complaint Manager will call a meeting with the complainant to clarify concerns, and seek a resolution. The meeting should normally be arranged to take place within 5 term time working days of the stage two complaint being received by the Principal. The notification of the meeting should be confirmed in writing and include confirmation that it forms part of the stage two complaints procedure. In circumstances where for good reason a meeting within 5 term time working days cannot be offered, this should be

² The Complaint Manager and Complaint Officer cannot be the same person.

explained in writing to the complainant and an alternative date identified with minimum delay.

5.2.8. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting, and should inform the Academy of the identity of their companion in advance.

5.2.9. In certain circumstances, the Academy may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case, the Academy will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment.

5.2.10. In the meeting with the complainant, the Complaints Officer will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint (e.g. what happened and who was involved) and what the complainant feels would put things right.

5.2.11. The Complaint Manager will then conduct their own investigation. Where, as would normally be the case, the formal complaint relates to a matter previously considered in accordance with section 5.1 above, the investigation will commence with a review of the documentation from that process. As considered necessary by the Complaint Manager, the investigation would be supplemented with their own additional enquiries.

5.2.12. The Complaint Manager should prepare a report outlining details of:

- the complaint raised
- how the stage two investigation was undertaken
- the findings of the stage two investigation
- the conclusions drawn and outcome (including actions to be taken)

5.2.13. The report will be referred to by the Complaint Manager when communicating the outcome to the complainant.

5.2.14. A written confirmation of outcome of the investigation will be sent to the complainant as soon as possible and, unless there is good reason, within 10 term time days of the meeting with the complainant held in accordance with 5.2.7 to 5.2.10. Where there is good reason for an extended timescale, a further written communication should be made to the complainant to provide explanation of the delay and advise when the written conclusion will be provided.

5.2.15. While the outcome communication will be made in writing, the Complaint Manager may also find it appropriate to arrange a meeting or have a telephone conversation with the complainant.

5.2.16. The written confirmation of outcome will be appended to the report and to any other written correspondence about the investigation (e.g. letter of invitation to attend the meeting with the Complaints Manager and, where applicable, witness interview notes). The collective documentation is to be kept in a confidential filing system as maintained under the authority of the Principal in accordance with section 9 of this Policy.

5.2.17. If the complainant is not satisfied with the written confirmation of outcome then they may appeal subject to the following:

- The appeal must be submitted in writing to the Managing Director addressed:
 - c/o The Director of HR and Compliance, Aspirations Academies Trust, World Business Centre 3, Heathrow Airport, Newall Road, Hounslow, TW6 2TA
 - Or by email sent to: info@aspirationsacademies.org

- A copy of the appeal communication should be sent to the Principal
 - The appeal notification must be received as set out above within 10 term time days of the complainant having received the written confirmation of the stage two outcome.
- 5.2.18. The letter of appeal should set out details of why the complainant feels the stage two procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently and what they feel would resolve the complaint.
- 5.2.19. The appeal process is set out in 5.3.

5.3: Appeal to Complaint Review Panel

- 5.3.1. Where an appeal is submitted in accordance with 5.2.17 to 5.2.18 the Trust's Director of HR and Compliance will instruct the relevant Regional Board Clerk to convene a Complaint Review Panel.
- 5.3.2. The panel will consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. The panel will be formed on the basis of the following:
- Two panel positions will be filled either by two members of the Trust's Regional Board or alternatively by one member of the Trust's Regional Board and one member of the Trust's central management team.
 - The other panel position will be filled by someone who is independent of the day to day running and management of the Academy and Trust.
- 5.3.3. The members of the Complaint Review Panel shall nominate a Chair.
- 5.3.4. The members of the panel will have access to the existing records associated with the complaint (see section 9).
- 5.3.5. The complainant will be invited to attend the meeting of the Complaint Review Panel and will be given at least 5 term time days' notice of the meeting. Nevertheless, the Complaint Review Panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. The complainant will be invited to submit documentation that they consider is relevant to their complaint.
- 5.3.6. The complainant may be accompanied at the meeting.
- 5.3.7. Representatives from the Academy shall, as appropriate, also be asked to be present at the meeting.
- 5.3.8. The Clerk to the Regional Board or substitute shall attend to take minutes.
- 5.3.9. At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.
- 5.3.10. The panel, the complainant and the Academy representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions.
- 5.3.11. Once the complainant and Academy representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

- 5.3.12. The panel must then determine its findings from the case, draw conclusions and make recommendations, including the identification of appropriate actions.
- 5.3.13. The Academy will inform the complainant and other relevant parties of the decision in writing within 5 term time days.
- 5.3.14. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint. Copies of these documents shall be kept with documentation relating to the earlier stage of the complaint in accordance with section 9.

6. Complaints against the Principal or a member of the Regional Board or entire Regional Board

- 6.1.1. Complaints that relate to the conduct of the Principal or escalate a complaint that the Principal considered as the Complaints Officer should be addressed to the Managing Director. This must be in writing addressed to the Managing Director, c/o The Director of HR and Compliance, Aspirations Academies Trust, World Business Centre 3, Heathrow Airport, Newall Road, Hounslow, TW6 2TA. Alternatively email info@aspirationsacademies.org
- 6.1.2. Where a complaint is against the Chair of the Regional Board or any member of the Regional Board other than the Managing Director of the Trust, the complaint should be addressed as set out above in respect of the Principal.
- 6.1.3. Where the complaint is against the Managing Director or the entire Regional Board, refer to 6.2.
- 6.1.4. Complaints as set out in 6.1.1 and 6.1.2 will be reviewed by the Trust's Managing Director who may delegate detailed consideration of the matter to a senior manager within the Trust's central management team or independent person. Such complaints will be considered as set out in 6.1.5.
- 6.1.5. Generally when reviewing such a complaint the Managing Director will assess that it should be considered either in a manner consistent with the procedure set out in 5.1 or 5.2 (i.e. either as a stage one complaint or stage two complaint). This will be confirmed in writing to the complainant in accordance with the timescale set out in 5.1 or 5.2 as appropriate.
- 6.1.6. In circumstances where such a complaint is considered with reference to the procedures set out in 5.1 (stage one complaint) and the complainant remains dissatisfied by the outcome they may submit a stage two complaint. This should be addressed in a manner consistent with the procedures set out in 5.2.
- 6.1.7. Where such a complaint is considered with reference to the procedures set out in 5.2 (stage two) and the complainant is not satisfied with the written confirmation of outcome then they may appeal subject to the following:
- The appeal must be submitted in writing, either by email or by letter and should be addressed to the Clerk to the Trust Board and copied to the Director of HR and Compliance
 - The appeal notification must be received by the Clerk/Director within 10 term time days of the complainant having received the written confirmation of outcome.

- Written correspondence to the Clerk to the Trust Board and Director of HR and Compliance should be addressed to Aspirations Academies Trust, World Business Centre 3, Heathrow Airport, Newall Road, Hounslow, TW6 2TA. Alternatively email info@aspirationsacademies.org
- 6.1.8. The letter of appeal should set out details of why the complainant feels the stage two procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently and what they feel would resolve the complaint.
- 6.1.9. The appeal process will be based on the procedures set out in 5.3. However, the members of the panel shall comprise:
- Two panel members will be Trustees of the Aspirations Academies Trust
 - One panel member will be independent of the day to day running and management of the Academy.
- 6.2 Complaints against the Managing Director or the entire Regional Board must be submitted in writing to the Chair of Trustees and a copy sent to the Clerk to the Trust Board. The correspondence should be sent to Aspirations Academies Trust, World Business Centre 3, Heathrow Airport, Newall Road, Hounslow, TW6 2TA. Alternatively email info@aspirationsacademies.org
- 6.3 The Chair of Trustees will consider any complaint submitted in accordance in 6.2 and determine relevant procedures that will be based on the procedural steps as set out in 6.1.4 to 6.1.8.

7. Referring complaints on completion of the Academy's procedures

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the Academy's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the ESFA. The ESFA will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the Academy. The ESFA will not overturn the Academy's decision about a complaint. However, it will look into:

- Whether there was undue delay, or the Academy did not comply with its own complaints procedure
- Whether the Academy was in breach of its funding agreement with the secretary of state
- Whether the Academy has failed to comply with any other legal obligation

If the Academy did not deal with the complaint properly, it will be asked to re-investigate the complaint. If the Academy's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the Academy will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

8. Persistent complaints and complaint campaigns

8.1 Unreasonably persistent complaints

Where a complainant tries to re-open an issue with the Academy after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and the Academy has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the Chair of the Regional Board (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the Chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the Academy again about the same issue, the Academy can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which a response will not be sent is if:

- The Academy has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the Academy's position and their options (if any), *and*
- The complainant is contacting the Academy repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time

However, the above list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The Academy will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- There is good reason to believe the individual is contacting the Academy with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, and/or
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, and/or
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, Academy staff

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint.

Once the Academy has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The Academy will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the Academy acts reasonably.

8.2 Complaint campaigns

Where the Academy receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the Academy, the Academy may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the Academy website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the Academy's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

9. Record-keeping

The Academy will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will normally be viewed only by the Principal, those involved in investigating the complaint or members of the Complaint Review Panel. Representatives of the Aspirations Academies Trust Board (e.g. senior members of the Trust's central management team) may also have access to the records as part of the Trust's monitoring of the practice of the Academy.

The records must also be made available to the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act where they request access to them. Relevant parts of the record or summary information may also be relevant for scrutiny or reporting in accordance with a freedom of information (FOI) request or the complainant making a subject access request under the General Data Protection Regulation.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, the Academy's privacy notices and Trust policy as may be amended from time to time concerning management of records.

The details of a complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole Regional Board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point. Where the Regional Board is aware of the substance of a complaint before the review panel stage, the Academy will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the Chair of the Regional Board in consultation with the Trust's Director of HR and Compliance. Consent will not be unreasonably withheld.

10. Learning lessons

The Regional Board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Principal, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the Academy can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

11. Monitoring arrangements

The Regional Board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly.

The Regional Board will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 10.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the HR Administrator and Executive Assistant under the authority of the Principal.