

COMPLAINTS POLICY



VANTAGE ACADEMY TRUST

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INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This procedure applies to the Vantage Multi Academy Trust (herein the 'Trust') and is implemented across our facilities to ensure we respond to complaints as quickly and effectively as possible.

The procedure will set out exactly what will happen with a complaint and how long the process will take.

The procedure will be used to deal with complaints relating to the Trust, school and any community facilities or services that the school provides.

We value all comments about our Trust and we will endeavour to address your concerns at the earliest stage possible.

The formal procedures will need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied. Formal procedures will begin when the person wishes the matter to be heard by an impartial committee of the Local Advisory Board or if the complaint requires attention from other parties, i.e. Trustees.

- 1.2 In the first instance complaints should be directed to a member of staff who will refer the issue to the most appropriate person. If the complaint concerns the School Principal or a Local Advisory Board (LAB) Representative you should contact the Chair of LAB Representatives in writing via the school.

If the complaint is about the Chair of LAB, you should write to the Clerk to the LAB who will convene the complaints committee appointed from the LAB, and stage three of this procedure will apply. In this instance the Chair of LAB Representatives may choose to present the evidence for the school. The clerk may refer to the Local Authority, Governor Support Service/Diocese/Board of Trustees for advice and support on any investigation.

Should the complaint be about the Chief Executive Officer, you should write to the Chairman of the Trustees. The complaint will be heard by this person and a further two Trustees who will form a complaints committee as per stage three of this procedure.

Complaints regarding the Trustees will be heard by the Members of the Trust and should be addressed to the Chairman of the Members.

1.3 When making a complaint it is important you identify your desired outcome, that is what actions you feel might resolve the problem at any stage.

1.4 Pupils, parents or carers can make a complaint to the school about most aspects of its function including:

- Attitude/behaviour of staff
- Teaching and learning
- Application of behaviour management systems
- Bullying
- Provision of extra-curricular activities
- The curriculum and collective worship

The same complaint could be made jointly by a number of persons, in this case it is expected that a nominee/representative speak on behalf of all complainants, otherwise, all complaints will be dealt with on an individual basis.

1.5 Members of the general public may make complaints to the school if the school is directly responsible for the issue being complained about e.g.

- Behaviour of pupils during break-times
- Health and safety issues of premises
- Behaviour of staff

These complaints will not fall within the jurisdiction of the Secretary of State or Ofsted, therefore only the School Principal and the Local Advisory Board will consider them.

1.6 This procedure will not be used for a staff grievance or disciplinary procedure. Legal, safeguarding or disciplinary proceedings take precedence over complaints procedures and timescales. A complaint about any community facilities or services provided by any third party through the school premises or using school facilities should be addressed to the third party provider who will have their own complaints procedure. Copies of the complaints procedure for any third party provider are available directly from the provider.

- 1.7 The Local Advisory Board will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary. Complaints information shared with the whole Local Advisory Board will not normally name individuals. As well as addressing an individual's complaints, the process of listening to and resolving complaints will contribute to school improvement. When individual complaints are heard, any underlying issues that are identified will be addressed. The monitoring and review of complaints by the school and the Local Advisory Board is seen as a useful tool in evaluating a school's performance.
- 1.8 The role of the Local Authority/Diocese in school complaints is prescribed by legislation. Local Management of Schools made schools self-managing and therefore responsible for administering procedures that deal with complaints made against them.

DEALING WITH UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS

- 2.1 If properly followed, a good complaints procedure will limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied.
- 2.2 A complaint can be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint and refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint
 - Seeks an unrealistic outcome
 - Has a history of making unreasonable complaints
 - Makes frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint
- 2.3 A complaint will be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so:

- Maliciously
- Aggressively
- Using threats, intimidation or violence
- Using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language
- Knowing it to be false
- Anonymously

2.4 The presumption should be in favour of not restricting access unless it is absolutely necessary. The LAB Representatives may consider:

- Warnings/contract re future conduct
- Restricting telephone calls to a particular day/time or person
- Restrictions on methods of contact (e.g. in writing)
- Not acknowledging future correspondence that does not present new information
- Temporary suspension of the person's access to the complaints system

2.5 The complainant will be informed in writing of any action taken and how long the action will last. They must be advised how to contact the Local Government Ombudsman.

STAGE ONE – COMPLAINT HEARD BY STAFF MEMBER

3.1 The vast majority of concerns can be resolved informally. There are many occasions where the class teacher, office staff, or the School Principal, can resolve concerns straight away. It is in everyone's best interests that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Complainants must feel able to raise concerns with members of staff without any formality, either in person, by telephone or in writing. This allows staff to establish whether a person is asking a question, expressing an opinion or making a complaint.

3.2 The member of staff first contacted should clarify the nature of the concern and re-assure the complainant that the school wants to hear about it. Once a complaint has been received by a member of staff they should determine whether they are the best person to resolve the complaint. The complaints co-ordinator should be informed of the complaint.

3.3 The Trust respects the views of any complainant and if they express a difficulty in discussing their complaint with a particular member of staff the complaints co-ordinator will refer the complainant to another member of staff.

Where the complaint concerns the School Principal, the complaints co-ordinator will refer the complainant to the Chair of LAB.

3.4 If the concern involves any child protection issue, the School Principal will inform the relevant Local Authority social care team or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the complaints co-ordinator may consider referring the complainant to another staff member.

3.5 Once the complaint has been investigated, the outcome should be communicated to the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator. The complaint will be responded to within 10 school days either verbally or in writing. The complainant must also be informed of what do next if they remain dissatisfied with the response.

3.6 If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation into your complaint you should write to the School Principal within 10 school days asking for your complaint to be investigated at stage 2.

STAGE 2 - COMPLAINT HEARD BY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

4.1 Parents and pupils should be advised of their right to make complaints. Complaints should be made either in writing or by arrangement of an appointment with the School Principal. The complainant may choose to use the attached complaints form (see appendix 1). If the complaint is about the School Principal, the Chair of LAB Representatives should deal with the matter using this procedure. If the complainant has difficulty expressing themselves in writing, they should be informed where they can get independent assistance.

- 4.2 The School Principal may delegate the task of collating the information to another staff member but not the decision on the action to be taken. The person investigating the complaint should be clear what exactly the complaint is and the desired outcome as soon as possible.
- 4.3 The School Principal should contact the complainant and provide an opportunity for the complainant to discuss their concerns and find solutions. This could be by phone or in a meeting. It should be made clear that the complainant may bring a friend, family member or advocate to any meeting if they wish. Interpreting services should be made available where necessary. The School Principal should have another member of staff present to observe and record the meeting and promote staff safety. Care should be taken in these circumstances not to create an intimidating atmosphere for the complainant. If it is necessary to interview pupils as part of the investigation, this should be done in the presence of another member of staff, or in the case of serious complaints e.g. where the possibility of criminal investigation exists, in the presence of their parents.

Written notes should be kept of all communications with regard to the complaint and its investigation.

- 4.4 The complaint will be investigated and written response will be provided within 10 school days, unless the complaint is complicated and to allow for a full investigation to be carried out an extension of 10 school days will be granted. Where it is deemed necessary to apply an extension to the investigation period this will be communicated to the complainant.

The complainant must be informed of the right to take the complaint to stage 3 if they remain dissatisfied.

STAGE 3 - COMPLAINT HEARD BY LOCAL ADVISORY BOARD'S CHAIR OF LAB REPRESENTATIVES (OR THEIR APPOINTEE)

- 5.1 Where a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint at stage two they should write to the Chair of LAB Representatives within 10 school days of receipt of the decision of the stage two investigation. The Chair of LAB Representatives should first ensure that the complaint has been dealt with at stage two, and the complaint is covered by the school's complaints procedure not other procedures e.g. personnel or child protection. If not the matter should be referred back to the School Principal and the Chair of LAB Representatives should write to the complainant advising them of the correct procedures.

- 5.2 Upon receipt of a letter notifying the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of a stage two investigation the Chair of LAB Representatives should write acknowledging that the complaint has been received.
- 5.3 At this point the Chair of LAB Representatives may offer mediation as a means of resolving the complaint. Mediation can be facilitated by the Chair of LAB, or if it is felt to be more appropriate an external agency may be used such as Parent Partnership, Bully Free-zone or a professional mediation service.
- 5.4 The Chair of LAB Representatives will investigate the handling of the Stage 2 complaint. They may revisit or extend the original investigation by the School Principal.

The Chair of LAB Representatives will conduct this investigation within 10 working days of receipt of the stage 3 complaint and respond to the complainant with the outcome of their investigation within this time frame.

STAGE FOUR – COMPLAINT HEARD BY LOCAL ADVISORY BOARD’S COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE

- 6.1 If the matter cannot be resolved through mediation/ investigation of the Chair of LAB, then the Chair of LAB Representatives should arrange for the Complaints Committee to be convened. The letter should explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further documents or information relevant to the complaint. A deadline for submission of these documents should be given, which should be at least 5 school days before the hearing.
- 6.2 A clerk will be appointed who should convene the complaints committee appointed from the Local Advisory Board. The committee should comprise of 3 or 5 LAB Representatives who have no previous involvement with the complaint, of which one will assume the role of chair for the committee, who will have delegated powers to hear complaints at this stage. The complaint should never be heard by the entire Local Advisory Board as this could compromise the impartiality of any committee set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

The School Principal should also be invited to submit a written report for the committee; this may be a copy of the stage two response. The School Principal may also invite members of staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant to respond personally or in writing.

The complaints committee should set a timetable for the hearing and should notify the complainant of this. The hearing should be heard within 20 school days of receiving the letter from the complainant following stage 3.

It is strongly recommended that the complaints hearing meeting be clerked. The clerk would be the contact point for the complainant and be required to:

- Set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- Collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
- Welcome the parties as they arrive to the hearing;
- Record the proceedings;
- Notify all parties of the committee's decision.

The Clerk should write to inform the committee, School Principal, complainant and any relevant witnesses of the date and time of the hearing, giving a minimum of 5 days' notice. All documents submitted should be circulated to the committee, the School Principal and the complainant. The complainant will be notified of their right to have a friend, family member, advocate or interpreter present if they wish. The Chair of LAB Representatives should ensure that minutes are taken at the complaints committee meeting.

- 6.3 The committee should be open-minded and independent. The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it may sometimes only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations that satisfy the complainant that their concern has been taken seriously.
- 6.4 The decision of the Committee must be final as they have been delegated authority by the Local Advisory Board to hear and make decisions about the complaint.
- 6.5 The hearing should be held in private. Any witnesses (other than the complainant and the School Principal) should only attend for the part of the hearing in which they give evidence. Good practice would be that at no point should the School Principal or the complainant be left with the complaints committee without the other being present.

The committee should remember that the complainants may not be used to formal meetings and may feel inhibited in addressing the committee. It is recommended that the Chair of the committee keep the proceedings as informal as possible. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child.

- 6.6 If either party wishes to introduce new information at the meeting, this should be allowed. The meeting should then be adjourned for a short period to allow other parties to review and respond to this information.

The meeting should allow for:

- The complainant to explain their complaint and the School Principal to explain the school's response
- Witnesses to be brought by the complainant or the School Principal
- The School Principal and the complainant to ask questions of each other and any witnesses
- The committee to ask questions of the complainant, School Principal and any witnesses
- The complainant and the School Principal to summarise their position

The Chair of the Committee should thank the complainant and School Principal for their attendance and request they leave the meeting while the committee consider their decision.

They should then decide:

- Whether to dismiss the complaint in whole or part
- To uphold the complaint in whole or part
- To approve any appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend to the Local Advisory Board what action can be taken to prevent similar difficulties in the future

- 6.7 A written response detailing the decisions, recommendations and the basis on which these have been made should be sent to the complainant and the School Principal within 5 school days.

The school should retain a copy of all correspondence and records of meetings in line with current retention guidelines.

COMPLAINTS REGARDING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OR TRUSTEES

- 7.1 Complaints at this stage should be sent in writing to the appropriate body. If the complaint relates to the Chief Executive Officer, the complaint should be addressed to the Chairman of the Trustees. Should the complaint relate to a member of the Trustees or Chairman, this should then be addressed to the Chairman of the Members.
- 7.2 Written acknowledgement of the complaint will be sent within 5 working days informing the complainant that their complaint will be heard within 30 working days.
- 7.3 A complaint panel hearing will be arranged with three members of the relevant body (Trustees or Members) and the complainant. Five working days' notice will be given to all attending.
- 7.4 At the hearing, everyone's case will be communicated and discussed.
- 7.5 A written response to the complainant will be made within 15 working days following the hearing.

UNRESOLVED COMPLAINTS

- 8.1 If the complaint remains unresolved and you feel that the school has behaved unreasonably about your concerns and has failed to meet its duties under the Education Act 1996, you can write to the Secretary of State for Education:

The Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

8.2 Ofsted will also consider a complaint if they affect the school as a whole. For example:

- The school is not providing a good enough education
- The pupils are not achieving as much as they should, or their different needs are not being met
- The school is not well led and managed, or is wasting money
- The pupils' personal development and wellbeing are being neglected

Ofsted can be contacted on 08456 404045 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

APPENDIX A

School Complaints Form

(Stage 3 Complaint)

Surname:

First Name:

Title:

Address:

Postcode:

Home Tel:

Work Tel:

Mobile:

Email:

Pupil's Name (if relevant):

Your relationship to pupil (if relevant):

1. Please give details of your complaint: (continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

2. What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint.

(Who did you speak to and what was the response?)

3. What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

4. Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signed:

Date:

OFFICIAL USE

Date Acknowledgement Sent: _____

Acknowledgement Sent by who: _____

Complaint Referred to: _____

Date: _____

School Complaints Procedure

A Guide for Parents

The Vantage Multi Academy Trust has a complaints procedure to ensure we respond to complaints as quickly and as effectively as possible. (A copy of the full policy can be obtained from the School)

This procedure is to deal with complaints relating to the school and any community facilities or services that the school provides. We value all comments about our school and we will endeavour to address your concerns at the earliest stage possible to prevent escalation to the formal stage and a protracted complaint that can be distressing for all involved.

When making a complaint it is important you identify your desired outcome, that is what actions you feel might resolve the problem at any stage. If the complaint concerns the School Principal or LAB Representatives you should contact the Chair of LAB Representatives directly in writing. If you are not satisfied with the action taken by the Chair of LAB Representatives or if the complaint is regarding the Chief Executive Officer, you should contact the Board of Trustees.

STAGE ONE: COMPLAINT HEARD BY STAFF MEMBER

The vast majority of concerns can be resolved informally. There are many occasions where the class teacher, office staff, or the School Principal, can resolve your concerns straight away. It is in everyone's best interests that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage.

Once the complaint has been investigated the outcome will be communicated to you. Your complaint will be responded to within 10 working days either verbally or in writing. If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation into your complaint you should write to the School Principal within 10 days asking for your complaint to be investigated at stage 2.

STAGE TWO: COMPLAINT HEARD BY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

When a complaint is received at stage 2 it will be acknowledged within 5 school days. The School Principal will contact you to provide an opportunity to discuss your concerns and find possible solutions. This could be by phone or in a meeting. You may bring a friend, family member or advocate to any meeting if you wish.

The complaint will be investigated and a written response will be provided within 10 school days, unless the complaint is complicated and to allow for a full investigation to be carried out, an extension of 10 days will be granted. Where it is deemed necessary to apply an extension to the investigation period this will be communicated to you. You have the right to take the complaint to stage 3 if you remain dissatisfied.

STAGE THREE: COMPLAINT HEARD BY LOCAL ADVISORY BOARD'S CHAIR OF LAB REPRESENTATIVES (OR THEIR APPOINTEE)

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint at stage two, you should write to the Chair of LAB Representatives within **10 school days** of receipt of the decision of the stage two investigation.

The Chair of LAB Representatives should first ensure that the complaint has been dealt with at stage two, and the complaint is covered by the school's complaints procedure not other procedures e.g. personnel or child protection. If not, the matter should be referred back to the School Principal and the Chair of LAB Representatives will write to you advising you of the correct procedures.

Upon receipt of a letter stating you are not satisfied with the outcome of a stage two investigation the Chair of LAB Representatives will write (within 5 school days) acknowledging that the complaint has been received.

At this point the Chair of LAB Representatives may offer mediation as a means of resolving the complaint. Mediation can be facilitated by the Chair of LAB, or if it is felt to be more appropriate an external agency may be used such as Parent Partnership, Bully Free-zone or a professional mediation service.

The Chair of LAB Representatives will investigate the handling of the Stage 2 complaint. They may revisit or extend the original investigation by the School Principal.

The Chair of LAB Representatives will conduct this investigation within 10 working days of receipt of the stage 3 complaint and respond to you with the outcome of their investigation within this time frame.

If you still remain dissatisfied with the outcome you may move to stage 4.

STAGE FOUR: COMPLAINT HEARD BY LOCAL ADVISORY BOARD'S COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE

You should write to the Chair of LAB Representatives within 10 school days of receipt of the decision of the stage 3 investigation. Upon receipt of your letter the Chair of LAB Representatives will write acknowledging receipt of your complaint. The Chair of LAB Representatives will then arrange for the Complaints Committee to be convened. You have the right to submit any further documents or information relevant to your complaint and the deadline for submission of these documents will be at least 5 days before the hearing.

The committee will comprise of 3 or 5 LAB Representatives who have no previous involvement with the complaint. The review hearing should be heard within **20 school days** of receiving the letter.

The Clerk to the Committee will write to inform you of the date and time of the hearing, giving a minimum of 5 days' notice. All documents submitted will be circulated to all parties. You may bring a friend, family member or advocate to the meeting if you wish.

At the end of the meeting, the committee will decide whether to dismiss the complaint in whole or part, to uphold the complaint in whole or part, decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint and where appropriate, recommend what action can be taken to prevent similar difficulties in the future.

A written response detailing the decisions, recommendations and the basis on which these have been made will be sent to you and the School Principal within 5 school days. The decision of the Committee is final.

The following diagram details the stages you should follow in the event of a complaint:

COMPLAINT STAGE DIAGRAM

Stage 1 - Complaint relayed informally to member of staff

• If complaint is related directly to the School Principle, got straight to Stage 3

Stage 2 - If unresolved, complaint taken to School Principle for investigation and responded to within 10 days

Stage 3 - If unresolved, write to Chair of Governors using complaints forms (Mediation may be offered at this stage)

Stage 4 - If unresolved, inform the Chair of Governors in writing that you wish the complaint to be heard by the Governors Complaints Committee

Committee meets and renders final judgement on the matter

APPENDIX C

A Guide for LAB Representatives – Formal Stage

If the School Principal/Chair of LAB Representatives is unable to resolve the matter at Stage Two the complaint can be referred to a Complaints Committee appointed by LAB. The aim of the hearing is to establish any areas of agreement and identify actions that can be taken to resolve the complaint.

The LAB may nominate a number of members with delegated powers to hear complaints at that stage, and set out its terms of reference. These can include:

- drawing up its procedures;
- hearing individual appeals;
- making recommendations on policy as a result of complaints.

The procedure adopted by the committee for hearing appeals would normally be part of the school's complaints procedure. The committee can be drawn from the nominated members and may consist of three or five people. The committee may choose their own chair.

THE REMIT OF THE COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE

The committee has delegated powers to:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

There are several points which any LAB Representative sitting on a complaints committee needs to remember:

- It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No LAB Representative may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and

the complainant. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

- An effective committee will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The committee chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.
- Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The committee needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.

ROLE OF THE CHAIR OF THE COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE

The Chair of the Committee has a key role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the committee is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease;
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;
- the committee is open minded and acting independently;
- no member of the committee has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

CHECKLIST FOR A COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE HEARING

The committee needs to take the following points into account:

- The hearing is as informal as possible.
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.
- The School Principal may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The School Principal is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses.
- The complainant may question both the School Principal and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The committee may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The School Principal is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the committee decides on the issues.
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the committee within a set time scale.

NOTIFICATION OF THE COMMITTEE'S DECISION

The chair of the committee needs to ensure that the complainant is notified of the committee's decision, in writing, with the committee's response; this is usually within a set deadline which is publicised in the procedure. The letter needs to explain if there are any further rights of appeal