



A C A D E M I E S

Complaints Procedure

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Q3 Academies Trust

Complaints Procedure

Contents

Who can make a complaint?	3
The difference between a concern and a complaint	3
How to raise a concern or make a complaint	3
Anonymous complaints	4
Time scales	4
Complaints received outside of term time	4
Scope of this Complaints Procedure	5
Resolving complaints	6
Complaints Procedure	7
Stage 1	7
Stage 2	9
Withdrawal of a Complaint	11
Next Steps.....	12
Roles and Responsibilities	13
Complainant.....	13
Investigator.....	13
Complaints Co-Ordinator	14
Clerk to the Governing Body.....	14
Committee Chair	15
Committee Member	15
Complaint Form (Appendix one).....	17

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at one of the Q3 Academies. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Q3 Academies Trust (QAT) about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

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 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 procedure. Q3 Academies Trust 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, the Head of School will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Head of School will 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 that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Q3 Academies Trust will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing 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 Head of School or the Learning Consultant (who will in turn notify the Head of School). If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual governors 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 procedure.

Complaints against Academy staff (with the exception of the Head of School) should be made in the first instance, to the Head of School. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that concern the Trust, involve or are about the Head of School, should be addressed to Dr Caroline Badyal, Chief Executive (CEO). Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual Governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to Sharlene Attwood, the Clerk to the Governing Body. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you would like help completing the form, the Academy will be happy to provide the assistance of someone unconnected with the complaint. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

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

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the CEO, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

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.

Complaints received outside of term time

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

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Q3 Academies Trust, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Admissions ✓ Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs ✓ Re-organisation proposals 	<p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Sandwell Local Authority.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO), Uzma Bhatti 0121 569 4770 who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) 0121 569 3100.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Exclusion of children 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p>*complaints about the application of the individual Academy's Positive Behaviour Policy can be made through the Q3 Academies Trust complaints procedure.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our Academy should complain through the Academy complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>

✓ Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the Academy's internal grievance procedures.
✓ Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the Academy's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
✓ Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use Academy premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure 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

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

If a complainant commences legal action against Q3 Academies Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Q3 Academies Trust 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 Academy policies in light of the complaint;
- ✓ an apology.

Complaints Procedure

Stage 1

If you feel that a concern has not been addressed through informal discussion with the Academy staff, and you wish to have the matter formally investigated please complete a [Complaints Form](#). If you would like help completing the form, the Academy will be happy to provide the assistance of someone unconnected with the complaint. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

If the matter is about:

- ✓ the day-to-day running of an Academy;
- ✓ the interpretation of local Academy policies;
- ✓ the actions or inactions of staff at an Academy.

It will be investigated by either the Head of School or a nominated investigator.

If the matter is about:

- ✓ the actions or inactions of a Local Governing Body (LGB).

It will be investigated by the Chair of the QAT Board or a Governor nominated by the Chairperson of the QAT Board.

If the matter is about:

- ✓ an Head of School;
- ✓ the day-to-day running of the QAT or its policies;
- ✓ the actions or inactions of QAT staff.

It will be investigated by the Chief Executive of the QAT or a nominated investigator.

If the matter is about:

- ✓ the Chief Executive;
- ✓ the actions or inactions of the QAT Board.

Then, it will be investigated by an independent panel.

In all instances please return the complaints form to Claire Burge the Complaints Co-ordinator, who will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or e-mail) within **5** school days.

Within this response, the Investigator will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see.

The investigator can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The investigator may delegate the investigation to another member of the Executive/Senior Group/Team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the investigator will:

- ✓ if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- ✓ keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the investigator will provide a formal written response and will provide a copy to the Complaints Co-ordinator, within 15 working days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the investigator is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the Academy/Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

The investigator will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2. A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Complaints Co-ordinator, within **10** working days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The Complaints Co-ordinator who will record the date the request is received and acknowledge receipt of the request in writing (either by letter or email) within **5** working days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

At this stage, the complaint will be considered by either the CEO or a Complaints Committee (three impartial governors), depending on who carried out the investigation in Stage 1. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

If Stage 1 was investigated by the Head of School (or a designated Investigator), the CEO will consider the manner in which the complaint was addressed and decide whether it has been properly dealt with. If the CEO has any concerns, the Head of School may be asked to re-open the investigation. The complainant will be kept informed of any delay. If the complainant is not satisfied after the CEO has completed the review, a Complaints Committee will meet to consider the complaint.

The Complaints Co-ordinator will liaise with the Clerk to Governors to establish a date for the Committee to meet. The Complaints Co-ordinator will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within **15** working days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Complaints Co-ordinator 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.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, an Academy 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 will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least **5** working days before the meeting, the Complaints Co-ordinator will:

- ✓ confirm and notify 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;
- ✓ request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least **10** working days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least **5** working days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless 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 committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- ✓ 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 committee will:

- ✓ decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- ✓ where appropriate, recommend changes to the Academies' systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Q3 Academies Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within **5**

working days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Q3 Academies Trust.

If the complaint is:

- ✓ about the Chair of the QAT;
- ✓ the entire QAT Board;
- ✓ the majority of the QAT Board.

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent, co-opted governors.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Q3 Academies Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the Academy did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure 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 2.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Q3 Academies Trust. They will consider whether Q3 Academies has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD.

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;
- ✓ co-operate with the Academy 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.

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 information.
- ✓ liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

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 Head of School, CEO or complaints

committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The Head of School, CEO, or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-Ordinator

The Complaints Co-ordinator should:

- ✓ ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure;
- ✓ liaise with staff members, the Head of School, CEO, Chair of Governors, Clerk, and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure;
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ keep records.

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ✓ ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to Academy 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 the meeting, 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;
- ✓ record the proceedings;
- ✓ circulate the minutes of the meeting;
- ✓ notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

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

- ✓ both parties are asked (via the Clerk) 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 committee 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.

If a new 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:

- ✓ both the complainant and the Academy 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;
- ✓ the committee is open-minded and acts independently;
- ✓ no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- ✓ the meeting is minuted;
- ✓ they liaise with the Clerk and Complaints Co-ordinator.

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so.

No governor 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 meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the Academy and the complainant.

We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations. 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 ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

However, the parent/carer should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests. The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

Complaint Form (Appendix one)

Please complete and return to the Head of School or to Claire Burge, Q3 Academies Trust, Wilderness Lane, Great Barr, Birmingham, B43 7SD, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Child's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the child (if relevant):
Address:
Postcode:
Day time telephone number:
Evening telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the Academy about it.

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: to be completed by the Complaints Co-ordinator

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date: