



FULHAM CROSS ACADEMY TRUST

Complaints Policy

All Policies refer to the application of the Fulham Cross Girls' School / Fulham Cross Academy Vision Statement which is:

Fulham Cross Academy Trust is driven by a passion to see the young people who arrive through our doors succeed. We are committed to providing a high quality, forward-thinking education for our students – equipping them with the tools to flourish beyond our walls.

We aim to instil compassion, empathy and respect in all our students, whilst also fostering a love for learning. At the end of their Fulham Cross journey, students will be confident and creative individuals with an unshakeable sense of self-worth who have gained the confidence and skills to reach their full potential in life.

We are an open, diverse and inclusive community where all students reach the heights of aspiration through nurturing self-confidence, belief and becoming a global citizen.

Person Responsible	Executive Principal
Review Frequency	2 - 3 Years
Statutory Policy	Yes
Policy First Issued	June 2016
Last Reviewed	December 2023
Does this policy need to be ratified by Governors?	Yes
Ratified by Governors on	December 2023
Link Director if applicable	TBC
This policy is communicated by the following means	Google Drive/School Website

Introduction

Fulham Cross Academy Trust (FCAT) is a multi-cultural and community federation. We believe that everyone in the school is of equal value and should have equal opportunities in the school, community and life (please refer to the Equal Opportunities Policy for the Trust). The purpose of all policies is to ensure that all members of the school community are treated fairly, equitably and have recourse to procedures that are in line with legal requirements.

1. Purpose and aims

- a. The Academy intends that parents and children experience the highest quality of service, educational provision and communication. However, we recognise that sometimes things can go wrong. We take complaints extremely seriously and will try to resolve them as effectively and efficiently as possible within the guidelines below.
- b. We aim both to put things right and to learn from complaints.
- c. This policy aims to ensure that the best-placed person deals with all complaints from parents, students and others as quickly and sensitively as possible. There are three possible stages described in the procedures that follow. Stage one is informal; stages two and three are formal.
- d. As far as possible, all concerns should be dealt with informally. You should be able to expect to have a response, even if not the final response, within five working days of having made the complaint.
- e. If a solution is not found through informal discussion and you wish to register a formal complaint, this should be put in writing and addressed to the Executive Principal or Head of School.
- f. The way to do this is set out in the procedure described below, with further details and guidance in the Appendices.
- g. Any complaint made three months after a student has left the academy trust will not be considered unless in exceptional circumstances. The EP/HOS will consider the grounds of the complaint and the evidence provided by the complainant. They will then decide whether to accept or progress a complaint.

2. Records of complaints

A record will be kept of all written formal complaints, including at what stage they were resolved and action taken by us as a result of those complaints, regardless of whether they were upheld. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where:

- access is requested by the Secretary of State;
- disclosure is required in the course of a school inspection;
- an individual has a legal right to access their own personal data contained within such documentation; or
- under other legal authority.

We will make the findings and recommendations of the panel available for inspection on the academy premises by the Trust and Executive Principal

3. Scope

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Please see our separate individual policies for procedures relating to these types of complaints.

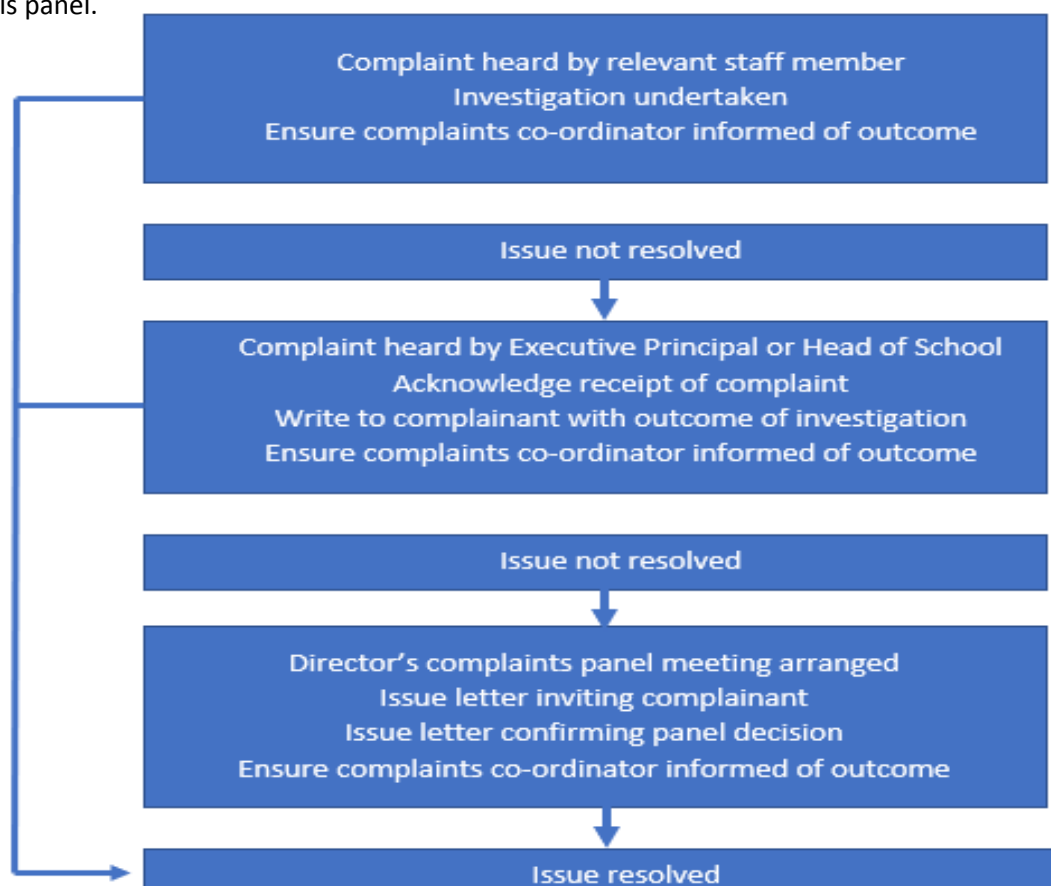
Withdrawal from the curriculum (parents and carers can withdraw their child from any aspect of religious education, including the daily act of collective worship. They do not have to explain why)

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

4. This diagram shows what happens at each stage of the Complaints Procedure

All complaints should be made to the Executive Principal or Head of School in the first instance unless the complaint is against the Executive Principal. The Chair of Directors may intervene in any investigation in place of the Executive Principal. The Executive Principal/Head of School will liaise and decide who is best placed to deal with the complaint based on a case-by-case approach.

Where possible, the Executive Principal or Head of School will not be involved unless as part of the appeals panel.



Stage One: Informal complaints

Who should you speak to if you have a complaint?

- 1) If you have any concerns that we have not met the expected standards, please contact the school office, who will put you in touch with the relevant member of staff, and give you their contact telephone number and their email address. The Academy expects all staff to return calls or emails speedily. Correspondence, statements and records of complaints are considered confidential.
- 2) If you cannot get a satisfactory response, please do not hesitate to contact the school office to arrange a meeting with a member of the Senior Leadership Team.
- 3) If you have any concerns about a particular subject or lesson, please contact your child's subject teacher or the curriculum leader.
- 4) If you have any concerns about attendance, punctuality or your child's welfare, please contact your child's tutor or Learning and Progress Coordinator/Head of Year.
- 5) At the meeting arranged to discuss your concerns informally:
 - You can bring a friend to any discussion. Please make the school aware should you wish to do so and state their role.
 - The staff member dealing with the concern should ensure that you are clear as to what action (if any) or monitoring of the situation has been agreed upon.
 - Members of staff will not discuss specific sanctions or consequences that will take place either towards another child or a member of staff.
- 6) This stage should be completed speedily and concluded in writing with appropriate detail. Where no satisfactory solution has been found, you should be informed that you can consider making a formal complaint in writing to the Headteacher, which will take matters on to Stage Two.

Stage Two: Formal Complaint to the Head of School for investigation

NB: The Executive Principal/Head of School's Personal Assistant will act as Complaints Co-ordinator for formal complaints.

- 1) The Executive Principal or Head of School will acknowledge your complaint in writing.
- 2) If appropriate, the Executive Principal or Head of School (or someone appointed by them) may invite you to a meeting to clarify your complaints and to explore possible resolutions. If you accept that invitation, you may be accompanied by one other person, such as a friend, relative, advocate or interpreter, to assist you. Where possible, this meeting will take place within 10 school days of receipt of the written complaint
- 3) If the complaint is against a member of staff, the Executive Principal or Head of School will talk to the staff member against whom the complaint has been made.

- 4) If necessary, the Executive Principal or Head of School will appoint a senior team member to lead an investigation by interviewing witnesses, taking statements from those involved, and reviewing any other evidence that may come to light.
- 5) The Executive Principal or Head of School will keep appropriate written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.
- 6) Once all the relevant facts have been established, the Executive Principal or Head of School will produce a written response for you. They may wish to meet with you to discuss/resolve the matter before confirming the outcome in writing.
- 7) The written response will include a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, it will consist of what action the school will take to resolve the complaint and what has been learned from it.
- 8) Staff members will not discuss specific sanctions or consequences that will occur towards another child or a staff member.
- 9) You should also be advised that if you are not satisfied with the response and wish to take the matter further, you can do so by writing to the Chair of the Board of Directors within two weeks of receiving the letter.
- 10) Stage Two should be completed in **ten school days**. However, it is recognised that this timetable is likely to prove impossible for complex complaints. The Executive Principal or Head of School should write to you in such cases, offering a revised target date.

Stage Three: Formal Complaint heard by a panel appointed by the Board of Directors

- 1) If you are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage Two, you will be advised to write to the Chair of the Board of Directors through the Complaints Co-ordinator giving details of the complaint. The Vice-Chair, or a nominated director, will convene a meeting of the Complaints Panel.
- 2) You have the right to be accompanied to the hearing by a friend, relative, advocate or interpreter. You should notify the Clerk in advance if you intend to bring anyone to the hearing.
- 3) The Complaints Panel will consist of three people appointed by the Board of Directors not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one panel member will be independent of the school's management. The Board of Directors may give the panel delegated powers. These powers can include:
 - a. Drawing up its terms of reference and procedures;
 - b. Hearing individual complaints;
 - c. Making recommendations on the policy as a result of complaints.
- 4) The whole Board will not hear individual complaints of Directors at any stage. This could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint. However, the Complaints Panel will report its findings to the next meeting of the Board of Directors.

- 5) Appendix Two sets out what happens at a Complaints Panel hearing. Appendix Three gives guidance on how a Panel meeting should be conducted. Appendix Four describes the roles of the different people involved.
- 6) In exceptional circumstances, the Panel may decide after taking advice not to proceed to consider the complaint on the grounds that the complaint has already been dealt with or is malicious.

3. Complaints against the Executive Principal

- a. If the complaint is wholly, or mainly, about the Executive Principal, the Board of Directors will consider the complaint in accordance with the Stage Three procedure. However, before Stage Three is instigated, the Chair of the Board of Directors will respond to the complaint in writing within ten school days.
- b. The Chair will send a copy of the Executive Principal's response to the complainant, who will be asked to indicate within five school days of receipt of the response whether they are satisfied with it.
- c. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response, stage three should start as described above.

5. Persistent complaints

5.1 Unreasonably persistent complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure, beyond all reason
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to cooperate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the timeframes it sets out
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the school disruptively, we may implement communications strategies. We may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#)
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

Stopping responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position, and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience
- Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from our school site.

5.2 Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or another individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint
- If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

5.3 Complaint campaigns

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

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

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

6. Learning lessons

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

7. Monitoring arrangements

The Governing Board will monitor the complaints procedure's effectiveness in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The Governing Board will track the number and nature of complaints and review underlying issues as stated in section six.

The complaints records are logged and managed by Angela O'Leary - PA to the Executive Principal

This policy will be reviewed by the Executive Principal/Head of School every 2-3 years in line with DFE best practice. At each review, the policy will be approved by the Governing Board

8. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Exclusion policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- SEN policy and information report
- Privacy notices

All of the relevant policies can be found in the Policies section of the school's website

Appendices

Appendix 1

Compensation

The Academy will not pay financial compensation as a response to complaints, though they may spend money on a relevant educational purpose (e.g., paying a fee for a repeat examination).

Appendix 2

What happens at a Complaints Panel hearing?

a) The Complaints Panel meeting will allow for:-

- the person complaining to explain his or her complaint and the Executive Principal/Head of School to explain the reasons for his or her decision;
- the Executive Principal/Head of School to question the complainant about the complaint and the complainant to question the Executive Principal/Head of School;
- panel members to have an opportunity to examine both the complainant and the Executive Principal/Head of School
- any party to have the right to bring witnesses (subject to the approval of the Chair of the Panel) and all parties having the right to question all the witnesses;
- final statements by the Executive Principal/Head of school and complainant.

The Chair of the Panel should explain to the complainant and the Executive Principal that the Committee will consider its decision. A written response will be sent to both parties as soon as possible. The complainant, Executive Principal and any witnesses will then leave.

The Panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented, reach a unanimous, or at least a majority decision on the complaint.

b) The panel can:

- 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 Academy's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

c) Notification of the Panel's Decision:

- The Chair of the Panel will ensure that the complainant, the Executive Principal/Head of School and, where relevant, the person complained about are notified of the Panel's decision in writing, within five school days of the hearing. The letter will set out the decision of the committee together with the reasons underpinning that decision.
- The complainant will be advised that if s/he is dissatisfied with the response, s/he has the right to take the matter further by complaining to the Secretary of State for Education.
- Stage Three complaints should be completed in 15 school days. However, it is recognised that this timetable is likely to prove impossible for complex complaints. In such cases, the Chair of the Complaints Panel should write to the parent, giving a revised target date.

- 1.1 After the hearing, the Complaints Committee will consider their decision and inform you and, where relevant, the person complained about, of their decision in writing within 5 school days. The committee can (by a majority if necessary):

Appendix Three

Guidance for the Stage Three Complaints Panel

There are several points that any Complaints Panel member needs to remember:

- a) It is essential that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No one may sit on the panel if they have had prior involvement in the complaint or the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the panel's make-up, Directors need to try and ensure that it is sensitive to the diversity of the Academy's pupils (including race and ethnicity, gender and religious affiliation).
- b) 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 that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing is not in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations that will satisfy the complainant that their complaint has been taken seriously.
- c) An effective panel 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 panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The room's layout will set the tone, and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.
- d) 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 panel needs to be aware of the child's views and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be advisable to allow the parent to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.
- e) Panel members need to be aware of the Complaints Policy and Procedure.

Appendix Four

Roles and Responsibilities

a) The Role of the Chair of the Board of Directors or the Nominated Director

The nominated director will:

- check that the correct procedure has been followed;
- if a hearing is appropriate, notify the clerk to arrange the panel.

b) The Role of the Clerk in Stage Three complaints

The Clerk to the Directors will act as Clerk to the Complaints Panel and would be the contact point for the complainant and will:

- 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;
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- notify all parties of the Panel's decision.

c) The Role of the Chair of the Panel

The Chair of the Panel has a crucial role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the panel 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 panel is open-minded and acting independently;
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- each side is allowed to state their case and ask questions;
- all parties see written material. If a new issue arises, it would be useful to enable all parties to consider and comment on it.

Appendix 5

Safeguarding children

Any complaint brought to the attention of the Executive Principal/Head of School that suggests that a child has been at risk of significant harm through violence, emotional abuse, sexual interference, or neglect may be referred without further notice to Hammersmith and Fulham Social Services and/or the social services authority for the area in which the child lives. If social services authority decides to investigate a situation, this may postpone or supersede the investigation by the Executive Principal/Head of School or Board of Directors.

Appendix 6 .

Complaints form

Please complete and return to the head of school who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Students name
Your relationship to the student:
Address:
Postcode:
telephone number:
email :
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school 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

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date: