

Staffordshire University Academies Trust		Trust Policy Document			
Approved by:	Trust Board	Issue date:	April 2021	Review date:	April 2023
Policy Owner:	CEO	Page: 1 of 6			
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	Parents <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

Complaints Policy and Procedure

In relation to complaints to Academies about that Academy, or facilities and services provided by that academy, SUAT academies are bound by The Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014. In order to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty SUAT encourages complainants to submit their concerns by means other than the conventional written approach, when applicable.

Purpose

Whenever parents, pupils, stakeholders or members of the public have concerns about the education provided at any of the Staffordshire University Academies Trust (SUAT) Academies we hope that they will raise issues with the Academy directly. We have a good track record of responding with sensitivity and with the primary concern of resolving matters as quickly as possible so that:

- the education of our pupils experiences the minimum disruption
- good relations are restored between any individuals concerned
- issues are addressed with as much discretion as possible

All expressions of concern are treated respectfully and with concern by the Academies.

In seeking to resolve matters the following will be taken into account:

- the nature and seriousness of the complaint
- the implications for the pupil(s), their family(ies) and staff
- the conduct of the complainant
- the wider implications, for example, the need to involve other agencies
- whether the complainant is a serial complainer about the same issue

SUAT's procedure aims to be

- simple to understand and use
- impartial
- non-adversarial
- enable a full and impartial investigation
- where necessary respects confidentiality
- addresses all points at issue
- provides an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary
- leads to service improvement, if appropriate

Complaint Campaigns

If a SUAT Academy becomes the focus of a campaign and receives a large volume of complaints on the same subject, by complainants not connected with the Academy, that Academy will issue a template response to all of those complainants.

Informal expression of concern

This will normally be the first course of action for complainants. All complaints raised will be addressed as quickly as possible by the most appropriate member(s) of staff with the aim of arriving

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at a fair and suitable resolution. Each SUAT Academy will decide which of its staff is best placed to resolve problems but, in general, it will be one of these staff:

- Academy Principals
- Academy Vice / Assistant Principals
- Business / Office Managers
- Pastoral staff/Head of Sixth Form

Formal complaints

The Academy Principals

It may be that the Principal has not been aware of the concern raised prior to this point. At this stage the Principal should consider whether the complaint can be adequately addressed without recourse to the Trust Board and / or Local Academy Council.

Taking account of the complaint and the evidence provided, the Principal should consider:

- who should be interviewed
- what additional evidence is needed
- the validity of the complaint
- the requirement for maximum discretion and
- the legal/employment rights of interested parties

In all cases where a complaint has been investigated the complainant will be given a written response covering:

- the complaint
- the scope of the investigation
- the conclusion of the investigation
- any action which has resulted

As a result of the investigation disciplinary or child protection procedures may be initiated. In these cases, the investigations under the complaints procedure will be suspended until action under the other procedures (including appeals) has been concluded. The complainant should be advised if this is the case and also informed of the likely delay in the final resolution of the complaint.

The Local Academy Council / Trust Board

Where a complainant is not satisfied with the response of the Principal or the complaint is about the conduct of a Principal, he/she should complain initially to the Local Academy Council. Complaints should preferably be in writing: a form is available (Appendix 1) to help the complainant register their complaint. Where a complaint is accepted verbally it will be reported back to the complainant to ensure that the details have been collected correctly.

The Academies will record when the complaint is received. A complaint will then be acknowledged in writing by, or on behalf of, the Chair of the Local Academy Council (LAC). The acknowledgement will include an explanation of what will happen next.

Details of a complaint will be kept confidential except in so far as they need to be shared with people who might contribute to their resolution. It is important that LAC do not become personally

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involved with, or discuss any issues with the parties involved, except as part of the formal procedures.

The Role of the Chair of the LAC

At this juncture the Chair of the LAC will need to consider whether the investigation of the complaint can be completed by:

- the Principal – *the course that would usually be followed*
- the Chair him/herself – *the course to be followed if the complaint is against the conduct of the Principal or his/her investigation of a complaint*
- a committee of three LAC members – *the course to be followed in exceptional circumstances where the Chair has already received too much information about the complaint to be able to conduct a fresh review*

Where the Chair is investigating a complaint he/she should follow the procedure outlined above for a Principal conducting an investigation.

Where the Chair has decided that a panel of LAC members should investigate the complaint the following should apply:

- the Chair should agree the membership of the committee, and ensure that one member is prepared to be the investigator and another the chair of the committee
- the investigating LAC member should review the evidence and follow the procedure outlined above for a Principal conducting an investigation
- when the investigating LAC member is satisfied that he/she can present a report to the committee, the Chair of the LAC will arrange a meeting time convenient to the members of the committee, the parent (in order that they may make representations in person) and any witnesses the investigating LAC member believes should attend

When the committee meet the following protocol will apply:

- the committee will first meet in private and ensure that they are aware of the appropriate conduct of the meeting
- the parent will be invited to attend and the investigating LAC member will present his/her report including recommendations
- the parent may make any representation he/she wishes (or submit a written statement if he/she does not wish to attend) and ask, through the chair of the committee, any questions they wish of the investigating governor
- after the parent has departed, any further witnesses may be called (or they may choose to submit a written statement)
- after hearing the complaint and considering the relevant facts, the committee will make a decision and convey it, in writing, to the complainant within 48 hours
- The panel will not be made up solely of LAC members because they are not independent of the management and running of the Academy. It is a matter for the LAC to identify suitably independent individuals who can fulfil the role and responsibility of being the independent member.

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In all cases where a complaint has been investigated the complainant will be given a written response within 5 working days covering:

- the complaint
- the scope of the investigation
- the conclusion of the investigation
- any action which has resulted

The committee may wish to offer the complainant the opportunity to discuss the response.

If the investigation upholds the complaint, redress should be appropriate to the complaint and may include:

- an appropriate expression of regret
- providing the solution desired by the complainant
- changing the procedures to avoid future problems

It will be made clear in writing to the complainant who is responsible

- for taking remedial action and
- that the remedy is carried out

Where a complaint is not upheld the complainant must be given a response and informed of any further action that might be appropriate in their situation.

Trust Board

There is not a general right of appeal against the decision of the Local Academy Council. However, if parents feel that proper procedures were not followed or reasonable consideration given to the complaint, they can raise the matter with the Trust Board.

A letter should be sent to the Chief Executive Officer explaining:

- what your complaint to the LAC was
- the response made to it
- why the complainant thinks that the LAC members have not followed a proper procedure in considering the complaint
- why the complainant thinks that the LAC member's consideration of it was unreasonable

The Chief Executive Officer will investigate the complaint on behalf of the Trust Board.

Complaints about an Academy Principal or the Local Academy Council itself

The Chief Executive Officer will investigate the complaint on behalf of the Trust Board.

Complaints about an employee of SUAT itself

The Chief Executive Officer will investigate the complaint on behalf of the Trust Board. If the complaint is about the Chief Executive Officer, then the complaint should be addressed to the Chair of the Trust Board.

Complaints about the Trust Board

The Chief Operating Officer will investigate the complaint because the Chief Executive Officer is a Trustee.

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Complaints Panel Composition

The Trust Board has agreed that LAC members, or the Trustees themselves, can be asked to be a member of a complaints panel in another SUAT Academy. The key requirement is that such a person is suitably skilled and can demonstrate their independence.

Audio or Visual evidence

SUAT Academies do not normally accept electronic recordings as evidence when they are asked to consider complaints.

Personal Data

Personal data is only kept for as long as is necessary for the immediate purpose of processing. All data is stored securely.

Conclusion

It is very rare for parents, pupils or stakeholders to feel it necessary to proceed beyond the informal stage because every effort will be made to ensure that the facts of a situation are understood by all involved. At the heart of SUAT's approach is the assurance that complaints will be considered seriously and that honesty and frankness will be evident in our responses.

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Appendix 1

Complaints and Compliments

Please complete this form and return it to the school who will then forward it to the Principal/Chair of the Governing Body. Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary.

1. Name _____

2. Address _____

3. Telephone Number Home _____ Work _____

4. Name of Child _____

5. Details of the Complaint/Compliment (please include the date or period of time to which your complaint relates and confirm whether you have already expressed your concerns informally, and to whom and when).

6. Do you have a suggestion for change?

Please attach copies of any more information you have to back up your complaint such as letters or report.

Signed: _____ Date: _____