



# ODYSSEY

TRUST FOR EDUCATION

## Complaints Policy & Procedure

<b>Policy Date</b>	October 2020
<b>Policy Owner</b>	COO
<b>Policy Approval</b> <i>(i.e. Trust board or delegated to subcommittee or individual)</i>	Trust Board
<b>Cross References</b> <i>(i.e. with other Trust policies)</i>	
<b>Statutory Policy</b>	Yes



## 1. Introduction

Odyssey Trust for Education endeavours to provide the best possible education for all of its pupils in an open and transparent environment. We welcome any feedback that we receive from parents, pupils and third parties, and we accept that not all of this will be positive. Where concerns are raised the school intends for these to be dealt with:

- Fairly
- Openly
- Promptly
- Without Prejudice

In order to do so, the Odyssey Trust Board has approved the following procedure which explains what you should do if you wish to make a complaint about the school. All members of staff will be familiar with the procedure and will be able to assist you.

## 2. Complaints that fall outside of this procedure

Complaints relating to the following issues are covered by a separate/specific policy.

- Pupil admissions;
- Pupil exclusions;
- Staff grievance, capability or disciplinary; procedure.
- Where the complaint concerns a third party used by the school; please complain directly to the third party themselves.
- Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information Requests

These policies are available on request from the school.

## 3. Resolving concerns informally

For the purpose of this procedure concerns are defined as having a worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought. The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the formal stages of the formal complaints procedure (see below). The Trust Board encourages those that have concerns to raise them with the appropriate person at the school (e.g. your students class teacher) and to work constructively with that person towards resolving them. The extent to which this was both attempted and followed may be taken into consideration when assessing the reasonableness of a complaint during the formal stages of the procedure.



#### 4. **Formal Complaints**

The formal stages of the procedure should be followed when all attempts to resolve concerns informally have proved unsuccessful, and in cases where individuals wish to raise their concern formally.

#### 5. **The timescale for making a complaint**

Notification of a complaint should be given as soon as possible after the issue that led to the complaint has occurred and after informal attempts to seek resolution have proved unsuccessful, using the form on page 7. Complaints that are submitted three months after the issue that led to the complaint occurred will not be considered under this procedure unless there are exceptional circumstances. These may include (but are not limited to) subsequent information about the complaint coming to light and a valid explanation of why it was not possible to give notification of the complaint sooner. In such cases the clerk to the governing board will review the circumstances, seek advice and determine whether the complaint should be considered under the formal procedure.

#### 6. **Maintaining records**

A confidential written record of all complaints that are made in accordance with this procedure will be kept by each school in the Trust. The written record will include whether the complaint has been resolved following a formal procedure and whether it proceeded to a panel review meeting. It will also refer to any action taken by the school as a result of the complaint regardless of whether it has been upheld.

#### 7. **Maintaining confidentiality**

Informal concerns and complaints will be dealt with confidentially at all stages and at the conclusion of the procedure. Confidentiality should be maintained all times by everyone involved. The Trust Board requests that complaints are not discussed publicly, including via social media.

Any actions that may be taken in relation to school staff that arise as a result of the complaint will remain confidential to the school and the member of staff concerned.

Written records taken and used throughout the complaints process, including correspondence, notes of meetings, telephone calls etc., will be kept securely and in accordance with the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018.

#### 8. **Safeguarding**

Wherever a concern indicates that a child's wellbeing or safety is at risk, the school is duty bound to report this immediately to the local authority. Any action taken will be in accordance with the school's safeguarding policy which can be found on each school's website.



The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the formal stages of the procedure. If you need to raise a concern then please do so with the relevant member of staff who will be happy to talk to you and seek to resolve it.

There are **two** formal stages of the complaints procedure.

## Stage 1 – formal investigation

A formal complaint about an individual, using the stage one process, will be investigated as follows:

Formal Complaint About	Investigating Officer
A Student	Class teacher
Teacher	Senior leadership team member.
Associate staff	Line Manager
Head of department	Senior leadership team member
Head Teacher	Chair of Governors
Chair of Governors	Trustee
Local Governor	Trustee
Chief Executive	Chair of the Trust board or Trustees
Chair of Trustees	Chief Executive and a Trustee
Trustees	Chief Executive and a Trustee

The investigating officer will acknowledge the request in writing no later than 10 working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of receiving it. The written acknowledgment will, as far as possible, explain how the complaint will be investigated and the timescale for completing the investigation.

A log of all correspondence in relation to the complaint will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Principles.

The investigating officer will consider all relevant evidence. This **may** include, but is not limited to:

- obtaining statements from the complainant and those involved with the complaint
- meeting with the complainant and those involved in the complaint
- reviewing correspondence and other document relating to the complaint

After considering the available evidence, the investigating officer can decide to:

- uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it
- uphold the complaint in part (in other words find an aspect or aspects of the complaint to be valid, but not the whole complaint) direct for certain action to be taken, or
- dismiss the complaint entirely

The investigating officer will inform the complainant of their decision in writing, the grounds on which it was made and any actions taken as a result of the complaint. This will be within 20 working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of having issued written acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint (see 2 above). The written notification shall also advise the complainant of their right to escalate the complaint to stage 2 of the formal complaints procedure if they are not satisfied with the outcome at stage 1, including the contact details of the clerk to the governing board.



## Stage 2 – Review by a panel

The complainant is entitled to request a review of the decision taken at stage 1 and the actions taken. The review is carried out by a panel of the local governing body at a meeting convened by the clerk to the governing board.

Requests for a review of the decision taken at stage 1 should be made in writing to the clerk (see contact details below) no later than 4 weeks after written notification of the decision taken has been received. The request should include a brief summary of the complaint, why the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of stage 1 and the outcome they are seeking.

The clerk will fulfil the role of organising the time and date of the review meeting, inviting all the attendees, collating all the relevant documentation and distributing this 5 days in advance of the meeting. Minutes of the review meeting will be taken by the clerk and provided with the written notification of the decision taken at stage 2 (see 9 below).

The following steps are taken at stage 2:

1. The clerk will acknowledge the written request for the complaint to be reviewed no later than ten working days (not including the school holidays) after receiving it.
2. The clerk will convene a panel of either 3 governors or 2 governors and one Trustee to review the complaint and will ensure that, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school. All three panel members will have no prior knowledge of the content of the complaint.
3. Where a panel hearing is convened the clerk will ensure that a parent (s) is invited to attend the hearing if they wish.
4. The review meeting will take place within 20 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) of receipt of the written acknowledgement from the clerk (see 1 above).
5. The panel **may** decide to invite the following to attend the review meeting:
  - the headteacher/senior members of the school's leadership team (or chair of the governing board as appropriate) who investigated the complaint and made the decision at stage 1
  - relevant persons involved in the complaint
  - persons whom, in the view of the panel, can provide relevant advice and information relating to the subject of the complaint and the review process at stage 2
6. Where the complainant, and/or other relevant person involved in the complaint attend the review meeting, they are entitled to be accompanied by a family member/friend/representative as appropriate. However, legal representatives are not permitted to attend the review meeting.



7. Where the relevant persons involved in the complaint include students at the school, and their attendance at the review meeting has been requested by the panel, parental permission must be sought if they are under the age of 18. Extra care will be taken to consider the vulnerability of students where they are present at a complaints hearing.
8. Where the complaint is about a governor/trustee/governing board the complainant may request that the review meeting is held by an independent panel. This is at the discretion of Odyssey Trust Board who will notify the clerk of their decision. Where an entirely independent panel is required, timescales may be affected while the school source appropriate individuals for the review.
9. After considering the complaint afresh and reviewing the available evidence, the panel reviewing the complaint can decide to:
  - uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it;
  - uphold the complaint in part (in other words find an aspect or aspects of the complaint to be valid, but not the whole complaint) and direct for certain action to be taken, or
  - dismiss the complaint entirely.

Irrespective of the decision taken, the panel may also recommend steps that the complainant and the school should take to move forward from the presenting issues in the best interests of all concerned. The panel may also recommend steps to be taken that reduce the likelihood of a similar complaint being made in the future.

Where the panel makes findings and recommendations a copy of those findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about and will be made available for inspection on the school premises by the Trust Board and the headteacher.

10. The person who investigated the complaint and made the decision at stage 1, and, where relevant, the person complained about will be informed in writing of the outcome of the review meeting no later than 10 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) after the review meeting has taken place.
11. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

This is the **final stage** at which the school will consider the complaint. If the complainant remains dissatisfied and wishes to escalate the complaint further they should refer to the following:

- If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaints procedure they may contact The Trust Board via the clerk.
- If the complainant feels that the local governing body acted 'unreasonably' in the handling of the complaint, they can complain to the Department for Education after the complaints procedure has been exhausted. Please note that 'unreasonable' is used in a legal sense and means acting in a way in which no reasonable school or authority would act in the same circumstances.

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



## Timescale for completing the formal stages of the procedure

### Stage 1

- Acknowledgement of complaint
- Formal investigation by investigating officer
- Notification of decision

No more than 30  
working days total

### Stage 2

- Acknowledgement of request to review the complaint
- Arrangements made for a review meeting
- The review meeting takes place
- Notification of the decision

No more than 40  
working days total

Odyssey Trust for Education will endeavour to complete the formal stages of its complaints procedure in a timely manner and within the timescale for each stage that is referred to above. However, if it becomes clear that for any reason the school is unable to meet the timescale for completing a stage of the procedure, the complainant will be advised of this immediately, along with the reason for the delay and the revised timescale.

### Serial, persistent and unreasonable complaints

For the purpose of this procedure a complaint may be viewed as serial and/or persistent if it relates to the same issue that was the subject of a previous complaint (made by the same complainant) which has already been through a formal complaints procedure in which the complainant has been notified of the outcome. In such cases it is likely that the complainant will be informed that the matter is now closed and that any school in the Trust will provide no further response.

For the purpose of this procedure a complaint may be viewed as unreasonable if it contains threatening, abusive or offensive language and conveys unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason. In such cases the headteacher/chair of the governing board/clerk to the governing board (as appropriate) will consult with relevant parties and may decide that the complaint is not considered under this procedure. The complainant will be notified in writing that this is the case and that the Trust will provide no further response.

Queries regarding any aspect of the complaints procedure should be directed to the clerk to the governing board at the following address: [clerk@odysseytrust.org.uk](mailto:clerk@odysseytrust.org.uk)



## APPENDIX 1 Formal Complaints Form

This form should be emailed to the clerk to governors and the Trust board :

clerk@odysseytrust.org.uk

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Name of pupil, year group and your relationship to them (where applicable)</b>	
<b>Contact address</b>	
<b>Contact telephone day</b>	
<b>Contact telephone mobile</b>	
<b>Contact email address</b>	
<b>Details of the complaint</b>	
<b>Action taken so far (including staff member who has dealt with it so far) or solutions offered</b>	
<b>The reason that this was not a satisfactory resolution for you</b>	
<b>What action would you like to be taken to resolve the problem?</b>	

Signed:					
Dated:					

*Official use*

Date received: