

# Interaction & Communication

**Academy Trust**

*Providing Opportunities, Inspiring Success*

# Complaints

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## Complaints Procedure

*The Interaction and Communication Academy Trust (ICAT) is committed to the highest possible standards in provision. This means that we will take all concerns expressed about any of the schools seriously. We will deal with complaints as efficiently and effectively as possible and, if after investigation it is found that the complaint is upheld, we will take appropriate action.*

*The following document sets out our procedures for dealing with complaints.*

### **Purpose**

This policy is in two parts.

Part A is a four-stage policy which deals with complaints received by individual academies as well as those received by the Multi Academy Trust (MAT) which have already been dealt with at school level, but where the complainant is not satisfied with the complaints process.

Part B is a three-stage policy which deals with complaints made against the Trust itself, or central staff. If you are unsure which policy applies, please contact 014845445588 or email [info@icat.org.uk](mailto:info@icat.org.uk)

**Note: Complaints must be presented within three months of the action or matter complained of.**

### **PART A**

As a MAT we welcome suggestions for improving our work in academies. Be assured that, no matter what you want to tell us, our support and respect for your child will not be affected in any way. Please advise us of your concern as soon as possible. It is difficult for us to investigate an incident or problem properly if it took place some time ago. We do appreciate the assistance we receive from parents/carers in addressing any problems that arise.

Most academies receive complaints at one time or another. Problems sometimes arise from misunderstandings which are easily addressed. Most concerns and complaints can be sorted out early and quickly by speaking with your child's class teacher / form tutor / subject teacher. When parents/carers and teachers treat each other with mutual respect and support, this provides a very good role model for our children. If, having spoken to the member of staff, you still have concerns; you should see the Principal in the first instance. He/she will investigate the problem and discuss his/her findings with you so that we can find a way forward together which serves the best interest of both the school and your child.

In the unlikely event of the problem remaining unresolved you may put your complaint in writing to the Chair of the Local Governing Body who will subsequently refer the complaint to an Investigating Officer. Please note that you may be referred back to Stage One or Stage Two if this part of the procedure has not been adhered to.

Please note that the term working days used throughout the policy indicates days on which a school is open. The correct procedure can be summarised in the following stages, see also the flowchart on page 13:

### **Stage 1: Informal Action**

Parents discuss their initial concerns with the member of staff informally. All academies welcome these conversations at an early stage and will take them seriously.

- Most issues can be resolved promptly, but, if the member of staff is unable to deal immediately with the matter, a clear note will be made, including the complainant's name, phone number and date. The parent will be contacted as soon as the matter has been investigated. Normally this would be within 10 working days. The member of staff may also consult the Principal or line manager at this stage.
- The member of staff should ensure that the parent is clear what action or monitoring of the situation has been agreed.
- If no satisfactory solution has been found, parents will be asked if they wish their concern to be considered further.

Parents requesting further consideration of their concern can do so in person, by telephone or in writing to the Principal. A formal complaint form is available, as an attachment to this policy (however, please be advised that the form is not compulsory, if it is easier, you may simply put your complaint in writing ensuring you have provided all the information listed on the form).

### **Stage 2: Referral to the Principal**

- On receipt, the Principal will appoint an investigating officer. This could be themselves or a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).
- The Principal will acknowledge the complaint in writing, within 5 working days.
- Within this response, the Principal will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Principal can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.
- It is the responsibility of the investigating officer, reporting to the Principal to make arrangements for fact finding interview(s) to take place
- The investigating officer will keep a written record of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.
- Once all relevant facts have been established, the investigating officer will report to the Principal who will then respond within 10 working days of the date of the receipt of the complaint
- If the Principal is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.
- If the complainant is not satisfied, they will be advised to write to the Chair of the Local Governing Body

If the complaint is about the Principal, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the whole governing body
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 2 will be escalated to the CEO of the Trust.

### **Stage 3: Review by the Local Governing Body**

- On receipt, the Chair will appoint an investigating officer. This could be either a Principal, a member of the SLT or an independent investigator from the Trust. The Chair may seek advice from the School Business Manager.
- The Chair will acknowledge the complaint in writing, within 5 working days confirming the name of the investigating officer.
- Within this response, the Chair will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Chair can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.
- A meeting or telephone call may be arranged with the complainant and investigating officer to clarify and supplement any information given.
- It is the responsibility of the investigator, reporting to the Chair of the Local Governing Body to make arrangements for fact finding interview(s) to take
- The investigator will keep a written record of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.
- Once all relevant facts have been established, the investigator will report to the Chair of the Local Governing Body.
- The Chair may consult with other governors if he/she feels they require additional support.
- It is the responsibility of the Chair to respond to the complainant and provide them with the outcome of the investigation within 10 working days
- If the Chair is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.
- If the complainant is still not satisfied, they must again write to the Chair of Governors within 5 working days of receipt of the outcome letter. The chair of Governors will then make provisions for a hearing before a panel appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor. The panel will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one of this panel will be independent of the management and running of the school.
- The complainant will be invited to attend, and be accompanied at, a panel hearing if they wish
- The panel will investigate the complaint and once all relevant facts have been established the panel will reach a decision regarding the complaint
- All findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant within 10 working days of the completion of the hearing, and where relevant the

person complained about, available for inspection on the school premises by the CEO and Principal.

All complaints will be recorded using the school's individual complaints log which outlines:

- whether they are resolved following a formal procedure or have had to proceed to a panel hearing
- what actions have been taken by the school as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether they are upheld)
- all complaints material 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.

#### **Stage 4: Review by the Multi Academy Trust**

Where the school-based complaints procedure has been completed and the complainant does not feel their complaint has been dealt with to their satisfaction by the school they may contact the Trust in writing to request a review of the complaint investigation.

The Trust will only look into complaints about academies that fall into the following two areas.

**a) The school did not comply with the complaints procedure when considering a complaint or the school's complaints procedure does not comply with statutory requirements.**

The Trust cannot review or overturn a school's decisions about complaints but will look at whether the school considered the complaint appropriately. The Trust will generally only do this after a complaint has been through Stages 1 – 3 of the complaints procedure but may investigate sooner if there is evidence of undue delays by the school. If the Trust finds that a school did not deal with a complaint appropriately it will request that the complaint is reconsidered within 30 days. Similarly, if the Trust's complaints procedure does not meet statutory requirements then the Trust will ensure this is put right and the complaint is reconsidered within 30 days.

**b) The school has failed to comply with a duty imposed under its funding agreement with the Secretary of State.**

The Trust will seek to resolve any concerns regarding potential or actual breaches of the funding agreement with the school. The Trust will also consider evidence that a school has failed to comply with any other legal obligation placed on it.

Investigations will not usually take place six months or more after the decisions or action taken by the school unless the complainant has good reason for the delay in making the complaint.

The Trust reserves the right not to investigate complaints considered being vexatious or malicious or where the Trust is satisfied with the action that the school has already taken or proposes to take to resolve the complaint.

### **Formal Procedures for Dealing with a Complaint for both individual academies and the Trust**

1. Written complaints will be acknowledged in writing within **5 working days**. The complainant will be given the name of the Investigating Officer.
2. The complainant will be asked to submit a written summary of the complaint.
3. The school will be asked to provide:
  - a copy of its complaints procedures and details of any other relevant policies or procedures
  - an explanation of how each stage of its complaints procedures has been followed, together with any feedback provided to the complainant
  - any relevant documents and copies of correspondence sent to the complainant.
4. The school will be asked to respond within a reasonable period of time (usually within 5 working days), notifying the Investigating Officer if there is any confidential information which may not be shared with the complainant such as data belonging to individuals not involved in the complaint.
5. The Investigating Officer will respond in writing to the complainant within a reasonable period of time (usually within 10 working days). However, whilst every effort will be made to complete investigations promptly, in some cases, requiring detailed investigations, it will take longer to produce a written response. Where this is the case the complainant will be advised of any revised timescale for production of the written response.
6. Where appropriate the Trust may direct the school to review its decision on the complaint submitted to it or change its procedures for reaching the decision if they are non-compliant with statutory requirements
7. Throughout this process the Investigating Officer will keep all relevant parties informed of progress.

### **The Role of the Education Funding Agency**

1. If the complainant still continues to be dissatisfied after the matter has been considered by the Trust, they may refer the matter to the Education Funding Agency via an online complaint form at the following address:

[https://form.education.gov.uk/fillform.php?self=1&form\\_id=cCCNJ1xSfBE&type=form&ShowMsg=1form\\_name=Contact+the+Department+for+EducationnoRegister=false&ret=%2Fmodule%2Fservices&noLoginPrompt=1](https://form.education.gov.uk/fillform.php?self=1&form_id=cCCNJ1xSfBE&type=form&ShowMsg=1form_name=Contact+the+Department+for+EducationnoRegister=false&ret=%2Fmodule%2Fservices&noLoginPrompt=1)

2. The Education Funding Agency will ensure that the complaint has been dealt with properly by the Trust and will consider complaints about the Trust or academies that fall into any of the following three areas:
  - Where there is an undue delay, or the Trust or school did not comply with its own complaints procedure when considering the complaint
  - Where the Trust or school is in breach of its funding agreement with the Secretary of State
  - Where the Trust or a school has failed to comply with any other legal obligation.
  
3. The Education Funding Agency will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint. However, if the Education Funding Agency find a school did not deal with a complaint properly they may request that the complaint is looked at again and procedures are changed to meet the requirements set out in the Regulations.

The contact details for complaints or information are: 01484 544558 or email [info@icat.org.uk](mailto:info@icat.org.uk)

## **PART B**

### **PROCEDURE FOR COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE MULTI ACADEMY TRUST OR CENTRAL STAFF**

#### **1. Stage 1 Expressing Concerns**

There are inevitably issues that arise that, if dealt with promptly and in a considerate manner, will avoid the need for a formal complaint. Any problem or concern should be raised promptly with the member of staff responsible for the area you are concerned about. If your concern is more serious you may prefer to make an appointment to discuss it with the Chief Executive Officer.

All staff will make every effort to resolve your problem promptly at this informal stage.

If your concern is about the Chief Executive Officer, it will be handled by the Chair of Directors or a delegated representative.

#### **2. Formal Complaints**

Formal procedures will be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further. All 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. The complaint will be dealt with in line with the Trust's complaints procedure.

In most cases it will be your choice as to whether to mount a formal complaint, but the Trust reserves the right to utilise the formal complaint procedures where the Trust feels that 'informal' methods of resolving concerns have been exhausted but a complainant clearly remains dissatisfied.

It should be noted that some outcomes of a complaint may lead to action being initiated under other formal procedures, such as safeguarding or disciplinary matters. Where this is the case you will be advised and informed of the procedures that are to be followed. It should be noted, however, that the Trust will not necessarily be able to provide you with the details of the outcome of those procedures for data protection reasons or otherwise, depending on the circumstances.

If a formal complaint is made to the Trust you will be provided with a copy of this complaints policy. It is not a requirement that a formal complaint is made in writing, but the Trust will need to be clear what the complaint is about and may therefore request written clarification from you before investigating the complaint.

### **Stage 2** (Chief Executive Officer or Director if about the Chief Executive Officer)

It may be that the Chief Executive Officer has not been aware of the concern raised prior to this point. At this stage the Chief Executive Officer or a delegated person will seek to investigate your concerns, as well as attempting to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of all concerned. This may involve having a discussion/meeting with you.

If the complaint is about the Chief Executive Officer, it will be considered by the Chair of Directors ("the Chair") at this stage. The Chair will seek to resolve the matter through discussion with the Chief Executive Officer and you. In doing so and, if considered appropriate, the Chair may wish to meet with you in person.

The Trust will endeavour to respond, in writing to a Stage 2 complaint within 10 working days after receiving the complaint.

Where concerns cannot be resolved by the Chief Executive Officer (or the Chair if applicable) then you will be advised that details of your continuing concerns will be accepted either in writing or verbally and the Chief Executive Officer (or the Chair if applicable) will liaise with other Directors (stage 3). It would also be useful if you were able to state what actions you feel might resolve the problem.

### **Stage 3 (Directors)**

If a complaint has been referred to Directors, they will consider the complaint and endeavour to provide you with a written response within 15 working days. You will be given the opportunity to meet with the Directors to make representations in person and you will have the right to be accompanied. The Directors will therefore meet at a time and a venue convenient to all parties. If you decide not to meet with the Directors, then a decision will be made in your absence.



### **3. Outcomes of Investigations**

Whether the complaint has been investigated by the Chief Executive Officer, Chair or Director a written response will be sent outlining the outcome of the investigation and how the conclusion has been reached within 10 working days of the outcome being reached. The letter will also tell you where to next take the complaint, if you are not satisfied with the response provided.

The aim of the investigation or review will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between you and the Trust. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that sometimes you may not be satisfied with the outcome if matters are not found in your favour.

### **4. The Role of the Local Authority**

The Local Authority does not have a statutory duty to consider Trust or school complaints and you do not have a right of appeal to the Local Authority should you disagree with the decision. You may, however, raise the matter with the Local Authority if you consider the complaint wasn't investigated properly or fairly. So long as the method of investigation followed a proper procedure and considered the complaint in a reasonable manner, then the Local Authority will simply inform you of that fact. It cannot reverse a decision of the Trust.

### **5. The Role of the Secretary of State for Education (the Department for Education)**

If you still remain dissatisfied and feel the Trust has acted unreasonably, or that it has failed to discharge a statutory duty, you may wish to refer your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education. Please go to the website [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) for the different avenues you may wish to take.

### **6. Persistent or Unreasonable Complainants**

You may remain dissatisfied despite all the procedures having been followed and reasonable responses being provided. It may be the case that it is not possible to resolve all your concerns and meet all your wishes. Sometimes it is preferable to 'agree to disagree' and move on. If you continue to make representations to the Trust or continue correspondence into the same issues, the Trust reserves the right to inform you, in writing, that the appropriate procedures have all been followed, that all reasonable actions have been taken to try to resolve the issue and that the matter is now closed.

ICAT is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

ICAT defines unreasonable complainants as 'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'.

**A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint: -**

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face- to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:

- maliciously
- aggressively
- using threats, intimidation or violence
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language
- knowing it to be false
- using falsified information
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay an outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Principal or Chair of the Local Governing Body will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues the Chair of the Local Governing Body/Principal will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact ICAT or one of its academies causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from ICAT and its academies.

## **7. Dealing with Persistent or Unreasonable Complaints**

A persistent complainant is not someone who raises legitimate concerns or criticisms of a complaints procedure as it progresses, for example, with regard to timescales, nor are they someone who is unhappy with the outcome of a complaint and are therefore seeking to challenge it.

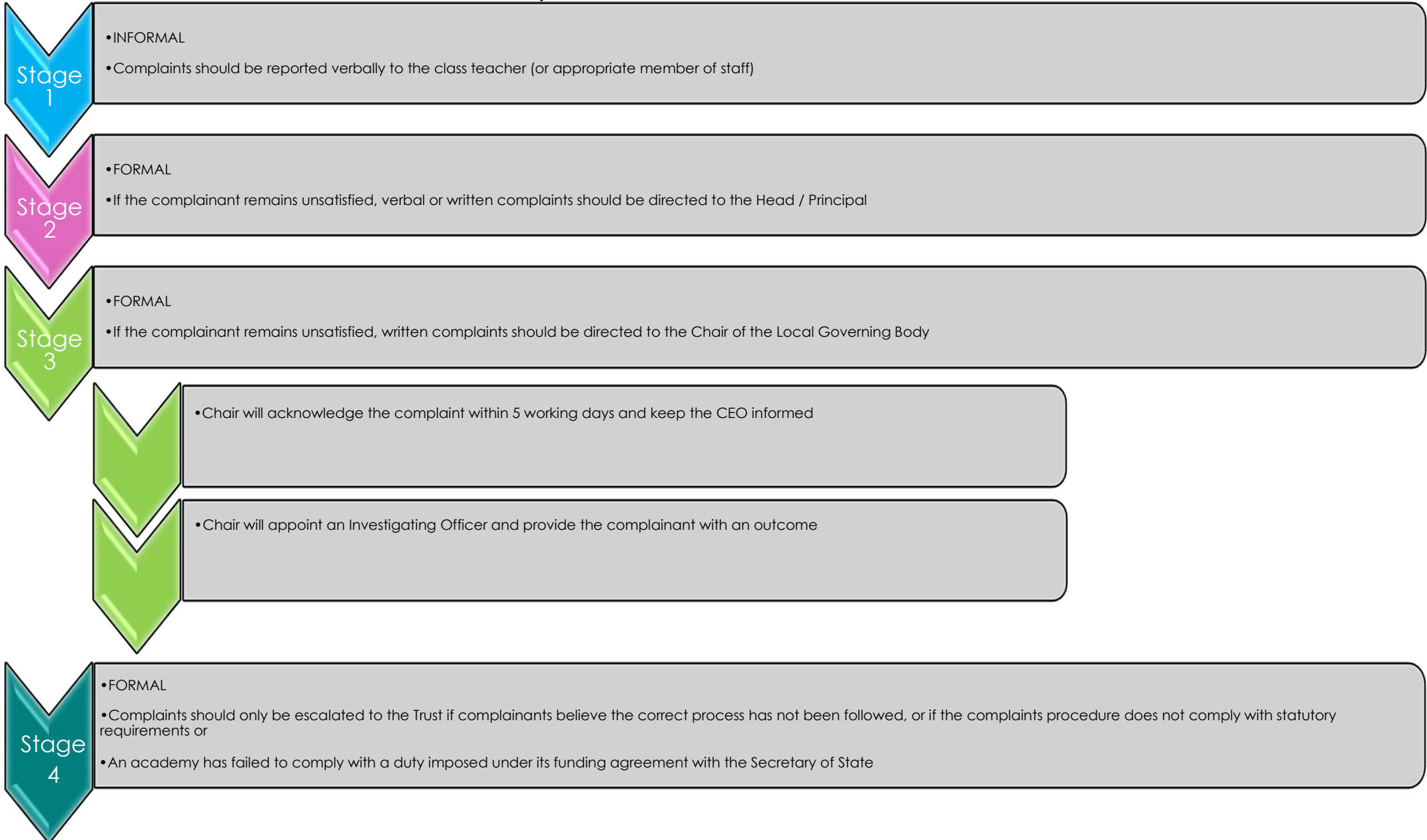
Occasionally however there may be situations where the Chief Executive Officer, Chair or Directors have done all they can to resolve matters, and it is therefore appropriate to consider closing a complaint as it has been on-going for some time. Alternatively, there may be some circumstances in which there will be a valid reason for not following the full complaints process. Closing complaints may be appropriate in particular where responding to continual communications from a complainant is detracting from the school's responsibility to look after the interests of all the children/students in its care.

The Trust therefore reserves the right to close complaints from those who demonstrate vexatious behaviour.

Any complainants demonstrating vexatious behaviour will be given an opportunity to modify their behaviour before correspondence is closed. Correspondence received from the complainant subsequent to closure will be kept on file, indefinitely, as will notes of telephone calls and any further personal calls referring to the matter.

The contact details for complaints or information are: 01484544558 or email [info@icat.org.uk](mailto:info@icat.org.uk)

## Complaints Process for all Academies in the Trust



## Appendix One

### ICAT Complaint Form

Your Name:

Pupil/  
Student's  
Name:

Please indicate your relationship to the Pupil/Student:

Address:

Daytime Tel No:

Evening Tel No:

Post Code:

Mobile Tel No:

Please provide as much detail about the complaint as possible:

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

Who did you speak to and what was the response?

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

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please provide details:

Signature:

Date:

**Internal Use Only:**

Date of Acknowledgement:

Acknowledgment sent by:

Date of referral:

Complaint referred to: