



Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust

Complaints Policy

September 2018
Last reviewed: June 2024

About Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust (OMAT)

OMAT is committed to the development of inclusive schools, sharing a common purpose to provide excellent education and improve outcomes for pupils.

OMAT strives to provide high-quality education for all children within our local communities by inspiring innovation, creativity and aspiration through an enriched curriculum.

OMAT is committed to the principles of co-operation, collaboration and sharing best practice with a strong focus on staff development.

OMAT is also committed to the preservation of the unique identity of all schools within the trust: each school will have a Local Governing Board (LGB) which is involved in decision making at school level, with autonomy to make decisions for its own school – in line with the scheme of delegation.

All trustees and any schools joining must agree to share and uphold all of these principles now and in the future.

Complaints Policy

1. Policy Statement

- This policy statement sets out Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust's approach to dealing with parental concerns and complaints. Further details of how we handle them are contained in our complaints procedures document, which you can obtain on request from your respective school office.
- We value good home/school relations and will, therefore, do everything we can to establish and maintain them. This includes seeking to resolve any concerns or complaints promptly, and to the satisfaction of all concerned.
- We welcome feedback on what parents feel we do well, or not so well, as a school. We will consider carefully all feedback, whether positive or negative, and will review our policies and practices accordingly.
- We will treat all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously and will advise parents and others of Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust's procedures for dealing with their concerns. In return, we expect parents and other complainants to behave respectfully towards all members of the Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust community. In particular, any disagreement with Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust and its respective schools should not be expressed inappropriately or in front of pupils.
- All school staff and members of each school's Local Governing Board, will receive a copy of this policy statement and will be familiar with Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust's procedures for dealing with parental concerns and complaints, to which they will have access as required. The policy is available on request to parents.

- Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust's procedures will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.
- Staff and governors will receive training in handling parental concerns and complaints as appropriate. This may be on an individual basis, or as a group activity for all staff, or for specific groups, such as the office staff or members of the Local Governing Board.
- Whilst we will seek to resolve concerns and complaints to the satisfaction of all parties, it may not be possible to achieve this in every case. We will, therefore, use our discretion to close a complaint before all the stages of Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust's procedures have been exhausted, if this appears to be appropriate.
- The government advocate resolution of parental concerns and complaints at school level wherever possible, in the interests of maintaining good home/school relations. The role of the Department for Education and the role of Ofsted in the handling of concerns and complaints is set out in Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust's procedures.
- Complaints should be lodged promptly, or at least within 3 calendar months of the incident. If a complaint is received after this time, unless there are exceptional circumstances, the Trust will take no further action.

2. Procedure for Dealing with Complaints

The majority of concerns from parents, carers and others are handled under the following procedures.

To ensure that you receive an effective response it would be helpful if you:

- Co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint.
- Express the complaint and outcome sought in full as early as possible.
- Respond promptly and fully to requests for additional information, meetings or in agreeing the scope and details of the complaint.
- Ask for assistance if needed.
- Treat all those involved in the complaint with respect.

The procedure is divided into three stages;

The Informal stage aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school.

Stage 1 is the first formal stage at which written complaints are considered by the Head Teacher (who may delegate to an Investigating Officer) or Chair of Governors (who may delegate to the designated complaints governor).

Stage 2 is the next stage once stage 1 has been exhausted. It involves an independent complaints appeal panel of governors / Trustees.

How each of these stages operates is explained below:

3. Informal Stage: Initial Contact with an Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust School

Many concerns will be dealt with informally when you make them known to us. The first point of contact should normally be your child's class teacher. However, depending on the nature of the complaint, the first point of contact may be the Key Stage Leader, Deputy Head Teacher or Head Teacher.

Once your concern is made known to us, we will see you, or contact you by telephone or in writing, as soon as possible. All members of staff know how to refer to the appropriate person with responsibility for your particular issues. He or she will make a clear note of the details and will check later to make sure that the matter has been followed up.

Any actions or monitoring of the situation that has been agreed will be communicated clearly. If necessary, we will contact appropriate people who may be able to assist us with our enquiries into your concern.

We will normally update you on the progress of our enquiries within ten school days. Once we have responded to your concern, you will have the opportunity of asking for the matter to be considered further if you wish.

If you are still dissatisfied following this informal approach, your concern will become a formal complaint and we will deal with it at the next stage.

4. Stage 1: Formal Consideration of your Complaint

This stage in our procedures deals with written complaints. It applies where you are not happy with the outcome of the informal approach to dealing with your concern, as outlined above. If you have not attempted to resolve your complaint informally, it will be referred back to that stage in the procedure before a formal complaint will be considered.

Normally your written complaint should be addressed to the Head Teacher, who may then appoint a senior member of school staff as the Investigating Officer. If however, your complaint concerns the Head Teacher personally, it should be sent to school marked "for the attention of the Chair of Governors". In order to maintain impartiality for a potential appeal hearing, the Chair of Governors may delegate investigation of the complaint to the designated complaints governors.

Your complaint will be acknowledged as soon as possible after receiving it. This will be within **3 school days**.

Normally we would expect to respond in full within **15 school days** but if this is not possible, we will write to explain the reason for the delay and let you know when we hope to be able to provide a full response.

As part of our consideration of your complaint, we **may** invite you to a meeting to discuss the complaint and fill in any details required. If you are invited to a meeting, you can ask someone to accompany you to help you explain the reasons for your complaint if you wish.

The person investigating the complaint may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.

Following the meeting, the person investigating the complaint will, where necessary, talk to witnesses and take statements from others involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, we will talk to the pupil concerned and, where appropriate, others present at the time of the incident in question.

If the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust's internal confidential procedures, as required by law.

Written and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation will be kept throughout.

Once we have established all the relevant facts, we will provide a response to your complaint, this will usually be in writing. This response will give an explanation of the person investigating the complaint's decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, we will indicate what we are proposing to do. We may invite you to a meeting to discuss the outcome of the complaint as part of our commitment to building and maintaining good relations with you.

The person investigating the complaint may decide that we have done all we can to resolve the matter, in which case we may use our discretion to close the complaint at this point. Please see below for further information about this process.

If you are unhappy with the way in which we reached our conclusions, you may wish to proceed to stage 2, as described below.

5. Stage 2: Consideration by an Appeal Panel

If the complaint has already been through stage 1 and you are not happy with the outcome as a result of the way in which the complaint has been handled, you can take it further to an appeal panel. This is a formal process, and the ultimate recourse at school level.

The purpose of this arrangement is to give you the chance to present your arguments in front of a panel who have no prior knowledge of the details of the case and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice.

The aim of a panel however, is not to rehear the complaint. It is there to review how the complaint has been investigated and to determine whether this has been conducted fairly. It is there to establish facts and make recommendations that will reassure you that we have taken the complaint seriously.

6. The Appeal Panel Operates According to the Following Formal Procedures:

If you wish to appeal the outcome of a formal complaint, you should inform the Chair of Governors in writing within **10 school days** of receiving the stage 1 response. Your letter should contain:

- The reasons for progressing to Stage 2;
- A description of how, in your opinion, the complaint could be resolved.

An appeal panel will be convened which will comprise of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint (or its investigation at stage 1). At least one of whom will be independent of the management of the school, for example, this may be a governor from another school, or a trustee from within OMAT or another trust. We will aim to arrange for the appeal panel meeting to take place within **20 school days** of receiving your appeal letter.

You will be asked whether you wish to provide any further documentation in support of your appeal.

The Headteacher /complaint investigator will be asked to prepare a pack of the documentation related to the investigation and outcome for the panel. The panel can request additional information from other sources if necessary.

You will be informed, at least **5 school days** in advance, of the date, time and place of the meeting. With the letter, you will receive any relevant correspondence or reports regarding stage 1 of the complaint.

The letter will explain what will happen at the panel meeting and that you are entitled to be accompanied to the meeting. The choice of person to accompany you is your own, but it is usually best to involve someone in whom you have confidence but who is not directly connected with Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust. They are there to give you support but also to witness the proceedings and to speak on your behalf if you wish.

If it is necessary, in the interests of ratifying the investigative process, the complaint investigator may, with the agreement of the chair of the panel, invite relevant witnesses directly involved in matters raised by you to attend the meeting.

The chair of the panel will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating for you and will do his or her best to put you at your ease.

As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses previously undisclosed should be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the meeting will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to new evidence.

During the meeting there will be opportunities for:

- The panel to hear you explain your case and argument for why it should be heard at stage 2.
- The panel to hear the complaint investigator's case in response.
- You to raise questions via the chair.
- You to be questioned by the complaint investigator through the chair.
- The panel members to be able to question you and the complaint investigator.
- You and the complaint investigator to make a final statement.

The purpose of the appeal is 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. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

In closing the meeting, the chair will explain that the panel will now consider its decision and that written notice of the outcome will be sent to you and the Head Teacher within **3 school days**. All participants other than the panel and the clerk will then leave.

The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in order to:

- Uphold the decision on the complaint.
- Uphold the decision on the complaint in part.
- Judge that the decision was incorrect and decide on the appropriate action to be taken which may include recommendations to make changes to systems, policies or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.

If you feel that you would like to have a copy of the meeting minutes, it would be helpful if you could indicate this in advance. If the panel is happy for the minutes to be copied to you, the clerk can then be asked to maintain confidentiality in the minutes.

We will keep a copy of all correspondence and notes on file in the school's records but separate from pupil's personal records. The panel will ensure that findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Findings and recommendations of the panel will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher.

7. Closure of Complaints

Very occasionally, the school will feel that it needs, regretfully, to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied.

We will do all we can to help to resolve a complaint against one of Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust's schools but sometimes it is simply not possible.

If a complainant persists in making representations to the school – to the Head Teacher, designated complaints governor, Chair of Governors or anyone else, this can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from our responsibility to look after the interests of **all** the children in our care.

For this reason, we are entitled to close correspondence (including personal approaches, letters and telephone calls) on a complaint where we feel that we have taken all reasonable action to resolve the complaint and that the complaint has exhausted our official processes. The Board of Trustees will support us in this position, and especially where the complainant's action is causing distress to staff and/or pupils.

8. Unreasonable Complaints

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable where a complainant refuses to support the investigation process, changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds, or provides false information. A complainant may be considered unreasonable if they make ongoing or unjustified complaints, seek unrealistic outcomes or use threatening, intimidating or offensive language or behaviour towards staff. A complainant may also be considered unreasonable where details of the complaint or members of staff involved are published or shared using social media.

Where a complaint or complainant is deemed to be unreasonable, the Headteacher/Chair will write to the complainant outlining the reason and explaining why the complaint will not be further investigated. Complainants may appeal this decision by writing to the Chair of the Local Governing Board within 10 days of receiving this letter, responding to the concerns outlined in the correspondence they have received.

9. The Role of Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust

Where a complainant contacts the Trust regarding a complaint against a school, they will be advised to raise their concerns informally in the first instance with the school, in line with the complaints policy.

Where appropriate, details of the concern may also be passed on to other officers within Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust who may provide assistance regarding the matter. If there are safeguarding issues, then information will be passed on to the relevant agencies.

10. The Role of Ofsted

Ofsted have the power to consider some complaints made in writing about schools.

Ofsted will not usually consider a complaint if the complainant has not first followed the Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust's complaints procedure.

Ofsted can investigate complaints related to a school and Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust as a whole, e.g.;

- The school is not providing a good enough education for its pupils.
- The school is not well-led and managed or is wasting money.

Ofsted will not usually investigate any complaint related to individual pupils.

Ofsted cannot consider complaints where there are other statutory ways of pursuing them.

Ofsted **do not**:

- Investigate incidents that are alleged to have taken place.
- Judge how well a school has investigated or responded to a complaint.
- Mediate between a complainant and a school to resolve a dispute.

11. Further Pursuit of a Complaint Following an Appeal Hearing

Where a complainant has been through Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust's complaints procedure and the complainant believes the school / Trust 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 ESFA after they have completed Stage 2.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the appeal panel but will consider whether the school / Trust has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure>, or by writing to:

Complaints Team
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

12. Communications

A copy of this policy will be made available on the Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust website and the website of each school within the trust.

A written record will be kept by the school of all formal complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the stage 1 or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision. This information will be reported to the school's Local Governing Board.

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. Records of complaints will be kept for a minimum of 6 years.

Appendix 1A: Stage 1 Complaint Form

Please complete the form below and return to the school office, Headteacher, or Chair of Governors – depending on the nature of the complaint. The recipient will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken next.

School Name:	
Your name:	
Child's name (if applicable):	
Your relationship to the child:	
Address:	
Daytime contact number:	
Evening contact number:	

Please give details of your complaint:
What action, if any, have you already taken to resolve your complaint? (I.e., who did you speak to and what was the response)
What action(s) do you feel might resolve the matter 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:

Appendix 1B: Stage 2 Complaint Form

Please complete the form below and return to the school c/o the Chair of Governors. The recipient will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken next.

Please use this form if your complaint has already been through stage 1 and you are not happy with the way in which the complaint has been handled.

The purpose of stage 2 is not to re-hear the complaint but to review **how** the complaint has been investigated and to determine whether this has been conducted fairly. It is there to establish facts and make recommendations that will reassure you that we have taken the complaint seriously.

School Name:	
Your name:	
Child's name:	
Your relationship to the child:	
Address:	
Daytime contact number:	
Evening contact number:	

Please give details of your complaint:
What is the reason for progressing your complaint to stage 2 of this policy? Please consider that your complaint will not be re-heard as part of the stage 2 procedure.
What are your comments in regard to the stage 1 investigation procedure?

How, in your opinion, can your complaint could be resolved 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:

**This Complaints Policy was adopted by Owlcotes Multi Academy Trust on
30/09/2018**

Chair of Trustees: Mrs Judith Norfolk		
Signature:		Judith Norfolk
Frequency of review:	2 years	
To be reviewed and approved by:	OMAT Full Board	
Date of next review:	June 2026	

REVIEW RECORD

Date of review	Reason for review	Date of next review
15/10/2020	Agreed review schedule.	September 2022

Name:		Signature:	
--------------	--	-------------------	--

on behalf of OMAT Full Board

Date of review	Reason for review	Date of next review
10/03/2022	Addition of section 8 and 12 and amendments to section 6 and 11.	September 2024

Name:			
--------------	--	--	--

on behalf of OMAT Full Board

Date of review	Reason for review	Date of next review
20/06/2024	Addition of Appendix 1.	June 2026

Name:		Signature:	
--------------	--	-------------------	--

on behalf of OMAT Full Board