Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust

Raising Concerns and Complaints Policy

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Adopted by the Trust on:

Signature of Andy Berry **On behalf of sponsor**		Date 09/03/2026
Signature of Mark Thomas **On behalf of Bridgwater College Trust**		Date 09/03/2026

Review by Trust Board **Approval Date**	9th March 2026
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1. Aims

1.1. Our Trust aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents and other carers of pupils at any school in our Trust.

1.2. The aims of the policy are to deal with concerns and formal written complaints:

- about one of our schools or any individual connected with it by following the correct procedure;
- thoroughly; and
- in an open, honest and fair manner.

1.3. When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

1.4. This Raising Concerns and Complaints Policy is not limited to parents or carers of children who are registered at any school in our Trust. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to the school about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Part 1 of this policy outlines how parents/carers of registered pupils currently attending one of our schools can raise a concern or formal written complaint. Concerns or formal written complaints from other persons will be dealt with in accordance with Part 2 of this policy.

1.5. This policy does not apply to concerns and complaints relating to the matters listed in Appendix 1.

1.6. Anonymous concerns or complaints will not normally be investigated under this procedure. The Headteacher or Chair of Governors (as appropriate) will determine whether there are exceptional circumstances to justify conducting an investigation into the issues raised.

1.7. All staff will be made aware of this Raising Concerns and Complaints Procedure and are expected to review this policy regularly in order that they are familiar with our process of dealing with complaints and can be of assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

1.8. In this policy:

- ‘concern’ means an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought. A concern can be made in person, via phone or email.
- ‘complaint’ means an expression of dissatisfaction, about actions taken or a lack of action following on from a concern that has been unresolved. A complaint is defined as a formal written complaint using the Complaints form found at Appendix 2 of this document
- ‘meeting’ means an in person or virtual meeting (i.e. telephone or video conference where all parties can participate verbally), virtual meetings will only be held in the event that all parties have access to appropriate equipment to attend and are happy to do so.
- 'parent' means a parent, carer or anyone with legal responsibility for a child.
- ‘school days’ excludes weekends and school holidays and periods of partial or total school closure.

1.9. The timeframes referred to in this policy are our usual timeframes and the school and Trust will seek to adhere to these timeframes where possible.

1.10. Reasonable adjustments will be made to this procedure where required to ensure that all complainants can access and complete this Raising Concerns and Complaints Procedure. For example, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal written complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

2. Key Principles

2.1. The school expects all complainants to make reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution using the raising concerns part of this policy.

2.2. The school encourages parents and others to approach the school with any concerns in the first instance and refrain from airing concerns about the school and its staff on social media sites. Posting negative comments on social media can cause damage and upset and is often counterproductive to pupil education.

2.3. To investigate your complaint properly and fairly, we have implemented a staged approach. We anticipate that almost all complaints that arise will be resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2, outlined below.

2.4. We expect our members of staff to be addressed in a respectful manner and for communication to remain calm at all times. The procedure under Part 3 will only be used on very rare occasions to deal with repetitious and/or vexatious complaints or complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner.

2.5. Concerns or complaints should be brought to our attention as soon as possible. Any matter raised more than 3 months after the incident being complained of (or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 3 months of the last of these

incidents) will not be considered unless the Headteacher or Chair of Governors (as appropriate) accepts that there are good reasons to explain the delay or the complaint is about a particularly serious matter.

2.6. Where a complaint is received outside of term time, we will consider it to have been received on the first school day following the holiday period.

2.7. On rare occasions the school may receive complaints from a number of individuals relating to the same issue. In order to deal with these complaints efficiently the school will follow the procedure set out in Part 4.

2.8. If it becomes necessary to alter the time limits and deadlines set out within this procedure, you will be advised accordingly and given an explanation as to why this has been the case and provided with revised timescales. If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority safeguarding teams or tribunals/courts, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. Where a complaint is raised but we do not have clarity from the complainant on the issues and/or desired outcomes, we will inform the complainant what information we need to progress the complaint and pause this procedure until reasonable clarity is achieved.

2.9. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may prevent them from considering complaints at later stages.

2.10. If a complainant commences legal action against the school in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether it would be appropriate to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

2.11. If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing within 5 working days.

2.12. We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

2.13. The Trust will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

2.14. To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the Trust website.

2.15. Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

2.16. Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) about a school's support are within the scope of this policy. Such complaints should first be made to the class teacher/special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO)/Headteacher they will then be referred to this complaints

policy. Our SEN policy and information report includes information about the rights of parents of pupils with disabilities who believe that our Trust has discriminated against their child.

2.17. Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities in any of our Trust schools should be directed to the provider concerned.

3. Legislation and guidance

3.1. This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.

3.2. It is also based on guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE) on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations, and refers to good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE).

3.3. This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

3.4. In addition, it addresses duties set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

4. Records of complaints

4.1. A record will be kept of all formal written 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.

4.2. We will make the findings and recommendations of the Complaints Committee available for inspection by the governors and the Headteacher.

4.3. This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

4.4. This is except where the Secretary of State (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or through a subject access request under the terms of the

Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

4.5. Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and Data Protection policy.

4.6. The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole Local Governing Body in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

4.7. Where the Local Governing Body is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

4.8. Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the Local Governing Body, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

4.9. As part of our regular review and monitoring cycle, anonymised data about complaints is shared with Trustees to enable them to monitor the implementation of policy and review the quality of the education provided.

5. Principles for investigation

5.1. When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right
- Ensure the parents' voice/child's voice is taken into account

5.2. **Time scales**

5.2.1. The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident using the complaints form.

5.2.2. We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

5.2.3. When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the next school day.

5.2.4. If at any point we cannot meet the time scales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

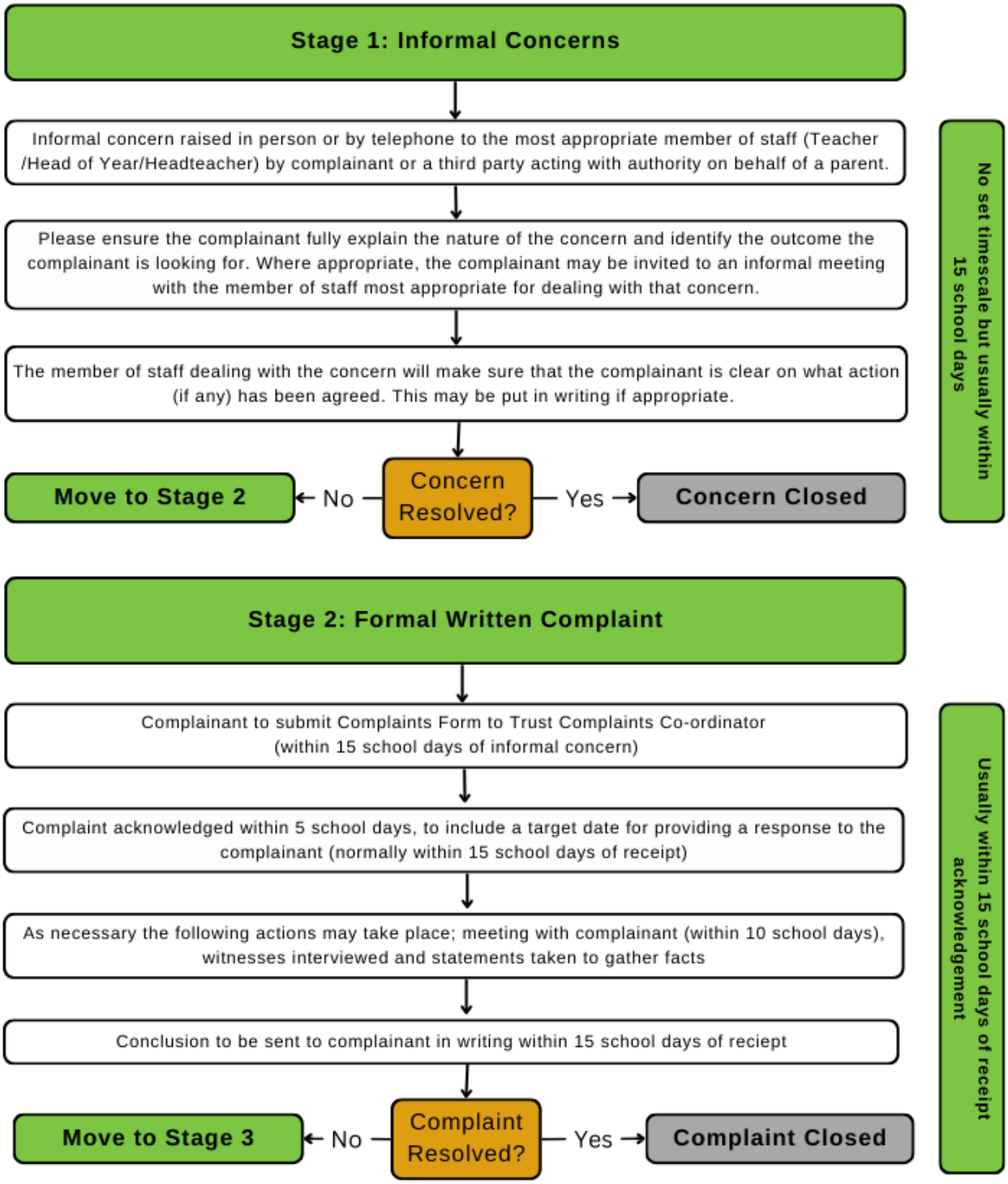
5.3. **Complaints about our fulfilment of early years requirements**

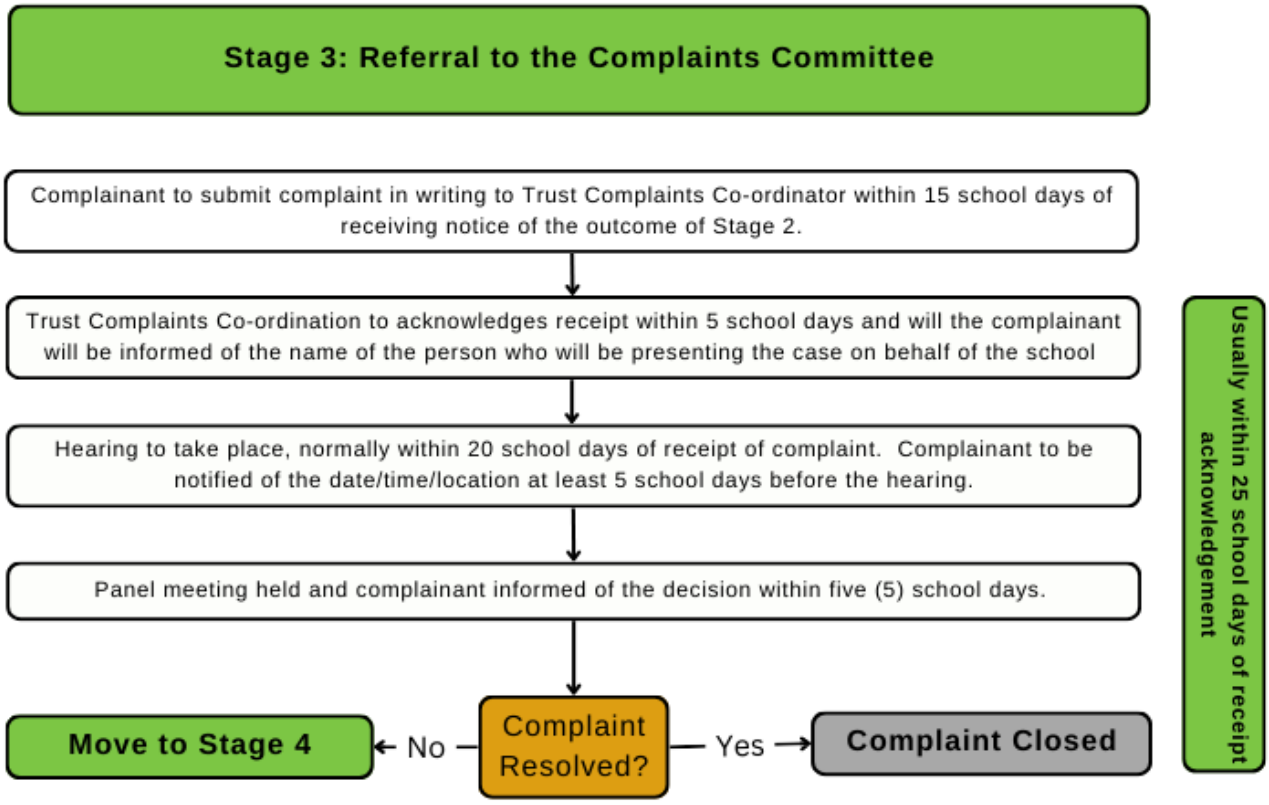
5.3.1. We will investigate all written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint (see section 10) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

5.3.2. Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the school is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by calling 0300 123 4234 or 0300 123 4666, or by emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. An online contact form is also available at https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts.

5.3.3. We will notify parents and carers if we become aware that the school is to be inspected by Ofsted. We will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

6. Concerns and Formal Written Complaints Flowchart





Stage 4: Referral of complaint to Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)

If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the school process, the complaint can be referred to ESFA under Stage 4 of this policy. See https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school for further details

At the time of writing this procedure, details about the ESFA procedure and the ESFA academy complaints form are available at:

How ESFA handles complaints about academies - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Or you can write to the ESFA at the following address:
Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

Part 1 Raising a Concern or Formal Written Complaint procedure for parents

Stage 1: Informal Concerns

1.1 An informal concern can be raised in person, by telephone or email. Concerns may also be raised by a third party acting on behalf of a parent, as long as they have appropriate authority to do so. Most enquiries and concerns can be dealt with satisfactorily by the class teacher or the head of year or other members of staff without the need to resort to the formal procedure. We value informal meetings and discussions and encourage parents to approach staff with any concerns they may have, and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding.

1.2 It is always helpful if you can fully explain the nature of the concern and identify the outcome you are looking for. Where appropriate, you may be invited to an informal meeting with the member of staff most appropriate for dealing with that concern. The member of staff dealing with the concern will make sure that you are clear on what action (if any) has been agreed. This may be put in writing if appropriate.

1.3 If the matter is brought to the attention of the Headteacher they may decide to deal with your concerns directly at this stage. If the concerns are about the Headteacher these should be referred directly to the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator under Stage 2.

1.4 The school will respect the views of a parent who indicates that they would have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff. In this case, the Headteacher, or a member of the Senior Leadership Team appointed by the Headteacher, will deal with the complaint themselves. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved in the circumstances leading to the concern feels too compromised to deal with it, the Headteacher will take responsibility of the complaint themselves.

1.5 Staff members should share agreed resolution of all informal concerns with their Headteacher and escalate any serious concerns.

1.6 It would be expected that most issues will be resolved within 15 school days. Where no satisfactory solution has been found, you will be advised that if you wish your concerns to be considered further, you should write to the Headteacher under Stage 2 of this procedure within 15 school days using the Complaints Form found at Appendix 2 of this policy.

Stage 2: Formal written complaints

2.1. If your concerns are not resolved under Stage 1, you are entitled to put your complaint in writing and send this to the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator.

2.2. It is very important that you include a clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint. Please complete the Complaint Form provided at Appendix 2 of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the Complaints Co-ordinator. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice/SENDIAS to help you. In all cases your written complaint must include:

- the nature of the complaint;
- details of how the matter has been dealt with so far;
- the names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events and copies of all relevant documents; and
- a clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint.

2.3. Your complaint will be acknowledged in writing within five school days of receipt. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the school's complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This target date will be within 15 school days of receipt.

2.4. If appropriate, the Headteacher (or someone appointed by them) will 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 or interpreter, to assist you. This meeting may be held remotely if all parties agree. This meeting will take place within 10 school days of receipt of the written complaint.

2.5. If necessary, witnesses will be interviewed and statements taken from those involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, the pupil will usually be interviewed with support if needed. Pupils will normally be interviewed with their parent present, but if this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint or if the pupil has specifically said that they would prefer that their parents were not involved, another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable will be present. If the matter includes a complaint relating to a member of staff, the member of staff will have the opportunity to respond to the complaint.

2.6. Once the relevant facts have been established, you will be provided with a written response to the complaint within 15 working days, including an explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. This will include what action will be taken to resolve the complaint (if any). You will be advised that if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, you may request that your complaint be heard by the Complaints Committee under Stage 3 of this procedure.

2.7. The school may engage an independent, external person, the complaints 'investigator', to carry out the investigation into the Stage 2 complaint or to review the investigation and response at Stage 2. This may be appropriate where the complaint is particularly complex or involves legal issues.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What if the complaint is about the Headteacher or the Headteacher has already considered your complaint under Stage 1?

In these cases, your complaint should be sent to the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator at the school's address (See appendix 3) who will arrange for a school Governor to carry out the Stage 2 procedure.

Q. What if the complaint is about a member of the Local Governing Body or a member of the school trust?

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual Governor, Member, Trustee or the whole Local Governing Body should be addressed to the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator via email to Tracy.Barnes@btc-trust.org . Please mark them as Private and Confidential. The Trust Complaints Co-ordinator will arrange for another Governor or Trustee to investigate the concerns in accordance with Stage 2.

If the complaint is about the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator, your complaint should be sent to the Chair of Governors at the school's address.

Please be aware that where your complaint relates to an employee, a copy of the complaint may be shared with them in order to investigate the issues raised.

Stage 3: Referral to the Trust Complaints Committee

3.1 If you are dissatisfied with the decision under Stage 2, you may request that a Trust Complaints Committee be convened to consider your complaint. The Trust Complaints Committee will principally consider how the complaint was handled at the previous stages but has discretion to review other aspects of the complaint as it sees fit. The Trust Complaints Committee will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

3.2 To request a hearing before the Trust Complaints Committee, you should write to the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator at the school address within 15 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 2. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. You should ensure that you provide copies of all relevant documents and state all the grounds for your complaint and the outcome that you are looking for.

3.3 Your written request will be acknowledged within five school days of receipt.

3.4 The Trust Complaints Co-ordinator will arrange for a Trust Complaints Committee to be convened, made up of at least three members, including:

Governors of the school with no prior involvement in the matter; and,
One person who is independent of the management and running of the school; and,
a Trustee

The Trust Complaints Co-ordinator shall appoint one of these members to be the Chair of the Committee.

The Trust will follow this process when arranging the hearing but will consider the wellbeing of all parties in accordance with the Trust's values and may ask an alternative School Representative to attend if a member of staff's wellbeing is affected.

3.5 Every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within 20 school days of the receipt of your request.

3.6 This hearing may be held remotely if all parties agree. As soon as reasonably practicable, and in any event at least five school days before the hearing, you will be sent written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the committee members who will be present. Fair consideration will be given to any bona

fide objection to a particular member of the committee. You will also be informed of the name of the person who will be presenting the case on behalf of the school (referred to in this policy as the 'school representative'). This may be the person who is the subject of the complaint, the person who undertook the investigation at Stage 2 and/or another person with sufficient knowledge of the matter.

3.7 If, despite best efforts, it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date and time for a hearing within a reasonable timeframe, the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator may determine that the hearing proceeds on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

3.8 You have the right to be accompanied to the hearing by a friend, relative or interpreter. You should notify the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator in advance if you intend to bring anyone to the hearing. We do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the Trust Complaints Committee meeting. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend. The Trust Complaints Committee itself may take legal advice and/or be supported by a legal advisor at the hearing on matters of law and procedure.

3.9 A copy of the complaint and any other documents provided by you in support of your complaint, or by the school representative in defence of the complaint, will be provided to the Trust Complaints Committee as soon as practicable upon receipt. Copies of these documents shall also be provided to you or school representative (as applicable) at least 3 three school days before the hearing. The Trust Complaints Committee reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented by either party less than 3 school days prior to the hearing. The Trust Complaints Committee is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. The committee will not normally accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

3.10 The hearing will be conducted to ensure that each party has the opportunity to address the Trust Complaints Committee. The procedure to be followed during the hearing will be explained to the parties by letter in advance of the hearing. The Trust Complaints Co-ordinator will ensure that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken or actions agreed. Electronic recordings of the hearing will not normally be permitted and, in any event, would require the consent of all those present.

3.11 Unless otherwise stated, the procedure for the Stage 3 hearing is as follows:

if both parties agree, the parent and school representative will enter the hearing together;
the Chair of the Committee will introduce the committee members and outline the process;
the parent will explain the complaint;
the school representative and committee members will question the parent;
the school representative will explain the school's actions;
the parent and the committee members will question the school representative and/or investigator;
the parent will sum up their complaint;
the school representative will sum up the school's actions;

the Chair of the Committee will explain that both parties will hear from the committee within five school days;
both parties will leave together while the committee decides;
the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator, and any legal advisor assisting the committee (if applicable), will stay to assist the committee with its decision making.

3.12 The Clerk and/or Trust Complaints Committee reserves the right to modify the above procedure at their sole discretion, for example requiring the parent and the academy representative to present their complaint/actions separately to the complaints committee in the absence of the other party.

3.13 If the complainant has not arrived by the start of the complaints committee, the Clerk will attempt to contact the complainant via telephone to ascertain if they are delayed, have chosen not to attend, or wish to withdraw their complaint. If the Clerk is unable to speak with the complainant, or if the complainant confirms that they have chosen not to attend, the hearing will proceed in the complainant's absence 30 minutes after the scheduled start time. Findings and recommendations will be based on the written submissions previously provided by both parties.

3.14 A Trust Complaints Committee may be adjourned if the Trust Complaints Committee require further evidence or in exceptional circumstances (for example, if clarification sought by the Trust Complaints Committee is essential to the proceedings). The adjourned date must be as soon as possible.

3.15 After the hearing, the Trust Complaints Committee will consider their decision and inform you and, where relevant, the person complained about of their decision in writing within five school days. The letter will set out the decision of the committee together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The committee can (by a majority if necessary):

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 school systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

Stage 4: Referral of complaint to the Department for Education (DfE)

2.8. If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Complaints Committee, you are entitled to refer your complaint to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will only investigate the complaint in limited circumstances.

2.9. For more information on the DfE's remit in relation to academy complaints, visit: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complain-about-an-academy/complain-about-an-academy

Part 2: Concerns or formal written complaints from other persons

Part 1 of this Raising Concerns and Complaints policy applies only to complaints made by parents or carers of current registered pupils of the school. However, the school wishes to

work closely with other members of the local community and will deal with their concerns and complaints as follows:

1 **Stage 1** - a concern regarding the school or its operations may be made to any member of staff. That member of staff will attempt to resolve the matter immediately or may, if appropriate, refer the matter to their line manager or member of the senior leadership team (SLT) who is best placed to deal with the concern. It is expected that most concerns will be responded to orally or in writing within five school days. If a longer period is required, you will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation.

2 **Stage 2** - where a concern is not resolved at Stage 1, or you wish your concerns to be dealt with immediately as a formal complaint, you should put your complaint in writing and send this to the Headteacher of the school to investigate. The Headteacher may delegate the task of investigation and/or responding to the complaint to a member of SLT or may escalate the complaint straight to Stage 3. A formal response to the complaint will usually be provided within 15 school days of receipt of the letter of complaint although if a longer period is required to respond, you will be kept updated.

3 **Stage 3** - if you are not satisfied with the response at Stage 2, you may request a review by writing to the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator. You should write to the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator within 15 school days of receipt of the letter at Stage 2. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. The Trust Complaints Co-ordinator will usually arrange for a governor to consider the complaint alone or may convene a Complaints Committee on the same terms as set out in Part 1 of this complaints policy. The decision at this stage will usually be sent to you within 15 school days of receipt of the request for a review or within five school days of the Complaints Committee hearing (as applicable).

4 **Stage 4** - if you are dissatisfied with the decision at Stage 3, you are entitled to refer your complaint to the DfE as outlined in Part 1 of this complaints policy.

Concerns or complaints regarding the Headteacher should be referred direct to the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator at the school's address (see Appendix 3) who will arrange for the stages above to be considered by an appropriate person.

Part 3: Repetitious and vexatious complaints and complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

There are rare circumstances where we will deviate from the Complaints Policy set out in Parts 1 and 2. These include, but are not necessarily limited to:

1. Repetitious, including serial and/or persistent, complaints

Where the complainant's complaint is the same, similar to or based on the same facts of a complaint which has already been considered in full and we have:

- taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns; and
- given the complainant a clear statement of our position and their options,

We will write to the complainant to advise that the complaints policy has been exhausted and that we will not be responding to any further correspondence in relation to these matters.

The complainant will be referred to Stage 4.

2. Vexatious complaints

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator defines the characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint as:

- complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitious;
- insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
- insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance;
- demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- refusal to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refusal to co-operate with the complaints investigation process;
- refusal to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints policy;
- insistence on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints policy or with good practice;
- introducing trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on;
- raising large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- seeking an unrealistic outcome, such as the inappropriate dismissal of staff;
- making excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;
- knowingly providing falsified information;
- publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

3. Complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

Where the complainant's behaviour or language towards staff, Governors, Members or Trustees is aggressive, abusive, offensive, discriminatory or threatening or insulting personal comments are made about, or threats are made towards, staff.

In the circumstances outlined in (2) and (3) above, we may:

- inform the complainant that we consider their complaint to be vexatious or the manner in which they are pursuing their complaint to be unreasonable and why, and ask them to desist;
- conduct the Complaints Committee by via remote meeting;
- refuse to consider the complaint any further and refer the complainant directly to Stage 4.

We may also restrict the complainant's access to the school e.g. requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only), requiring contact to take place with a named person only, restricting telephone calls to specified days and times or number of contacts or banning the complainant from the school's premises.

Where the complainant's behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, Governors, Members or Trustees, we will consider other options, for example reporting the matter to the police or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

Part 4: Complaint campaigns

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint campaign is defined as a complaint from three or more separate individuals (whether or not connected with the school) which are all based on the same subject.

Depending on the subject in question, we may deviate from the procedure set out in this policy and instead:

- send a template response to all complainants; and/or
- publish a single response on the school's website (as applicable).

7. Complaints about Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust (BTC Trust)

7.1. There may be times when a complaint is received that is regarding the actions of BTC Trust and / or a BTC Trust staff member. In these instances, the procedures for dealing with such complaints differ from those regarding schools.

7.2. The process for complaining about BTC Trust follows three stages. Complaints to BTC Trust are likely to be in relation to the services that BTC Trust provides or the actions of its employees. Again, it is a precondition of the complaints procedure that reasonable attempts should be made to resolve issues on an informal basis (at stage 1) and the Chief Executive Officer of BTC Trust shall have the discretion, to be exercised reasonably, not to allow a complaint to be pursued where this precondition has not been met.

7.3. **Stage one – informal**

7.3.1. Informal concerns can be made over the phone, by email or post. Concerns should be raised directly with the staff member that they involve. If your concerns are not able to be resolved directly with the staff member involved, then you should follow the process detailed in stage two.

7.4. **Stage two – formal**

7.4.1. A complaint should be made in writing to the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator.

7.4.2. The complaint will be dealt with by the line manager of the person who the complaint involves and / or the Trust's Complaints Co-ordinator. Where the complaint cannot be resolved immediately, a full response will be provided within ten school days.

7.5. **Stage three – review**

7.5.1. The final stage is for the complaint to be reviewed by a member of the Trust Executive Leadership Team. It is the responsibility of the complainant to request a review.

7.5.2. To request a review, you should write to the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator detailing why you remain unhappy with the stage two response. This request will be acknowledged within five school days. The Complaints Co-ordinator will pass this on for review. They will remain your main point of contact at this stage.

7.5.3. The task of collating the information may be delegated to another staff member but not the decision on the action to be taken. A full and final response to your complaint will be communicated in writing within 10 school days of the complaint being allocated to a member of the executive team.

8. Roles and Responsibilities

8.1. **The role of the complainant**

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Treat all those involved with respect and confidentially
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

8.2. **The role of the investigator**

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint, and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the Headteacher or Complaints Committee which includes the facts and potential solutions

8.3. **The role of the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator**

The Trust Complaints Co-ordinator is the contact point for the complainant and the Complaints Committee, and should:

- be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings
- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure;
- liaise with staff, Headteacher and Chair of Governors (as applicable) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure;
- be mindful of the timescales to respond to complaints;
- ensure that all people involved in the complaints procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR);
- ensure that the Complaints Committee has access to legal advice, where appropriate;
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, taking reasonable steps to find a date that is convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;

- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale;
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- arrange for the meetings to be minuted;
- notify all parties of the Complaint Committee's decision;
- assist the school in issuing a summary letter to the complainant.

8.4. **The role of the Headteacher (or other party investigating as applicable in accordance with the procedure) at Stage 2**

- to ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure;
- to ensure that the correct procedure has been followed;
- to ensure that an investigation is carried out, and a report compiled;
- to meet the complainant, if appropriate;
- if the complaint is being referred to Stage 3, notify the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator to arrange the Complaints Committee.

8.5. **The role of the Chair of the Complaints Committee**

The Chair of the Complaints Committee has a key role, ensuring that:

- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy;
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child;
- the remit of the Complaints Committee is explained to the complainant;
- the written material is seen by everyone in attendance (provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR);
- key findings of fact are made, and that any issues not previously mentioned in writing should not be raised at the meeting and, if they are mentioned at the meeting, these should not be noted or considered by the Complaints Committee;
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case, and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting, or verbally in the meeting itself;
- the Complaints Committee is open-minded, acts independently and no Complaints Committee member has an external interest in the outcome or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- the meeting is accurately minuted.

9. Remote Meetings

9.1. Any meeting may be conducted remotely where the parents/school request for it to be conducted remotely with all participants having access and are able to make representations. A meeting may also take place remotely where there is an extraordinary event or unforeseen circumstance that means it's not reasonably practicable to hold the meeting in person. Such events can include, but are not limited to, floods, fire, and an outbreak of an infectious disease.

9.2. In addition, where an external party is due to attend a meeting, they may join an in-person meeting remotely as long as it can be fairly accessed, the technology is available, and everyone would be able to make representations.

10. Learning lessons

10.1. The Local Governing Body will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher/senior leadership team, 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. The Trustees will receive an annual record of complaints.

11. Monitoring arrangements

11.1. The Local Governing Body will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The Local Governing Body will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 10.

11.2. The complaints records are logged and managed by the Trust Complaints Co-ordinator

11.3. This policy will be reviewed by the Chief Executive Officer of the Trust every three years or in the following circumstances:

- Changes in legislation and/or government guidance
- In the event that the policy is determined not to be effective.

11.4. At each review, the policy will be approved by Trustees.

12. Links with other policies

12.1. Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

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

Appendix 1- Matters excluded from the scope of this policy

Excluded Matters	**Signposting**
Admissions	The process for challenging admissions decisions is set out in our admissions policy in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.
Child protection matters	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
Data protection matters	Complaints about data protection matters are handled under our data protection policy and in accordance with relevant guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the ICO directly, but the ICO will usually expect you to have raised your concerns with our Data Protection Officer in the first instance.
Exclusions	The process for challenging exclusions decisions is set out in the DfE's statutory guidance and information can be found at: School suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Freedom of information matters	Complaints about our compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 are handled under our freedom of information policy and in accordance with relevant guidance from the ICO. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the ICO directly, but the ICO will usually expect you to have raised your concerns with us in the first instance.
Governor and Trustee grievances	Complaints from trustees and governors will be dealt with by the chair of trustees under the Trust's internal governance procedures. This does not preclude governors or trustees from raising complaints in their capacity as a parent.
National Curriculum content	Please contact the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk/contactus
School re-organisation proposals	Where concerns are not adequately addressed by the school, complaints can be raised direct with the Department for Education.
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Certain complaints about staff may need to be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of

	a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with the local authority.
Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus Volunteer staff who have concerns should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of the complaint

Appendix 2: Complaints Form

Complaints Form	
Your name:	
Pupil Name:	
Your address and contact number:	
Your daytime telephone number:	
Your evening telephone number:	
Your email address:	
School:	
Your complaint is: (if you have more than one complaint, please number these)	
What action have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint(s)?	

Who did you speak to and what was the response?	
What would you like as an outcome from your complaint?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, give details here:	

Your signature…… Date ……

All functions of the complaints procedure must adhere to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Please complete and return to the school office in a sealed envelope addressed to the Headteacher or Trust Complaints Co-ordinator to the Local Governing Body (as appropriate).

Office use

Date received ……

Date acknowledgement sent ……

Responsible member of staff ……

Appendix 3: School Contact Details

Bridgwater College Academy	Parkway, Bridgwater, TA6 4QY Telephone: 01278 727 327 Email: office@bridgwateracademy.org
Brookside Academy	Brooks Road, Street, BA16 0PR. Telephone: 01458 443 340 Email: office@brooksideacademy.co.uk
Brymore Academy	Cannington, Bridgwater, TA5 2NA. Telephone: 01278 652 369 Email: office@brymoreacademy.co.uk
Hamp Academy	Rhode Lane, Bridgwater, TA6 6JB. Telephone: 01278 424 600 Email: office@hampacademy.co.uk
Maiden Beech Primary Academy	Lyme Road, Crewkerne, TA18 8HG.

	Telephone: 01460 726 77 Email: office@maidenbeechprimary.org
Otterhampton Primary School	School Lane, Combwich, Bridgwater, TA5 2QS. Telephone: 01278 652 487 Email: office@otterhampton.org
Stanchester Academy	East Stoke, Stoke-sub-Hambdon, TA14 6UG. Telephone: 01935 823 200 Email: office@stanchester.co.uk
West Somerset College	Bircham Road, Minehead, TA24 6AY. Telephone: 01643 706 061 Email: enquiries@westsomersetcollege.org
Trust Complaints Co-ordinator	BTC Trust c/o Bridgwater College Academy, Parkway, Bridgwater, TA6 4QY. Email: Tracy.Barnes@btc-trust.org

Appendix 4 Summary of Complaints Procedure for Parents & Carers

Stage 1: Informal concerns	Parent brings complaint to attention of member of staff
	Issue to be resolved (guide: within 15 school days)
	Where no satisfactory solution has been found, parent to be advised that they should proceed to Stage 2
Stage 2: Formal Written Complaint	Parent to put complaint in writing using Complaint Form within 15 school days
	Complaint to be acknowledged within five school days
	Meeting with parents within 10 school days (where appropriate)
	Response to the complaint sent within 15 school days
Stage 3: Referral to Complaints Committee	Parent to request hearing within 15 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 2
	Request to be acknowledged within five school days
	Hearing to take place within 20 school days of receipt of request
	Notification of date, time and place of the hearing and details of the committee members present sent at least five school days before the hearing
	School representative and parents to submit evidence in support of their case to Trust Complaints Co-ordinator at least 3 school days before the hearing
	Trust Complaints Committee decision sent not more than five school days after the hearing