

Policy/Procedure:

Complaints Policy

Approved by Trust Board: December 2017

Review Frequency: Every two years

Date of last review:

Date of next review: December 2019

Complaints Policy

St Clere's Co-operative Academy Trust is a multi-academy trust (MAT) incorporated around the principles and values of the international co-operative movement. These are Equality, Equity, Democracy, Self-help, Self-Responsibility and Solidarity, along with the ethical values of openness, honesty, social responsibility and caring for others. These values and principles underpin all our actions.

General Principles:

- This procedure is intended to allow you to raise a concern or complaint relating to the school, or the services that it provides.
- An anonymous concern or complaint will not be investigated under this procedure, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- To enable a proper investigation, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the school as soon as possible. In general, any matter raised more than 3 months after the event, being complained of, will not be considered.

Raising a concern or complaint

Informal Stage

It is normally appropriate to communicate directly with the member of staff concerned. This may be by letter, by telephone or in person by appointment, requested via the school office. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved by this informal stage.

In the case of serious concerns it may be appropriate to address them directly to the Head Teacher (or to the Chair of the Local Governing Body, if the complaint is about the Head Teacher).

If you are uncertain about who to contact, please seek advice from the school office or the Clerk to the Local Governing Body.

Formal Stage

If your concern or complaint is not resolved at the informal stage you may choose to put the complaint in writing and pass it to the Head Teacher, who will be responsible for ensuring that it is investigated appropriately. If the complaint is about the Head Teacher, your complaint should be passed to the Clerk to the Local Governing Body, for the attention of the Chair of the Local Governing Body.

A Complaint Form is provided to assist you.

You should include details which might assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events, and copies of relevant documents.

It is very important that you include a clear statement of the actions that you would like the school to take to resolve your concern. Without this, it is much more difficult to proceed.

Please pass the completed form, in a sealed envelope to the school office. The envelope should be addressed to the Head Teacher, or to the Clerk to the Local Governing Body, as appropriate.

The Head Teacher (or Chair) may invite you to a meeting to clarify your concerns and to explore the possibility of an informal resolution. If you accept that invitation, you may be accompanied by a friend, if you wish, to assist you in explaining the nature of your concerns.

It is possible that your complaint will be resolved through a meeting with the Head Teacher (or Chair). The Chief Executive Officer of the Trust may also attend this meeting. If your complaint is not resolved at this meeting, arrangements will be made for the matter to be fully investigated, using the appropriate procedure. In any case you should learn in writing, usually within 5 days of the school receiving your formal complaint, of how the school intends to proceed. This notification should include an indication of the anticipated timescale.

Any investigation will begin as soon as possible and when it has been concluded, you will be informed in writing of its conclusion.

If you are not satisfied with the manner in which the process has been followed, you may request that the Trust Board reviews the process followed by the school, in handling the complaint. Any such request must be made in writing to the Trust Secretary (email info@stcleres.coop), within 10 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of your original complaint to the school. Please include a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow the procedure. The procedure described below will be followed. A Review Request form is provided for your convenience.

Review Process

Any review of the process followed by the school will be conducted by a panel of three members of the Trust Board. This will usually take place within 10 school days of receipt of your request.

The review will normally be conducted through a consideration of written submissions, but reasonable requests to make oral representations should be considered sympathetically.

Exceptions to Complaints Procedure

This Complaints Procedure covers all complaints about any provision of facilities or services in the Trust's schools. However, the exceptions listed below are not covered because separate procedures exist.

In certain circumstances, for example where the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) or another public body is investigating the matters in a complaint, the school's own process will be suspended until those investigations are concluded.

Exceptions	Where to look
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allegations of child abuse /other child protection issues • Other safeguarding issues 	Immediately report your concern to the class teacher, Designated Safeguarding Lead or Principal and check the school's safeguarding policy.
You can also report concerns about how child protection issues are being handled in your own or another organisation to the NSPCC's whistleblowing advice line on 0800 028 0285 or at help@nspcc.org.uk .	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory Assessment of SEN 	Check the school's SEND offer and report your concern to the SENCO or Headteacher.

• School Admissions including appeals	Check the information on the school's Admissions page.
• Pupil Exclusions	Check the school's Behaviour Policy.
• Whistleblowing (for financial or other regulatory malpractice)	St Clere's Co-operative Academy Trust's Whistleblowing Policy. Contact the Trust Secretary at info@stcleres.coop for further advice.
• Staff grievances /disciplinary procedures	These matters will invoke the school internal grievance procedures
• Complaints about Trust central (non-school based) members of staff	Email hr@stcleres.coop with details of your complaint and these will be passed to the relevant line manager
• Complaints about the CEO or HR Manager	Contact the Chair of Trust direct (contact details available from the Trust Secretary, info@stcleres.coop)

If your complaint relates to an external service provider, this should be raised with the Headteacher of the school in the first instance, but it might be that you or the school will have to follow the provider's own complaints policy thereafter.

If the issue concerns a serious safeguarding or child protection issue, an allegation of abuse or a matter with serious disciplinary consequences, the Headteacher should be informed immediately. The appropriate policy and procedures must be followed

If there is any doubt about whether an issue should be dealt with as a complaint or through another formal procedure, guidance can be sought from the Trust Secretary at info@stcleres.coop.

Stage 1

- **Informal**
- Complaints should be reported verbally to the class teacher or relevant member of staff

Stage 2

- **Formal**
- If the complaint remains unsatisfied, verbal or written complaints should be directed to the Headteacher for investigation

Stage 3

- **Formal**
- If the complainant remains unsatisfied or if the complaint is against the Headteacher, written complaints should be directed to the Chair of Governors for review or investigation



- Chair will pass the complaint to the CEO to investigate and respond and/or



- Chair will pass the complaint to a committee/panel to investigate and respond

Stage 4

- **Formal**
- Complaints should only be escalated to the Trust if the complainant believes the correct process has not been followed or that the complaints policy does not meet statutory requirements, or
- A school has failed to comply with a duty imposed in its funding agreement with the Secretary of State



- **Formal**
- Full review of process will be carried out by Chair of Trust, supported by CEO and the outcome will be fed back to the complainant

Appendix – Roles and Responsibilities

The Complainant

The complainant or person who makes the complaint will receive a more effective response to the complaint if he/she:-

- co-operates with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint;
- expresses the complaint in full as early as possible;
- responds promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint;
- asks for assistance as needed;
- treats all those involved in the complaint with respect.

The Complaints Co-ordinator (or headteacher)

The complaints co-ordinator should:-

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure;
- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure will be aware of the legislation around complaints including the Equality Act 2010, Data Protection Act 1998 and Freedom of Information Act 2000;
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, Chair of Governors and Clerk to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure;
- keep records;
- be aware of issues regarding:-
 - sharing third party information;
 - additional support - this may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support.

The Investigator

The Investigator is the person involved in Stages 1 and 2 of the procedure. The Investigator's role can include:-

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:-
 - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved;
 - consideration of records and other relevant information;
 - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint;
 - analysing information;

- effectively liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- identifying solutions and recommending courses of action to resolve problems;
- being mindful of the timescales to respond; and
- responding to the complainant in plain and clear language.

The person investigating the complaint should make sure that they:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting.

The Trust Secretary

The Trust Secretary is the contact point for the complainant for the panel meeting and is expected to:- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;

- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- circulate the minutes of the panel hearing;
- notify all parties of the panel's decision;
- liaise with the complaints co-ordinator.

The Panel Chair

The Panel Chair has a key role in ensuring that:-

- the meeting is minuted;
- the remit of the panel is explained to the complainant and both they and the school have the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- parents/carers and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease – this is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person;
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with everyone treated with respect and courtesy;

- the layout of the room will set the tone – care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial;
- the panel is open-minded and acts independently;
- no member of the panel has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to state their case and seek clarity;
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance – if a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the hearing;
- liaise with the Clerk and complaints co-ordinator.

Panel Member

Panellists will need to be aware that:-

- it is important that the review panel hearing is independent and impartial, and that it is seen to be so; No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the hearing, which will be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant;

However, it must be recognised that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. 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.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting;

Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible.

- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the hearing; Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated. The panel should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the panel should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the panel should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child/young person needs to attend. The parent should be advised however that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting which the panel considers not to be in the child/young person's best interests.

- The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

Interviewing Best Practice Tips

Children/young people

- Children/young people should be interviewed in the presence of another member of staff, or in the case of serious complaints (e.g. where the possibility of criminal investigation exists) in the presence of their parents/carers. However, it might not always be possible to conduct an interview in case it prejudices a LADO or police investigation.
- Care should be taken in these circumstances not to create an intimidating atmosphere.
- Children/young people should be told what the interview is about and that they can have someone with them.

Staff/Witnesses

- Explain the complaint and your role clearly to the interviewee and confirm that they understand the complaints procedure and their role in it.
- Staff are allowed a colleague to support them at their interview. The colleague must not be anyone likely to be interviewed themselves, including their line manager.
- Use open, not leading questions.
- Do not express opinions in words or attitude.
- Ask single not multiple questions, i.e. one question at a time.
- Try to separate 'hearsay' evidence from fact by asking interviewees how they know a particular fact.
- Persist with questions if necessary. Do not be afraid to ask the same question twice. Make notes of each answer given.
- Deal with conflicting evidence by seeking corroborative evidence. If this is not available, discuss with the complaints co-ordinator/ headteacher/ Chair of Governors the option of a meeting between the conflicting witnesses.
- Make a formal record of the interview from the written notes as soon as possible while the memory is fresh. Show the interviewee the formal record, ask if s/he has anything to add, and to sign the record as accurate.

Meeting Request Form

I wish to meet [*name of teacher*] to discuss the following matter:

Brief details of topic to be discussed:

Dates/times when it would be most convenient for a meeting:

Your name:

Relationship with school (e.g. parent of a pupil on the school roll):

Pupil's name (if relevant to the matter to be discussed)

Your Address:

Telephone numbers

Daytime:

Evening:

e-mail address:

Signed

Date

[Please complete this form and return it to the school office]

School use:

Date Form received:

Date response sent:

Received by:

Response sent by:

School Formal Complaint Form

Please complete this form and return it to the school office or to the Head Teacher who will acknowledge its receipt and inform you of the next stage in the procedure.

Your name:

Relationship with school (e.g. parent of a pupil on the school roll):

.....

Pupil's name (if relevant to your complaint):

.....

Your Address:

Telephone numbers

Daytime:

Evening:

E-mail address:

Please give concise details of your complaint, (including dates, names of witnesses etc...), to allow the matter to be fully investigated:

You may continue on separate paper, or attach additional documents, if you wish.

Number of Additional pages attached =

What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? (i.e. who have you spoken with or written to and what was the outcome?)

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

School use:

Date Form received:

Received by:

Date acknowledgement sent:

Acknowledgement sent by:

Complaint referred to:			
Date:			

School Complaint Review Request Form

Please complete this form and return it to Head Teacher (or Clerk to the Local Governing Body), who will acknowledge its receipt and inform you of the next stage in the procedure.

Your name:

Your Address:

Telephone numbers:

Daytime:

Evening:

E-mail address:

Dear Sir

I submitted a formal complaint to the school on and am dissatisfied by the procedure that has been followed.

My complaint was submitted to and I received a response from on

I have attached copies of my formal complaint and of the response(s) from the school.

I am dissatisfied with the way in which the procedure was carried out, because:

You may continue on separate paper, or attach additional documents, if you wish.

Number of Additional pages attached =

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

Signature:

Date:

School use

Date Form received:

Received by:

Date acknowledgement sent:

Acknowledgement sent by:

Request referred to:			
Date:			

Response to spurious complainant

Dear [Name of complainant]

Thank you for submitting your concern in the letter received on the [insert date]. After careful consideration, unfortunately, I am unable to deal with this matter under the Local Governing Body's Complaints Procedure. This is because:

[we suggest that you include one of the following statements]

- The substance of your complaint has been addressed under the complaints procedure already.
- The concerns that you raise do not fall within the scope of this procedure *[suggest alternative for example: admissions policy, exclusion policy, behaviour policy, grievance procedure etc]*

If you wish my decision to be reviewed then you can follow the school's Formal Complaint Procedure, by writing to the Clerk to the Local Governing Body.

Yours sincerely,

Head Teacher
Or Chair of Local Governing Body

Acknowledgement of receipt of formal complaint and invitation to meet

Dear [Name of Complainant]

I have received your formal complaint, dated I am grateful that you have brought this to my attention.

The school and Local Governing Body take any complaint seriously. Therefore, I would like to meet with you, as soon as possible, so that I may understand the details of your concerns more clearly. You are welcome to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend, if you would find this helpful. *Please telephone..... in order to arrange an appointment. **OR** I can offer you an appointment at on ,..... Please let me know if this is convenient.*

I hope that we will be able to resolve your concerns through our meeting, but if not I will ensure that the appropriate investigation takes place.

Yours sincerely,

Head Teacher
Or Chair of Local Governing Body

Acknowledgement of receipt of formal complaint referred by a third party [e.g. LA, Diocese, MP]

Dear [Name of Complainant]

I have received a copy of the documentation that you sent in to setting out a complaint about This has been passed to the school as it has responsibility for these matters.

The school and Local Governing Body take any complaint seriously. Therefore I would like to meet with you, so that I may understand the details of your concerns more clearly. Please telephone, in order to arrange an appointment. **OR** I can offer you an appointment at on Please let me know if this is convenient.

Meanwhile I would be grateful if you would complete and return the Formal Complaint Form that is enclosed, along with details of the school's complaints procedure.

I hope that we will be able to resolve your concerns through our meeting, but if not I will ensure that the appropriate investigation takes place.

Yours sincerely,

Head Teacher
Or Chair of Local Governing Body

Acknowledgements of receipt of formal complaint and advising complainant that the matter is being dealt with under a confidential school procedure

Dear

I have received your formal complaint, dated I am grateful that you have brought this to my attention.

The school and Local Governing Body take any complaint seriously. Therefore I have initiated an immediate investigation. It is possible that the investigator will wish to meet with you to clarify the evidence that you have provided so far. If so, he/she will write to you to make suitable arrangements.

As your concerns relate to the conduct/capability of a member of staff, the investigation will be carried out under the school's personnel procedures. This means that the detail of the procedure and its outcome **must** remain confidential to the school and the member of staff concerned.

OR

As your concerns relate to the behaviour of a pupil, the investigation will be carried out under the school's pupil conduct and disciplinary procedures. This means that the detail of the procedure and its outcome must remain confidential to the school and the parents of the child concerned.

In due course, I may be able to provide you with some information about the outcomes of the investigation and the processes that have been followed, but in any event will let you know when the matter has been concluded.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do let me know.

Yours sincerely,

Head Teacher
Or Chair of Local Governing Body

NOTIFICATION OF DECISION REGARDING FORMAL COMPLAINT

Dear

Following receipt of your complaint and careful consideration of all the available relevant evidence, I/the panel have/has concluded that:

The concern is not substantiated by the evidence in that

OR

The concern was substantiated in part/in full, as The school will review its practices/procedures..... with the intention of avoiding any reoccurrence. Parents will be informed in due course of any policy changes.

OR

In order to address fully the matters investigated, the school has initiated appropriate internal procedures. Due to the nature of these procedures, their outcome must remain strictly confidential. We are confident, however, that the circumstances that gave rise to your complaint should not recur

OR

In order to address fully the matters of concern that you identified, the panel recommended that the Local Governing Body should review its policy, as a matter of urgency. We are confident that this should prevent similar concerns arising in future.

I hope that this will now conclude the matter and we can look to the future working together for the benefit of your child's and the school.

Yours sincerely,

Head Teacher/Chair of Local Governing Body/Chair of Panel

REVIEW OUTCOME NOTIFICATION

Dear

Having carefully considered your representations in the context of the relevant evidence, the Trust Board Complaints Review Panel has concluded that the school followed the relevant procedure appropriately in respect of your complaint.

Summary of reasons

Therefore, we now consider the matter closed.

Or

Having carefully considered your representations in the context of the relevant evidence, the Trust Board Complaints Review Panel has concluded that the school followed the relevant procedure appropriately in respect of your complaint except

Therefore, the following action will be taken

Once this action has been completed the school will consider the matter to be closed.

Or

Having carefully considered your representations in the context of the relevant evidence, the Trust Board Complaints Review Panel has concluded that the school followed the relevant procedure appropriately in respect of your complaint except

However the panel determined that this procedural failure did not affect the outcome of the consideration of your complaint so, while we regret this error, we will now consider this matter to be closed as far as the school is concerned.

Yours sincerely,

Chair of Complaints Review Panel

c.c. Head Teacher
Chair of LGB