

Complaints Procedure

Key document details			
Author:	CEO	Approver:	Trust Board
Owner:	CEO	Version no:	2.0
Draft Date:	March 2026	Next review:	Jul 2027
Ratified:	March 2026		

Complaints Procedure

Contents

1.	Who can make a complaint?	3
2.	The difference between a concern and a complaint	3
3.	The School / Trust’s responsibilities in dealing with a concern / complaint	3
4.	The complainant’s responsibilities when raising a concern or complaint	4
5.	The use of AI in making a complaint	5
6.	The stages of the Complaints procedure	5
7.	Time scales	5
8.	Complaints received outside of term time	5
9.	Scope of this Complaints Procedure	6
10.	Out of Scope of this Complaints Procedure	6
11.	Withdrawal of a complaint.....	8
12.	Managing serial and persistent complaints	8
13.	Unreasonable Complaints	9
14.	Vexatious Complaints.....	10
15.	Stage 0: Concerns	11
16.	Stage 1 Complaint – The School.....	11
17.	Stage 2 Complaint – Education Director	12
18.	Mediation	13
19.	Stage 3 Complaint - The Final Panel.....	14
20.	Other complaints.....	15
21.	Next steps.....	16
22.	Reporting and recording complaints	17
	1
	1
	Annex A: Stage 1 Form.....	A-1
	Annex B: Stage 2 Form.....	B-1



Annex C: Stage 3 Form.....C-1

Annex D: Indicative Timelines.....D-1

Annex E: Roles and Responsibilities.....E-1

Annex E: Flow Chart Summary of Complaints Process.....F-1

1. Who can make a complaint?

- 1.1 This Complaints Procedure is not limited to parents or carers of students that are registered at CET schools. Any person who has a **legitimate interest in the School provision** may make a complaint to the School about any provision of facilities or services that it provides. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this Complaints Procedure. CET will take seriously any complaint but must prioritise provision for existing students.
- 1.2 In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments, if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this Complaints Procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations. Please contact the School Office or the Trust Office if you would like to request reasonable adjustments.
- 1.3 **Anonymous concerns:** We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints or concerns. However, the Headteacher or Trust will determine whether the concern warrants an investigation.

2. The difference between a concern and a complaint

- 2.1 The Trust's aim is that all schools ensure a positive working relationship with all stakeholders. The School will endeavour to address any concerns at the earliest stage, sometimes as part of general day to day conversations and discussions. The ideal situation is that no concerns need to be raised via the complaints procedure.
- 2.2 A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.
- 2.3 A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

3. The School / Trust's responsibilities in dealing with a concern / complaint

- 3.1 It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the Complaints Procedure. schools and the Trust take concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.
- 3.2 If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the School will refer you to an appropriate staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the School will refer you to another staff member who can look at your concern objectively and impartially.

3.3 We understand, however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns more formally. In this case, the School/Trust will attempt to resolve the issue internally through the stages outlined within this Complaints Procedure.

3.4 At each stage of the procedure, our schools seek to resolve complaints. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made;
- an undertaking to review School policies in light of the complaint;
- an apology.

4. The complainant's responsibilities when raising a concern or complaint

4.1 Complaints must be made in line with this procedure.

4.2 Complainants must engage in the complaint procedure for the complaint to be investigated appropriately. This includes speaking to or meeting with relevant members of staff, in person, via telephone or video call.

4.3 There are 4 separate stages to the School Complaints Process. Complainants must follow each stage in turn. Concerns or complaints should be made first to the School. Concerns and complaints must not be raised directly with individual Governors.

4.4 Complaints at Stages 1, 2 and 3 must be made using the correct complaint form.

4.5 Complainants who are parents of a student in a school acknowledge and accept the school's policies at enrolment, indicating this via the home-school agreement.

4.6 Complainants must not publish any information identifying the nature of the complaint, the school or any member of staff on any social media websites, apps, online news site, or other publication, nor share with other individuals, prior to raising the complaint, during the investigation or after the complaint has been resolved. Education staff also have protection in law with regard to privacy and what information about them in their role can be shared.

4.7 Complainants must act reasonably and respectfully. Further information on actions that are considered unreasonable is at paragraph 12.

4.8 Complaints must not be vexatious. Further information on what makes a complaint vexatious is at paragraph 13

5. The use of AI in making a complaint

- 5.1 The Trust understands that AI can be a powerful tool in supporting individuals to draft written information. However, AI should always be used as a drafting aid, not the final author. A complaint should always be in the complainant's own voice, using their own words. AI can be useful in organising thoughts, creating a structure and improving clarity and tone. It must not be used to generate the complaint itself.
- 5.2 AI works best when sufficient and appropriate information is used as prompts. However, care should be taken not to use personal data or information as prompts.
- 5.3 AI should be used to refine a draft that the complainant has written, rather than create the complaint from a series of prompts
- 5.4 AI only works effectively with human intervention – in both the creation of appropriate prompts and in reviewing what has been produced.
- 5.5 The Trust reserves the right to request further information from the complainant if it considers that the complaint has been created using AI. As per this complaints procedure, complaints must be made using the appropriate complaint form. Emails that have been drafted by AI will not be accepted without the relevant complaint form.

6. The stages of the Complaints procedure

- 6.1 The School Complaints Process is informed by the [DfE's Best practice guidance for schools complaints procedures](#).
- 6.2 The stages are described in detail in this document at paragraphs 14-17 (page 9). In summary, the stages are:
- **Stage 0:** Concerns raised at the school level with the appropriate member of staff (e.g., Head of Year, Pastoral Lead, Head of Subject) at the school. The school will aim to address the concerns at this stage, preferably through a meeting or a conversation.
 - **Stage 1:** A formal complaint, made in writing using the correct complaint form, can be raised if the concern was not resolved at Stage 0. This is usually managed at the school level.
 - **Stage 2:** An additional stage of investigation, undertaken by someone with no direct responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school (for example, a member of the central team or education director)
 - **Stage 3:** The final stage; a Panel Hearing, with a panel of three appropriate individuals

7. Time scales

- 7.1 Complainants should raise the complaint **within 10 School days** of the incident or issue taking place. Complaints must be raised **within three months**; where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents or issues. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame only if exceptional circumstances apply.

8. Complaints received outside of term time

8.1 We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first School day after the holiday period.

9. Scope of this Complaints Procedure

9.1 This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by our schools.

9.2 If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example: the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, 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.

9.3 If a complainant commences legal action against the School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the Complaints Procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded. The Complaints Procedure may also be suspended in the event of a school or the Trust commencing legal action against the complainant.

10. Out of Scope of this Complaints Procedure

10.1 Complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures are outside of the scope of this Complaints Procedure and are listed below:

Exceptions	Who to Contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Admissions to the School on Primary transfer or to Post 16 ▪ Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs ▪ School re-organisation proposals for consultation 	<p>Concerns about admissions to the School on Primary transfer, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs or School re-organisation proposals for consultation should be raised with the relevant local authority in which the School is situated.</p> <p>Note: Please contact the School Office for further details.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs 	<p>Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with the relevant local authority.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Matters likely to require a Child Protection investigation <p>If the matter relates to a serious safeguarding concern or an allegation of abuse, the Head of School/Headteacher must be informed directly as well as the CEO via rebecca.hickey@harrisfederation.org.uk.</p>	<p>Complaints about Child Protection matters are handled under the relevant School Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>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).</p>

Exceptions	Who to Contact
	<p>Note: Please contact the School Office for the contact details of the LADO and MASH.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Exclusion of children from the School* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusions can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*Complaints about the application of the Behaviour Policy can be made through the School's Complaints Procedure.</i></p> <p>Note: Further details can also be found in the School Behaviour Policy which is published on the School websites.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Whistleblowing (for other regulatory or financial malpractice) 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. If you have a concern about regulatory or financial malpractice please contact rebecca.hickey@harrisfederation.org.uk. Please mark as 'Private and Confidential'.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters directly with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about the School should complain through the School's Complaints Procedure.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the School's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the School's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Complaints about Compass Education Trust (non-School based) members of staff. 	<p>Please contact rebecca.hickey@harrisfederation.org.uk with details of your complaint which will be passed to the relevant line manager.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use School premises or facilities 	<p>Providers should have their own Complaints Procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.</p>

Exceptions	Who to Contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National Curriculum - content 	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus .

- 10.2 **Data Protection - Rights of Access.** Right of Access requests such as Subject Access Requests (SARs) are handled via a specific process and must be dealt with separately if included in a complaint.
- 10.3 Complainants should make any right of access request in line with the relevant legislation using the information available on the school's website. The timeframe for the completion of such requests is subject to Data Protection legislation and may vary to the timeline for more general school complaints.
- 10.4 **Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.** Requests which fall under the definition of a Freedom of Information Request are handled via a specific process and must be dealt with separately if included in a complaint.
- 10.5 Complainants should make any FOI requests in line with the relevant legislation using the information available on the school's website. The timeframe for the completion of such requests is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 may vary to the timeline for more general school complaints.
- 11. Withdrawal of a complaint**
- 11.1 If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.
- 12. Managing serial and persistent complaints**
- 12.1 Compass Education Trust uses the DfE guidance to inform its definition of vexatious, persistent, serial or unreasonable concerns/complaints.
- 12.2 Compass Education Trust is committed to dealing with all concerns and complaints fairly and impartially. In the case of vexatious, persistent, serial or unreasonable concerns/complaints, if the complainant remains unsatisfied after all the stages have been exhausted, the CEO will inform the complainant in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.
- 12.3 Should any individual's approach to their concern/complaint become disturbing, intimidating, or harassing, the school has the right to ban an individual from the premises, or restrict communications. Depending on the nature of the activity, the school reserves the right to refer individuals to the police.

- 12.4 We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with us. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive, or threatening.

13. Unreasonable Complaints

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

- fails to follow this procedure
- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to co-operate with the investigation process;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed;
- makes excessive demands on School time by frequent, lengthy, complicated, and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;
- publishes information in breach of paragraph 4.6 of this procedure.

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

- maliciously;
- aggressively;
- using threats, intimidation or violence;
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- knowing it to be false;
- using falsified information;

- 13.3 A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if it is manifestly unjustified, inappropriate, or an improper use of formal procedure. In assessing this, the School shall have regard to all the circumstances of the case and the nature of the complaint itself rather than making any judgement of the complainant. In assessing all the circumstances of the case the School / Trust will consider a range of factors including:

- whether a complaint has reasonable foundation;
- the history and context of the complaint (and any evidence where relevant);
- whether the time and cost of investigating the complaint is proportionate to the issue(s) complained of;
- whether an investigation of the complaint is likely to cause a disproportionate or unjustified level of disruption, irritation or distress;
- unexplained delay in raising a complaint or issue;
- if the purpose of the complaint is to obtain an outcome which is unavailable via the Complaints Procedure, such as a claim for compensation, damages or a refund of fees paid;
- any evidence of a complaint being brought for an improper purpose.

- 13.4 Whenever possible, the designated person responsible will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before a complaint is dismissed as unreasonable. A complaint can be dismissed as unreasonable at any stage of the Complaints Procedure.
- 13.5 Any decision to dismiss a complaint as unreasonable will be taken by a member of the central team, though communication of this decision may come from another member of staff.
- 13.6 If the behaviour continues, the School will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it.
- 13.7 For complainants who excessively contact the School causing a significant level of disruption, the School may specify methods of communication and limit number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.
- 13.8 In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence the School will immediately inform the police and communicate its actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the School in line with [DfE guidance on controlling access to school premises](#).

14. Vexatious Complaints

- 14.1 The Trust or any school will consider a complaint vexatious if:
- complaints are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitive;
 - the complainant insists on unrealistic outcomes, such as staff dismissal or financial compensation;
 - the complaint is designed to cause disruption or annoyance, for example by introducing trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raising large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insisting they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
 - makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced.

15. Stage 0: Concerns

- 15.1 A concern at Stage 0 should, where possible, be made in writing but can be made verbally, such as at a meeting. It may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.
- 15.2 Concerns should initially have been raised with an appropriate member of staff; this may be the Class Teacher, Pastoral Lead or Head of Faculty/Year. If raised directly with the Headteacher they may choose to delegate to another member of staff. If the issue remains unresolved, after having conducted meetings and/or phone calls to try to resolve the situation, the next step is to begin a formal process.
- 15.3 Complainants should not approach individual Governors or the Trust central team to raise concerns at Stage 0; they have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.
- 15.4 At Stage 0, there is no requirement to complete a form, but where possible the concerns should be set out in writing to the School's general enquiries email address.

16. Stage 1 Complaint – The School

- 16.1 Complaints must be made in the first instance to the School Office using the general enquiries email address. Contact details are published on School websites via the 'Contacts' page. The Stage 1 Complaint Form (Annex A) must be completed in order to raise a complaint. Please mark the complaint as 'Private and Confidential' in the email subject header.
- 16.2 The PA to the Headteacher will record the date the complaint was received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within two School days.
- 16.3 The Investigator will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Investigator can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.
- Note:** The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the School's Senior Leadership Team but not the decision to be taken.*
- 16.4 During the investigation, the investigator will:
- if necessary, interview those involved in making the complaint;
 - if necessary, interview those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
 - if necessary, interview any person who may have information useful to the investigation.
- 16.5 The Stage 1 process will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. **New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 0 of the procedure.**

- 16.6 At the conclusion of their investigation, the School will provide a formal written response within **twenty (20) School days** of the date of receipt of the complaint.
- 16.7 If the School is unable to meet this deadline, the complainant will be provided with an update and revised response date.
- 16.8 The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the School will take to resolve the complaint.
- 16.9 The School will advise the complainant, in writing, of how to escalate their complaint if it has not been resolved at Stage 1.
- 16.10 If the concerns raised are about the Headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body or the majority of the Governing Body, the Stage 1 Complaint must be made to the CEO's Office via email rebecca.hickey@harrisfederation.org.uk. Please mark as 'Private and Confidential' in the email subject header.
- 16.11 The CEO's Office will assess the complaint prior to referring to an appropriate individual for investigation. If it is deemed that the complaint is not about the Headteacher, then it will be passed back to the school to investigate. The CEO's decision on this cannot be challenged.
- 16.12 Stage 1 will then be considered by a member of the central team who has not been involved in the complaint before. At the conclusion of their investigation, the member of the central team will provide a formal written response.
- 16.13 If a concern or a complaint is made direct to the Compass Education Trust, the complainant will be asked to complete the **Stage 1 Complaint Form** (Annex A) for submission directly to the School. A matter will only become a formal complaint requiring Trust review after all attempts to resolve the matter through other stages have been exhausted.
- 17. Stage 2 Complaint – Education Director**
- 17.1 If the complaint has not been resolved at Stage 1, the complainant can escalate the complaint to Stage 2, where the Education Director will review the response to the complaint. The complainant must complete the **Stage 2 Complaint Form** (Annex B) to request the escalation. The Form must be submitted to the Head of Governance via email governor.services@harrisfederation.org.uk. This form can only be used when all Stage 0 and Stage 1 processes have been exhausted. Please mark as 'Private and Confidential'. The complaint should be escalated within 10 school days of the date of the Stage 1 response.
- 17.2 The complaint may be delegated to an appropriate individual for further investigation or dealt with directly by the Education Director for review and response. The response should be sent within twenty (20) School days.

17.3 The Stage 2 process will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. **New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 0 of the procedure.**

18. Mediation

18.1 In some cases, raising a complaint may not be the most appropriate approach to fully resolve the issues raised. While a formal response is provided following investigation, this can leave both parties without a clear or satisfactory resolution.

18.2 The Trust supports mediation as an approach to resolve concerns, reset relationships and enable complainants and academies to move forward in a positive and productive manner without the pressure of a process of conflict. Mediation is most suited to resolving concerns and complaints raised by parents.

18.3 After Stage 1 of the complaints process, mediation may be offered by the Trust or requested by the complainant as an additional step to support resolution.

18.4 The mediation process typically involves:

- Meeting with the complainant to listen carefully to the basis of the complaint.
- Explaining that the formal complaints process may not, in itself, resolve the issue, as the outcome will be a written response stating whether the complaint is upheld or not.
- Suggesting a mediation meeting involving the relevant school staff most closely connected to the issue (for example, the SENCo or Behaviour Lead), chaired by an external leader (e.g., the investigator at Stage 2)

18.5 If mediation is agreed, a meeting between relevant parties will be arranged to:

- explore possible solutions collaboratively
- agree practical next steps
- establish a plan for monitoring progress, usually reviewed every two weeks, until both parties are confident the matter is resolved.

18.6 This process relies on openness, honesty, and fairness from all involved, alongside a shared commitment to move forward constructively rather than focus on past events. These expectations will be clarified both in the initial meeting with the complainant and in a preparatory meeting with the staff involved.

18.7 If mediation is successful, the complaint will be considered as resolved and not be escalated to Stage 2.

18.8 Mediation is not offered in every case. There are occasions where, following discussion with the complainant, it is clear that mediation will not be productive and a full Stage 2 investigation is more appropriate.

19. Stage 3 Complaint - The Final Panel

- 19.1 This is the last stage of the complaints process. If the complaint has not been resolved at Stage 2, the complainant can escalate the complaint to Stage 3. The complainant must complete the **Stage 3 Complaint Form** (Annex C). The Form must be submitted to the Head of Governance via email governor.services@harrisfederation.org.uk. This form can only be used when all informal, Stage 1 and Stage 2 processes have been exhausted. Please mark as 'Private and Confidential'. The complaint should be escalated within 10 school days of the date of the Stage 2 response.
- 19.2 Governor Services will record the date the Stage 3 complaint form was received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within two School days.
- 19.3 Requests received outside of the 10 school days will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.
- 19.4 **Convening and constitution of the Panel:** Governor Services will convene a Complaints Panel which will take place within 25 academy days of the date of the request and will comprise the following:
- At least three individuals with no prior direct involvement of the complaint. Elected Staff Governors may not be included in the Panel.
 - One member of the panel must be independent of the School, but can be from another Trust School Governing Body or an appropriate external individual
- 19.5 The complainant is expected to attend the Stage 3 meeting. They may bring someone along to provide support; this can be a relative or friend. A representative of the school is also expected to attend. In most cases this will be the investigator at Stage 2. In line with the DfE guidance, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the Panel meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a School employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation. This decision will be at the discretion of the Panel Chair.
- 19.6 The complainant will be entitled to submit written information to the Panel ahead of the meeting. This will be organised by the Clerk to the Complaints Panel.
- 19.7 Where the complainant chooses not to attend the Stage 3 panel meeting, the panel will review the information from the previous stages in order to make a decision.

Note: *Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this Complaints Procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.*

- 19.8 Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

- 19.9 At least 5 School days before the meeting, the Clerk will confirm the details to all parties and share relevant information (usually the correspondence from each stage of the complaint, including complaint forms and school responses).
- 19.10 The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or additional needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.
- 19.11 The Panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The Panel will review if the complaint was investigated properly at previous stages, in accordance with this Procedure. The Panel can:
- uphold the complaint, in whole or in part;
 - dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part.
- 19.12 If the complaint is upheld, in whole or in part, the Panel will:
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
 - where appropriate, recommend changes to the School's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.
- 19.13 The Panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.
- 19.14 The Panel will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. **New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 0 of the procedure.**
- 19.15 The Clerk to the Panel will provide the complainant and the School (and person complained about if relevant) with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within five School days.
- 19.16 The findings and recommendations of the Panel will be available for inspection on the School premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher.
- 19.17 The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled.

20. Other complaints

- 20.1 If the complaint is about the CEO:

The complainant must complete the **Stage 1 Complaint Form** (Annex A). The form must be submitted to the Chair of CET Karen.lay@compasstrust.org. Please mark as 'Private and Confidential'.

Stage 1 will be completed by a member of the Trust Board.

If the complaint has not been resolved, then the **Stage 2 Complaint Form** (Annex B), must be completed within 10 School days and sent to Governor Services as above.

Stage 2 will be heard by a panel of Trustees from the Trust's main Board, who have not been involved in the complaint.

- 20.2 If the complaint is about:
- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair;
 - the entire Governing Body;
 - the majority of the Governing Body.

The complainant must complete the **Stage 1 Complaint Form** (Annex A). The form must be submitted to the Head of Governance via email governor.services@harrisfederation.org.uk. Please mark as 'Private and Confidential'.

Stage 1 will be completed by the CEO.

If the complaint has not been resolved, the complainant can escalate to Stage 2. The complainant must complete the **Stage 2 Complaint Form** (Annex B). This form should be completed within 10 School days and sent to Governor Services as above.

Stage 2 will be heard by a panel of Trustees from the Trust's main Board, who have not been involved in the complaint.

- 20.3 The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

21. Next steps

- 21.1 If the complainant believes the School 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 Department for Education after all stages have been completed.
- 21.2 The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the School; they will consider whether the School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.
- 21.3 The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus



22. Reporting and recording complaints

- 22.1 All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except in limited circumstances to comply with specific acts or statutory law. This includes Data Protection and Freedom of Information, or where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.
- 22.2 Compass Education Trust will monitor the level of concerns and complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis. Where possible, the complainant will not be identified.



Annex A: Stage 1 Complaints

- A.1 Please complete and return to the School Office, who will acknowledge receipt. Contact details are published to our School websites via the 'Contacts' page. You should receive an acknowledgement from the School within two School days and a response within twenty (20) school days.

STAGE 1 COMPLAINT FORM	
Your name:	
Address:	
Contact numbers, please state preferred contact time:	
Email address:	
School:	
Student name (if relevant):	
Student Year Group (if relevant):	
Your relationship to the student (if relevant):	
What is the nature of your complaint?	
Which members of staff have you discussed this with at Stage 0	
What was the resolution at Stage 0?	
Why was the resolution at Stage 0 not satisfactory?	



STAGE 1 COMPLAINT FORM	
What additional actions do you feel might resolve the complaint at this stage?	
Signature:	Date:
Official use	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By who:	
Complaint referred to:	
Date:	

CONFIDENTIAL (when complete)



Annex B: Stage 2 Complaints

- B.1 Please complete and return to the Head of Governance via email governor.services@harrisfederation.org.uk. This form can only be used when all Stage 0 and Stage 1 processes have been completed. You should receive an acknowledgement within 2 school days and a response within twenty (20) school days.

STAGE 2 COMPLAINT FORM	
Your name:	
Address:	
Contact numbers, please state preferred contact time:	
Email address:	
School:	
Student name (if relevant):	
Student Year Group (if relevant):	
Your relationship to the student (if relevant):	
What is the nature of your complaint?	
What was the resolution at Stage 1?	
Why was the resolution at Stage 1 not satisfactory?	



STAGE 2 COMPLAINT FORM	
What additional actions would need to be agreed in order to resolve this complaint?	
Signature:	
Date:	
Official use	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By who:	
Complaint referred to:	
Date:	

CONFIDENTIAL (when complete)



Annex C: Stage 3 Complaints

- C.1 Please complete and return to the Head of Governance via email governor.services@harrisfederation.org.uk . This form can only be used when all previous stages have been completed.

STAGE 3 COMPLAINT FORM	
Your name:	
School:	
Address:	
Contact numbers, please state preferred contact time:	
Email address:	
Student name (if relevant):	
Student Year Group (if relevant):	
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):	
What is the nature of your complaint?	
What was the resolution at Stage 2?	
Why was the resolution at Stage 2 not satisfactory?	



STAGE 3 COMPLAINT FORM
What additional actions would the Panel need to agree in order to resolve this complaint?
Signature:
Date:
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Date:

CONFIDENTIAL (when complete)

Annex D: Indicative Timelines

D.1 School staff will try to resolve all concerns as soon as possible, but it must be recognised that teachers and support staff have other important demands on their time. In some complex cases, it may take longer than indicated below however, it must also be recognised that making a complaint can cause anxiety and so the investigator must keep complainants informed on any time delays. A complaint will not be upheld solely because a deadline is missed.

Complaints NOT about the Headteacher, or Education Director

Stage 0	Responsible Party	Deadline for action
Complainant raises concern informally (either in writing or verbally, such as at a meeting)	Complainant	Within 3 months of the incident that caused concern
Concern acknowledged	School	2 School days from the date concern raised
Investigation and response	Relevant member of staff	20 School days from the date concern raised
Stage 1	Responsible Party	Deadline for action
Complainant raises complaint using form at Annex A	Complainant	Within 10 school days of the date of the Stage 0 response from School
Complaint acknowledged	School	2 School days from receipt of the Stage 1 complaint form
Investigation and response	School/Headteacher	20 School days from receipt of the Stage 1 complaint form
Stage 2		
Complaint requests escalation to Stage 2 made using the form at Annex B	Complainant	Within 10 School days of the date of the Stage 1 response
Complaint acknowledged	Head of Governance / Education Director	2 School days from receiving the Stage 2 complaint form
Review of investigation and response	Education Director	2 School days from receipt of the Stage 2 complaint form
Stage 3		
Complainant requests escalation to Stage 3 (Panel) using the form at Annex C	Complainant	Within 10 School days of the date of the Stage 2 response
Complaints Panel convened	Clerk to the Panel	25 School days from receipt of the Stage 3 complaint form



Outcome of Panel communicated to complainant	Clerk to the Panel	5 School days from Panel meeting
----------------------------------------------	--------------------	----------------------------------

Complaints about the Headteacher, or Education Director:

Stage 0	Responsible Party	Deadline for action
Parent/carer raises concern informally (either in writing or verbally, such as at a meeting)	Complainant	Within 3 months of the incident that caused concern
Concern acknowledged	CEO	2 School days from the date the concern was raised
Investigation and response	Member of the central team	20 School days from the date the concern was raised
Stage 1	Responsible Party	Deadline for action
Complainant raises Stage 1 complaint using form at Annex A	Complainant	10 School days from incident
Complaint acknowledged	CEO	2 School days from receipt of the Stage 2 complaint form
Investigation and response	Member of the central team	20 School days from receipt of the Stage 2 complaint form
Stage 2		
Complainant requests escalation to Stage 2 made using the form at Annex B	Education Director	Within 10 School days of the date of the Stage 1 response
Complaint acknowledged	Education Director	2 School days from receipt of the Stage 2 complaint form
Review and response	Education Director	20 School days from receipt of the Stage 2 complaint form
Stage 3		
Complainant requests escalation to Stage 3 (Panel) using Annex C	Complainant	Within 10 School days of the date of the Stage 2 response
Complaints Panel convened	Head of Governance / Governor Services	25 School days from receipt of the Stage 3 complaint form
Outcome of Panel communicated to complainant	Head of Governance / Governor Services	5 School days from Panel meeting

Annex E: Roles and Responsibilities

E.2 Both the School and Trust recognise that it is important that all staff, Governors and Trustees are appropriately trained to enable them to carry out their roles and responsibilities appropriately when dealing with any part of the Complaints Procedure. Headteachers will ensure staff are familiar with the Complaints Procedure and their role in helping to deal with any concerns at an early stage successfully. Governor Services will ensure anyone delegated to deal with complaints or be part of a Panel will have appropriate training.

E.2.1 Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible;
- co-operate with the School in seeking a solution to the complaint;
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint;
- ask for assistance as needed;
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect;
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

E.2.2 Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- 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;
 - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint;
 - consideration of records and other relevant information;
 - analysing information.
- liaising with the complainant as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep brief notes of interviews or where appropriate arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting;
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal;
- be mindful of the timescales to respond;
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Head of School/Headteacher/Executive Headteacher/Director or Complaints Panel that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and



recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

Head of School/Headteacher/Executive Headteacher/Assistant Director/Primary/Secondary Director or Complaints Panel will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

E.2.3 **Governor Services**

Governor Services is the contact point for the complainant at Stages 2 and 3. For the Stage 3 Panel, Governor Services will:

- 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);
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) 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;
- record the proceedings;
- notify all parties of the Panel's decision.

E.2.4 **Panel Chair**

The Panel's Chair should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting;
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy;
- 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/young person;
- the remit of the Panel is explained to the complainant;
- 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.
- 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 issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- 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;
- the meeting is minuted;



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 meeting.

E.2.5 Panel Members

Panel members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent, impartial, and should be 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 meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the School and the complainant. We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations;
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting;
- parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child;
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting:
 - Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should 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 at the centre of the complaint, 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 meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.
 - However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the Panel considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

Annex F: Flow Chart Summary of Complaints Process

