



Diocese of Salisbury
Academy Trust
'Beyond expectations for all of God's children'

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Policy Date: July 2022

Review Date: July 2026

This policy applies to all DSAT schools

General Principles

This procedure is intended to allow you to raise a concern or complaint relating to the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust (DSAT), any of its schools or the services that they provide.

The Trust has adopted this procedure for complaints from people who are parents / carers of pupils attending any of the schools at the time the complaint is made, or from people who are accessing the services of the Trust at the time the complaint is made.

The Trust will usually also follow this procedure when dealing with complaints from others but reserves the right to substitute this procedure for an alternative process where it is appropriate to do so. Complainants will be informed about the procedure that will be used to consider their complaint as soon as possible after their complaint is received.

This procedure does not apply to concerns and complaints relating to the following, which are dealt with under separate policies:

- Employment matters
- Admissions
- Exclusions
- Issues related to Child Protection
- Statements of SEND/EHC Plans

The aims of the procedure are:

- To deal with any complaint against the Trust or a school or any individual connected with it by following the correct procedure;
- To deal with all complaints thoroughly and in a timely manner, and by being open, honest and fair when dealing with the complainant.

All staff will be made aware of this complaints procedure and are expected to review this policy regularly to ensure that they are familiar with the process of dealing with complaints and can be of assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

Understanding this procedure

In order to investigate your complaint as fully as possible, we have implemented a staged approach. We anticipate that almost all complaints that arise will be resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2 below.

We expect our members of staff to be addressed in a respectful manner and for communication to remain appropriate at all times. The procedure under Part B of this policy will only be used on very rare occasions to deal with unreasonably persistent complainants or unreasonable behaviour on the part of the complainant. Part C of the policy applies to complaint campaigns.

To enable a proper investigation, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the individual school, or of the main DSAT office where it relates to a Trust issue, as soon as possible. In general, any matter raised more than 3 months after the event being complained of will not be considered. However, the Trust may make exceptions to this.

If, at any stage, the Trust or the school believes that the concern or complaint is vexatious, has insufficient grounds, has already been considered in full or has been closed, the Chief Executive,

Headteacher or Chair of Governors / Trustees (as appropriate) may write to you to refuse to consider the concern or complaint under this procedure. They will state the reasons why they are refusing to do so. In this eventuality, the individual with the concern or complaint may proceed directly to Stage 4 of this procedure.

An anonymous concern or complaint will not be investigated under this procedure unless there are exceptional circumstances.

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.

In this procedure:

- 'school days' excludes weekends, bank holidays and **school** holidays;
- 'parent' means a parent, carer or anyone with legal responsibility for a child.

PART A - RAISING A CONCERN OR COMPLAINT

STAGE ONE: Informal Stage

Most concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information by a school. Where a complaint is about the Trust more generally, it is normally appropriate to communicate directly via the Business Support Administrator. This may be by email, letter, by telephone or in person by appointment, requested via the Trust office. Where the complaint is about a member of staff, it is normally appropriate to communicate directly with them in the first instance. This may be by email, letter, by telephone or in person by appointment, requested via the school office, or through the Trust office where it is a member of the DSAT Services team.

Where a complaint concerns your child or a child attending a school, it is normally appropriate to communicate directly with the child's class teacher, or the school's Headteacher.

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. If you wish to hold a meeting to discuss your concern or complaint, please explain the nature of your concern or the complaint in advance. If it is helpful, you can use the Meeting Request Form provided where that is appropriate.

In the case of serious concerns, it may be appropriate to address them directly to the Headteacher or Chair of Governors (or to the Chief Executive, via the Business Support Administrator, if the complaint is about a Headteacher or Chair of Governors). If you are uncertain about who to contact, please seek advice from the Trust office or the Clerk to Governors of the appropriate school.

It is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved by this informal stage within 15 school days of the complaint being received.

STAGE TWO: Formal Stage

If your concern or complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction at Stage One (the informal stage), or you wish the complaint to be dealt with immediately as a formal complaint, you should put your complaint in writing. If you need help to put your complaint in writing, please contact the school office, or the Trust office if appropriate, for assistance. Alternatively, you could ask an organisation such as Citizens Advice to help you.

If your complaint is about a Headteacher, your complaint should be sent to the Chair of the Academy Standards and Ethos Committee (Chair of Governors) through the school office, who will liaise with the Chief Executive where appropriate.

Your written complaint should include details which might assist any investigation, such as 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. 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. You may wish to use the Complaint Form provided.

Your written complaint will be acknowledged within 5 school days of receipt. You may be invited to have a conversation or 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 one other person such as a relative or friend (but not someone acting as a legal representative) or an interpreter, to assist you in explaining the nature of your concerns. Where possible, this meeting will take place within 10 school days of receipt of the written complaint.

Where you decline this invitation, or the complaint cannot be resolved through a meeting, arrangements will be made for the matter to be formally investigated by an appropriate investigating officer.

If necessary, witnesses will be interviewed, and statements taken from those involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, the pupil may also be interviewed. Pupils should 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 s/he would prefer that their parents were not involved, or if the parent chooses not to be involved, another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable should be present. If a member of staff is complained against, they must have the opportunity to present their case.

Once all the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, and following investigation, the Executive Headteacher, Headteacher or Chair of Governors, Chief Executive or Trustees (as appropriate), will notify you with a written response to the complaint, including a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. Where possible, this will be within 15 school days of receipt of the complaint. This will include what action the school or Trust will take to resolve the complaint (if any, and if appropriate). You will be advised that if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, you may request that your complaint be heard by a Review Panel (Stage Three, below).

If in the early stages of the investigation, the Headteacher / Chief Executive considers that the complaint is best dealt with immediately at Stage Three, it will be passed to the Chair of the Governors / Trustees and you will be informed of this action without delay.

What if the complaint is about the Chief Executive or a Trustee?

In the case of complaints regarding DSAT, the Chief Executive, or a Trustee please forward documentation, marked 'confidential' and for the attention of the Chair of Trustees, to:

Business Support Administrator
Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust
The Avenue
Wilton SP2 0FG or office@dsat.org.uk

What if the complaint is about a Governor or Trustees?

You should contact the Chair of Governors or Chair of Trustees, who will investigate the concerns in accordance with Stage 2.

If the complaint is about the Chair of Governors, you should contact the Chief Executive who will direct your complaint accordingly.

If the complaint is about the Academy Standards and Ethos Committee (ASEC – the local governors) as a whole, you should send your complaint to the Chair of the Trustees, via:

Business Support Administrator

Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust

The Avenue

Wilton SP2 0FG or office@dsat.org.uk

STAGE THREE: Review Panel Hearing Stage

If you are dissatisfied with the decision under Stage Two (the Formal Stage), you may request that a Review Panel is convened to reconsider your complaint. Your request will only be considered if you have completed the relevant procedures at Stages 1 and 2, other than in exceptional circumstances. To request a hearing by a Review Panel, you should write to the Clerk to Governors (individual school complaints), or Business Support Administrator (where the complaint involves the Headteacher, Chair of Governors or another Trust officer) within 10 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of the Formal Stage.

You should ensure that you provide copies of all relevant documents and state all the grounds for your complaint and the outcome that you desire. You may wish to use the Complaint Review Request Form provided. The Clerk to Governors / Business Support Administrator will acknowledge your request in writing within 5 school days of receipt.

The review will be conducted by a panel of at least 3 members, consisting of two Trustees (in the case of DSAT complaints) or two governors of the school (in the case of complaints to a school) and one other person who is independent of the management and running of the Trust / school.

Every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within 20 school days of the receipt of your request. As soon as is reasonably practical, and in any event at least 5 working 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 Panel members who will be present. Fair consideration will be given to any genuine objection to a particular member of the Panel. Copies of any additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk to Governors / Business Support Administrator at least 3 days prior to the hearing. The Review Panel will not normally accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

A copy of the complaint and any other documents provided by you in support of your complaint, or by the Trust / school explaining the response to the complaint, will be provided to the Review Panel as soon as practicable upon receipt. Copies of these documents shall also be provided to you or the Headteacher / Chief Executive (as applicable) at least 3 school days before the hearing. The Review Panel reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented by either you or the Trust / school less than 3 school days prior to the hearing.

You will be asked to attend the hearing and you may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative or friend (but not someone acting as a legal representative, unless agreed in advance by the Review Panel Chair), or an interpreter. The Clerk to Governors / Business Support Administrator or another nominated person, will also attend the hearing in order to keep a written record of the proceedings. Electronic recordings of the hearing will not normally be permitted and, in any event, would require the consent of all those present.

The Review Panel will be conducted in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The Panel is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and / or may take written statements into account.

Unless otherwise stated by the Clerk or Review Panel Chair, the procedure for Review Panel hearing is as follows:

- The complainant and Investigating Officer (who may be the Headteacher or Chief Executive, or

another appropriate person) will enter the hearing together;

- The Chair of the Review Panel will introduce the panel members and outline the process;
- The complainant will explain the complaint;
- The Investigating Officer and panel members will question the complainant;
- The Investigating Officer will explain the investigation as required, and the Trust's / school's actions that may have followed;
- The complainant and the panel members will question the Investigating Officer;
- The complainant will sum up their complaint;
- The Investigating Officer will sum up the Trust / school's actions;
- The Chair of the Panel will explain that both parties will hear from the committee within 5 school days;
- Both parties will leave together while the panel deliberates;
- The Clerk will stay to assist the panel with its decision making.

After the hearing, the panel will consider their decision and inform you and the Chief Executive / Headteacher / Investigating Officer of their decision in writing within 5 school days. The letter will set out the decision of the panel together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The panel can:

- Request further information from you and / or the school to assist them in making their decision;
- 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's or Trust's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not reoccur.

The panel will make findings and recommendations and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be:

- provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and
- available for inspection on the school premises or through electronic means by the Trust and the Headteacher as appropriate.

STAGE FOUR: Referral to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)

If the complainant believes the school / Trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the ESFA after they have completed Stage 3.

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

The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road

Coventry CV1 2WT

Records of Complaints

A written record will be kept of all complaints, including at what stage they were resolved and action taken by the Trust / schools 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 or where disclosure is required in the course of a school inspection or under other legal authority such as a subject access request under data protection laws.

PART B - UNREASONABLY PERSISTENT COMPLAINANTS AND UNREASONABLE COMPLAINANT BEHAVIOUR

There are rare circumstances where we will deviate from the Complaints Procedure set out in Part A.

These include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Where the complainant's behaviour towards staff, members of the Governors or Trustees is unacceptable, for example, is abusive, offensive or threatening;
- Where, because of the frequency of their contact with the Trust / school, the complainant is hindering the consideration of their or other people's complaints and / or the proper running of the Trust / school;
- Where the complaint is vexatious and / or has patently insufficient grounds;
- Where the complaint is the same, similar to or based on the same facts of a complaint which has already been considered in full by the Trust / school.

In these circumstances, we may:

- Inform the complainant that their behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent and ask them to change it;
- Restrict the complainant's access to the Trust / 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 banning the complainant from the school's premises;
- Conduct the Review Panel on the papers only i.e. not hold a hearing;
- Refuse to consider the complaint and refer the complainant directly to Stage 4.

In all cases we will write to tell the complainant why we believe his or her behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, what action we are taking and the duration of that action.

Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, members of the Governors 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 C – COMPLAINTS CAMPAIGNS

We define a complaint campaign as a complaint from three or more separate individuals (whether or not connected with a school or the Trust) 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 academy/trust's website (as applicable).

Complainants are still able to refer their complaints to the ESFA if they are dissatisfied with the response provided by the school / Trust.

SUMMARY OF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

STAGE ONE: Informal concerns	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complainant brings complaint to attention of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School complaints – member of staff • Trust complaints – DSAT Business Support Administrator 2. Issue to be resolved within 15 school days 3. Where no satisfactory solution has been found, parent to be advised that they may proceed to Stage Two
STAGE TWO: Formal Written Complaint	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complainant to put complaint in writing using Complaint Form to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School complaints – Clerk to Governors • Trust complaints – DSAT Business Support Administrator 2. Complaint to be acknowledged within 5 school days 3. (Optional) Meeting with parents within 10 school days 4. Response to the complaint sent within 15 school days
STAGE THREE: Referral to Review Panel	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complainant to request hearing within 10 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 2 2. Request to be acknowledged within 5 school days 3. Hearing to take place within 20 school days of receipt of request 4. Notification of date, time and place of the hearing and details of the Review Panel sent at least 5 school days before the hearing 5. School / Trust and complainant to submit evidence in support of their case to Clerk / Business Support Administrator at least 3 school days before the hearing 6. Review Panel decision sent not more than 5 school days after the hearing

CONTACT DETAILS

School informal complaints:

Headteacher at the appropriate school address (contact details on website)

School formal complaints:

Clerk to Governors at the appropriate school address (contact details on website)

DSAT informal and formal complaints:

Business Support Administrator
Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust
The Avenue
Wilton SP2 0FG
office@dsat.org.uk
01722 548519

DSAT: MEETING REQUEST FORM

Name of School	
I wish to meet	
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 the Trust/school (eg parent/carer 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 DSAT registered office or to the school office, as appropriate]	
Admin use	
Date Form received	Date response sent
Received by	Response sent by

DSAT: FORMAL COMPLAINT FORM

Please complete this form and return it, to DSAT registered office or to the school office (as appropriate) who will acknowledge its receipt and inform you of the next stage in the procedure.	
Your name:	
Relationship with the Trust / School (eg parent/carer 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	
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?	
Signed	Date
Admin use	
Date Form received	Date acknowledgement sent
Received by	Acknowledgement sent by
Complaint referred to:	Date:

DSAT: COMPLAINT REVIEW REQUEST FORM

Please complete this form and return it, to the school office or to DSAT's registered office (as appropriate) who will acknowledge its receipt and inform you of the next stage in the procedure. Your name:	
Relationship with the Trust / school (e.g. parent/carer 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
<p>Dear Sir/Madam</p> <p>I submitted a formal complaint to the Trust / school on and I am dissatisfied by the procedure that has been followed.</p> <p>My complaint was submitted to and I received a response from on</p> <p>I have attached copies of my formal complaint and of the response(s) from the Trust / school.</p> <p>I am dissatisfied with the way in which the procedure was carried out, because:</p>	
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?	
Signed	Date
Admin use	
Date Form received	Date acknowledgement sent
Received by	Acknowledgement sent by
Complaint referred to	Date
Request referred to	Date