



BERLESDUNA
ACADEMY TRUST

Complaints Policy

(Parents and Public)

This policy was reviewed by Trustees:	February 2026
This policy will be reviewed:	2 years
This policy is due for renewal:	February 2028 (or sooner if statutory changes made)

Quick guide for parents and the public

We want concerns to be resolved quickly, fairly and in partnership. Most issues can be settled informally with a prompt conversation. If you are unsure where to start, contact the school office who will connect you with the right person.

- Prefer live conversations: where possible we will offer a call or meeting first, as tone and empathy carry best in person.
- Service standards (school days): acknowledge within 3 days; update or outcome within 15 days (or we will agree an adjusted timeline for complex matters).
- Who to contact: concerns normally go first to the class teacher/phase lead, then to a senior leader, then the Headteacher (see Stages below).
- If your concern is about the Headteacher, write to the **Chair of Governors** via the Clerk (marked *Private & Confidential*). *The Chair of Governors conducts Stage 2 for complaints about the Headteacher.*
- If about the Chair/whole Local Governing Body, write to the Clerk to Trustees.
- Accessibility: we will make reasonable adjustments (alternative formats, support to complete forms, accessible venues).
- What not to do: please do not contact individual governors directly about a complaint; this may prevent them from sitting on a review panel later.

1. Purpose, scope and principles

1.1 This policy sets out how our school and Trust handle concerns and complaints from parents, carers, pupils, and members of the public about any provision of facilities or services we provide. It complements (and does not replace) statutory procedures for specific issues.

1.2 Principles

- Resolution at the earliest suitable point, with a focus on partnership and learning.
- Fair, transparent, and timely process with clear roles and responsibilities.
- Accessibility and reasonable adjustments under equality legislation.
- Respectful, safe conduct by all parties, including protection of staff from abuse.
- Data protection and confidentiality applied appropriately (see section 2).

1.3 Definitions

- **Feedback:** an opinion or suggestion shared for consideration. Our role is to listen and consider a proportionate response and, where possible, close the feedback loop.
- **Concern:** an expression of worry or doubt for which reassurance or information is sought. Most concerns are best resolved quickly and informally.

- **Complaint:** an expression of dissatisfaction about an action taken or not taken. A complaint may move through the formal stages below if it cannot be resolved informally.

1.4 Our approach when handling concerns (CLEAR)

- **Categorise:** clarify whether the issue is feedback, a concern, or a complaint so we can respond appropriately.
- **Listen:** hear the full story without judgement; where possible we offer a phone call or meeting to understand the issue.
- **Empathise:** acknowledge feelings and intentions; we can validate emotions without necessarily agreeing with every point.
- **Ask:** agree the next steps together, checking that proposed actions align with what the complainant needs.
- **Respond:** document what was agreed, set timescales, follow through, and close the loop.

2. Accessibility, adjustments and confidentiality

2.1 We will make reasonable adjustments to enable access to this procedure (e.g., alternative formats, help to draft a complaint, interpreters, or accessible meeting spaces). Please inform the school office of any adjustments needed.

- Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated; the Headteacher or Chair will decide if the matter warrants action.
- Complaints received in school holidays are treated as received on the first school day after the break.
- Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the event (or the last in a series). We may consider older matters in exceptional circumstances.

2.2 Confidentiality and data protection:

Information will be shared only with those who need to know to consider the complaint, or where required by law. Parties agree not to publish confidential information about the complaint on social media or elsewhere. Records are kept securely and retained in line with our data retention schedule.

3. What this procedure covers (and what it does not)

This policy covers complaints about the school’s provision of education, facilities and services. Some matters follow separate statutory processes:

Exception	Who to contact / process
Admissions, statutory assessments of SEND, school organisation proposals	Refer to the Local Authority (Essex County Council) processes.

Child protection / safeguarding	Handled under Safeguarding and Child Protection policy and statutory guidance; contact the LADO / MASH as appropriate.
Exclusions of pupils	Follow exclusions statutory guidance. (Complaints about application of the behaviour policy may use this procedure.)
Whistleblowing (staff)	Use internal whistleblowing procedure or contact DfE as prescribed person if needed.
Staff grievances/disciplinary, services by third parties, National Curriculum content	Handled under employment or provider procedures; or contact DfE as applicable.

4. Service standards (timescales)

We aim to be responsive and proportionate. Unless otherwise stated below, timeframes refer to school days.

Stage	Target timescale
Acknowledgement of a concern/complaint	Within 3 school days
Stage 1 – Informal resolution	Update/outcome within 15 school days
Stage 2 – Formal written response	Within 15 school days
Stage 3 – Panel Hearing	Outcome within 10 school days of meeting

5. How to raise a concern or make a complaint

- You can raise an issue in person, by phone, or in writing (including email). A third party may act on your behalf with your consent.
- Please raise classroom matters with the class teacher/phase lead first; then a senior leader or Deputy; then the Headteacher. The Headteacher may delegate investigation but not the decision.
- Complaints about the Headteacher: address to the Chair of Governors via the Clerk (marked Private and Confidential).
- Complaints about the Chair, an individual governor, or the whole Local Governing Body: address to the Clerk to the Governing Body (Private and Confidential).
- Complaints involving the CEO or Trust matters: address to the Chair of Trustees via the Trust Head Office (Private and Confidential).

Important: Please do not approach individual governors directly to raise a complaint. This protects impartiality should a panel be required later.

Complex or Legally Referenced Complaints (including the use of AI)

The school recognises that some complaints may include detailed references to legislation, policy, or guidance, including content generated using artificial intelligence (AI) tools. All complaints will be considered in accordance with this policy (or other school policies, such as

staff disciplinary procedures); however, the school is not required to provide a legal interpretation or detailed response to every statutory reference included in a submission. Responses will focus on the substantive matters raised and their relevance to the school, its pupils, and staff. Where appropriate, the school may seek legal or professional advice, but reserves the right to limit its response to matters within its remit and operational responsibility, and with reference to the substance of the complaint.

The school acknowledges the statutory right of individuals to make a Subject Access Request (SAR) under data protection legislation. Where a SAR is submitted in relation to a complaint, the school will process the request in accordance with legal requirements and within the appropriate statutory timescales, following the school's Data Protection Policies. Depending on the nature of the Subject Access request, the scope of the search will usually be limited to information relevant to the subject matter of the complaint. If you wish the SAR to be processed prior to the hearing of your complaint, this may cause delays and extend the timeframe of the complaints process as the school may need to complete the data disclosure before progressing or finalising aspects of the investigation.

6. The procedure

Stage 1 — Informal resolution

Most concerns can be resolved quickly by the relevant member of staff. Staff will apply the CLEAR approach and will usually offer a call or meeting. A brief written record of the issue and outcome will be kept. If not resolved within 15 school days, you may proceed to Stage 2.

Stage 2 — Formal complaint (Headteacher or Chair for HT complaints)

Submit the complaint in writing.

If the complaint is about a member of staff:

The **Headteacher** acknowledges, investigates and provides the written decision.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher:

The **Chair of Governors** conducts Stage 2.

The Headteacher will **not** be involved in the investigation or decision.

Process

- Acknowledge within 3 school days
- Clarify the points and desired outcomes if needed
- Investigation may include meeting parties, reviewing records
- A written response is issued within 15 school days
- The letter explains how to escalate to Stage 3 if dissatisfied

Stage 3 — Panel Hearing

If dissatisfied with the Stage 2 outcome, you may request a Panel Hearing within **10 school days** of the decision.

Composition

- At least **three panel members**
- No prior involvement
- At least **one independent** of school management
- Clerk coordinates arrangements

Process

- Acknowledge request within 5 school days
- Panel considers whether the earlier process was fair and reasonable
- You may attend and be accompanied
- The panel may uphold, partially uphold, or dismiss the complaint
- Recommendations may be issued even if no fault is found
- Written outcome provided within **10 school days** of the meeting

If the complaint is about the Chair, Vice-Chair, or entire LGB

A panel of **independent governors/trustees** will hear the complaint.

This is the final stage of the Trust's complaints procedure.

(You may contact the DfE if you believe the process was not followed properly.)

After the local procedure — referring to DfE

If you believe the school/Trust has not complied with statutory requirements for complaints or has not followed its published procedure, you may refer the matter to the Department for Education (DfE) after the local procedure is complete. The DfE cannot overturn a decision but will consider whether the process was followed properly. See the DfE guidance and online form.

7. Expectations of behaviour; managing serial or unreasonable complaints

We aim to treat everyone with dignity and respect, and we expect the same in return. We may restrict contact where behaviour is abusive, persistent, or disproportionate, and we may put in place a communications plan. Serious aggression or threats will be reported to the police and may result in site access being withdrawn. For more detail see the Trust's Persistent Complaints, Harassment and Unreasonable Behaviour Policy.

8. Record keeping, monitoring and transparency

- We keep a central record of concerns and complaints, stages reached, timescales, and outcomes. Records include notes of meetings and telephone calls and copies of correspondence.
- An anonymised termly report on complaints (number, themes, timeliness) is provided to senior leaders and governors/trustees to support learning and improvement.
- We may publish an annual, anonymised summary of themes and improvements made as a result of complaints, to support transparency and trust with our community.

Appendix A — Complaint Form

Please complete this form and return it to the school office for the attention of the Headteacher, Chair of Governors or Clerk, as appropriate. If you need help, contact the school office and we will provide support or reasonable adjustments as required.

Your name:

Relationship with school (e.g. parent/carer/member of public):

Pupil's name (if relevant):

Preferred contact (phone/email):

Address:

Summary of your concern/complaint (include dates, people involved, and what happened):

What outcome are you seeking?

What action, if any, have you already taken (who was contacted and when)?

Do you require any reasonable adjustments to engage with this process?

Signature:

Date:

Appendix B — Stage 3 Review Request (to the Clerk)

Submit within 10 school days of the Stage 2 outcome letter. If received after this time, exceptional circumstances must be evidenced.

Your name:

Relationship with school:

Pupil's name (if relevant):

Contact details:

Date of formal complaint and to whom it was submitted:

Date of Stage 2 decision letter:

Grounds for review (e.g., procedure not followed; decision unreasonable based on evidence; new relevant information—explain why not previously available):

Outcome you are seeking:

Appendix D — Useful information

[Complain about a school: Types of complaints - GOV.UK](#)

[Local Authority Designated Officer \(LADO\) | Essex County Council](#)

<https://www.essex.gov.uk/children-young-people-and-families/find-support-services-children-and-their-families/local>

[Parent guide to school complaints | Parentkind](#)