The GALLERY TRUST

A community of special schools

Complaints Policy

Policy Owner	Chief Financial Operating Officer
Approved by	Trust Board
Date approved	September 2026
Date of next review	September 2028
Signed:	Chief Executive Officer:  Chair of Trustees: 

Who can raise concerns

This policy only applies to parents of children at the schools in our Trust. If you are not a parent at one of the trust's schools, you can still get in touch, but we will consider your concerns outside of this policy.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.*

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.*

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. We take concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In some cases, the Head Teacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Head Teacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.
We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, we will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing/email or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complaints against school staff (except the Head Teacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Head Teacher via the school office.

Complaints that involve or are about the Head Teacher should be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer via the Trust Office or email: office@thegallerytrust.co.uk

Complaints about the Chair of the Local Academy Board (LAB),any individual member of the LAB or the whole LAB should be addressed to the Chair the Trustees via the Trust Office or email office@thegallerytrust.org.uk

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) an individual Trustee or the whole Trust Board, should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees, via the Trust Office or email: office@thegallerytrust.org.uk

The address for the Trust Office is:

The Gallery Trust
C/O North House Academy
23 South Parade
Summertown
Oxford
OX2 7JN

You can expect to receive an email acknowledgement within 3 school days of sending your complaint. If after this time you have not received an acknowledgement, please contact the Trust Office on 01865 747606, so that we ensure that we have received it.

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.

Duplicate Enquiries

We will usually consider and reply to concerns individually. If we receive lots of similar concerns at the same time – for example from a campaign group – we may decide to deal with them together and send you a shared reply that responds to common concerns.

Mutual Respect

In most cases, we work well with parents to resolve concerns. We recognise that emotions can run high, but we expect communication to remain respectful. Where behaviour becomes unreasonable, abusive, or intimidating, or where there is a refusal to engage with the policy and process, it can be harder for us to support a resolution. In these cases, we may suspend consideration of a complaint or place proportionate restrictions on how we manage contact.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. If appropriate, it will be determined whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

You should let us know about any problem within 3 months of it happening or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply. We will always try to keep to the time scales set out in this policy, but for complex queries it may take longer to reply, and we will let you know if this is the case.

Complaints received outside of term time

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

The types of concerns we can consider

This policy is for general concerns about how our schools are run. Some areas have particular processes required by law or regulations. This includes admissions, exclusions and suspensions, safeguarding concerns, staff grievances, disciplinary matters, and whistleblowing. If your concern would be better handled through one of these processes, we will let you know and explain the alternative process to you.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, Local Authority (LA) safeguarding team 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. If this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

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

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Complaints

We recognise that some complainants may use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to help draft concerns or complaints. While this can be helpful, complaints generated in this way may sometimes be overly detailed, include incorrect references to legislation, or lack clear explanation of how the issues relate specifically to the school or Trust.

Where a complaint is lengthy or unclear, we may offer a telephone call or meeting to agree the substantive issues and then summarise these under a small number of clear headings.

We recommend against using public AI tools because they are not confidential and can store and republish personal and sensitive information.

Withdrawal of a complaint

If you wish to withdraw your complaint, we will ask you to confirm this in writing.

How we resolve concerns and complaints

Your child's experience is important to everyone in our trust schools. We want to work together with you to ensure that your child is happy at school, and that they achieve their best. If you feel something has gone wrong, we want to hear from you.

Stage 1 – Informal Concerns

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.
It is always best to begin by speaking with either the class teacher, year head/subject head or Head Teacher as soon as possible to let them know what has happened and what you would like done to make it better We ask that you do not raise concerns with Local Academy Board members as they have no power to act on an individual basis.
Following the investigation of your concern the appropriate person will get back to you as soon as they can and within 15 days with an informal written response.
If the issue remains unresolved, you can make a formal complaint.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaints

If you still have concerns, you can write to us with a formal complaint. Formal complaints should be made to the Head Teacher (unless they are about the Head Teacher), via the school office. When writing include brief details of what has happened, who was involved, who you have already spoken to and what actions you feel might resolve the issue at this stage. If you prefer, we can provide a form that asks for the details we need, or you can access it on our trust website (insert link).

We will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 3 school days.

If your letter is unclear to us, we may request a meeting or call first to ensure we have understood your concern before responding in writing. We will tell you if we need any more information, and who will be investigating your concern.

Note: The Head Teacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Head Teacher (or investigator) will:

- If necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

After considering your complaint, we will provide you with a formal reply setting out our response and any actions we have taken or plan to take. We will respond within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If we are unable to meet this deadline, we will provide you with an update and revised response date.

Should you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 we will advise how to escalate your complaint.

If the complaint is about the Head Teacher of a school within the Trust, this should be raised in the first instance with the CEO of The Gallery Trust, who will, if the issue cannot be resolved

informally, ensure there is an investigation of the complaint under Trust Level complaints procedure as explained below.

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- The entire LAB or
- The majority of the LAB

This should be referred to the Chair of the Board of Trustees and will be investigated under Trust Level complaints procedure as explained below.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wish to take the matter further, you can ask for a formal meeting to discuss your complaint. This is a Stage 3 Panel Hearing.
A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing, within 5 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will contact you to arrange the date of the panel hearing and request any supporting papers you wish to submit. The aim will be to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep you informed.

The Panel will consist of three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. One panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school. (This could be a member of a Local Academy Board within the Trust with no previous connection to the school). The panel will principally consider how the complaint was handled at the previous stages but has discretion to review other aspects of the complaint as it sees fit. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

Meetings can be held virtually (i.e. video conference where all parties can participate verbally) providing all parties have access to the appropriate equipment to attend and are happy for the meeting to be held virtually.

You can bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. We do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel can:

- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

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/Trust's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

After the meeting, the panel will write to you, within 10 school days, with a full explanation of their decision and the reasons for it. It will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and where appropriate, will include details of actions the school/trust will take to resolve the complaint. The Headteacher and the trust will also receive a copy of the letter.

The letter will also include details of how to contact the Department for Education if you are dissatisfied with the way your complaint has been handled by the school/trust.

There are more details about how panels are run in our complaints handling guidance (link)

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing.

Trust Level Complaints

If a complaint is about a Head Teacher of a school within the Trust, or you wish to complain directly about the Trust, then the complaint should be sent to the CEO to be investigated. If appropriate, the CEO can delegate this investigation to a member of the Senior Leadership Team of the Trust who will be known as the investigator.

The CEO will write to acknowledge the complaint within 5 school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under this Complaints Policy and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

Following the investigation, the CEO or investigator will write to the you confirming the outcome within 15 school days of the date that the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the CEO will write, explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a Trustee, the complaint will be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board. If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation.

Note. Where the Chair of the Trust Board has investigated the complaint, they will write the letter of outcome to the Complainant and provide a copy to the CEO.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation, you can ask for a formal meeting to discuss your complaint. This is a Stage 3 Panel Hearing

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk to the Trust Board, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The procedure will mirror that outlined under Stage 3- Panel Hearing above.
If the complaint is about:

- The Head Teacher or
- The Chair or Vice Chair of the LAB or
- The entire LAB or
- The majority of the LAB

The Stage 3 Complaint Panel will consist of three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. One of the panel members will be independent of the management and running of the school. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will not be a Trustee or an employee of the Trust. (This could be a member of a Local Academy Board within the Trust with no previous connection to the school).

If the complaint is about:

- The CEO or
- Jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- The entire trust board or
- The majority of the Trust Board

The Stage 3 Complaint Panel will consist of three members who are completely independent of the Trust. None of the three members of the Complaint Panel will have been involved in the incidents or events which led to the complaint or have been involved in dealing with the complaint in the previous stages, or have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing.

Confidentiality

Some complaints may involve confidential details of pupils and staff. We will share as much information as possible with you, while respecting their privacy and legal rights. We will keep a written record of written complaints and review panels, and actions we take as a result. We will keep details confidential but we may need to share them with the Secretary of State for Education or an inspection organisation like Ofsted if they ask to see them.

Next Steps

If you believe the school / trust did not handle your complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of

their duties under education law, you can contact the Department for Education after you have completed Stage 3.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school or 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.

You can refer your complaint to the Department for Education online at: https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe