CEAT Complaints Procedure

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Trustees' Sub Committee	**-**
Statutory Policy	**Yes**

Contents

1. Our Commitment 3
2. Who Can Make a Complaint? 3
3. If Something Has Gone Wrong 3
4. Stage One: Talk to Us 4
5. Stage Two: Formal Written Complaint 4
6. Stage Three: Complaint Review Panel 5
7. Complaints About Senior Leaders, Governors and Trustees 5
8. Matters Outside This Policy 6
9. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) 6
10. Respectful Communication 6
11. Campaign Complaints 7
12. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) 7
13. Accessibility and Support 8
14. Learning from Complaints 8
15. Confidentiality and Record Keeping 8
16. After the Complaints Procedure 8
Appendix A: Complaint Form 10

1. Our Commitment

Central England Academy Trust believes that strong relationships between schools, families and communities are essential to ensuring children and young people thrive.

Most concerns can be resolved quickly through open and honest communication. We encourage anyone with a concern to speak to us as early as possible so that we can understand the issue and work together to put things right.

We are committed to handling concerns and complaints fairly, consistently, respectfully and in a timely manner.

We will:

- listen carefully;
- investigate concerns objectively;
- communicate clearly;
- seek to resolve issues at the earliest opportunity;
- learn from complaints to improve our services.

This policy applies to all schools within Central England Academy Trust and to services provided directly by the Trust.

2. Who Can Make a Complaint?

Any parent, carer, pupil, member of the public or stakeholder may raise a concern with the Trust or one of our schools.

The formal complaints procedure within this policy is primarily intended for parents and carers of pupils attending CEAT schools.

Where concerns are raised by other individuals, the Trust will determine the most appropriate route for considering the matter.

3. If Something Has Gone Wrong

We understand that concerns can arise from time to time.

The quickest and most effective way to resolve most issues is through a conversation with the appropriate member of staff.

We encourage concerns to be raised promptly so that events remain fresh in everyone's minds and solutions can be found quickly.

Complaints should be raised within **three months** of the incident occurring or, where there is a series of related events, within three months of the most recent occurrence. We may consider complaints outside this timescale, but only where exceptional circumstances apply.

4. Stage One: Talk to Us

In the first instance, concerns should be raised informally with the most appropriate member of staff. The Trust/school reserves the right to identify the member of staff it considers most appropriate to deal with the matter.

We aim to acknowledge concerns promptly and respond wherever possible within 72 hours. The initial response may acknowledge receipt of the communication and outline next steps if further investigation is required.

If concerns remain unresolved, a formal complaint may be submitted.

We expect concerns to be raised and discussed with us at Stage One before a formal complaint is made. If a formal complaint is received about a matter that has not been raised with the school first, including a complaint prepared using an AI tool, we will normally offer a conversation at Stage One before deciding whether a formal investigation is needed.

5. Stage Two: Formal Written Complaint

Formal complaints should be submitted in writing (to the school/setting the complaint relates to) using the Trust's Complaint Form. The school/Trust will provide reasonable support to individuals who require assistance in completing the form.

The complaint should include:

- a summary of the concerns
- relevant dates and details
- any action already taken to resolve the issue
- the outcome sought

Please keep your complaint focused on the key points. The summary of concerns should normally be no longer than **two sides of A4**. You may attach supporting documents, but please include only those that are directly relevant.

Upon receipt, the Trust/school will:

- acknowledge the complaint within **five school days**
- confirm who will consider the complaint
- explain the next steps and timescales

Wherever possible, complaints will be considered by an individual who has not been directly involved in the matter and who can act impartially. The Trust/school will decide the most appropriate staff member, this may be a school leader, Trust leader, governor or trustee, depending on the circumstances.

Where complaints are lengthy or unclear, we may suggest a meeting or telephone conversation to ensure we fully understand the concerns and can respond effectively.

Where we need to clarify a complaint before it can be investigated, the 20 school day timescale will start from the date we confirm the agreed complaint points in writing.

A formal written response will normally be issued within **20 school days** of receipt of the initial complaint. If additional time is required for a complex investigation, we will keep the complainant informed.

The response will explain:

- the investigation undertaken
- findings reached
- any actions taken or proposed
- how to progress the matter if the complainant remains dissatisfied with the Stage Two outcome.

6. Stage Three: Complaint Review Panel

Where a complainant remains dissatisfied following the formal Stage Two outcome, they may request a Complaint Review Panel.

Requests must be made within **15 school days** of receiving the Stage Two outcome.

The panel will:

- comprise at least three individuals not directly involved in the complaint
- include at least one person independent of the management and running of the Trust/school concerned
- review the complaint and the handling of the previous stages
- consider whether the complaint was investigated fairly and appropriately

The panel will usually meet within **20 school days** of receiving the request.

The complainant may attend and may be accompanied by a friend, relative or supporter. Attendance of additional people must be confirmed in advance of the meeting.

Following the meeting, the panel will issue its findings and recommendations in writing, usually within **ten school days**.

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

7. Complaints About Senior Leaders, Governors and Trustees

Complaints involving:

- a headteacher
- a local governor
- the Chief Executive Officer
- a trustee
- the Board of Trustees

will be managed by an appropriate individual or panel that is independent of the matters complained about and has no conflict of interest.

The Trust will determine the most appropriate investigation arrangements in each case, ensuring fairness to all parties.

8. Matters Outside This Policy

Certain matters are subject to alternative statutory procedures and cannot be considered through this complaints policy.

These include:

- admissions appeals
- exclusions and suspension reviews
- safeguarding and child protection matters
- whistleblowing concerns
- staff grievances
- staff disciplinary matters
- SEND tribunal matters
- Freedom of Information requests
- Subject Access Requests

Where concerns fall outside this policy, we will explain the appropriate process to follow.

Requests for information, including requests for documents, emails, records, recordings or personal data, will be dealt with under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or data protection law, not through the complaints procedure. Including such requests in a complaint does not make them part of the complaint. They will be handled separately, within the relevant statutory timescales.

9. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

We recognise that concerns relating to SEND can be particularly complex.

Schools are responsible for:

- providing high-quality teaching
- making reasonable adjustments
- delivering SEND Support
- reviewing provision and progress

Local authorities are responsible for:

- Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments
- issuing and maintaining EHCPs
- securing provision set out in EHCPs where legally required

Where concerns relate to local authority responsibilities, we will explain the appropriate route for pursuing the matter.

10. Respectful Communication

We recognise that complaints can arise when families are worried or frustrated.

We ask all parties involved in the process to communicate respectfully and professionally and adhere to the Central England Zero Tolerance Statement, located on the Trust website.

Where behaviour becomes abusive, threatening, discriminatory or unreasonably persistent, the Trust may:

- limit methods of communication
- appoint a single point of contact
- place reasonable restrictions on communication
- suspend consideration of a complaint until concerns about behaviour have been resolved

Any restrictions will be proportionate, recorded and communicated clearly to the complainant.

Sending a high volume of lengthy or repetitive correspondence, or contacting several members of staff about the same matter, may be treated as unreasonably persistent. This includes correspondence generated using AI tools.

11. Campaign Complaints

Where multiple complaints are received about the same issue, including coordinated campaigns organised through social media or community groups, the Trust may:

- issue a collective response
- publish a response on a school or Trust website
- respond through a representative group

Individual complainants may still request consideration through the normal complaints procedure if they remain dissatisfied.

12. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Some people use artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as chatbots, to help them write complaints, emails and requests for information. Used carefully, these tools can help people set out their concerns, and we will never treat a complaint as less valid because AI has been used.

However, schools are receiving a growing number of long, AI-generated complaints and requests. These often repeat points, quote legislation or guidance that does not apply, set deadlines or make demands that this procedure does not require, and include information that is inaccurate. Responding to them takes staff time away from pupils. A lengthy written exchange is rarely a substitute for a conversation, which remains the quickest way to resolve most concerns. The Department for Education's guidance for parents on raising concerns (January 2026) also advises using AI with caution.

If you use AI to help you write to us, you are responsible for everything you send. Please:

- check that facts, names, dates and any references to law, guidance or policy are accurate and relevant
- keep your complaint short and focused on what happened and what you would like us to do
- not put personal information about pupils, staff or other families, or school correspondence, into AI tools, as this may breach data protection law
- make sure the tone is respectful (section 10)

How we will respond. We will respond to the substance of your concerns, not to the length or format of what you send. In particular:

- we will identify the key complaint points and agree them with you, normally through a meeting or telephone call, before any investigation begins

- we will not provide a point-by-point response to lengthy submissions, legal arguments, or questions and demands that fall outside the agreed complaint points
- deadlines, legal duties or procedures quoted in correspondence that do not apply will not replace the timescales in this policy. We will explain which procedure does apply
- requests for information will be handled separately under the appropriate statutory process (section 8)
- repeated or high-volume correspondence may be managed under section 10

Anyone who needs help to set out their concerns can ask for support (section 13), including a meeting or telephone call in place of a written complaint.

13. Accessibility and Support

We are committed to ensuring this procedure is accessible to all.

Reasonable adjustments may include:

- alternative formats
- accessible meeting arrangements
- support in completing complaint documentation

Complainants requiring assistance should contact the office of the setting their complaint relates to.

14. Learning from Complaints

CEAT views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve.

The Trust will:

- maintain a record of formal complaints
- identify common themes and trends
- monitor complaint outcomes and timescales
- share learning across schools
- report complaint trends and lessons learned to trustees

Trustees will seek assurance that complaints are managed fairly and that learning from complaints informs future improvement.

15. Confidentiality and Record Keeping

The Trust will:

- maintain records of all formal complaints
- record the stage at which complaints are resolved
- record actions taken as a result of complaints
- maintain confidentiality in accordance with data protection legislation

Complaint records will only be shared where required by law or by regulatory and inspection bodies.

Staff will not enter complaint information into AI tools that have not been approved by the Trust.

16. After the Complaints Procedure

The Complaint Review Panel is the final stage of the Trust's complaints process.

If a complainant believes the Trust has not followed its complaints procedure properly or has acted unlawfully or unreasonably, they may refer the matter to the Department for Education.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Central England Academy Trust. They will consider whether Central England Academy Trust has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

Further information is available via the Department for Education complaints process.
www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

Appendix A: Complaint Form: *An editable version of this form is available on the Trust and school websites.*

Central England Academy Trust: Complaint Form

Please complete this form electronically where possible and email or submit it to the office of the relevant setting. A staff member will acknowledge receipt and advise on the next steps. Please keep to the key points. If you use an AI tool to help you write your complaint, please read section 12 of the Complaints Procedure first.

Your name:	
Pupil's name (if relevant):	
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Daytime telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
Email address:	
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school/Trust about it and any actions that you or the school/Trust have already taken: (Please summarise the key points, normally in no more than two sides of A4.)	
What actions do you feel might resolve your complaint at this stage?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	

Use of AI tools: did you use an AI tool (for example ChatGPT, Copilot or Gemini) to help write this complaint? Yes / No This will not affect how your complaint is considered. If you did, please check that everything in this form is accurate and reflects your own concerns, and that you have not entered information about other pupils, staff or families into the AI tool.	
Declaration: I confirm that the information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and sets out my own concerns.	
Signature:	**Date:**
Official Use	
Date form received:	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By who:	
Complaint referred to:	
Action taken:	