



THE SALTERNS ACADEMY TRUST

COMPLAINTS POLICY



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The Directors of Salterns Academy Trust will ensure that:

All concerns expressed to any school in the Trust, or about the Trust will be taken seriously.

Where at all possible problems will be resolved informally.

Should concerns not be resolved informally, the formal complaints procedure will give the complainant a route to ensure the issue is appropriately and fairly considered.

1. This complaints procedure is for parents, students and members of the public.

2. DEFINITION OF A COMPLAINT:

“An expression of dissatisfaction which needs a response from a school”.

Most issues can be amicably resolved within the school. Every effort should be made to resolve these informally. However, where issues cannot be resolved, and you are not satisfied, your concerns may be submitted in writing and this would then form a “complaint” which will be responded to using these procedures.

3. Complaints in the following areas are not dealt with in this document as separate statutory provision has been made for these areas:

- Curriculum
- Sex Education
- Admissions
- Exclusions
- SEN
- Child Protection
- Examinations

4. The Complaints Procedure will work through the following principles:

It will:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
- Be easily accessible and publicised
- Be simple to understand and use
- Be non-adversarial
- Allow swift handling with established time limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress
- Ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary
- Respect people’s desire for confidentiality
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress where necessary
- Provide information to the Board of Directors so that services can be improved

5. Complaints regarding each school should be dealt with by the relevant school in the first instance. These should be made in writing to the Headteacher, (copy to the Director of HR) not by text or email. Only when this has been exhausted should further action be taken. Complaints about the Trust should be made in writing to the Chief Executive Officer.

6. Review of the Policy by the Board of Directors should be on a regular basis and the number of formal complaints monitored by the Trust’s Board and how they were dealt with and any action taken.

7. Where formal procedures are being followed, written records of all complaints with indication of whether they were resolved and at what stage will be kept centrally and will be available for inspection by the senior leaders of the Trust. Accurate information of the investigation should be recorded to avoid confusion at any later stage: this includes names, times, dates of events etc. Records should be dated and signed by the investigator.

All records concerning the complaint will be maintained in compliance with GDPR and 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.

8. The Complaints Policy and Procedure will be available in each School Handbook, on the schools' websites, Salterns Academy Trust website and available on request from the Director of Human Resources. Details of how to obtain a copy of the Complaints Policy will be included in each School's Prospectus.

Procedures for Salterns Academy Trust Complaints Policy

1. Introduction:

This policy is based on the principle that where at all possible, complaints will be dealt with on an informal basis. Where this proves unsuccessful the formal procedures will give the complainant a route to ensuring the issue is appropriately considered.

This document has been prepared to support a process for dealing with complaints. It is intended that this document will clarify how complaints can be made by parents, students, members of the public and also how each school will respond.

This document does not cover complaints in the following areas:

- Curriculum
- Sex Education
- Admissions
- Exclusions
- SEN
- Child Protection
- Examinations

Separate statutory provision has been made for complaints within these areas (see Definition of Complaint).

Complaints concerning statutory and advisory services provided directly by the Local Authority are dealt with by Portsmouth City Council's Complaints Procedure.

2. Concerns:

Stage 1: Informal Stage

Concerns can normally be dealt with on an *informal* basis. If complainants have a *concern*, they should:

- a. Raise the concern with the member of staff or, if more appropriate, their Subject Leader or Line Manager as soon as possible.
- b. Allow the school sufficient time to investigate and respond. A verbal or email acknowledgement will be made, usually within 24 hours of receipt and a response to the concern within 5 working days by telephone, email, letter or in person. A record will be made in school on the appropriate systems.

3. Complaints:

When does a concern become a **complaint**?

- a. When there is a serious concern that cannot be resolved in an informal way.
- b. When a concern is strong enough to require the use of the formal procedure, eg the Health and Safety of students are thought to be at risk.

Stage 2: Formal Stage – Complaint to the Headteacher

If there is dissatisfaction with the outcome of the informal stage, or the concern is of a very serious nature which affects the Health and Safety of the students, then a letter should be sent to the Headteacher of the School.

If the complaint is about the Trust, letters should be sent to the Chief Executive of the Trust. In both cases, a copy of the complaint should be sent to the Trust's Director of HR.

- A verbal or written acknowledgement to the complainant will be made, usually within 24 hours of receipt by the Director of Human Resources.
- The complainant may be invited into the school to discuss the issues or called to discuss the matter over the telephone.
- The school will respond in writing by letter as soon as possible and within 5 working days of receiving the complaint.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher the complainant should write to the Chair of the Local Governing Body.

Stage 3: Formal Stage – Complaint to the Chair of the Local Governing Body

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the process, they can write to the Chair of the Local Governing Body.

If the complaint is about the Trust, they can write to the Chair of the Board of Directors (see Stage 4.)

The Chair of the Local Governing Body will convene a panel to consider the complaint within 15 working days of receipt of the complaint, giving at least 5 working days' notice. The panel will consist of 3 members, all of whom have not been involved with the complaint previously. ***No panel member will be an employee of the school. At least one member will be independent of the school.***

The complainant will be invited to meet the panel in person to put forward their case. The complainant may choose to be accompanied but must advise the Chair of the Local Governing Body of whom they wish to invite in advance.

The panel may also invite members of the school staff to attend the meeting to provide background or further information, including details of actions taken or resolutions offered under the earlier stages of the procedure.

This meeting will be minuted.

Once the panel has concluded its review, a letter will be sent to the complainant stating any findings, recommendations and outcome, within 5 working days.

Copies of the letter and any recommendations will also be given to:

- a. The person complained about.
- b. The Headteacher of the School/Chief Executive Officer.
- c. The Director of Human Resources (to ensure an accurate record and to update the Complaints Register for monitoring purposes).

Stage 4: Formal Stage – Complaint to the Chair of the Board of Directors

If the complainant still remains dissatisfied with the process, they can write to the Chair of the Board of Directors.

The Chair of the Board of Directors will convene a panel to consider the complaint within 15 working days of receipt of the complaint. The panel will consist of 3 members, all of whom have not been involved with the complaint previously. ***At least one of the panel members will be independent of the management or running of the relevant School.***

The complainant will be invited to meet the panel in person to put forward their case. The complainant may choose to be accompanied but must advise the Chair of the Board of Directors of whom they wish to invite in advance.

The panel may also invite members of the school staff to attend the meeting to provide background or further information, including details of actions taken or resolutions offered under the earlier stages of the procedure.

This meeting will be minuted.

Once the panel has concluded its review, a letter will be sent to the complainant stating any findings, recommendations and outcome, within 5 working days. The Directors decision is final.

Copies of the letter and any recommendations will also be given to:

- a. The person complained about.
- b. The Headteacher of the School/Chief Executive Officer.
- c. The Director of Human Resources (to ensure an accurate record and to update the Complaints Register for monitoring purposes).

4. **Unresolved Complaints:**

If, after following all the steps outlined above and you are not satisfied with the way the Trust has dealt with your complaint, you can complain to the Secretary of State for Education via the schools complaints form https://form.education.gov.uk/en/AchieveForms/?form_uri=sandbox-publish://AF-Process-f1453496-7d8a-463f-9f33-1da2ac47ed76/AF-Stage-1e64d4cc-25fb-499a-a8d7-74e98203ac00/definition.json&redirectlink=%2Fen&cancelRedirectLink=%2Fen

You should include any relevant documents with your complaint.

5. **Recording Information:**

Where formal procedures are being followed details of complaints will be recorded at all stages. Accurate information of the investigation will be recorded to avoid confusion at any later stage; this includes names, times, dates of events etc. Records will be dated and signed by the investigator.

6. **Confidentiality:**

Complaints will be handled confidentially, and information should only be given on a need to know basis. It is not advisable for complaints to be discussed at Local Governing Body meetings or Board meetings as this may prejudice any involvement of people at a later stage.

Any information will be kept in compliance with GDPR.

7. **Guidance for Carrying out an Investigation:**

The extent of the investigation and number of students, staff or others to be interviewed will clearly vary on a case by case basis but some broad principles can be identified.

Where a parent has complained, he/she should be interviewed to clarify the issues raised in the complaint and any concerns the parent may have should be listened to. Parents should be reassured that their complaint is being taken seriously and that the matter will be fully investigated and any outcome reported back to them.

At the outset of an investigation, the person undertaking the investigation should identify and note down who needs to be interviewed. Others may be added or deleted to the list at a later stage as information emerges.

It is usual to interview individual children away from others who may have been involved in the matter causing the complaint. It is often appropriate to interview individual students privately, with another adult present where necessary. A note of the information provided can be taken at the same time and then signed and dated by the interviewer (*contemporaneous note*). We aim to ensure that the surroundings for the meeting are comfortable and familiar to the interviewee.

Notes will be made of the interviews undertaken at the time of the meeting, signed and dated by the interviewer.

If an allegation of a serious nature is made, eg bullying, theft or a significant number of lesser allegations, the parents of the alleged perpetrator(s) should be informed with an explanation that the matter is being investigated. It would be appropriate to invite parents to discuss the problem and interview the children in the parent(s) presence. (If the parents cannot be present, it is appropriate to have a member of staff, not involved in the matter, to act in a support role for the child). It would be appropriate to advise the parent of the outcome of the investigation and the reasoning behind it.

If during an investigation a child should become distressed, it would not be appropriate to continue at that point. It may not be necessary or appropriate to resume later.

A report of the investigation should be prepared. This should reference the issues of the complaint, details of the investigation and any conclusion reached.

8. Support to staff at Review by Local Governing Body or Board of Directors:

Staff are entitled to bring a friend or representative to support them at a committee meeting of the Local Governing Body or Board of Directors reviewing a complaint. A friend or representative may also support any witnesses invited to present evidence.

9. Local Authority support to schools and parents:

Parents may seek advice from the Local Authority. School staff, Governors and Directors can seek advice and support at any stage of a complaint from the Trust's Director of Human Resources.

PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

