Complaints Resolution Policy

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This Policy and Procedure is based on DfE Best Practice Guidance for School Complaints Procedures (last updated 2021) and subsequent sector guidance (2026)

1. Definitions

'Pupil'	For the purposes of this policy, references to a "parent" include all those with parental responsibility or care of a pupil, unless stated otherwise. A 'pupil' refers to any child or young person who is registered at, or receives education from, an academy or provision within the Trust. This includes pupils and students educated at all phases, including early years, primary, secondary, post-16, alternative provision, and any other forms of education delivered or commissioned by the Trust.
'Headteacher'	For the purposes of this policy, the term "Headteacher" includes any role responsible for the overall leadership of a school, such as a Head of School.
'Concern'	A 'concern' may be treated as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.
'Complaint'	A complaint may be generally recognised as 'an expression or statement of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

A concern becomes a complaint when the complainant indicates that they are dissatisfied and wish the matter to be considered formally under this procedure.

2. Aims

Both school and parents are united in wanting the best for their children. At EAST, our aim is to ensure that pupils feel valued, safe and able to thrive during their many years in our schools. Children are best supported when the school and parents work together around academic and pastoral support.

We recognise that there are occasions when this may be challenging, and there may be times when the parent/s and school may see things differently. We also accept that there may be occasions where mistakes are made.

The aim of this policy is to initially ensure that every possible means of resolving a concern or a complaint informally have been exhausted to reach a resolution. This policy also provides a robust formal process for making a complaint should a parent feel that an informal resolution is no longer possible.

At all stages, whether concern or complaint, informal or formal, seeking a joint resolution is in the best interests of all involved and is the overall aim of our staff and this policy.

3. Who can make a complaint?

While this policy refers to parents throughout, it applies to any individual who wishes to raise a concern or complaint about a school or the Trust. All complaints will be considered and managed in line with the same process set out in this policy.

This policy does not apply to complaints raised by staff, which should be addressed through the Trust's Grievance Policy.

4. Important Information to Read Prior to Submitting a Concern or Complaint

Please read before submitting a concern or complaint

In line with our aims, the following information is provided to support parents when submitting a complaint or concern.

4.1 Requests for all communication to be in writing only

We will not agree to this type of request as it does not enhance relationships between school and parents in order to move forward from a situation where there is concern. Gaining a mutual understanding is always best communicated in person. We may choose to have other or additional staff in a meeting and parents are able to be accompanied should they feel this would be supportive to the resolution process.

4.2 Recording of Meetings

We want everyone to feel comfortable and safe in meetings. For this reason, we do not normally allow recordings, unless someone needs to record to support accessibility needs. If a recording would be helpful, all participants should agree to it beforehand, with the Headteacher or CEO making the final decision. Secret or covert recordings will not be considered as part of the complaints process as conversations must only be recorded with the full, informed consent of everyone involved.

4.3 Use of AI

We understand that parents may want to use AI tools to help put their thoughts in writing. Whilst useful, AI can unintentionally introduce irrelevant law, mistake responsibilities, and inflate the complexity of issues. This can be difficult and time-consuming for us to unpick. To help us respond fairly and efficiently, we ask all complainants to use our forms to provide a short summary of the key issue and the outcome they are seeking. There is usually more clarity around the complaint or concern when we are able to hear this directly through the parent voice rather than AI.

If a written submission appears to have been generated using AI tools or contains extensive legal commentary that does not appear to relate to the child's situation, or further complicates a concern or complaint, we may request a meeting to clarify the concern before responding in full. This helps ensure we understand the issue correctly and will not delay or prevent access to the formal complaints process.

Most public AI tools are not set up to protect personal information, so we encourage parents not to share any sensitive details about their child when using them.

4.4 SEND: Understanding Roles & Responsibilities

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Some concerns about SEND provision arise because responsibilities are shared between us and the Local Authority. To help avoid confusion, we want to explain the following:

- **What we are responsible for:** We provide high-quality teaching, reasonable adjustments, and support from our own resources (known as SEN Support). We monitor your child's progress, put support plans in place, and review these with you.
- **What the local authority is responsible for:** The local authority decides whether to assess a child for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and then produces and maintains the EHCP, and provides the funding and services specified within it.
- **What an EHCP sets out:** An EHCP describes your child's needs, the provision required to meet those needs, and who must deliver it. Schools must implement the parts of the plan that fall within their control, and the Local Authority must provide the provision it is responsible for.
- **What is affected by national funding constraints:** Some support depends on national or local funding decisions that are outside of our control. We will always do our best within the resources available to us.

If you are ever unsure about who is responsible for a particular aspect of SEND support, please ask. Early clarification often prevents misunderstandings and helps us work together in your child's best interests.

4.5 Social Media

We respectfully ask that concerns and complaints are not posted on social media but that you talk to the school directly to resolve any issues.

4.6 External Bodies

A number of external moderating bodies exist in education and these are sometimes cited by parents as bodies that they may contact as part of the process. It is important to understand the role of each of these bodies to enable any concerns to be directed to the right organisation.

A note about other external bodies and their respective roles

We know that parents sometimes think about approaching other organisations for help. It may be useful to understand what each body can and cannot do:

- DfE – will only consider whether we have followed a proper process; they will not reinvestigate a complaint
- Ofsted – will only consider whole-school or safeguarding issues, not individual complaints
- Local Authority – may only become involved where there is a risk of harm to a child, concerns about children missing in education, or where the LA holds specific statutory duties
- Ombudsman – will usually only consider complaints about LA decisions rather than individual school decisions

4.7 Complaints Concerning Staff & Information Sharing

It is important to note that where a complaint may result in the school/trust taking action with a member of staff, this will be done through the school HR policies and, where appropriate, the Local Authority safeguarding procedures. The outcomes of these processes will not be shared with the complainant in line with GDPR guidance and confidentiality.

Any sanctions given to other pupils involved in the parental complaint will not be discussed with the parent (complainant). This information remains confidential to the school/trust and the parent and child concerned.

4.8 Scope

This policy does **not** cover concerns or complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Complaints about services provided by other providers who use the Trusts premises or facilities will be directed to the provider concerned

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

5. Informal stage

5.1 Raising a Concern

If you have been told something or seen something that raises a concern with you, please contact your child's form or class teacher in the first instance. This is part of the informal process around concern and complaint resolution and is an expected part of the partnership between parent and school. We always encourage early, informal conversations with the member of staff who knows your child best, as this is often the quickest way to understand what is happening and put things right. Often the school is able to resolve issues through discussions between parent and school staff, and clarification of events and circumstances.

You can raise a concern by:

- contacting the school via the office email address and/ or talking to a staff member
- calling the school or by writing to us
- Arranging an appointment (via the school office) to talk to the staff member

We aim to resolve your concern as soon as we can and **within 20 school days** of the date that you raised it. Depending on the situation, we will make sure your concern reaches the right person so it can be handled properly. Timely discussions around concerns will often support a quick resolution to the issue and provide clarity.

If you have further questions at this informal stage you may be invited to talk to other staff, including senior staff (e.g. Head of Year, Deputy / Assistant Head) who may help you to reach a resolution.
We want to ensure that both parent and school have been explored all informal avenues before moving into the formal complaint stages.

Parents may choose to raise a formal complaint at any time. While informal resolution is strongly encouraged and can lead to a quicker resolution, it is not a prerequisite for submitting a formal complaint.

6. Formal Complaints Procedure.

6.1 Formal Written Complaint

If the matter is not resolved informally, parents may submit a **formal complaint in writing** to the relevant person depending on who the complaint is about (see Table 1 below.)

Who is the complaint about?	Where to direct your initial written complaint	Who hears the complaint at each stage*
Complaint about a staff member	Headteacher	Stage 1: Headteacher Stage 2: LGB chair
Complaint about the Headteacher	Trust Governance Professional mail@eastmat.org	Stage 1:Trust leader (primary or secondary director or SEND director or LGB chair) Stage 2:Trust senior leader (CEO/ DCEO)
Complaint about the CEO / Executive Leader	Trust Governance Professional	Stage 1: Chair of Trustees (or a trustee delegated for complaints) No formal stage 2. Mediation is offered if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome.
Complaint about an LGB member	Trust Governance Professional	Stage 1: Chair of the LGB Stage 2: Chair of the Trust Board
Complaint about a Trustee or the chair of a Local Governing Board	Trust Governance Professional	Stage 1: Chair of Trustees (if not the subject) No formal stage 2. Mediation is offered if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome.
Complaint about the Chair of Trustees	Trust Governance Professional?	Stage 1: Vice-Chair or a Trustee appointed for the purpose No formal stage 2. Mediation is offered if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome

* Stage 3 for all complaints will be heard by a panel who have not been involved in the complaint at stage 1 or 2.

6.2 Submitting a Formal Complaint

The complaint should:

- Be clearly marked as a “Formal Complaint”
- Set out the nature of the complaint
- Indicate what outcome is sought

Formal complaints must be made using the Trust's Complaints Form (Appendix 1) wherever possible. A written submission can be made by the complainant outlining the complaints and the efforts made so far to resolve the issue.

6.3 Stage 1.

Once the complaint is received in writing, the appropriate person will:

- Acknowledge the complaint within **5 school days**
- Gather relevant evidence
- Investigate the complaint impartially
- Provide a written response within **20** school days

Possible outcomes:

- Fully upholds the complaint.
- Partially upholds the complaint.
- Fully dismisses the complaint.
- Partially dismisses the complaint.

If things still feel unresolved and the complainant lets us know within **5 school days**, we may offer a meeting within **10 school days** with the continued aim to find a shared way forward in the best interests of the child.

6.4 Stage 2 *(Complaints in relation to: Teachers, Support Staff and Headteachers)*

6.4.1 Review of Complaint – Process and reasonableness of outcome

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the Stage 1 outcome and wishes to escalate the complaint further, they should inform the relevant person within **20 school days** of receipt of the Stage 1 written response. Stage 2 seeks to review the process undertaken by the school and the outcome and respond with their findings within **20 school days**.

By Stage 2, the complaint has already been fully investigated and a decision made regarding the actions taken by the school. Stage 2 focuses on process and reasonableness of the outcome and is reviewed by a different individual in the Trust. It focuses primarily on whether the complaint was handled fairly, reasonably and in line with this procedure, and whether the conclusions reached were supported by the evidence.

The complaint should:

- Be clearly marked as a "Formal Complaint"
- Set out the nature of the complaint considering the scope of Stage 2 (i.e. ensuring process was followed correctly)
- Indicate what outcome is sought

New complaints cannot be submitted as part of the review at Stage 2. Any new complaints should follow the procedure, seeking an informal resolution first.

Possible outcomes:

- Fully upholds the complaint.
- Partially upholds the complaint.
- Fully dismisses the complaint.
- Partially dismisses the complaint.

If things still feel unresolved and the complainant lets us know within **5 school days**, we may offer a meeting within **10 school days** with the continued aim to find a shared way forward in the best interests of the child.

6.5 Stage 2: (Complaints in relation to: Trust CEO, Trustees and Chair of Trustees)

The Trust may feel it is appropriate to offer the option of mediation led by an external person if the complainant is in agreement. Core to this process is seeking a resolution to the issue to move forward positively as quickly as practicably possible.

6.6 Stage 3 – Complaints Panel

6.6.1 Requesting a Panel Hearing

If the parent remains dissatisfied at the end of Stage 2, they may request that the complaint be considered by a Stage 3 **Trust Complaints Panel**.

The request must:

- Be submitted in writing
- Be made within **10 school days** of receiving the Stage 2 outcome

6.6.2 Panel Composition

The panel will consist of three individuals, including a Chair, drawn from governance and external representatives provided they have had no prior involvement in the complaint. At least one panel member will be independent of the school.

6.6.3 Panel Hearing

The Panel will:

- Review written submissions and evidence
- Hold a hearing (remotely if appropriate)
- Allow both parties to make representations

The Panel will:

- Reach a decision
- Decide whether the complaint is upheld in whole or in part
- Recommend any actions

A **written decision** will be issued within **10 school days** of the hearing.

If the complaint has completed all stages of the Trust's procedure and the complaint is unresolved, a referral may be made to the **Department for Education (DfE)**.

The DfE will **not** reinvestigate the complaint but may consider whether:

- The Trust has followed its complaints procedure properly, and
- The Trust has met its obligations under its funding agreement and the Independent School Standards.

7. Timeframes

We will do our best to meet the timeframes in this policy where it is reasonable and proportionate to do so. If something prevents us from doing so, such as the complexity of the concern or someone being unavailable, we will contact you within the original timeframe to explain why and let you know when you can expect a response. When we refer to 'school days', this refers to days when the school is open. This means that '5 school days' is usually a week. If a concern is raised during a holiday period, the timeframes in this procedure will start from the first day back. You can find our term dates on the school websites.

8. Withdrawing your Complaint

It is our hope that we will be able to resolve your concerns before the need to convene a panel. If you decide you would like to withdraw your complaint, we will ask you to confirm this in writing so that we can keep clear and accurate records and make sure the process closes properly for everyone involved.

9. Records, Confidentiality & Data Protection

We will keep a written record of all formal complaints. All correspondence, statements, and records will be kept confidential, except where disclosure is required by law or by a body conducting an inspection. We will handle personal data in line with data protection law.

It is important to make clear that we operate an 'open' complaints process. This means that any complaints will be shared with the headteacher of the school in question unless there is a safeguarding breach in doing so. This is to enable the best route to resolution. Please note that this means that in submitting information to the Trust, parents should be aware that this is the case and as a result it does not constitute a GDPR breach.

In line with information sharing rules, any sanctions applied to pupils or staff involved in the complaint will not be shared with the complainant.

10. Subject Access Requests (SAR) & Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests

Sometimes a SAR or FOI is submitted because a parent/carer is trying to understand a concern better. We will always respond to these fully and within the legal timeframes (see data protection policy). However, it is often quicker and easier to tell us directly what information you are looking for. We can usually provide the answer informally, which avoids unnecessary delay and reduces the significant

workload that formal information requests create for staff. If you do choose to make a formal request, we will still continue to handle your complaint through this procedure and indicate that this may lead to a delay to the timescale. The freedom of information policy outlines where charges for this information may be made.

11. Mutually Respectful Behaviour

The best way to reach a positive resolution is to approach concerns in a calm and mutually respectful way. We understand that emotions can sometimes run high, but behaviour that becomes unhelpful can make it harder for us to support you. Our staff have the right to work in an environment that is free from negative behaviour including anything that is abusive, intimidating, or prevents us from looking into a concern properly. Behaviour may be judged unreasonable if it hinders the process, see Appendix 3 for more information of what is judged as unreasonable behaviour and the steps the Trust may take in the event behaviour is judged as unreasonable.

12. Time Limits

It is much easier to look into your concern carefully and accurately while details are still recent and everyone remembers what happened. For that reason, we ask that concerns are raised **within three months** of the event. We will look at later concerns if there are exceptional reasons for the delay. If another agency, such as the police or local authority safeguarding team, is already looking into related matters, we may pause our process and restart it once their work is complete, if appropriate, so that everything is handled safely and in the right order.

If the information provided suggests that we need to inform the police, it is at the school's discretion as to whether the parent is informed. Should the school not contact the parent to inform them, this will not constitute an acceptable basis for a complaint.

13. External Routes after our Process is Complete

To avoid delay or confusion we must stress that to stand the best chance of a clear route to resolution, all **concerns should come to us first**. We can resolve most matters quickly when all relevant information is kept in one place, and early contact with external agencies can complicate or slow investigations.

If, after our full process has concluded, you believe we have not handled your complaint in line with this procedure or have acted unlawfully or unreasonably, you can contact the Department for Education, which handles complaints about academies on behalf of the Secretary of State. See Complain about a school on GOV.UK for how to raise this.

14. Complaint Campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website

- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

14.1 Learning Lessons

The Trust Board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher/CEO, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

15. Monitoring Arrangements

The Trust Board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled effectively. The Trust Board will track the number and nature of complaints, and review this information as appropriate.

The complaints records are logged and managed by CEO/ Headteacher. This policy will be reviewed by the CEO / DCEO and Trust board in consultation with LGBs, Headteachers, CEO and Senior Leaderships Teams every 2 years.

At each review, the policy will be approved by the Trust Board.

15.1 Links with other policies

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures
- Admissions Policy
- Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Policy
- SEN Policy and Information Report
- Privacy Notices
- DPA Policy
- Community Code of Conduct
- Freedom of information policy

16. Summary of Changes

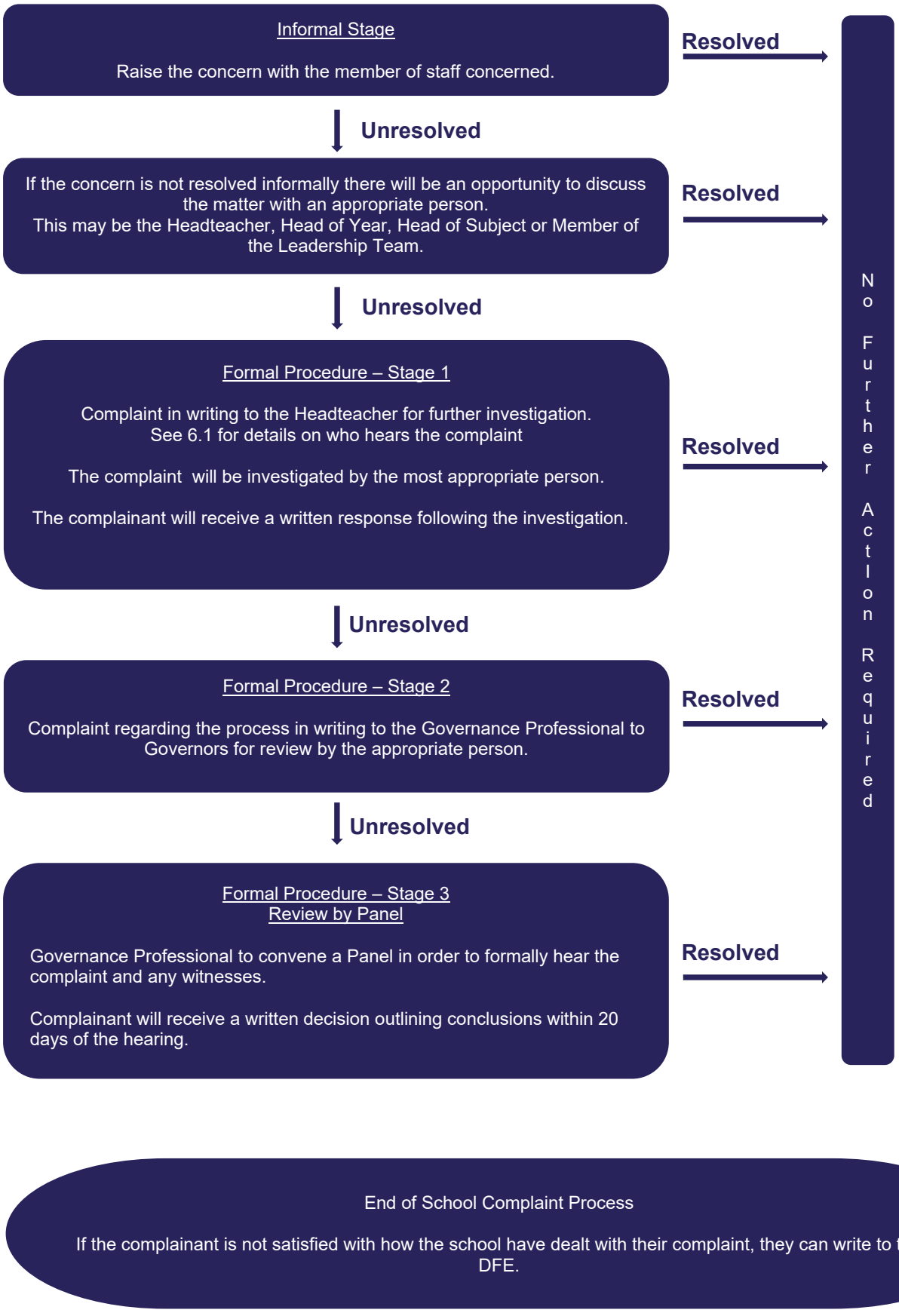
Document control		
Date	**Section(s)**	**Update(s)**
10.5.26		Whole policy written in line with DfE guidelines *Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures 2020 - GOV.UK*

Appendix 1: Formal Complaint Form

Your Details:			
Full Name:			
Relationship to the school/trust:	Parent / Carer: ☐	Community Member: ☐	Other: ☐
If 'Other', please specify:			
Email Address:			
Phone Number:			
Please complete if you are a Parent / Carer to a pupil who attends an EAST school:			
Pupil Name:			
Pupil Year / Form:		**Pupil DOB:**	
Location:			
Which school / EAST Location does your complaint relate to:			
Complaint Details: Please provide full details of complaint (including the names of all persons involved and the dates of incidents referred to):			
Informal Resolution: Please outline how you have sought to resolve the issue with the school informally. *(It is important to note that we are committed to ensuring that all informal methods have been exhausted before moving to the formal process.)*			

Desired Outcome: What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?			
Are you attaching any paperwork (Yes / No)?			
If 'Yes', please provide details:			
Declaration			
Signature:		**Date:**	
For Trust use Only			
Date Received:			
Date Acknowledged:			
Acknowledged By:			
Name of person complaint refers to:			
Complaint Stage:			
Summary of Action Taken:			
Outcome:			
Reference No.			

Appendix 2: School Complaints Procedure Flowchart



Appendix 3: Managing Serial & Unreasonable Complaints

Taken from the Department for Education (DfE) Model Policy, 2023

EAST is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

EAST defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher/CEO or Chair of Governors/Trustees will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable'* marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher/CEO will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the

school/EAST causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from an EAST School / Central EAST Office.