

RAISING CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

A guide for parents



Together we Exceed

Working together to resolve concerns

Parents, carers and schools share the same goal: supporting children's education and wellbeing.

We know that when concerns arise, they can feel worrying or frustrating. This guide is designed to help you understand:

- how to raise concerns or complaints,
- who to contact,
- what will happen at each stage, and
- how to work with the school or Trust to seek a fair and proportionate outcome.

Most issues can be resolved quickly through open and respectful communication.

This guide explains the steps available to you if concerns cannot be resolved informally.

What kind of issue is it?

Understanding the type of issue helps ensure it is handled in the most effective way.

Feedback – you need to be heard

Sometimes you want to share views or suggestions without requesting action. Schools welcome feedback and may use it to improve practice.

A concern – you need reassurance or explanation

Concerns are worries or questions that often can be resolved quickly through discussion and clarification.

A complaint – you are seeking action or change

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction where you are seeking an explanation, remedy, or change.

Formal complaints are handled through the Trust's published complaints procedure.

Who should I contact first?

Issues are usually resolved best by the person closest to the matter.

Class teacher or staff member

For day to day issues such as:

- learning or homework,
- friendships,
- behaviour,
- classroom routines.

Middle or senior leaders

Where the issue is wider or ongoing, for example:

- bullying,
- additional support needs,
- repeated concerns not resolved earlier.

Headteacher or service lead

For more serious or whole school issues, or where earlier steps have not resolved the concern.

Tip: Governors or Trustees should not be contacted directly to raise concerns or complaints. The complaints process set out in the policy should be followed.

Step 1: Talk it through (where possible)

Most concerns can be resolved quickly and positively through discussion.

- Contact the appropriate member of staff.
- Explain your concern clearly and calmly.
- Give the school opportunity to look into the issue and respond.

Informal resolution is encouraged, but you do not have to do this before making a formal complaint if you do not feel it is appropriate.

What is the formal complaints process?

Exceed Academies Trust uses a four stage complaints procedure.

Each stage is designed to provide an appropriate level of consideration and independence, while remaining proportionate.

Stage 1 – Initial Formal Complaint

- Complaints should usually be made in writing.
- Your complaint will be acknowledged within 5 school days.
- The matter will be investigated fairly and proportionately.
- A written response will normally be provided within 25 school days.

In your complaint, it helps to explain:

- what has happened,
- what steps have already been taken, and
- what outcome you are seeking.

Stage 2 – Review of handling

If you remain dissatisfied, you may request escalation to Stage 2 within 5 school days of receiving the Stage 1 response.

Stage 2:

- is a review, not a full reinvestigation;
- considers whether the complaint was handled fairly and in line with the policy.

A written response will normally be issued within 25 school days.

Stage 3 – Independent governance review

Stage 3 provides a further, independent review by a governance representative.

- It looks at how the complaint was handled and whether decisions were reasonable.
- It does not repeat the investigation.
- Escalation to this stage is not automatic.

A written response will normally be issued within 25 school days.

Stage 4 – Complaint Review Panel (final stage)

Stage 4 is the final stage of the Trust's complaints procedure.

- A panel of three people (including one independent member) reviews how the complaint was handled.
- The panel does not re hear the complaint or consider new issues.
- You will receive a written decision explaining the panel's findings.

Once Stage 4 is completed, the Trust's complaints process is concluded.

How long do I have to raise a complaint?

- Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the issue arising.

- Requests to move to the next stage should normally be made within 5 school days of receiving the previous written response.

If you miss a deadline, this does not automatically end your complaint, but you may be asked to explain the reason for the delay.

When might a complaint be formally concluded early?

In some circumstances, where a complaint has been considered appropriately and no reasonable or proportionate outcome could be achieved through further escalation, the Trust may conclude the complaint without progressing to later stages.

If this happens:

- you will be told in writing,
- reasons will be explained clearly, and
- you will be advised of any external routes available to you.

After the Trust's procedure is finished

If you believe the Trust:

- did not follow its complaints procedure correctly, or
- acted unlawfully or unreasonably,

you may refer your concern to the Department for Education (DfE).

The DfE considers whether the complaints process was followed properly. It does not reinvestigate the complaint itself.

What does not fall under the complaints process?

Some matters must follow separate legal procedures, including:

- admissions and admissions appeals,
- exclusions,
- safeguarding concerns,
- statutory SEND decisions and EHCPs,
- staff disciplinary or grievance matters.

Where this applies, the school or Trust will explain and signpost you to the correct process.

How complaints can be resolved positively

- **Be Clear:** State your concern clearly and concisely.
- **Be Specific:** Provide dates, names, and details. Explain a realistic outcome sought.
- **Be Respectful:** Maintain a polite and constructive tone.
- **Be Patient:** Allow reasonable time for investigation and response, and follow one stage at a time.
- **Keep Records:** Retain copies of all correspondence.

Tip: Avoid using social media, aggressive language, or repeated contact with multiple people at once. This can make concerns harder to resolve and may slow the process.

If you need help

If you are unsure:

- who to contact,
- which stage applies, or
- how to submit a complaint,

the school or Trust will help guide you and consider any reasonable adjustments you may need.

Key Message

Your voice matters. We are dedicated to listening and working together to ensure the best possible learning environment for all pupils at Exceed Academies Trust.

Complaints are most often resolved when parents, carers and schools work together constructively, with a shared focus on what is best for the child.