



**Cabot**  
Learning  
Federation

## Complaints Policy

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September 2016

**History of most recent Policy changes**

| Version | Date           | Page           | Change  | Origin of Change e.g. TU request, Change in legislation                   |
|---------|----------------|----------------|---|---|
| V1.0    | November 2012  | Whole document | Adoption by the Cabot Learning Federation & Implementation                | Following consultation and development of a harmonised Employee Hand Book |
| V2.0    | June 2015      | Whole document | Annual review of full document.   | Annual review including feedback received from Academies                  |
| V2.1    | October 2015   | 4 and 5        | Minor changes to clarify the stage 1 process                              | Request for clarity from Academies  |
| V2.2    | September 2016 | Whole document | Amended to reflect policy covers parents/carers and members of the public | Following review  |
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## 1 Policy Statement

### 1.1 Aim

1.1.1 This policy outlines the process for complaints from parents, carers and members of the public. The aim of this policy is to ensure that any complaint, including a complaint against a member of staff, is handled by the Cabot Learning Federation (the Federation) sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is:

- Good for relationships.
- Good education practice.
- Good business practice.

### 1.2 Statement

1.2.1 The Federation needs to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. Parents, carers and members of the public should never feel - or be made to feel - that a complaint, made in a reasonable and appropriate way, will be taken amiss or will reflect adversely on any student or his/her opportunities at any School within the Federation. We will investigate and try to resolve every complaint in a positive manner and will treat every complaint as an opportunity:

- To put right any matter which may have gone wrong.
- To review our systems and procedures in the light of the relevant circumstances.

1.2.2 We recognise that a complaint which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, damaging to relationships and also to our internal culture.

1.2.3 This policy can be made available in larger print or more accessible format if required.

1.2.4 The Head of Compliance is the nominated Complaints Officer of the Federation and has responsibility for the operation and management of the Federation complaints procedure.

### 1.3 Who this policy applies to

1.3.1 Parents or carers of students at any School within the Federation and members of the general public. This policy is available on the Federation's website and can also be made available upon request.

## 2 Procedures

2.1 The Federation is clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

### 2.2 Informal Stage – Initial complaints and Minor Concerns

2.2.1 In many cases, a concern can be resolved quickly and will not reach the stage of becoming a formal complaint. In most cases an individual member of Federation staff will receive the first approach. It is helpful when staff are able to resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary and appropriate. Concerns relating to individual Academies should be raised with the School directly, with reference to the School Complaints Procedure.

2.2.2 Should the matter not be resolved informally within 10 school days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays, or where parents, carers and members of the public are not satisfied with the response to the complaint raised informally, they may proceed with Stage 1 of this Procedure.

### 2.3 Stage 1

2.3.1 Parents, carers and members of the public may invoke Stage 1 when initial attempts to resolve the issue at the Informal Stage are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

2.3.2 The School Principal of each School will nominate a named School Complaints Coordinator for their School. This information can be found in the local School Complaints Procedure.

2.3.3 A complaint can be made in writing to the School Complaints Coordinator who will investigate (or delegate the investigation to another senior member of staff) and offer a written resolution to the issue. For complaints about Federation issues not specific to an School, the complaint should be made in writing to the Complaints Officer, details of whom can be found at Annex 1.

2.3.4 The School Complaints Coordinator will ensure that the investigation:

- Reviews the informal complaint and how it was handled (if applicable);
- Establishes what has happened so far and who has been involved;
- Clarifies the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- Meets with the complainant or contacts them to clarify information if necessary;
- Clarifies what the complainant feels would put things right;
- Formally meet with persons involved in the matter (allowing them to be accompanied if they wish);
- Keep detailed written records of their investigation;

2.3.5 When he/she is satisfied that, so far as is reasonably practicable, that they have all the necessary information, give a decision in writing. The complainant will be informed of this decision together with written reasons for the decision in accordance with the timeframe identified below. The staff member should inform the CLF Complaints Officer of a summary of the complaint and its resolution.

2.3.6 Early Years Foundation Stage – In accordance with the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework, persons making a complaint about a Foundation School will be notified of the outcome of an investigation within 28 working days of having received the complaint.

2.3.7 The following timeframes will be adhered to for complaints heard by School staff under stage 1:

- A formal complaint in writing will be acknowledged in writing within three school days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays.
- Formal response will be provided within 20 school days of receipt of the written complaint wherever practicable. If it is not possible to respond to the complainant within this timeframe, a letter explaining the reasons for this and an expected full response date will be issued.

#### 2.4 Stage 2 - Complaint Heard by Panel of the School Council

2.4.1 If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the response, or wishes to escalate the complaint, they should write to the Clerk to the School Council giving full details of the complaint enclosing all relevant supporting documentation within 10 school days of receipt of the decision under Stage 1. A request for a panel hearing will usually only be considered if the complainant has invoked the informal stage and Stage 1.

2.4.2 The Chair or nominated councillor will, once in receipt of the complaint, schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 10 school days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays. The Chair or nominated councillor will arrange for the Panel to be convened to consider the matter at the hearing.

2.4.3 The Chair or nominated councillor will convene a panel of the School Council consisting of at least three people who have not been involved in previous consideration of the complaint. At least one of the members of the panel must be independent of the management and running of the School. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chair or nominated councillor.

2.4.4 If the Panel deems it necessary, the Chair will arrange for the complaint to be further investigated.

The complainant may be accompanied to the hearing if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be necessary.

2.4.5 The aim of the hearing is for the Panel will review the decision reached at Stage 1 with the aim of resolving the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between the School and the complainant. The Panel will not consider any new complaints that have not been raised as part of the initial complaint. After due consideration of all facts the Panel considers relevant, the Panel will reach a decision on the balance of probabilities as to whether or not the complaint is made out.

The Panel can:

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- Recommend changes to systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

2.4.6 It is recognised that the complainant may not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

2.4.7 The Chair of the Panel will write to the parents or carers informing them of the Panel's decision and the reasons for this decision. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise confirmed in writing to the parents, the Principal and Executive Principal of the School, the School Council and, where relevant, the person complained of. The Panel's decisions, findings and any recommendations will also be made available to the complainant for inspection on the School's premises.

2.4.8 The following timeframes will be adhered to for complaints heard by School Council under stage 2:

- A formal complaint in writing will be acknowledged in writing within three school days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays.
- A panel will be convened as soon as possible and normally within 10 school days (or as soon as practicable within the school holidays).
- Formal response will be provided within 20 school days of receipt of the written complaint wherever practicable. If it is not possible to respond to the complainant within this timeframe, a letter explaining the reasons for this and an expected full response date will be issued.

2.5 Stage 3 - Complaint Heard by Panel of the Federation Board

2.5.1 If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the response, or wishes to escalate the complaint, they should write to the Clerk to the Federation Board giving full details of the complaint enclosing all relevant supporting documentation within 10 school days of receipt of the decision under Stage 2. A request for a panel hearing will usually only be considered if the complainant has invoked Stages 1 and 2.

2.5.2 The Chair or nominated director will, once in receipt of the complaint, schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 10 school days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays. The Chair or nominated director will arrange for the Panel to be convened to consider the matter at the hearing.

2.5.3 The Chair or nominated director will convene a panel of the Federation Board consisting of at least three people who have not been involved in previous consideration of the complaint. At least one of the members of the panel must be independent of the management and running of the Federation. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chair or nominated director.

2.5.4 If the Panel deems it necessary, the Chair will arrange for the complaint to be further investigated.

The complainant may be accompanied to the hearing if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be necessary.

2.5.5 The aim of the hearing is for the Panel will review the decision reached at Stage 2 with the aim of resolving the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between the Federation and/or School and the complainant. The Panel will not consider any new complaints that have not been raised as part of the initial complaint. After due consideration of all facts the Panel considers relevant, the Panel will reach a decision on the balance of probabilities as to whether or not the complaint is made out.

The Panel can:

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- Recommend changes to systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

2.5.6 It is recognised that the complainant may not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

2.5.7 The Chair of the Panel will write to the complainant informing them of the Panel's decision and the reasons for it normally within 10 school days. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise confirmed in writing to the complainant, the Executive Principal of the Federation, the Federation Board and, where relevant, the person complained of. The Panel's decisions, findings and any recommendations will also be made available to the complainant for inspection on the Federation's premises.

2.5.8 The following timeframes will be adhered to for complaints heard by the panel of the Federation Board under Stage 3:

- A formal complaint in writing will be acknowledged in writing within three school days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays.
- A panel will be convened as soon as possible and normally within 10 school days (or as soon as practicable within the school holidays).
- Formal response will be provided within 20 school days of receipt of the written complaint wherever practicable. If it is not possible to respond to the complainant within this timeframe, a letter explaining the reasons for this and an expected full response date will be issued.

### **3 Resolving Complaints**

3.1 At each stage in the procedure the Federation will keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- An apology.
- An explanation.
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better.
- An explanation of what steps have been taken to ensure that the situation will not recur.
- An undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint.

3.2 It is useful if complainants are able to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the situation could have been handled better is not an admission of negligence.

#### **4 Early Years Foundation Stage**

4.1 In respect of children within the Early Years Foundation Stage of the Foundation's Academies:

- records of complaints will be kept for at least three years; and
- parents or carers may make a complaint to Ofsted: Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD; general helpline 0300 123 1231; textphone number 0161 618 8524 and/or ISI (on 020 7600 0100) if they wish.

4.2 The School will provide Ofsted, upon request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period and the action taken and conclusion reached.

#### **5 Vexatious complaints**

5.1 We are fully committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, in a friendly, respectful and professional way. We ask complainants to understand the need to behave in a similar way as it is in everyone's best interest to help ensure the matter can be resolved as quickly and informally as possible. However, the Cabot Learning Federation does not expect its staff, Members of the Board or School Councillors to tolerate behaviour by complainants which is unacceptable, for example, which is abusive, offensive or threatening, and they will take action to protect staff, Members of the Board or School Councillors from any such behaviour if it occurs. Also, there may be complainants who, because of the frequency of their contact with the School, hinder our consideration of their or other people's, complaints and potentially the running of the School.

5.2 We anticipate that such behaviour will be a very rare occurrence, but if we consider a complainant's behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, we will tell them why and ask them to change it. If the behaviour continues, we may take action to restrict the complainant's contact with the School.

5.3 The decision to restrict access to the School will be taken by the Principal and chair of the School Council. Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. They may include:

- requesting contact in a particular form (for example, emails only);
- requiring contact to take place only with a named member of staff or Member of the School Council ;
- restricting telephone calls, meetings or emails to specified days and times;
- asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their conduct.

5.4 In all cases we will write to tell the complainant why we believe his or her behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, what action we are taking and the duration of that action. We will also tell them how they can challenge the decision if they disagree with it.

5.5 Where a complainant continues to behave in a way which is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, we may decide to terminate contact with that complainant and discontinue any investigation into their complaint. If we decide to carry on treating someone as an unreasonably persistent complainant and we are still investigating their complaint six months later, we will carry out a review and decide if restrictions will continue.

- 5.6 Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, members of the Board or School Councillors, we will consider other options, for example reporting the matter to the police and/or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.
- 5.7 Where a complainant whose case is closed persists in communicating with us about it, we may decide to terminate contact with that complainant. In such cases, we will read all correspondence from that complainant, but unless there is fresh evidence which affects our decision on the complaint we will simply acknowledge it or place it on the file with no acknowledgement.
- 5.8 New complaints from people who have come under the unreasonably persistent complainant's policy will be treated on the merit of that new complaint.

## **6 Managing and Recording Complaints**

- 6.1 The Federation and its Academies will keep a written record of all complaints (including whether resolved at the preliminary stage or proceeded to a panel hearing), the date on which they were received and their final outcome. Written records will be kept for at least three years. Brief notes of meetings and telephone calls should be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.
- 6.2 The School Complaints Coordinator is responsible for records and their safe storage. All correspondence, and statements and records of complaint must be kept confidential but must be shown to HMI when requested.
- 6.3 The School Councils and Federation Board should monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure.

## **7 Publicising the Procedure**

- 7.1 There is a legal requirement for the Complaints Procedure to be published.

## **Annex 1 – Local School Procedures**

Each CLF School will publish their local arrangements (including details of who their complaints coordinator is) within this Annex of the policy published on their School website.

### **School Details**

School Name: Digitech Studio School

School Complaints Coordinator: Veronica Balasco

Contact details for School Complaints Coordinator: Digitech Studio School, Tower Road North, Warmley, Bristol, BS30 8XQ

### **CLF Details**

The Head of Compliance is the nominated Complaints Officer of the Federation and has responsibility for the operation and management of the Federation complaints procedure.

Head of Compliance: Bryony Green

Contact details: Cabot Learning Federation, King's Oak School, Brook Road, Bristol BS15 4JT