

Complaints Policy

Policy owner / date:	Chief Operating Officer	November 2024
Approved by / date:	Board of Trustees	5 December 2024
Review period:	Annually, or sooner if new guidance or legislation is issued and/or a business need for review is identified	
Next review due:	September 2025	
Version:	2.0	

Current version	Previous version	Summary of key change(s) since last version:
2.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amended contact details • Inclusion of the difference between a concern and a complaint • Inclusion of contact details for various bodies dealing with issues not covered by this policy • Minor editorial updates

**GOSFORTH GROUP
COMPLAINTS POLICY FOR PARENTS/CARERS
OR FROM PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT PARENTS OF ATTENDING PUPILS**

1 Scope of the Complaints Policy

- 1.1 Gosforth Group is committed to providing the highest quality education and care for students. The Trust is committed to the principle of anyone being able to raise a concern or register a complaint in respect of or in relation to their child/children at its academies or the institution itself.
- 1.2 The Trust is committed to an open and honest approach to complaints handling. The Trust will always strive to recognise when a complaint or any expression of dissatisfaction is being made and treat it in accordance with this complaints policy. However, the Trust does ask all complainants to follow the procedures set out in this complaints policy to allow the Trust to deal with any such complaints in the fairest way using the most appropriate means available to it.

2 Who can make a complaint?

- 2.1 This complaints policy is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to [Gosforth Group](#) about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory policies (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints policy.
- 2.2 In investigating a complaint we will take every care to safeguard privacy and confidentiality. However, any member of staff mentioned in a complaint will be made aware of the issues raised and will have an opportunity to comment on them. In addition, it may be necessary to share the complaint with other parties within the Trust likely to be helpful in providing a solution.
- 2.3 It may be appropriate to resolve things with one or more of the following:
- An explanation
 - An acknowledgement that the complaint is valid in whole or in part and / or that a situation could have been handled differently or better [this is not the same as an admission of negligence]
 - An assurance and explanation of the steps that have been taken/will be taken to help to ensure that it will not happen again
 - An apology
 - An undertaking to review Trust procedures in light of the complaint.

3 Objectives of the complaints policy

- a) To promote high quality education and care for students
- b) To develop and maintain harmonious and respectful relationships between all stakeholders and the Trust
- c) To respond promptly and effectively to concerns or complaints made by parents and carers/others
- d) To encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
- e) To be easily accessible

- f) To be simple to understand and use
- g) To be impartial
- h) To be non-contentious
- i) To allow swift handling with established time limits for action
- j) To respect people's desire for confidentiality
- k) To address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary.

4 The difference between a concern and a complaint

- 4.1 A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.
- 4.2 A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.
- 4.3 Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the Complaints Policy.

5 Complaints that result in staff capability or disciplinary action

- 5.1 If at any formal stage of a complaint it is determined that staff capability or disciplinary proceedings are necessary to resolve an issue, the details of this action will remain confidential to the appropriate person / people within the Gosforth Group. The complainant is entitled to be informed that action is being taken. However, they are not entitled to participate in these proceedings or receive any detail about them.

6 Social media

- 6.1 In order for complaints to be resolved as quickly and fairly as possible, we request that complainants do not discuss complaints publicly via social media. Complaints will be dealt with in confidence for those involved and we expect complainants to also observe confidentiality.

7 Anonymous complaints

- 7.1 The Trust will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the appropriate person / people within the Gosforth Group will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.
- 7.2 The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

8 Time scales

- 8.1 Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. The Trust reserves the right not to accept complaints received outside of this time frame, but will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if the Trust determines exceptional circumstances apply.

9 Complaints received outside of term time

- 9.1 The Trust will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

10 How to raise a concern or make a complaint

- 10.1 The first point of contact with the Trust concerning your child should be his/ her/ their Form Tutor/ Plan Manager.
- 10.2 The first point of contact with the Trust concerning anything else should be the Trust's Head of Governance and Compliance at: admin@gosforthgroup.org.uk
- 10.3 The Trust considers any concerns very seriously and most problems can be resolved at the initial stage, however, it is important that you tell us as soon as possible.

11 STAGE 1 - Policy to register a concern (Informal)

- 11.1 The Trust will seek to agree an informal resolution whenever appropriate.
- 11.2 The Trust recognises that many concerns may easily be dealt with by way of a telephone call or face to face conversation. If a complainant would like their concerns to be initially dealt with in this informal way, the complainant should make this known to the Trust.
- 11.3 If the concern cannot be dealt with straightaway, the complainant's first point of contact will acknowledge the concerns and will provide the complainant with an anticipated time in which it will be addressed.
- 11.4 Formal procedures will only need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue have been unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.
- 11.5 To raise your concern/ complaint informally, please send an email, with the subject line of Complaint, to your academy's main office/reception outlining the information below. You will find your academy's main office/reception email address on the Contact Us page of the academy website. Alternatively, you may choose to write a letter, in which case please address it to the Principal of the relevant academy. Either way, please include:
- Your name and preferred method of contact and details
 - Student's name and form group if you are a Parent/Carer
 - Who you are raising your complaint/concern with (name of staff from whom you would like a response)
 - An outline of your complaint/concern

12 STAGE 2 - Formal complaint

- 12.1 If the concern has not been resolved at the informal stage, and you wish to continue to pursue your complaint, the formal complaint process must be followed. Only one individual complaint may be considered at one time.
- 12.2 For a complaint/concern to be formally investigated by an appropriate person from the Trust, you must raise this with the Head of Governance and Compliance in writing outlining the information below. To do this via email, please send an email, with the subject line of Formal Complaint, to the following email address: admin@gosforthgroup.org.uk Please include the following details in the email:
- Your name and preferred method of contact and details
 - Student's name and form group if you are a Parent/Carer
 - To whom your initial complaint was raised and when, if applicable
 - The academy's response to your complaint, if applicable
 - Why you remain dissatisfied with the response to your complaint, if applicable
 - An outline of your complaint
 - The outcome you seek to your complaint. You are asked to note that this is your preference only and places no restriction on the outcome of the operation of the Complaints Policy.
- 12.3 If you do not have access to email and/or would prefer to write to us, you can collect a Complaints Form (Stage 2 – Formal Complaint) from your Academy reception and complete and return this back to a member of staff at reception.
- 12.4 If the matter is about:
- the day to day running of the Academy/Trust
 - the interpretation of Academy/Trust policies, or
 - the actions or inactions of staff at the Academy/Trust
- It will be investigated by the CEO, or a senior member of staff nominated by the CEO.
- 12.5 If the matter is about:
- Academy/ Trust policies as determined by the Trustees
 - the actions or inactions of the Trustees, or
 - the CEO
- It will be investigated by the Chair of Trustees, or a person nominated by the Chair of Trustees.
- 12.6 Where possible the person carrying out the investigation will respond to the complaint within 15 Trust working days of receiving the complaint, providing the complainant with an investigation report. If there is a delay it will be communicated to the complainant together with the reasons for the delay. This may be a summary of the full report, providing sufficient information to allow the complainant to understand why any decisions or conclusions were met.
- 12.7 If it becomes apparent during the investigation that the complaint is a disciplinary or capability issue, then the matter will be dealt with by following the appropriate policy rather than the complaints policy. The complainant will be notified if this is the case.

13 STAGE 3 – Review panel

13.1 If not satisfied with the result from Stage 2, the complainant may choose to refer the complaint to Stage 3 of the policy. This must be done in writing to the Head of Governance and Compliance with the subject line Formal Complaint Stage 3 at: admin@gosforthgroup.org.uk within 15 Trust working days of the completion of Stage 2. If you do not have access to email and/or would prefer to write to us, please address your letter to: Head of Governance and Compliance, c/o North Gosforth Academy, Dudley Lane, Seaton Burn, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE13 6EJ. Please make it clear in your letter that you wish to proceed to Stage 3 of the Complaints Policy.

13.2 At this Stage, the complaint will be considered by a panel.

- If Stage 2 was investigated by the CEO or a senior member of staff nominated by the CEO, Stage 3 will be carried out by a panel of two Trustees plus a person independent of the management and running of the school / Trust. The panel will consider the way the complaint was addressed and decide whether it has been properly dealt with. They will make a final decision on behalf of the Trustees. The general principle is that the Trust should be able to produce documentary evidence to show that the complaint has received fair and proper consideration within the Trust's policy. If they have any concerns, they may ask the CEO to reopen the investigation. The Trust will endeavour to provide a final written decision within 15 Trust working days. The complainant will be kept informed of any delay and the reason for such delay.
- When Stage 2 has been investigated by the Chair of Trustees or a person nominated by them, Stage 3 will be carried out by a panel of two other Trustees plus a person independent of the management and running of the school / Trust, who will meet to consider the complaint and make a final decision on behalf of the Trustees.

13.3 Where the complaint is considered by a panel

13.3.1 This will comprise two Trustees and a person independent of the management and running of the school / Trust who have no detailed prior knowledge of the complaint, or connection with the complainant.

13.3.2 The complainant will be informed of the identities of the panel members no later than 10 Trust working days before the meeting. If the complainant has a genuine concern with regards to the identities of the panel members, they should make these known to the Trust no later than five Trust working days before the meeting together with the reason for concerns. In these circumstances, it may be necessary for the Trust to reschedule the meeting to address such concerns and/or to arrange alternative panel members.

13.3.3 The meeting will normally take place within 15 Trust working days of the request. If this is not feasible the complainant will be contacted and provided with sufficient detail to understand the reason for the delay. There is the opportunity to submit written evidence regarding the complaint prior to the meeting of the panel and also to attend, accompanied by a friend/partner if desired, to put forward the case.

13.3.4 At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to make statements, present evidence and ask / reply to questions. Once the complainant and

Trust representative have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave for the panel to consider its findings and make recommendations.

13.3.5 The panel will write to the complainant [and, where relevant, the person/s complained about] with its conclusion within 15 Trust working days of the meeting. The complainant will be kept informed of any delay and the reason for such delay.

13.4 The decision of the panel is final

13.4.1 The decision of the panel is the last step in the Trust process. Internal Trust matters are the responsibility of the Trustees. The local authority can only provide advice to parents/carers in respect of best practice procedures when dealing with complaints.

14 Referring complaints on completion of the Trust's procedures

14.1 If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaints policy, you can refer your complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) at [Complain about a school: State schools - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complain-about-a-school), or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

14.2 The ESFA will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school. The ESFA will not overturn a Trust's decision about a complaint. However, it will look into:

- Whether there was undue delay
- Whether the Trust failed to comply with its own Complaints Policy
- Whether the Trust was in breach of its funding agreement with the Secretary of State
- Whether the Trust has failed to comply with any other legal obligation

14.3 If the Trust did not deal with the complaint properly, it will be asked to reinvestigate the complaint. If the Trust's policy is found not to meet regulations, the Trust will be asked to correct its policy accordingly.

15 Dealing with persistent complaints

15.1 In the case of vexatious or persistent complaints, the relevant member of Trust personnel will inform the complainant in writing that the policy has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed. Gosforth Group reserves the right to deny investigation of any complaints which it considers to be vexatious, malicious, unsubstantiated, unfounded and/or those relating to a previous complaint which has already been investigated.

16 How we will collect and process your personal data

- 16.1 We will collect and process the data you provide to us when raising a complaint/concern, including your name, contact details and details of the complaint/concern (including any sensitive/confidential information), only for the purposes of dealing with your complaint/concern. This information will be held by the Trust and will be made available to the investigator/panel members for use as evidence or supporting documentation as appropriate. As part of the investigation into the complaint/concern it may be necessary to share this information with other Trust staff on a need-to-know basis.

17 Record keeping

- 17.1 The Trust will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. Records will include copies of letters, emails and notes relating to meetings and phone calls. The written records will be in accordance with Part 7 of the Education [Independent School Standards] Regulations 2014, sub paragraph [e] with details of whether they were resolved following a formal policy, or progression to a panel hearing.
- 17.2 This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel. Findings and recommendations of the panel will be available on the school premises for inspection by the proprietor and the relevant Trust personnel. This is except where the Secretary of State [or someone acting on his/her behalf] or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a Freedom of Information [FOI] request or under the terms of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), or where material must be made available during a school inspection under Section 109 of the 2008 Act where access is requested.
- 17.3 The complaints records are logged.
- 17.4 Details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with all the Trustees in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later date.
- 17.5 Where Trustees are aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the Trust will [where reasonably practicable] arrange for an entirely independent panel to hear the complaint. This will be sourced from another Academy Trust or via Newcastle City Council Governor Services.
- 17.6 Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the Trustees who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

18 Monitoring and review

- 18.1 The Trust will record the action it takes as a result of complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). The Trustees will determine whether there are any improvements or changes the Trust can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events happening in future.
- 18.2 The policy is reviewed annually, or sooner if there are changes to relevant legislation / guidance or a business need is identified.

19 Availability

- 19.1 A copy of this policy is available to all parents/carers on request and can be found on the [Trust's website](#).

20 What if I have a concern/complaint about any of the following?

There are other statutory bodies, personnel or procedures for dealing with these eventualities:

- Children with special educational needs
- Disciplinary issues relating to members of staff
- Allegations of abuse
- Anonymous complaints
- Services provided by other providers who use school premises
- Safeguarding
- Freedom of Information and Subject Access requests
- Admissions and exclusion appeals
- Provision of collective worship and religious observance

Area	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SEN	Concerns about admissions or statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs should be raised with Newcastle City Council.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disciplinary issues relating to members of staff	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allegations of abuse	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) on lado@newcastle.gov.uk or LADO@northtyneside.gov.uk
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Services provided by other providers who use school premises	Providers should have their own complaints policy to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Safeguarding	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Safeguarding and Child Protection policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) on lado@newcastle.gov.uk or LADO@northtyneside.gov.uk

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freedom of Information and Subject Access requests 	<p>If you wish to make a Freedom of Information request or a Subject Access Request, please make this clear in the subject line by email to the Head of Governance and Compliance on admin@gosforthgroup.org.uk or by post c/o North Gosforth Academy, Dudley Lane, Seaton Burn, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE13 6EJ</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions and exclusion appeals 	<p>Any applicant refused a place at an academy has a right of appeal to an independent appeal panel established by the admission authority for that school.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of collective worship and religious observance 	<p>Each Academy has its own RSHE policy which is published on its website. In England and Wales, the law specifies that all state funded schools must provide a daily act of collective worship. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from religious education and/or collective worship.</p> <p>From age 16, pupils can choose for themselves to opt out of collective worship if they wish. However, they cannot opt out of receiving religious education without parental consent until they are 18.</p>