



Complaints Procedure

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This document applies to all academies and operations of the Vale Academy Trust: www.vale-academy.org

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Dealing with Concerns

From time to time Children & Young People (C&YP) and parents may wish to raise concerns with the Academy, as may members of the local community, employees of the Academy, and others who have an interest in its success. Well-founded concerns are a useful source of feedback to the Academy, and if they are dealt with fairly and effectively they can lead to changes that enhance performance and raise standards. Communication is improved, and confidence in the Academy increases.

Most concerns should initially be raised informally with the most appropriate member of staff, and it will usually be self-evident who this is. Very often some indication of where to look for further advice, or with whom to raise questions and concerns, will be given to parents in letters from the Academy.

Parents and C&YP are likely to raise general concerns with Class Teachers, Tutors or Year Coordinators, whilst subject-related concerns can often best be dealt with by Subject Teachers and Curriculum Coordinators. This will depend on the age and stage of the child or young person (CoYP).

Sometimes you may not feel able to raise your concern with the most obvious person, perhaps because your concern relates to them directly, or because you have difficulty in discussing issues with them. If this is the case you should seek advice from the Complaints Coordinator (Tel 01235 225700) who will arrange for your concern to be investigated by someone else. He/she will also advise you if you are unsure with whom you should raise your concern.

Most concerns can be dealt with by a telephone call, although e-mail is increasingly convenient. We do not require concerns in writing because we want to avoid discouraging you from raising them. If you do wish to write down your concern we may nevertheless decide that a telephone conversation is the most appropriate way to discuss things further.

In the majority of cases discussion will resolve the concern, or at least allow both parties to appreciate the other's point of view. Clearly not every concern will be resolved in favour of the person raising it. At this stage you may feel that you have grounds to register a complaint. You may feel that the Academy is in breach of its published policies, or that these policies are unreasonable, or that your concern was not properly considered.

Registering a complaint

The Academy operates a three stage complaints procedure. At any stage in the procedure C&YP may be accompanied by a parent or another adult, or adults may be accompanied by a supporter or advisor.

The procedures are designed to be simple to understand, and to ensure a full and fair hearing for all complaints. Any requests for confidentiality will be respected. Complaints will be dealt with as quickly as possible, and you will be kept informed about the progress of your complaint at all times.

Every complaint is recorded by the Complaints Coordinator, and the Headteacher regularly reports to the Governing Body on the number, nature and outcomes of complaints received.

Stage 1

You should contact the Complaints Co-ordinator to raise your complaint on 01235 225700. You may make this contact by telephone, e-mail, or in writing.

If the original concern that led to the complaint has already been discussed with one of the Senior Staff you are free to continue the discussion with them as a formal complaint, or to raise it with another Senior Staff member. However if a Senior Staff member is the subject of the complaint you are making you must contact the Complaints Coordinator who will nominate an alternative Senior Staff member to hear the complaint.

The Senior Staff member will arrange to discuss the complaint with you, normally at a meeting during Academy hours, and not later than ten working days after you raise the complaint. The proceedings of the meeting will be minuted and you will be sent a copy of the record. If you have not already explained your complaint in writing it will be set out as part of the record.

The Senior Staff member may be able to adjudicate on the complaint at the initial meeting. However he/she may wish to take advice from other colleagues, check the facts, or investigate further. If this is the case, and further information is forthcoming you will be informed of this, and either you or the Senior Staff member may request a further meeting.

If the Senior Staff member agrees with your complaint he/she will notify you of this, and if appropriate apologise formally on behalf of the Academy. You will also be informed of the steps that will be taken to ensure that the incident that led to the complaint does not happen again.

If you feel that the Senior Staff member has not handled the complaint according to the procedures outlined above or, for example, where the decision against your complaint hinges on a finely balanced interpretation of events, you may ask that your complaint is taken to Stage 2. If you are in any doubt about whether to do this you may discuss the matter with the Complaints Coordinator, or you may choose to seek the views of one of the Parent Governors.

If the Senior Staff member feels that the complaint needs to be dealt with at a higher level, or if he/she believes that his/her decision needs to be confirmed by the Headteacher, he/she may, at any point in the proceedings, decide to refer the complaint to Stage 2 on your behalf.

Stage 2

Your complaint will be reviewed by the Headteacher.

You should inform the Senior Staff member who handled your complaint in stage 1 that you intend to take it further, and he/she will inform the Head on your behalf. You should do this in a brief written note, but you do not need to explain the complaint any further. However you do need to explain why you are asking for your complaint to be continued into Stage 2. All the paperwork associated with the complaint will be passed to the Headteacher, and he/she will contact you to arrange a meeting within ten working days. The meeting will normally be during the Academy day. If the Headteacher is not available within this time you have the option of waiting until later, or asking an alternative Senior Staff member to hear your complaint on his behalf.

At the Headteacher's discretion some or all of the information recorded in the documentation may be reviewed, and those involved in the events from the expression of original concern onwards may be approached again. This review of the facts will not necessarily be undertaken by the Headteacher personally, but by someone else who may or may not be an employee of the Academy.

The Headteacher may be able to adjudicate on the complaint at the initial meeting. However he/she may wish to take advice from other sources, or investigate further. If this is the case, and further information is forthcoming you will be informed of this, and either you or the Headteacher may request a further meeting.

If the Headteacher agrees with your complaint he/she will notify you of this, and if appropriate he will apologise formally on behalf of the Academy. You will also be informed of the steps that will be taken to ensure that the incident that led to the complaint does not happen again.

If you feel that the Headteacher has not handled the complaint according to the procedures outlined above, or, for example where the decision against your complaint hinges on a finely balanced interpretation of events you may ask that your complaint is taken to Stage 3. If you are in any doubt about whether to do this you may discuss the matter with the Complaints Coordinator, or you may choose to seek the views of one of the Parent Governors.

If the Headteacher feels that the complaint needs to be dealt with at a higher level, or if he believes that his decision needs to be confirmed by the Governing Body, he may, at any point in the proceedings, decide to refer the complaint to Stage 3 on your behalf.

Stage 3

Your complaint will be reviewed by the Governing Body's Complaints Appeals Panel. You should write formally to the Chair of the Governors requesting that the decision made at Stage 2 be reviewed. You do not need to set out the detail contained in the original complaint, but you should explain why you are appealing. The Chair of the Governors will convene a panel of three to five governors, with one nominated as chair, to hear the appeal. The chair of the appeal panel will request all the records related to the complaint from the Headteacher.

The panel will be independent and impartial. No Governor may serve on the appeal panel if they have had prior involvement with the complaint. One member of the

panel will be independent of the Academy Trust. It is likely that this independent panel member will be a current Director of another Academy Trust within Oxfordshire but will have no prior knowledge or involvement in the case.

Issues such as gender, race and religious affiliation will be considered when the panel is convened. The panel will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible, especially where the complainant is a CoYP.

The chair of the panel will ensure that all parties at the appeal have the opportunity to put their case without undue interruption, and to ask questions, and that the proceedings are conducted with respect and courtesy. The chair will make sure that the key issues are addressed, and that written evidence is seen by all parties where appropriate and taking into account current legislation regarding data protection and freedom of information.

The Clerk to the Governors will make the arrangements for the appeal meeting, at a date convenient to all parties. All collated written material will be made available to all parties in advance of the hearing; the Clerk will minute the hearing and will inform all parties of the panel's decision.

If the appeal is dismissed, either in whole or in part, there are no further stages of appeal for you within the Academy. The Clerk to the Governors will advise you if there are any further steps available to you.

Where the appeal is upheld, either in whole or in part the panel will decide, in consultation with the Leadership Team the appropriate action to be taken, and will recommend changes to Academy procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not arise again. If appropriate the Academy will write to you and formally apologise.

Vexatious Appeals

If after the proper procedures have been followed you try to open the same issue, or encourage a third party to do so, the Chair of Governors will write to you explaining that the procedures have been exhausted, and will declare the matter closed.

Stage 4

It is hoped that all complaints can be resolved using the Academy Trust's own local complaints procedure. However, should this not be the case, complainants have recourse to further their complaint using EFA (Education Funding Agency) guidelines. Further details can be found on their website.

If a complaint reaches this level we will refer to the appeals process of the Educational Funding Agency.

Exceptions to the appeals procedure

The procedures outlined here cover general concerns and complaints. Statutory procedures for specific situations (for example staff grievances or appeals against admissions or exclusions) will always take precedence over these procedures.