Complaints Policy for Hayes School

Owner (job role):	Head of Governance
Approval Body:	Trust Board
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Inspire, Respect, Flourish.

Version	Approval Date	Summary of Changes
1	7/7/22	New IMAT Policy
2	15/12/22	Clarifying that the independent panel member is likely to be a Governor serving on another IMAT school governing body Amending the days allowed to convene the panel (from 15 to 20) Clarifying who can be brought to the panel Clarifying regarding when an online panel might be permitted Clarifying process regarding stage 3 panel minutes Clarifying the constitution of the panel Clarifying contact details
3.	20/11/24	Updated front sheet and dates, reviewed content Minor changes made to contact information and minor amendments Noting the timeframe for acknowledging a stage 1 informal complaint on page 8 Increasing the maximum time to investigate a stage 1 complaint from 5 to 10 days on page 8 Slight update to who will investigate at stage 2 on page 10 Clarifying timings for requesting evidence for the panel on page 12 and on page 16

		Adding a notification about a Trust policy on page 20
4.	2/1/25	Minor amendment on page 13 to post panel process
5.	22/9/25	Minor date changes and contact details updated
6.	14/7/26	Update to scope of complaints procedure Update to section on managing serial and persistent complaints Update to section on Stage 3 Panel Process Added section on use of AI

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At our School we work hard to establish and maintain good relationships with everyone in the school community. Occasionally, expectations are not met, and issues need to be resolved. This policy sets out how we will deal with any concerns or complaints raised.

Legislation and guidance

This policy meets the requirements set out in part 7 of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that the academy must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the academy. It is also based on guidance published by the Department for Education on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations.

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure 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 our School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure. If a complaint concerns Impact Multi Academy Trust, rather than the school, the Trust complaint policy must be followed, which can be found on the policies page of the Trust's website.

Third Party Providers

If your complaint relates to the service provided by a third party on school premises, for example, an after-school club run by an outside agency, you should use the complaints procedure of the external provider and not this procedure. Contact details of outside providers can be obtained from the school office should you require them.

Multiple Complaints regarding the same incident

Occasionally, we may receive a number of complaints from different complainants, all based on the same subject. Where this happens, we will consider whether they should be dealt with as a single complaint or as separate complaints. Generally, where the complaints are based on the same facts and circumstances, they will all be dealt with together, using the process below. When managing multiple complaints based on the same subject together, we may consider sending a single response to all complainants.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.*

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.*

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaint's procedure. We take concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, [HT name] (Headteacher), will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, [HT name] (Headteacher)

will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, we will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints' procedure.

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing, by email or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

How to make a complaint

Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to Mr Rob Hitch, Headteacher, via the school office postmaster@hayes.bromley.sch.uk. Please mark it as Private and Confidential.

Complaints against the Headteacher should be addressed to Mrs Janice Pigott, Chair of Governors and the CEO, Sarah Lewis, via clerk@imat.uk Please mark it as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Trust Governance Team at clerk@imat.uk Please mark it as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a Trustee of the Trust, should be dealt with under the Trust Complaints Policy.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask a third-party organisation for example like the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Head Teacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will not consider complaints made outside of this time frame unless exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

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

Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by our academy, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority. Please see details of our Admission Appeals process on the school website.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) Gemma Taylor, via LADO@bromley.gov.uk, who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. You can also refer to the Trust's Suspension and Exclusion policy which can be found on the Trust's website: Key Information - Impact Multi Academy Trust *complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.
Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. Please see our Trust website policy page for details. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: https://www.gov.uk/contact-dfe Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain directly to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures. The grievance policy is available on the Trust website's policy page.
Staff conduct	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.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, Local Authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against our Academy in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Staff are not expected to spend a disproportionate amount of time attempting to interpret and respond to communications that are unclear, unduly lengthy or complex, or overly legalistic. The school will not engage in legal debates within its complaints process. In cases where a complaint contains detailed legal arguments, including references to case law, the school may seek advice from its legal representatives. Where this occurs, the school will inform the complainant of the impact on response times.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, we will seek to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- An explanation.
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better.
- An assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur.
- An explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made.
- An undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.
- An apology.

Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Stages of a complaint

Stage 1 – Informal concerns

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, phase leader, deputy headteacher or Headteacher. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis, and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.

The Head Teacher / named person will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing by email) within 3 school days.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the concern will provide an informal written response as quickly as possible and within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the informal complaint.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Stage 2 – Formal complaint

For all complaints that are not about the Headteacher or a member of the Governing Body

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher – see below), via the school office (provide contact details). This may be done in person or in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form).

The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.

Within this response, the Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

The Headteacher or the person investigating the complaint or the Headteacher may seek a discussion with the person raising the complaint at a mutually convenient time to ensure they understand the complaint and the resolution that is being sought. This is so we can respond to the complaint effectively. In the event that the parent does not agree to this we may need to end the complaints process, due to being unable to sufficiently clarify the concerns.

Note: The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Headteacher (or investigator) will:

- If necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.
- Keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions we will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

For complaints that are about the Headteacher or a member of the Governing Body

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, either the CEO, or the Chair of Governors, will investigate. If either the CEO or the Chair of Governors have been involved in the complaint previously then the matter will be referred to another Governor or a Trustee.

If the complaint is about a member of the Governing Body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the Governing Body must be made to the Trust Governance Team clerk@imat.uk

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair; or
- The entire governing body; or
- The majority of the governing body

Stage 2 will be escalated to the Impact Multi Academy Trust Governance Team.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a panel hearing consisting of at least three people. Those wishing to escalate their complaint to stage 3 must do so within 10 school days of receiving their stage 2 response. We will not consider complaints made outside of this time frame unless exceptional circumstances apply.

Stage 3 Complaints Panel Membership

This will be a Panel hearing consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint or have any information about the complaint.

For most Stage 3 Complaints Panels:

- Two members of the Panel will be school Governors who are not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and have no knowledge of it
- One panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school but is likely to be a governor serving on another IMAT Trust School Governing Body.

However, if the complaint is:

- Jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair; or
- The entire governing body; or
- The majority of the governing body

Then the Stage 3 Panel will be heard by a panel of two Trustees and an independent panel member.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Pupils are not permitted to attend the Stage 3 Complaints Panel. The school does not allow either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. Parents may be asked to confirm that they will not attend the Stage 3 Complaints Panel with legal representation.

There may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate for a staff member. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under (Human Resources) staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

The Headteacher will always attend a Stage 3 Complaints Panel to represent the school. In exceptional circumstances, a Deputy Headteacher could attend in the Headteacher's place, but not if they have led on the Stage 2 investigation.

The individual who conducted the Stage 2 investigation may be invited to attend the Stage 3 Complaints Panel.

Stage 3 Panel process

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, postmaster@hayes.bromley.sch.uk within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response. We will not consider complaints made outside of this time frame unless exceptional circumstances apply.

Within this request, please ensure that you explain why: 1) you are not satisfied with the Stage 2 outcome, and 2) you are escalating it to Stage 3.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

Timings

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee.
At least 7 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will confirm and notify the complainant and the school of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant and school is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The Stage 3 Complaints Panel will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private and face to face. A virtual (online) Stage 3 Complaints Panel will only be considered if the parent, Headteacher or a Panel Member has a disability or a special set of circumstances that means that they cannot meet safely face to face.

Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The Stage 3 Complaints Panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the Panel will:

- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.

- Where appropriate, make findings and recommendations, and ensure that a copy of these findings and recommendations are available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher.

The Chair of the Stage 3 Complaints Panel will provide the complainant and the school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education (DfE) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the Academy will take to resolve the complaint.

The Panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher.

Minutes from the Stage 3 Panel are the Panel's own notes of the proceedings. Minutes are not intended to be a verbatim record of the meeting. Rather, they are intended to capture the main discussion points, questions, answers and actions. Once agreed by the Stage 3 Panel members and its Chair, minutes will not be changed, unless personal data is recorded incorrectly. Stage 3 Panel minutes are not sent to parents or the school for amendment or comment in advance of them being agreed.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing.

Complaints about the Trust, CEO or Trustee

If the complaint is about Impact Multi Academy Trust, the CEO, Trustee or a member of the Trust's central team, then please refer to the Trust's complaints policy which can be found here.

Use of AI

The school recognises that AI can be used to support parents to voice their concerns, and can also help overcome potential barriers such as confidence, disability, or language barriers when English is not the first language o.

Complainants are reminded that publicly available AI platforms and chatbots are not confidential. Complaints, and in particular those containing the personal data of students, staff and other individuals, should not therefore be uploaded to or processed via such platforms.

Staff are not expected to spend a disproportionate amount of time attempting to interpret and respond to communications that are unclear, unduly lengthy or complex, introduces inaccurate information, overly legalistic or misstate the law.
In those circumstances, we will pause the process until the person dealing with the complaint receives the required clarification or summary. We may also ask for a meeting or phone-call to clarify the concerns being raised. In the event we are unable to clarify the concerns sufficiently we may need to end the complaints process, but we will make every effort to clarify the concerns that are being raised and to ensure that they are addressed.

Managing serial and persistent complaints

Our school 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.

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.

Our school 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 complaint investigation process.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaint procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint 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 the 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.

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

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact our school causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication, for example restrict the individual to a single point of contact via an email address and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months. Please see the Trust's Policy on parental engagement, which is available on the Trust's website.

If multiple letters, phone calls, emails or texts are received regarding the same complaint or issue, the school / Trust will consider the date of the last contact to have 're-set the clock' for response deadlines. Complainants will be notified when this approach is being taken.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school / trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the DfE after they have completed Stage 3.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the Trust / Academy. They will consider whether the Trust / Academy has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE online at: Complain about a school to the Department for Education - GOV.UK,

Appendix 1 - Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the school office, who will acknowledge receipt and let you know the next steps.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number: Email address:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature: Date:
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By whom:

Complaint referred to:
Action taken:
Date: