



Policy & Procedure Guidance for Complaints

Last Reviewed: July 2019

Next Review: July 2021

Plume Academy recognises that at times things can and do go wrong. The trustees and staff believe that it is in all stakeholders' best interest to resolve concerns and complaints at the earliest possible stage. Therefore, this policy is aimed at helping parents, carers and all associated stakeholders understand how best to resolve their associated issues, concerns or complaint.

The stages are sequential, and it is expected that parents and carers will follow the procedural order described below. A referral by the academy to an earlier stage in the procedure should not be interpreted as 'trivialising' but is a professional attempt to deal with the complaint quickly and at the most appropriate level.

Scope

The scope of this policy covers the vast majority of complaints that the academy is likely to receive from parents/carers or students. However, it is not intended to cover matters in respect of which there is an alternative process.

In particular:

- Parents/carers who are not satisfied with a special needs' assessment may appeal to an SEND Tribunal.
- Concerns about admissions or exclusions have specific appeal rights to the trustees and are detailed in the relevant policies.
- Allegations of child abuse will be dealt with through the Child Protection Policy.
- Complaints of financial improprieties or other criminal activities will be dealt with through the Whistleblowing Policy, if raised by staff members.

General Principles

Plume Academy complaints procedure will:

- seek to resolve problems by **informal** means at an appropriate level wherever possible;
- be easily **accessible** and **publicised**;
- be **simple** to understand and use;
- be **impartial** and non-adversarial;
- respect **confidentiality**;
- seek to provide an **effective** response and **appropriate** redress, where appropriate;
- provide **information** to the academy's senior leadership team so that services can be improved;
- identify a formal complaints procedure;
- ensure that written records are kept of all complaints: and
- ensure that all correspondence, statements and records of complaints are kept confidential and held securely and separate to any students' personal records.

Procedure

The following are the key stages of our complaint's procedure:

Stage 1 - An informal discussion

Stage 2 - Referral to the respective senior leaders with Head of Site responsibility:

- Assistant Vice-Principal, Mill Road Campus
- Assistant Vice-Principal, Cambridge Road Campus
- Head of College

Stage 3 – Referral to the respective Vice-Principal

Stage 4 - Formal stage – Referral to the Principal

Stage 5 – Further and final formal Stage – Referral to the Board of Trustees

Note:

Any complaint directly against the Principal will be dealt with in the first instance by the Chair of Trustees who may delegate any appropriate investigation to another member of the Board of Trustees.

Stage 1 - An informal discussion

Our experience is that the vast majority of concerns and complaints can be resolved informally.

Concerns should first be raised with the relevant form tutor, Assistant Head of Year or Head of Year, class teacher, subject or faculty leader. If the complaint is of a more serious nature, it should be raised with the relevant Head of Site. As noted above, this may initially result in a referral by the academy to a less senior member of staff in order to gather evidence. The respective Head of Site may, however, conclude that the complaint should move to Stage 2 with immediate effect.

Informal discussions and/or meetings will be a key feature of this stage and we will endeavour to resolve the complaint at this stage within an acceptable timescale.

If the person is dissatisfied with the response given however, they should refer to Stage 2 below.

Stage 2 - Referral to the respective Head of Site for investigation

If the complaint has not been resolved at Stage 1, the complainant should write to the appropriate Head of Site giving reasons for their dissatisfaction. This shall formally be acknowledged within three working days of receipt.

An informal meeting with the appropriate senior member of staff will seek to bring the complaint to an acceptable conclusion at this stage. The meeting will be arranged as soon as possible and at a convenient time to both parties.

As preparation for the meeting, the senior member of staff will review all notes of previous meetings and outcomes and may arrange for an investigation to be conducted. If an investigation is conducted:

- interviews and statements will be taken as necessary; and
- all persons interviewed will have the right to be accompanied or represented by a friend or relative at discussions and hearings.

After the informal meeting, a written response will be sent to the complainant within 10 working days. The response will determine whether or not the complaint has been upheld, the reasons why and what action, if any, that will be taken.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after this response, they should refer to Stage 3 of the complaints policy and put the complaint in writing to the respective Vice Principal, clarifying the reasons why they believe it has not been resolved.

Stage 3 – Referral to the relevant Vice Principal

If the complaint has not been resolved at Stage 2, the complainant should write to the appropriate Vice-Principal:

- Vice-Principal with responsibility for any teaching and learning matter
- Vice-Principal with responsibility for any pastoral or behaviour matter.

A meeting with the respective Vice-Principal will be arranged as soon as possible and at a convenient time for both parties. This will be with the aim of bringing the complaint to an acceptable conclusion.

As preparation for the meeting, the respective Vice-Principal will review all notes and information from previous meetings and outcomes and may arrange for a further investigation to be conducted.

After the informal meeting has taken place, a written response will be sent to the complainant within 10 working days. The response will determine whether or not the complaint has been upheld, the reasons why and what action, if any, will be taken.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after this response, they should refer to Stage 4 which is the first part of the formal procedure and put the complaint in writing to the Principal, including the reasons why they believe it has not been resolved.

Stage 4 – Referral to the Principal

If the complaint has not been resolved at Stage 3, the complainant should write to the Principal giving reasons for their dissatisfaction. This should be acknowledged within three working days of receipt. It is a precondition to the operation of Stages 2 and 3 that the complainant shall have made reasonable attempts to seek an informal solution and have acted in relation to the matter in a reasonable and measured way.

The Principal will review all notes of meetings and any statements collected as part of an earlier investigation and may arrange for further investigation to be carried out by a senior member of staff who has had no previous involvement with the case.

The Principal may offer to meet the complainant to try to come to an agreed resolution to the complaint. This meeting is at the discretion of the Principal, however, and any agreed outcomes will be conveyed by letter.

Within 10 working days, the Principal will respond to the complainant. If this timescale cannot be met, the Principal should inform the parent/carer that this will take longer, explain the reasons as to why this is the case and provide a timescale for when the investigation will be completed.

At the end of this stage, the Principal will put the findings into writing to the complainant and will identify any agreed outcomes, suggest further steps to resolve the matter and/or explain the academy's position.

Stage 5 – Complaints Panel

It is a precondition of the move to the formal panel stage that the complaint has been dealt with under this complaints policy and has not been resolved at Stage 4, and that the complainant shall have acted in relation to the matter in a reasonable and measured way.

It should be noted that the Chair of Trustees will review the handling of the complaint and has a discretion, which will not be exercised unreasonably, not to allow the complaint to be considered at the formal panel stage where this precondition has not been met. The discretion may also be applied where the Chair takes the view that the complaint is vexatious and/or has little or no substance.

1. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response to Stage 4 s/he may request that the complaint be considered by the Complaints Panel of the Board of Trustees which will comprise at least three people and which will include one person who is independent of the management and running of the academy.
2. The request must be in writing, addressed to the Clerk to the Board of Trustees of the academy within 10 working days of the response at the end of Stage 4 being sent to the complainant. This communication must set out the reasons why the complainant is dissatisfied with the response.
3. If the complaint is to be considered by a panel, the Clerk to the Board of Trustees will invite the academy to put in writing its response to the complainant's reasons. The academy will do this within 15 working days and at the end of that period (whether or not the academy has responded), the Clerk to the Board of Trustees will convene a meeting of the Complaints Panel.
4. The panel meeting will be held as quickly as possible given the need to find a date that is reasonably convenient for the complainant and the members of the panel. Whenever possible, the meeting will be held within 15 working days of the end of

the academy's response time. At any meeting, the complainant will be entitled to be accompanied by a friend, but legal representation will not be allowed.

5. The meeting is not a court case and will be as informal as circumstances allow. The complainant will have the opportunity to put her/his reasons for dissatisfaction and to enlarge on them but may not introduce reasons that were not previously put in writing. The academy will have the opportunity to provide an input during the meeting and each side, as well as the panel members, will be able to ask questions. The complainant and academy will also have the opportunity to make final comments to the panel.
6. The panel may make findings and recommendations and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be:
 - (i) sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and
 - (ii) available for inspection on the academy premises by the Academy Trust and the Principal.
7. The panel will formulate its response as quickly as reasonably possible, aiming to do so within 10 working days, and the Clerk to the Board of Trustees will notify all concerned.
8. If a complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of Trustees may write to the complainant to inform him/her that the procedure has been completed and the matter closed.
9. A written record will be kept of all Stage 5 complaints, and as to whether they are resolved prior to or via a panel hearing.
10. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 requests access to them.

This Complaints Policy was reviewed and ratified by the Board of Trustees of Plume Academy