Atlantic & Bideford - Feedback, concerns and complaints procedure

This procedure was approved by Trustees

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Using this Feedback, concerns and complaints procedure

This section provides a quick overview of what we need from you and what you can expect from us when raising feedback, concerns or complaints. Please refer to the sections referenced below for full details.

What we need from you

- Raise concerns as soon as possible – we will not usually consider matters that happened more than three months ago (see Section 5.1).
- Try to resolve matters informally first – this is usually the quickest way to sort things out (see Section 3 and Section 7.1 to 7.5).
- Explain your concern or complaint clearly and concisely, including what happened, what has already been done and what you would like us to do to put things right (see Section 4).
- (Optional for your school) Use the complaint forms provided at Annex 3 and Annex 4 when raising or escalating a formal complaint (see Section 4.6).
- Treat our staff and governors/trustees with respect and courtesy – we will not accept inappropriate, abusive or threatening behaviour (see Section 1.5 and Part 3).
- Avoid discussing the details of your complaint publicly, including on social media, while we are investigating – you are of course welcome to discuss the matter privately with a companion, advisor or support organisation (see Section 4.8).

What you can expect from us

- We will treat you with respect and courtesy at all times (see Section 1.5).
- We will acknowledge your formal complaint within 5 school days, normally arrange a meeting or discussion within 15 school days, and usually provide a written response within 15 school days (see Sections 7.12 to 7.15).
- If you ask for a complaints committee hearing, we will try to hold this within 20 school days of your request and write to you with the decision within 5 school days of the hearing (see Sections 7.23 and 7.33).
- We will provide help if you need adjustments to use this procedure or assistance with writing your complaint (see Section 1.8 and Section 4.7).

1 About this procedure

1.1 Before using this procedure, we encourage parents to read the **'Parent guide to school complaints'** published by Parentkind, the Department for Education, Ofsted and the Improving Education Together board, which provides helpful guidance on how to provide feedback, resolve concerns and raise complaints. A copy of this guide is available at https://www.parentkind.org.uk/assets/parents-resources/Parent-Guide-to-School-Complaints.pdf.

1.2 This procedure explains how we will deal with feedback, concerns and complaints about a school, the school trust ("Trust"), or any individual connected with it.

1.3 This procedure is for parents, carers and members of the public. **Part 1** explains how parents and carers of children currently registered at our schools can give feedback or raise a concern or complaint. **Part 2** explains how other people can do so. If you are under 18 years of age, your parent or carer will need to use this procedure on your behalf.

1.4 We will not investigate matters raised anonymously under this procedure. A complaint will be regarded as 'anonymous' if the complainant cannot be identified or their identity cannot be verified from the information provided. This includes complaints submitted using unidentifiable contact details, such as an email address that does not reveal who has made the complaint. However, we may decide to look into issues raised anonymously under other procedures (e.g. our safeguarding procedures) where we think it is right to do so.

1.5 We know that giving feedback or raising a concern or complaint can feel difficult. Our staff and governors/trustees will always treat you with respect and courtesy. We ask that you treat our staff and governors/trustees in the same way. We will not accept inappropriate, abusive or threatening behaviour towards any member of our community. If this happens, we may take action as set out in **Part 3** of this procedure.

1.6 On rare occasions a school or the Trust may receive complaints from several individuals relating to the same issue. To deal with these complaints efficiently, we will follow the procedure set out in **Part 4** of this procedure.

1.7 Unless we decide at our discretion that it is otherwise appropriate to do so, some matters will not be dealt with under this procedure as they have their own separate procedures. These include concerns or complaints about:

1.7.1 Your or your child's personal data or our handling of a request for information;

1.7.2 The suspension or exclusion of your child from a school;

1.7.3 Some safeguarding and child protection concerns or complaints; and

1.7.4 Some concerns or complaints about the conduct of members of our staff or governors/trustees or members.

Please see **Annex 1** for the full list of matters not covered by this procedure and where to go instead.

1.8 If you need any adjustments to help you use this procedure, please let us know. For example, we can provide information in different formats or help you put your complaint in writing.

2 What do we mean by certain words in this procedure?

2.1 A *'meeting'* or *'hearing'* can be in person, by telephone or by video call, as long as everyone can take part and is happy to do so. In exceptional circumstances, including where there are concerns about the safety or wellbeing of any participant, we reserve the right to determine the format of the meeting or hearing without the agreement of all parties, and will notify those involved of the reasons for doing so.

2.2 A *'parent'* includes biological parents, carers, and anyone with parental responsibility or care for a child.

2.3 *'School* days' means days when our schools are open to pupils. It does not include weekends, school holidays or days when our schools are closed to pupils.

2.4 '*Trust'* means the academy trust - Athena Learning Trust.

3 How this procedure works

3.1 We use a step-by-step approach to deal with feedback, concerns and complaints fairly and proportionately. The stages are:

3.1.1 Informal stage - we encourage you to always try to resolve any issues informally first. Raising matters informally is usually the quickest way to sort things out and **most issues can be resolved at this stage**. At this stage, you may want to share:

(a) feedback – where you want to share your voice with us without needing us to respond, but you want us to listen and take it on board;

(b) concerns – where you have a worry or doubt over an important issue and you are looking for reassurance; or

(c) complaints – where you are dissatisfied with our actions or lack of action.

3.1.2 Formal complaint stage – if the matter is not resolved at the informal stage, you can make a formal complaint in writing. Your formal complaint will be investigated, and you will receive a written response explaining our decision and any action we will take.

3.1.3 Complaints committee or review stage - if you are not happy with the outcome of your formal complaint, you can ask for it to be reviewed. The committee/reviewer will consider your reasons for disagreeing with our decision at the formal complaint stage and can make recommendations about how to put things right. This is the final stage of this procedure.

3.2 Please do not approach individual governors, trustees or members to raise concerns or complaints. They cannot act on their own and getting them involved too early may stop them from helping you at later stages.

3.3 Someone else can raise your concern or complaint on your behalf if you let us know in writing that you give them permission to do so. If you want to raise a concern on behalf of someone else, then you will need to give us their full name and ask them to confirm to us in writing that they consent to you doing so.

3.4 You can bring someone with you to any meeting or hearing, such as a friend, relative, interpreter or advocate, provided that you let us know the name and role of the person in advance. If we have a genuine reason to object to the person you want to bring with you, we will let you know the reasons for this and ask you to choose someone else.

4 Raising matters effectively

4.1 When raising concerns or complaints, it is very important that you explain clearly:

4.1.1 What your concern/complaint is;

4.1.2 What has already been done to try and resolve it;

4.1.3 Names of any witnesses, dates and times of what happened and copies of any relevant documents; and

4.1.4 What you would like us to do about it to put things right.

4.2 We encourage you to:

4.2.1 Focus on the relevant facts - what happened, when and who was involved;

4.2.2 Remain objective and direct your concern towards processes or decisions rather than target individuals; and

4.2.3 Suggest clear and realistic outcomes so that we can see what is possible and we can try to resolve the matter constructively.

4.3 For the avoidance of doubt, certain outcomes are not available under this procedure. These include but are not limited to:

4.3.1 outcomes relating to staff disciplinary action — any disciplinary matters will be handled confidentially under our internal staff procedures and you will not be informed of any action taken; and

4.3.2 financial compensation or payments of any kind.

4.4 We ask that you keep your complaint and any supporting documents short and focused on the issues that matter. If what you send us is too long, repeats the same points or includes information that is not relevant, it may take us longer to look into and respond to your concerns. As a guide, we would not expect a letter or email to be longer than two sides of A4 (about 1,000 words). If you send us more than we need, we may ask you to tell us which issues and documents are most important and put the timescales in this procedure

on hold until you do. If we think a concern or complaint is being pursued in a way that is unreasonable, we may deal with it under **Part 3** of this procedure.

4.5 If you choose to use artificial intelligence (AI) tools (such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini or similar) to help you draft or structure your concern or complaint, please read the guidance set out in **Annex 2** of this procedure before doing so. AI tools can be helpful in organising your thoughts and presenting your concern or complaint clearly, but they must be used carefully. You are responsible for the accuracy and content of anything you submit to us, regardless of whether AI was used to help prepare it.

4.6 For formal complaints, please complete all sections of the complaint form at **Annex 3**. When asking for our response to your formal complaint to be reviewed, please complete all sections of the complaints committee hearing and review request form at **Annex 4**. Put *'complaint'* in the subject line of your email or clearly on any correspondence so we can deal with it quickly.

4.7 If you need help with writing or escalating your complaint, please contact the relevant school who can arrange for a member of staff to help you. You can also ask organisations like Citizens Advice to help you.

4.8 To assist us in investigating your complaint fairly and thoroughly, we ask that you refrain from discussing the details of your complaint publicly, including on social media, while the matter is being considered under this procedure. This helps to protect the privacy of all individuals involved and supports the integrity of the investigation. Nothing in this paragraph prevents you from discussing the matter privately with a companion, advisor or support organisation from whom you are seeking advice or support.

5 Timescales

5.1 Please raise concerns or complaints as soon as possible. We will not usually consider matters that happened more than three months ago, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

5.2 Where correspondence is received outside of term time, we will consider it to have been received on the first school day following the holiday period.

5.3 This procedure sets out timescales that we will work to, to try and resolve your concern or complaint in a timely way. We will always try to meet these timescales. However, sometimes we may need more time than set out in this procedure. If so, we will explain why and give you new timeframes.

5.4 If we need more information from you to understand your concern or complaint or the outcomes you are seeking, we will let you know what we need and pause the timescales in this procedure until we have it.

5.5 If you threaten or start legal action against us about matters which are the same, substantially similar or based on the same facts as issues raised in your concern or complaint, we may need to pause our consideration of the matter until the legal action is concluded. This is likely to cause a delay to the resolution of your concern or complaint.

5.6 We also encourage you not to approach other organisations (for example, Ofsted, the local authority or the Teaching Regulation Agency) about your concern or complaint until you have completed this procedure. If other organisations are looking into or will be determining the same issues, we may need to pause our consideration of these matters under this procedure until their investigations have finished or findings have been made, which can cause a delay to the resolution of your concern or complaint.

5.7 We have a duty to use our staff time and resources proportionately and in the best interests of all pupils, and we will take this into account when deciding how to manage multiple concerns or complaints raised at the same time. Where you raise more than one concern or complaint at the same time or raise a new concern or complaint while an existing matter is still being considered under this procedure, we may combine these and deal with them together. Where you raise a new concern or complaint while a complaints committee hearing or review in respect of an earlier complaint is pending, we may at our discretion pause the complaints committee hearing or review until the new matter has been investigated and responded to under this procedure.

5.8 You may withdraw your concern or complaint at any stage of this procedure by notifying us in writing. Your written notification should be sent to the person who is currently dealing with your concern or complaint or, if you are unsure, to: governance@athenalearningtrust.uk

6 Record keeping

6.1 Staff members are encouraged to log all informal concerns and inform the head teacher or principal of any serious concerns.

6.2 We keep a record of all complaints that reach the formal complaint or complaints committee/review stages. This includes how and when the complaint was resolved, and any action we took as a result.

6.3 We keep records in line with our data retention policy and data protection law. We keep all complaint details confidential, except where:

6.3.1 The Secretary of State asks to see them;

6.3.2 They are needed for a school inspection;

6.3.3 An individual has a legal right to see their own personal information in the records; or

6.3.4 The law requires us to share them.

6.4 The findings and recommendations from any complaints committee decision will be shared with the relevant staff, depending on whether the complaint was at school or trust level.

6.5 Electronic recordings of any meetings or the complaints committee hearing will not be permitted unless there are very good reasons to do so and all parties to the meeting or hearing give their written consent.

7 PART 1: Procedure for parents

Raising matters informally

7.1 At this stage, you may want to share:

7.1.1 Feedback – where you want to share your voice with us without needing us to respond, but you want us to listen and take it on board;

7.1.2 Concerns – where you have a worry or doubt over an important issue and you are looking for reassurance; or

7.1.3 Complaints – where you are dissatisfied with our actions or lack of action.

7.2 Before raising matters informally, please refer to **Section 4** of this procedure: '**Raising matters effectively**'. You can raise matters in person, by email or by telephone.

7.3 We encourage you to raise matters first with the member of staff closest to your child, such as their class teacher or form tutor, as they will usually be best placed to help you. Matters raised informally will not normally be considered by the head teacher or principal or by a governor or trustee as getting them involved too early may stop them from helping you at later stages. If you are not sure who to raise the matter with informally, then contact the school office, or email: governance@athenalearningtrust.uk who will direct you to the most appropriate person.

7.4 Most matters can be sorted out quickly by informal meetings (in-person or online) or telephone discussions with the right member of staff, rather than by exchange of emails. These meetings or telephone discussions may need to be arranged in advance to make sure the right member of staff is available to discuss the matter with you and has the time to listen and put things right.

7.5 There is no set timeframe for consideration of informal concerns, but we would expect most matters to be resolved within **15 school days**. If we cannot find a solution, we will let you know that you can move to making a formal complaint in writing.

Making a formal complaint in writing

7.6 If the matter is not resolved at the informal stage, you can make a formal complaint in writing. You do not have to raise your concern informally before making a formal complaint, but we encourage you to do so as it is usually the quickest way to resolve matters. We encourage you to approach the formal complaint process constructively and with a focus on solutions, recognising that a positive ongoing relationship between you and the school is in the best interests of your child.

7.7 Before raising a formal complaint, please refer to Section 4 of this procedure: '**Raising matters effectively**'.

7.8 The table below sets out who you should send your formal complaint to and who will usually investigate and respond to your complaint:

What is the complaint about?	Who should the complaint be sent to?	Who will investigate?
A school or the school's actions.	The school's principal or head teacher.	The school's principal or head teacher, or a member of staff appointed by them.
A school or the school's actions where the principal or head teacher has already responded to you under the informal stage of this procedure.	The school's principal or head teacher.	The school's principal or head teacher, or a member of staff appointed by them. In some circumstances, a local governor may be appointed to investigate.
The Trust or the Trust's actions.	The chair of the board via: governance@athenalearningtrust.uk	An appropriate Trust contact or a member of Trust staff, appointed by the chair of the board. In some circumstances, a trustee may be appointed to investigate.
The local governing body or the actions of a local governing body.	Clerk to the Trustees: governance@athenalearningtrust.uk	A trustee.
The Board of Trustees or the actions of the Board of Trustees.	Clerk to the Trustees	A member.

7.9 In some cases, it may be appropriate for us to handle complaints about the conduct of members of our staff or governors/trustees or members confidentially under our internal staff and governance procedures, rather than under this feedback, concerns and complaints procedure. You will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a member of staff or a governor/trustee or member. However, we will always let you know that the matter is being addressed and share such information as we are lawfully able to. The table below sets out who you should send your formal complaint to and who will usually investigate the matter:

Who is the complaint about?	Who should the complaint be sent to?	Who will investigate?
A member of staff of the school other than the head teacher or principal.	Head teacher or principal.	Head teacher or principal or a member of staff appointed by them.
Head teacher or principal of the school.	CEO or chair of trustees.	CEO or chair of trustees or a member of Trust staff appointed by them. In some circumstances, a trustee may be appointed to investigate.
A member of staff of the Trust other than the CEO.	CEO.	CEO or a member of Trust staff appointed by them.
CEO.	Clerk to the Trustees	A trustee.
A member of a local governing body.	Clerk to the Trustees	A trustee or local governor appointed by them.
A trustee.	Clerk to the Trustees	A trustee.
A member.	Clerk to the Trustees	A member.

7.10 If you are not sure who to send your complaint to, then contact the clerk to the Trustees who can help you: governance@athenalearningtrust.uk

7.11 We may engage an independent, external person to carry out the investigation into your complaint, or to review the investigation and response. This may be appropriate where the complaint is particularly complex or involves legal issues.

7.12 We will acknowledge your complaint in writing within **5 school days**. We will explain what happens next, who will investigate your complaint and when you can expect a response.

7.13 We will normally invite you to a meeting (in-person or online) or arrange a telephone discussion with you to discuss your complaint and explore how we can resolve it. We encourage you to attend this meeting/discussion so we can better understand your concerns and try to put things right. We will try to hold this meeting within **15 school days** of receiving your complaint.

7.14 When investigating your complaint, we may need to share all or some of your complaint or discuss this with:

7.14.1 members of staff; and

7.14.2 your child or other pupils/students who may be interviewed with their parent or with an appropriate member of staff present.

7.15 Once we have looked into your complaint, we will write to you with our decision and explain our reasons. We will tell you what action we will take. We will usually provide you with our written response to your complaint within **15 school days** of your complaint being raised or our meeting with you to discuss your complaint, whichever is the later. Whatever the outcome, we are committed to working with you to move forward positively and to maintain a constructive relationship in the best interests of your child's education.

7.16 In some cases, we may invite you to a meeting (in-person or online) or arrange a telephone discussion with you to discuss your complaint and our findings. We encourage you to attend this meeting/discussion so we can explain why we have reached our decision and answer questions you may have. We will try to hold this meeting within **10 school days** of providing you with our written response.

Asking the complaints committee to review your complaint at a hearing

How to ask for a complaints committee hearing

7.17 If you are not happy with the decision of your formal complaint, you can ask for your complaint to be reviewed by a complaints committee at a hearing. Your request must be received within **15 school days** of receiving the formal complaint outcome letter or our meeting/discussion about the outcome of your complaint if we invite you to one (whichever is the later).

7.18 Before asking for a complaints committee hearing, please refer to Section 4 of this procedure: '**Raising matters effectively'**.

7.19 The complaints committee cannot reinvestigate your complaint at the hearing. The purpose of the hearing is to give you the opportunity to explain why you are not happy with our decision about your formal complaint. The committee will decide if they agree with your reasons and can make recommendations about how this can be put right. For this reason, the complaints committee will not consider new complaints or evidence that is not related to your original complaint. If you have other concerns or complaints, we encourage you to raise these as informal concerns first and, if you are not happy with the outcome of this, to raise these as new formal complaints.

7.20 If your complaint was investigated and responded to by the head teacher or principal of the school, or a member of staff appointed by them, you should send your request for a complaints committee hearing to the clerk to the local governing body at: governance@athenalearningtrust.uk. If your complaint was investigated and responded to by anyone else, then send your request to the clerk to the Trustees at:

governance@athenalearningtrust.uk. If you are not sure who to send your request to, then contact enquiries@athenalearningtrust.uk.

7.21 A complaints committee will be made up of at least three committee members and may include, but is not limited to:

7.21.1 members of any local governing body within the Trust; and

7.21.2 trustees of the Trust;

with no prior involvement in the matters detailed in the complaint. One committee member will always be independent of the management and running of the school (for example, this might be a governor from another school within the Trust, a governor from another local school/college or an educational professional who has no link to the school, at the Clerk's discretion). The Clerk will appoint one of these committee members to be the chair of the complaints committee. The committee may have a legal advisor to help with legal and procedural questions during the hearing or their deliberations.

What will happen next?

7.22 We will acknowledge your request for a complaints committee hearing within **5 school days** of your request. We will write to you to explain what happens next.

7.23 We will try to hold the hearing within **20 school days** of your request. If, despite best efforts, it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date and time for a hearing within a reasonable timeframe (normally within 50 school days of the request), the Clerk may decide that the hearing will proceed on the basis of written submissions only from both parties.

7.24 At least **10 school days** before the hearing, we will confirm the date, time, and place of the hearing, and who will be on the committee. If you have a genuine reason to object to a committee member, you must notify the Clerk no later than **5 school days** before the hearing and we will consider your objection fairly. We will also tell you who will be presenting the school/Trust's response.

7.25 If you want to bring someone with you to the hearing for support, such as a friend, relative, interpreter or advocate, please let the Clerk know and provide details of their name and role **at least 5 school days** before the hearing. We do not permit parents or the school/Trust representative(s) to bring legal representatives. Media representatives are not allowed.

7.26 If you want the complaints committee to see any documents relating to your complaint, you will need to send these to the Clerk at least **5 school days** before the hearing. the school/Trust representative(s) will also need to send the Clerk any documents relating to your complaint at least **5 school days** before the hearing. The complaints committee will not usually consider any documentation sent less than **5 school days** prior to the hearing unless there is a very good reason for the document to have been sent late. The complaints committee will not accept as evidence any recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

7.27 The documents received from both parties will be put into a bundle of documents by the Clerk and shared with you, the school/Trust representative(s) and the complaints committee at least **3 days** before the hearing.

About the complaints committee hearing

7.28 If you are going to be late for the hearing, then let the Clerk know as soon as possible. If you have not arrived by the start of the complaints committee, the Clerk will attempt to contact you by telephone. If the Clerk is unable to speak with you within **30 minutes** of the scheduled start time, or if you tell the Clerk that you are not attending, the Clerk and/or chair of the complaints committee (as appropriate) will decide if:

7.28.1 The hearing will be adjourned and re-scheduled; or

7.28.2 The hearing will proceed in your absence - findings and recommendations of the complaints committee will be based on any representations made by the school/Trust representative(s) at the hearing and the documents provided in advance by both parties.

7.29 Unless otherwise stated, the procedure for the complaints committee hearing will be as follows:

7.29.1 The parent and school/Trust representative(s) will enter the hearing together;

7.29.2 The chair of the complaints committee will introduce the committee members and outline the process;

7.29.3 The parent will explain the complaint;

7.29.4 the school/Trust representative(s) and committee members will question the parent;

7.29.5 the school/Trust representative(s) will explain the school/Trust's actions;

7.29.6 The parent and the committee members will question the school/Trust representative;

7.29.7 The parent will sum up their complaint;

7.29.8 the school/Trust representative will sum up the school/Trust's actions;

7.29.9 Both parties will leave together while the complaints committee decides. The Clerk, and any legal advisor assisting the complaints committee (if applicable), will stay to assist the complaints committee with its decision making.

7.30 The Clerk and/or complaints committee reserves the right to modify the above procedure if there is a good reason for them to do so.

7.31 The Clerk will take minutes of the complaints committee hearing to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken, or actions agreed. These minutes will be our record of the hearing. The minutes can be provided to you after the

hearing on request once available. You are welcome to take your own notes of the hearing if you wish.

7.32 In exceptional circumstances, a complaints committee may be adjourned and a new hearing date set. This might be needed if the complaints committee requires further evidence to make their decision. A new hearing date will take place as soon as possible and within **10 school days**.

After the hearing

7.33 After the hearing, the complaints committee will consider their decision and write to you to confirm their decision within **5 school days**. The letter will set out the decision of the complaints committee together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The complaints committee can (by a majority if necessary):

7.33.1 Dismiss your complaint in whole or in part;

7.33.2 Uphold the complaint in whole or in part; and/or

7.33.3 Make recommendations to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

7.34 The outcome of a formal complaint, including at the complaints committee stage, is intended to be a resolution where parents and the school/Trust have worked together to listen and take action to support the child's education. We encourage all parties to move forward positively after the complaints process has concluded, in the interests of maintaining a supportive and constructive relationship.

Taking your complaint to the Department for Education

7.35 If you are not happy with the complaints committee's decision, you can refer your complaint to the Department for Education (DfE) which has limited powers to consider complaints about academies. The DfE cannot change our decision about your complaint but can review whether the complaint was handled properly.

7.36 Details about the DfE procedure and the DfE complaints form are available at Complain about a school to the Department for Education - GOV.UK

Complaints about the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

7.37 To comply with the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage ("EYFS"), written concerns or complaints about whether a school is meeting the EYFS requirements will be dealt with as follows:

7.37.1 We will acknowledge the written concern or complaint within **5 school days**.

7.37.2 The head teacher will investigate the concern or complaint, which may include meeting with you and the early years lead. We will send you a written response with the outcome of the investigation within **28 school day**s of receiving the complaint.

7.37.3 If you are not happy with the outcome, you can ask for your complaint to be reviewed by a complaints committee at a hearing, as set out in Section 7.17 onwards of this procedure.

7.38 We will keep a record of all written complaints about EYFS requirements and their outcomes and will make this available to Ofsted on request. If you have concerns about whether a school is meeting EYFS requirements, you can also contact Ofsted at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or 0300 123 4666.

8 PART 2: Concerns or complaints from other people

8.1 The procedure for raising a concern informally and for making a formal complaint in writing are the same as in **Part 1** of this procedure. Please refer to those sections for full details.

Asking for your complaint to be reviewed

8.2 If you are not happy with the decision of your formal complaint, you can ask for your complaint to be reviewed. Your request must be received within **15 school days** of receiving the formal complaint outcome letter or our meeting/discussion about the outcome of your complaint if we invite you to one, whichever comes later. Before asking for your complaint to be reviewed, please refer to **Section 4** of this procedure: 'Raising matters effectively'. The reviewer will not reinvestigate your complaint. The purpose of the review is to hear from you why you are not happy with our decision and to decide whether to make recommendations about how this can be put right. New complaints or evidence that is not related to your original complaint will not be considered as part of the review.

8.3 If your complaint was investigated and responded to by the head teacher or principal of the school, or a member of staff appointed by them, you should send your request for a review to the clerk to the local governing body at: governance@athenalearningtrust.uk. If your complaint was investigated and responded to by anyone else, then send your request to the clerk to the Trustees at: governance@athenalearningtrust.uk. If you are not sure who to send your request to, then contact: enquiries@athenalearningtrust.uk who can help you.

8.4 We will acknowledge your request for a review within **5 school days**. The Clerk will appoint a governor, trustee or appropriate member of staff with no prior involvement in the matter to conduct the review. We may invite you to a meeting or arrange a telephone discussion to discuss your complaint, which we will try to hold within **10 school days** of receiving your request. Once the review is completed, we will write to you with our decision and reasons, usually within **15 school days** of your request or of meeting with you to discuss your complaint, whichever is the later.

8.5 In exceptional circumstances, where the Clerk considers there is a very good reason to do so, a complaints committee may be convened to review your complaint on the same terms as set out in **Part 1**.

8.6 If you are not happy with the outcome of the review, you can refer your complaint to the Department for Education as set out in **Part 1** of this procedure.

9 PART 3: Repeated, vexatious, or unreasonable concerns and complaints

9.1 In rare cases, we may not follow the usual procedure. This includes where your concern or complaint is classified as repetitious, vexatious or pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner.

9.2 The decision to classify your concern or complaint in this way will be made by an appropriately senior member of staff, such as the head of school, principal, chief executive officer or chair of governors/trustees (as appropriate).

Repeated complaints

9.3 If you make a complaint that is the same, substantially similar or based on the same facts as one we have already fully considered, and we have:

9.3.1 Done everything we can reasonably do to address your concerns; and

9.3.2 Given you a clear explanation of our position and your options;

We will write to tell you that the complaints procedure is finished, and we will not respond to further correspondence about these matters. We will tell you how to contact the Department for Education if you wish to take things further.

9.4 If we have already fully considered a complaint about the same subject from another member of your family, we may inform you that the matter has already been considered and the local process is complete. We will advise you to contact the Department for Education if you are dissatisfied with our handling of the original complaint.

Vexatious concerns/complaints and concerns/complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

9.5 A concern or complaint may be considered vexatious if it:

9.5.1 Is obsessive, persistent, harassing, or repetitive;

9.5.2 Pursues matters that have no merit, or seeks unrealistic outcomes;

9.5.3 Pursues matters in an unreasonable way;

9.5.4 Is designed to cause disruption or annoyance; or

9.5.5 Demands action that has no serious purpose or value.

9.6 Examples include but are not limited to:

9.6.1 Refusing to explain your concern or complaint or what outcome you want, even when we offer to help;

9.6.2 Refusing to cooperate with our investigation;

9.6.3 Refusing to accept that some issues are not covered by this procedure;

9.6.4 Insisting we deal with your concern or complaint in ways that do not fit with this procedure or good practice;

9.6.5 Raising trivial or irrelevant information and expecting us to respond to it;

9.6.6 Asking many detailed but unimportant questions and demanding immediate answers;

9.6.7 Changing what your concern or complaint is about as we investigate;

9.6.8 Seeking unrealistic outcomes, such as asking for staff to be dismissed;

9.6.9 Making excessive demands on staff time through frequent, lengthy, or complicated contact while we are dealing with your concern or complaint;

9.6.10 Knowingly providing false information;

9.6.11 Posting information about your concern or complaint on social media or other public forums — sharing your complaint on social media can be harmful to those involved, is unlikely to lead to a quicker resolution and may be considered unreasonable behaviour;

9.6.12 Encouraging or coordinating with other parents to submit multiple complaints about the same issue - your complaint should be specific to you and your child, and organising others to raise the same matter may be treated as a complaint campaign under **Part 4** of this procedure and may not be dealt with under the usual complaints process; or

9.6.13 Using artificial intelligence (AI) tools to draft complaints or to cite laws, regulations or guidance, where the AI-generated content is inaccurate, misleading or makes the complaint more complex than necessary.

9.7 We will not accept behaviour or language towards staff, governors, trustees, or members that is aggressive, abusive, offensive, discriminatory, or threatening or makes insulting personal comments or threats about staff.

Action we may take

9.8 In these situations, we may:

9.8.1 Issue a verbal or written warning setting clear expectations for your future conduct, which may include putting in place a communication plan to manage future contact;

9.8.2 Pause the complaints process until the unacceptable behaviour stops;

9.8.3 Hold a complaints committee review based on written documents only, without a hearing; and/or

9.8.4 Refuse to consider your complaint any further and direct you to the Department for Education.

9.9 Where you continue to send correspondence raising matters that are the same as, or broadly similar to, issues that are already being considered under this procedure, we may decide not to review or respond to such further correspondence until the existing

complaint has been fully considered and responded to at the current stage of this procedure. We will write to let you know if we decide to do this. Any matters that are genuinely distinct from your existing complaint should be raised separately and will be considered on their own merits.

9.10 We may also restrict your access to the school, Trust or our staff or governors/trustees, e.g. requesting contact in a particular form (for example, in writing only), requiring contact to take place with a named person only or limited to a particular email address, restricting telephone calls to specified days and times or number of contacts, or banning you from the school/Trust's premises in line with our Parent Code of Conduct. Any decision to cease responding to correspondence or to decline to consider a complaint further will be communicated to you in writing, with reasons for the decision.

9.11 Where behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the safety and welfare of staff, governors, trustees, or members, we will consider other options, for example, reporting the matter to the police, or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give you prior warning of that action.

10 PART 4: When we receive many concerns or complaints about the same issue

10.1 On rare occasions, we may receive concerns or complaints from three or more people about the same issue.

10.2 When this happens, we will not follow the usual procedure. Instead, we will:

10.2.1 Send the same response to everyone who has raised a concern/complaint; and/or

10.2.2 Publish a single response on our website.

10.3 Where the complaint involves complainants who are parents or carers of pupils currently attending one of our schools, they will be entitled to escalate their complaint to a complaint committee hearing if they are dissatisfied with our response. We will consider how best to manage complaint committee hearings in such circumstances.

10.4 If you are not happy with our response, you can refer the matters to the Department for Education (DfE) which has limited powers to consider complaints about academies. The DfE cannot change our response to the 'complaint campaign' but can review whether we handled it properly.

Annex 1 Matters not covered by this procedure

Excluded Matters	Signposting
Admissions	The process for challenging admissions decisions is set out in our **admissions policy** and the DfE's school admissions codes at: School admissions code - GOV.UK and School admission appeals code - GOV.UK. Parents who wish to challenge our decision to refuse their request for admission out of the normal age group (where there is no statutory right of appeal) may submit a complaint using this feedback, concerns and complaints procedure.
Collective worship	Complaints about the content of the daily act of collective worship should be directed to the local authority or the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). Complaints about the handling of a request to withdraw your child from religious education or the daily act of collective worship can be raised under this procedure
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities (including the PTA)	Providers, including the PTA, will have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about them or their service. Please contact them directly.
Curriculum	Complaints about the content of the national curriculum should be directed to the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk/contactus. However, complaints about the delivery of the curriculum, including the delivery of religious education (RE) and sex and relationships education, can be raised under this procedure.
Data protection matters	Complaints about data protection matters are handled under our **data protection policy** and in accordance with relevant guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the ICO directly, but the ICO will usually expect you to have raised your concerns with our Data Protection Officer in the first instance.
Freedom of information matters	Complaints about our compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 are handled under our **freedom of information policy** and in accordance with relevant

	guidance from the ICO. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the ICO directly, but the ICO will usually expect you to have raised your concerns with us in the first instance.
Governor/trustee grievances	Complaints from local governors or trustees will be dealt with under the Trust's internal governance procedures. This does not prevent local governors or trustees from raising complaints in their capacity as a parent.
School re-organisation proposals	Where concerns are not adequately addressed by the school/Trust, complaints can be raised directly with the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk/contactus
Safeguarding and child protection matters	Some complaints that relate to safeguarding or child protection matters will be handled under our **child protection and safeguarding policy** rather than under this procedure. Where that policy applies, a separate investigative process will be followed. This feedback, concerns and complaints procedure does not limit or replace any action that may be taken under our child protection and safeguarding policy, and in some cases both processes may run concurrently or one may take precedence over the other depending on the nature of the concern raised. If you have a serious concern about a child's safety or welfare, you may also wish to contact: ● the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), who has local responsibility for managing allegations against people who work with children; or ● the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), which coordinates safeguarding referrals across local agencies.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Staff, governor/trustee or member conduct	In some cases, it may be appropriate for us to handle complaints about the conduct of members of our staff or governors/trustees or members confidentially under our internal staff and governance procedures, rather than under this feedback, concerns and complaints procedure. You will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a member of staff or a governor/trustee or member. However, we will always let you know that the matter is being

	addressed and share such information as we are lawfully able to.
Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)	Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with the local authority.
Suspensions and exclusions	The process for challenging suspension or exclusions decisions, or matters relating to those decisions, is set out in our **exclusions policy** and the DfE's statutory guidance at: School suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters directly with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

Annex 2 Guidance on using AI tools to raise concerns or complaints

Introduction

AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini and similar large language model applications) can help you organise your thoughts, structure your concern or complaint clearly, and express yourself effectively. However, these tools have significant limitations and must be used with care. This Annex provides practical guidance on how to use AI tools effectively when raising a concern or complaint under this procedure, and what to avoid.

If you are unsure about how to use AI tools when raising a concern or complaint, or if you would like help preparing your concern or complaint, please contact the school office and we will arrange for a member of staff to assist you.

How AI tools can help you

AI tools can be useful for:

(a) Organising your thoughts and structuring your concern or complaint in a clear and logical way;

(b) Helping you express what happened in plain, clear language if you find writing difficult;

(c) Summarising a timeline of events based on information you provide;

(d) Suggesting what outcome you might want to ask for; and

(e) Checking your draft for clarity, tone and spelling before you submit it.

Important limitations and risks

You should be aware of the following limitations and risks when using AI tools:

(a) AI tools do not know what happened – they can only work with the information you give them, and they may fill gaps with invented details that sound convincing but are untrue (this is sometimes called 'hallucination');

(b) AI tools may generate references to laws, regulations, policies or legal rights that do not exist, are out of date, or do not apply to your situation;

(c) AI tools may produce language that is overly formal, legalistic or aggressive, which may not reflect your genuine concern and may make it harder for us to resolve the matter constructively;

(d) any personal data (including names, dates of birth, or other identifying information about your child, other children, staff or other individuals) that you enter into an AI tool may be stored, processed or used by the AI provider in ways that are outside your control and may breach data protection law;

(e) AI-generated complaints that do not accurately reflect your experience may cause delays in resolving your concern, as we may need to spend time clarifying what actually happened; and

(f) AI tools work by predicting the most likely answer based on the information they have been trained on. They do not check whether their output is accurate or relevant to your particular situation, and the most likely-sounding answer is not always the correct one. AI tools are also designed to make you feel helped and understood, which means they may agree with your point of view, use an overly sympathetic tone, or present your complaint in a one-sided way rather than giving a balanced account of what happened. This can wrongly reinforce your point of view and make you more fixed in your position, which may make it harder for us to work together to resolve the matter.

Annex 3 Formal complaints form

Before completing this form, please refer to **Section 4** ('Raising matters effectively') of our **feedback, concerns and complaints procedure**.

Your name:
[Pupils/students]'s name (if applicable):
Your relationship to [pupils/students] (if applicable):
Your address and postcode:
Your telephone number(s):
Your email address:
Your complaint is: (if you have more than one complaint, please number these) 1. 2.
What action have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? Who did you speak to and what was the response?
What you would like as an outcome from your complaint (if you have more than one outcome, please number these) 1. 2.
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, give details here:

Your signature…… Date ……

Office use

Date received ……

Date acknowledgement sent ……

Responsible member of staff ……

Annex 4 **Request for a complaints committee or complaint review**

Before completing this form, please refer to **Section 4** ('Raising matters effectively') of our **feedback, concerns and complaints procedure**.

Your name:
[Pupils/students]'s name (if applicable):
Your relationship to [pupils/students] (if applicable):
Your address and postcode:
Your daytime telephone number:
Your evening telephone number:
Your email address:
What action have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? Who did you speak to and what was the response?
Why you are not happy with our decision about your formal complaint (if you have more than one complaint, please number these): 1. 2.
What you would like the complaints committee to do to put things right (if you have more than one outcome, please number these) 1. 2.
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, give details here:

Your signature…… Date …….

Office use

Date received ……

Date acknowledgement sent ……

Responsible member of staff ……