Altrincham CE Primary School:

Complaints Procedure

Altrincham CE
Aided Primary School

'Some fell on good earth, and produced a harvest beyond his wildest dreams.'

Matthew 13:8, The Message

Grow Strong and Bear Fruit

1. Document Administration & Version Control

School Name: Altrincham CE Primary School

Effective Date: September 2026

Review Date: September 2029 (unless further DfE guidance)

Version History

Version	Date	Change Description
1.0	March 2025	Initial update and review.
2.0	16th September 2026	Full policy update incorporating 2025/26 Parent Guide guidance, including feedback categorisation, 5-step escalation path (Stage 2/3 alignment), AI/Social Media formal cautions, and IET 'pausing' protocols.

Ownership and Confidentiality

Guide owner: Governors Board – Finance & Resources Committee

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2. Policy Aims

Policy Objectives In fulfilling its statutory obligations, the school is committed to:

- Maintaining impartiality and a non-adversarial approach.
- Facilitating full and fair investigations by independent persons or panels.
- Addressing all points at issue with effective and prompt responses.
- Respecting confidentiality and treating all parties with respect and courtesy.
- Ensuring decisions are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair, and proportionate.
- Feeding complaint outcomes into school improvement and evaluation processes.

3. Categorisation of Feedback, Concerns, and Complaints

To ensure the most efficient resolution, the school categorises issues based on the required outcome.

Identifying the Nature of Your Issue

Feedback: "To be heard"	Concern: "To get an answer"	Complaint: "To get action"
Pre-procedural. Sharing views without the necessity for a response.	**Pre-procedural.** A worry or doubt where reassurance is sought.	**Formal Procedure Begins.** Dissatisfaction with actions or lack thereof.
The school listens and adapts views to improve services.	Handled via rapid informal resolution with staff.	Handled via the formal escalation path detailed in this policy.

Scope and Statutory Exceptions

This procedure covers most complaints regarding school facilities and services. However, the following are governed by separate statutory procedures:

- **Admissions:** Contact the Chair of the Governing Body.
- **Statutory Assessments of SEN:** Contact the Local Authority.
- **Collective Worship:** Refer to www.trafford.gov.uk or Church of England Education.
- **Child Protection/Safeguarding:** Handled under the Safeguarding Policy. Contact **Trafford Children's First Response** or the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) at 0161 912 5125.
- **Exclusions:** Refer to www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.
- **Whistleblowing:** The Secretary of State for Education is the "prescribed person" for education. Referrals can be made at www.education.gov.uk/contactus.

- **Staff Grievances/Conduct:** Handled under internal disciplinary/grievance procedures. Complainants will be notified that the matter is being addressed but will not receive details of disciplinary outcomes.
- **Third-Party Providers:** Contact the provider directly.

4. The Five-Step Escalation Path

Step 1: Discussion with Teacher/Form Tutor (Informal)

- **What to expect:** Acknowledgment within 5 school days; investigation and response within 15 school days.
- **Example issues:** Classroom-level concerns, homework, or day-to-day behaviour.

Step 2: Raise to Middle or Senior Leader (Informal)

- **What to expect:** Used if the issue is wider than a single classroom or remains unresolved after Step 1.
- **Example issues:** Bullying, additional support, or repeated behaviour patterns.

Step 3 / Stage 2: Formal Escalation to the Headteacher

- **What to expect:** The Headteacher acknowledges the formal complaint within 5 school days and calls a meeting to seek resolution. A written conclusion is provided within 15 school days.
- **Example issues:** Whole-school issues, safeguarding, policy disputes, or staff conduct.

Step 4 / Stage 3: Governing Body Review Panel

- **Procedure:** If dissatisfied with Stage 2, the complainant must notify the Clerk to the Governing Board (**Trust GS, clerk@trustgs.co.uk**) via the school office within 10 school days.
- **Timescales:** The Clerk will aim to find a date within 15 school days. At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will confirm the date, time, and venue.
- **Submissions:** Any additional written material must be submitted 5 school days prior and will be circulated 3 school days prior to the meeting.
- **Outcome:** A final decision letter is sent within 10 school days of the hearing.

Step 5: Referral to the Department for Education (DfE)

- **What to expect:** If the school's procedure is exhausted, the complainant may refer to the DfE. The DfE checks for legal adherence and procedural correctness rather than re-investigating the original incident.

5. Guidance for Complainants: Conduct & Tools

Preparation Checklist

- **Stick to Facts:** Document what happened, when, and who was involved.
- **Stay Objective:** Direct issues toward processes or decisions rather than individual staff.

- **Suggest Outcomes:** Be clear and realistic about your desired resolution.
- **Keep Records:** Log all conversations to demonstrate the escalation path was followed.

Communications Warnings

- **Social Media Usage:** Sharing details of complaints on social media is harmful to the school community. This will not accelerate resolution and may lead to a suspension of the investigation.
- **Formal Caution - AI Usage:** Artificial Intelligence tools should be used with extreme caution. AI frequently cites incorrect legislation. Submissions generated via AI will be strictly scrutinised for legal accuracy before being admitted as evidence.

6. Managing Unreasonable Behaviour

The school must protect staff wellbeing while resolving valid complaints.

Definitions of Unreasonable Behaviour

A complaint is deemed "unreasonably persistent" if the person:

- Makes the same complaint repeatedly after resolution.
- Is obsessive, harassing, prolific, or defamatory.
- Aims to cause disruption or excessive demands on school time.
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes that lack any serious purpose or value.

The "Pause" Protocol

In accordance with the Improving Education Together (IET) board protocols, the school may "pause" the complaints process as a first step. The procedure is suspended until unacceptable behaviour stops. Once behaviour has normalised, the process will resume.

Further Sanctions

If behaviour persists, the school may:

- Issue verbal or written warnings.
- Implement a communications plan (single point of contact).
- Bar the individual from the school site (notified in writing by the Headteacher).

7. Administrative Roles & Responsibilities

- **Complainant:** Must follow procedures, respond to deadlines, and treat staff with respect.
- **Investigator:** Establishes facts by interviewing parties and reviewing records to prepare a comprehensive report.
- **Complaints Coordinator:** (Headteacher or designated Governor) Ensures the process runs smoothly and keeps the complainant updated.

- **Clerk to the Governing Board (Trust GS):** The contact point for the panel; circulates papers, arranges the hearing, and records minutes.
- **Committee Chair:** Ensures the panel meeting is conducted respectfully and all parties present their case fairly.

Record Keeping

All complaint progress is recorded and held centrally. These records are confidential, managed by the School Business Manager, and retained in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

8. Monitoring and Links

Policy Review

The Governing Board monitors the number and nature of complaints to identify underlying issues. This policy is reviewed every three years by the Headteacher and the Full Governing Board.

Cross-References

This policy should be read alongside the following:

- Safeguarding Policy and Procedure
- Admissions Policy
- Behaviour and Relationships Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Equality Policy and Objectives
- SEN Policy and Information Report
- Privacy Notices
- Staff Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures