

## Policy for Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints & Communication

### Document Control

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### Related Policies and Documents

- Complaints Policy

### Definitions

- Where the word 'Trust' is used in this document it refers to the Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust, which consists of all Academy staff, governors, central team, executive and trustees.
- Where the word 'Governing Body' is used it refers to the Local Governing Body of an individual Academy within the Trust.
- Where an Academy does not have a Full Governing Body, members of the Trust Central Team may undertake duties attributed to governors in this policy.
- 'Complainant' applies to an individual stakeholder, as complaints from groups of stakeholders will be approached separately.
- Complainant may also be interpreted to encompass stakeholders, who may not be seeking to make formal complaints but whose communications and/behaviour falls under categories defined in the Implementation section of this policy.

## Policy Statement and Objectives

The Trust's Complaint Policy and procedures for its implementation aim to clarify and promote a consistent and transparent approach to the way in which complaints are managed.

This policy and the procedures for its implementation aim to clarify the way in which serial and unreasonable complaints are managed. It aims to do so in a way which is clear and concise. The policy seeks to promote a consistent and transparent approach to dealing with such matters.

## Introduction

DEMAT is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and seeks to swiftly resolve all such matters in line with this Serial and Unreasonable Complaints Policy.

We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our Academy. 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.

## Implementation

The Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust (DEMAT) is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain.

### Definition

DEMAT defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the Academy, 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 complaints investigation process.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways that are incompatible with the complaints 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 that complaint where the Academy's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education or the Education Funding Agency.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on Academy staff 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.

### **Course of Action**

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the Academy 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.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before determining that the complaint has met the threshold for applying this policy.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will discuss the matter with the DEMAT Head of Governance ahead of writing to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is not acceptable and ask them to modify their approach to the Academy and/or wider Trust.

For complainants who excessively contact the Academy or wider Trust, causing a significant level of disruption, we may put communications strategies in place, such as:

- Reserve the right not to engage with parents unless in accordance with any communication strategy put in place.
- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address.
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term.
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Put any other strategy in place, as necessary.

This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression, violence or repetitive behaviour or actions that could be deemed as harassment, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the Academy site or Trust Head Office premises.

### **Duplicate or multiple complaints multiple stakeholders**

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and the local process is complete.
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint.

If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

Where the Academy receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the Academy, the Academy may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the Academy website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If individual complainants are not satisfied with the Academy's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the stages set out in the Academy's Complaint Policy should be followed.