Lumen Learning Trust
Learning together for a brighter future

Concerns and Complaints Policy

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1. Who can make a complaint?

The Trust has adopted this policy to allow parents and carers of pupils attending any of the Lumen Learning Trust schools, nurseries or LAN centre, to raise a concern or complaint, unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions, see page 5.

The policy applies to complaints from:

- Parents of current pupils at a Lumen Learning Trust school

Please refer to Appendix E if you are not the parent of a pupil currently on roll at a Lumen Learning Trust school which outlines our procedures in that instance.

The complaints policy is based on Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

The Trust also reserves the right to substitute this policy for an alternative process when complaints are vexatious, when complainants are unreasonably persistent or the behaviour of complainants is unreasonable.

Conflict between estranged parents, over the application of parental responsibility, is a common cause of complaints made to schools. The legal definition of parent differs in education and family law. Lumen Learning Trust does not favour one parent over another unless there are serious safeguarding or legal reasons for doing so, which can be evidenced.

2. Definitions and interpretation

Where the following words or phrases are used in this policy:

- References to the **Trust** are references to Lumen Learning Trust, the multi academy trust responsible for the School;
- References to **days** or **school days** mean Monday to Friday, when the School is open to pupils during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website.

References to **Parent** or **Parents** means the natural or adoptive parents of the pupil (irrespective of whether they are or have ever been married, with whom the pupil lives, or whether they have contact with the pupil) as well as any person who is not the natural or adoptive parent of the pupil, but who has care of, or parental responsibility for, the pupil (e.g. legal guardian).

3. 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 procedure. The Lumen Learning Trust takes 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, you will be referred to an appropriate alternative staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, you will be referred 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, The Lumen Learning Trust will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant
The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- follow these procedures;
- explain the complaint in full as early as possible;
- engage and co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint;
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint;
- ask for assistance as needed;
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect;
- do not approach individual governors about the complaint;
- do not publicise the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator
An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
    - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved;
    - interviewing all relevant parties to the complaint;
    - consideration of records and other relevant information;
    - analysing information.
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The Headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator
Each school has a complaints co-ordinator. The complaints co-ordinator for the Trust is the Governance Professional to the Trust board.

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure;
- make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with others as necessary.be aware of issues regarding:
    - sharing third party information;
    - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person.
- keep records.

Governance Professional to the Trust Board
The Governance Professional will:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR);
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale;
- record the proceedings in note form;
- circulate the notes of the meeting;
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Panel Chair

The Panel chair will:

a. Chair the meeting, ensuring everyone is treated with respect throughout;
b. Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee and are allowed to present their case.

Panel Member

Panel members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so no governor / Trustee may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it;
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations;
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child;
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated. The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults. If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend. However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests;
- **the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.**

5. How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern can be raised in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of the person with the concern, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so. Concerns should be raised with either the Class Teacher or Headteacher.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint, using the Stage 1 Complaint form (Appendix B).

Complainants should not approach or email individual governors, their school headteacher or CEO 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 a later stage of the procedure. Complainants email addresses may be blocked if contact is persistently sent to individually named Trust staff email accounts.

Template complaint forms are included at the end of the policy to help complainants. These have been designed to ensure that a complainant's child remains at the centre of the process by capturing relevant information at the outset of each stage of the process thereby allowing a resolution to be reached as quickly as possible. Each form is also available as an online version to further enhance accessibility for complainants.

Any complaint submission, regardless of structure or format, should be limited to 1000 words maximum, and ensure it includes how the concern is impacting the complainant's child and what a resolution could look like for them. Should any submission exceed the maximum length or not include the stipulated content we reserve the right to ask the complainant to modify and resend their submission before any process begins.

If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask a third-party organisation such as 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.

6. Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, CEO or Chair of Trustees, as appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

7. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools when raising a complaint

The Trust expects complaints to be clear, concise, and focused on the specific actions, decisions, or omissions of the school or Trust.

While complainants may use digital tools to assist with drafting, complaints containing Artificial Intelligence (AI)-generated content that obscures the core issues through excessive, non-applicable, or misleading references to legislation, statutory frameworks, or legal jargon will not be accepted for processing.

Where a submission is deemed to fall under this category, the Trust will return the correspondence and pause any formal timeline. The complainant will be requested to resubmit their concern in plain text using the Trust's standard Complaint Form, clearly setting out:

- The specific facts of the incident or issue.
- How the pupil or complainant was directly impacted.
- The specific outcome or resolution sought.

The formal complaints procedure and associated statutory deadlines will only commence upon receipt of a clear, relevant resubmission.

If you choose to use 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 Appendix F of this policy before doing so.

8. Timescales for raising a complaint

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 consider complaints made outside of this time frame only if exceptional circumstances apply.

8.1. 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.

9. Audio or video evidence

As data controller in our own right we do not allow video or sound recording of any meetings held between parents and our Trust and its schools. All parties present at meetings are able to make their own written or typed notes which will be held on file together as a record of the meeting. Only where a reasonable adjustment is required will recording be permitted. The determination of a reasonable adjustment is at the discretion of the professional judgement of a Trust or school leader i.e. the Headteacher. Where recording has been permitted, prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any notes taken.

We do not normally accept electronic audio or video recordings as evidence when we are asked to consider a complaint.

We may accept independently notarised transcriptions of recordings.

We do not accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

If we do accept a recording, we may ask for written consent from all recorded parties before it is viewed.

10. Raising Complaints about school/Trust staff or the Trust staff

10.1. School Staff
Complaints against school staff are dealt with by the Headteacher (Stage 1) in the first instance.

10.2. Governance staff, Headteacher or member of the Trust central team
Where a complaint is about a matter relating specifically to the persons/groups below, whilst the general principles of this policy will be applied, the complaint will be considered immediately at Stage Two of the policy by the CEO.

- a central Trust employee;
- the personal conduct of a Headteacher;
- a governor;
- a Trustee;
- the local governing body (as a whole);
- the Trust Board or Multi Academy Trust (as a whole).

The investigating officer/body may differ depending on the subject of the complaint. In exceptional circumstances an independent investigator may be commissioned, who will submit a report on completion of their investigation.

If a complaint refers jointly to the following groups a Stage 3 panel will be heard by a committee of Trustees:

- The Chair and Vice Chair of the local governing body;
- The entire local governing body;
- The majority of the local governing body.

Where such a complaint is not made by a parent of a pupil on roll at one of the Trust's academies appendix E will apply.

10.3. Complaints escalated to/about the Trust, CEO or Trustee
If a complaint is escalated to the Trust it or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the Trust, then the complaint should be sent to the CEO, via the Governance Professional to Trustees, to be investigated.

The CEO will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within **5 school days** of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

Following the investigation, the CEO will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within **15 school days** of the date that the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the CEO will write to the Complainant explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a Trustee, the complaint should be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board. If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation.

NB. Where the Chair of the Trust Board has investigated the complaint, they will write the letter of outcome to the Complainant and provide a copy to the CEO.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Governance Professional Governance Professional asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Review Panel, within 10 school days. The procedure will mirror that outlined under Stage 3 – Panel Hearing above.

If the complaint is about any of the following groups it will be heard by a completely independent panel:

- jointly about the Chair of Trustees and Vice Chair of Trustees or
- the entire trust board or
- the majority of the trust board

If a complaint is made about the Trust, CEO or Trustee by a non-parent and is not regarding a child at the School, please refer to Appendix E.

11. Deviation from the procedure

There may be occasions when it's necessary or reasonable to deviate from the published complaints procedure. In these cases, the complainant will be kept informed and reasons for the deviation given.

12. Regulatory Framework

This policy has been prepared to meet the Trust's responsibilities under:

- Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, March 2017);
- Education and Skills Act 2008;
- Children Act 1989;
- Childcare Act 2006;
- Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR); and
- Equality Act 2010.

13. Publication and availability

Information is available on the School websites and the policy is published on the Trust's website. It is available in hard copy on request.

A copy of this policy is available for inspection from the Trust's office during the school day. This policy can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required.

14. Scope of this complaints procedure

These types of complaint are subject to other statutory procedures that are separate or potentially out of scope from this general complaints procedure:

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
Data Protection and freedom of information	For all data protection concerns the complainant will be offered the opportunity to raise concerns directly with the Trust Data Protection Officer via datamanager@lumenlearningtrust.co.uk.
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. *complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure. A copy of the policy can be found on the school's website via School Info > Policies.
Health and safety	We may be required to escalate such complaints directly to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or the local authority instead of handling them through our internal complaints procedure. If the complaint relates to a serious health and safety failure that endangers people, it may fall under whistleblowing protections rather than a standard complaints policy, meaning it should be raised with external authorities such as the HSE, Ofsted, or the local authority

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) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Surrey Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA) on 0300 470 9100.
Religious education and collective worship	Parents have the right to withdraw their child from all or part of RE teaching. Those parents wishing to exercise this right or to discuss concerns about its content or delivery should address this directly with the Headteacher of their child's school.
Sex education	Parents have the right to withdraw their child from all or part of the Sex Education provided at their child's school except for those parts included in statutory National Curriculum Science. Those parents wishing to exercise this right or to discuss concerns about its content or delivery should address this directly with the Headteacher of their child's school.
Staff capability, discipline or grievances	Complaints from employees will be dealt with under the Trust's internal grievance procedures. Employees must raise their concerns with the Headteacher, or with the CEO should the grievance be related to the Headteacher.
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.
Statutory Assessment of SEN	Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with local authorities.
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 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: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
If the complaint has been made previously about the same issue which has been fully investigated and/or resolved	See Section 23.3

If other statutory 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 The Lumen Learning Trust or the individual school in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

15. Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, the Trust wants 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 about 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.

In addition, **mediation** can provide a helpful mechanism for discussion when a complaint is raised, and can help to rebuild the relationship between parties and may be offered at any point of the procedure. We work on the basis that all parties want to ensure the best resolution for the sake of the home-school relationship, therefore hope that everyone making a complaint is open to mediation.

16. Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing, including by email. If they do not respond to this request within 10 school days the matter will be judged to be closed and the complaint withdrawn.

17. Informal concerns and complaints

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis, within **10 school days**.

Concerns should be raised with either the Class Teacher, phase leader 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 a later stage of the procedure.

Who to contact
Where appropriate, complaints should initially be raised as follows:

- **Educational issues**: if the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, please speak or write initially to the Class Teacher. Your complaint may be passed to a more senior member of staff if appropriate;
- **Pastoral care**: for complaints relating to matters outside the classroom, please speak or write to the Class Teacher or Home School Link Worker;
- **Disciplinary matters**: a problem over any pupil disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised first of all with the Class Teacher;
- **Financial matters**: a query relating to fees or extras should be addressed in writing to the Trust's Head of Finance.

An informal complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within **5 school days** of receipt, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely timescales. Such action may include an investigation and/or a meeting with the Parent.

Wherever appropriate, the School will ask the Parent at the earliest stage what they think might resolve the issue.

The Parent will receive a response to the complaint within **15 school days**.

If the Parent is dissatisfied with the response to the informal complaint or in the event that the complaint cannot be resolved by informal means, the Parent may make a formal complaint under Stage 1 of the Trust's Formal Complaint Procedure.

18. Formal complaints

We expect that most concerns can be resolved informally. We request that prior to entering into any formal process, the complainant requests a meeting with the school to enable both parties to discuss concerns with the aim of resolution before further steps are taken. The aim of the process is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if it does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

We ask that you do not discuss your concerns on social networking sites (e.g. Facebook). This can be potentially damaging for the school and/or its pupils, can reach a much wider audience than you might have intended, and more importantly does not give the school the opportunity to resolve the issue. Should a complainant choose to discuss their concern on a social networking site, the school will question the complainant's commitment to finding an appropriate resolution to the complaint.

The complaints process is designed to resolve individual, specific concerns between the complainant and the school. Complainants must not attempt to orchestrate or escalate their individual concern into a wider group campaign or seek to rally collective pressure against the school. Doing so compromises the necessary confidentiality and impartiality required to investigate the matter fairly, and constructively.

Stage	Process
Stage 1 **Headteacher Investigation** (or other appropriate person)	• Acknowledgement of receipt of complaint to be sent within 5 days of receipt of the complaint. • Complaint to be investigated and written response to be received by complainant within 15 days of receipt of the formal complaint.
Stage 2 **Governor / CEO / Chair of Trustees Investigation**	• If the complainant believes that their complaint has not been fully addressed at Stage 1, they may request to move to Stage 2. This request must be made within **10 days** of the receipt of the outcome letter at Stage 1. • Acknowledgement of receipt of complaint to be sent within 5 days of receipt of the complaint. • Pre-investigation meeting between Investigating Officer and Complainant to take place. • Complaint to be investigated and written response to be received by complainant within 15 days of the pre-investigation meeting taking place.
Stage 3 **Complaint Review Panel Hearing**	• If the complainant believes that their complaint has not been fully addressed at Stage 2, they may request to move to Stage 3. This request must be made within **10 days** of the receipt of the outcome letter at Stage 2. • Acknowledgement of receipt of request to escalate complaint to Stage 3 to be sent within 5 days. • Hearing to be held within 30 days of receipt of request to go to Stage 3. • Paperwork for Stage 3 hearing to be received from all parties at least 7 days before the hearing. • Paperwork for Stage 3 hearing to be sent to all parties at least 3 days before the hearing. • Outcome letter from panel to be received by complainant within 10 days of the hearing.

If at any time a child protection concern becomes apparent, the child protection process will take precedence over the complaints process, which will be halted until the child protection matter is resolved.

19. Formal: Stage 1 – Consideration by the Headteacher (or other appropriate person)

Complaints will usually only progress to Stage 1 after first being considered at the informal stage, and where the Parent indicates that they intend to escalate a matter to the formal stage.

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher or governance) – via the school office. Should the complaint be about the Headteacher or governance the complaint will be considered at Stage 2 of the policy. This may be done in person or in writing in accordance with Section 5 of this policy. The Stage 1 Complaint Form – (see Appendix A for the contact details of the Headteacher, and Appendix B for a copy of the form) ensures that relevant information is communicated at the outset and a key part of completing the form is to ensure you have stated the outcome you are seeking.

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 **5 school days**.

Within this acknowledgment, the complainant will be invited to meet with the headteacher at the outset of the process. The aim of this pre-investigation meeting is to enable the headteacher to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and confirm the intended outcome the complainant is seeking.

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 pre-investigation meeting having taken place.

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 The Trust/School will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will advise the complainant on how to escalate their complaint if they believe it has not been fully addressed at this stage. Escalation is not automatic and is only triggered if the issues raised have not been addressed in full.

Where a complaint is not regarding a child at the School, the Trust reserves the right to deviate from the formal stages of the Complaints policy, to provide a formal response and where possible seek resolution.

20. Formal: Stage 2 – Investigation

Before requesting a Stage 2 investigation we ask parents to reflect on why they were not satisfied by the Stage 1 outcome to consider whether mediation might be an option to resolve the matter.

Complaints will usually only progress to Stage 2 after first being considered at Stage 1.

If the complainant believes that their complaint has not been fully addressed at Stage 1, they may request a Stage 2 investigation. A complaint cannot progress to Stage 2 where the outcome at Stage 1 does not match that which the complainant sought. Stage 2 can only be considered as a next step where it can be demonstrated the School has not addressed in full the concerns of the complainant. This should be done in writing in accordance with Section 5 of this policy. The Stage 2 Complaint Form (see Appendix A for the contact details of the Governance Professional, and Appendix C for a copy of the form for this stage) allows the collection of relevant information to expedite the process.

If a complainant requests for their complaint to progress to Stage 2 but does not provide their submission, in accordance with Section 5 of this policy, the complaints co-ordinator will ask for this to be provided. If this is not received within 15 school days of the complaints co-ordinator's request the complaint will be considered closed and the process will end.

Receipt of the complaint submission will be acknowledged. The complainant will be invited to meet at another Lumen school site, with the investigator at the outset of the process. The meeting will be in person. The aim of this pre-investigation meeting is to enable the investigator to understand the scope of the complaint and desired outcomes prior to commencing their investigation. If the complainant is a parent, it is an expectation that both parents with Parental Responsibility will take part in the meeting with the investigator, as both parents must be sighted on the concerns being raised and the school's response to them. If this is not possible, then two separate meetings will be arranged with the understanding that this may delay the process.

The investigation of the complaint will be undertaken by either the Chair of Governors/a Nominated Governor/the CEO/Chair of Trustees/nominated Trustee or independent investigating officer. The person appointed to investigate at Stage 2 is at the discretion of the Trust. The investigator will have had no prior involvement in the complaint.

The investigator will consider all relevant evidence; this may include but is not limited to:

- evidence and outcome from Stage 1 investigation if applicable;
- a statement from the complainant;
- where relevant a meeting with/statement from an individual who is the subject of the complaint;
- any previous correspondence regarding the complaint;
- any supporting documents from all parties;
- interviews with /statements from anyone related to the complaint;
- relevant policies and whether they were followed;
- written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. Personal data may be redacted and names anonymised or cyphered in line with data protection principles.

After considering the available evidence, the investigator may:

- uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it;
- not uphold the complaint and if requested provide the complainant with details of the Stage 3 complaint review process;
- uphold the complaint in part: in other words, the investigator may find one aspect of the complaint to be valid, but not another aspect. They may recommend certain action to be taken to resolve any aspect that they find in favour of the complainant.

The investigator should inform the complainant of their decision in writing **within 15 school days of the pre-investigation meeting taking place.** They should explain clearly why they have come to the decision that they made. They should detail any agreed actions as a result of the complaint. Finally, they should provide the complainant with details of how to progress the complaint to Stage 3 if they believe their complaint has not been fully addressed, providing them with the contact details of the Governance Professional to the Trustees Body (Appendix A). Should the complaint not be resolved mediation may be considered using an impartial and objective mediation service.

21. Formal: Stage 3 – Complaint Review Panel Meeting

Complaints will usually only progress to Stage 3 after first being considered at Stage 1 and Stage 2.

Stage 3 is a review process to consider how the complaint has been managed and not a rehearing of the complaint itself. It may be mediation with an external mediator would help to achieve a restoration of home school relationships or a resolution. This could be a more effective option than an escalation to Stage 3. Either the complainant or school may suggest mediation.

If the complainant does not believe that their complaint has been fully addressed at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3. To make this request the complainant should complete the form found in Appendix D. This consists of a Panel hearing with at least three panel members involved in school governance who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint or any previous investigation. One of the Complaint Panel members will be independent of the management and running of the Trust. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will not be a Trustee or an employee of the Trust. As such this could be a

member of a Local Governance Board at another school within the Trust or someone involved in school governance outside the Trust. The Governance Professional will establish and convene the panel.

This is the final stage of the Trust's complaints procedure.

The purpose of the panel meeting is to:

- Review whether the Trust has followed its policies and procedures in its management of the complaint;
- Consider ways to achieve reconciliation between the School/Trust and the complainant;
- The purpose of Stage 3 is not to re-investigate the complaint, but to review how the School / Trust has previously dealt with the complaint.

The role of the Panel is to:

- establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:
  - the documents provided by both parties; and
  - any representations made by the Parents, the Headteacher and the CEO & Chair of Trustees;
- to reach a decision, on the balance of probabilities, as to whether each complaint point is upheld.

Timeline

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Governance Professional, via the school office, within **10 school days** of receipt of the Stage 2 response. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply and are explained to the Governance Professional at the same time that the request for a Stage 3 hearing is made.

The Governance Professional 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 Governance Professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within **30 school days** of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed. If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Governance Professional will decide when to hold the meeting. In this case the Panel will meet with the Governance Professional in attendance, and consider the complaint on the basis of written submissions from both parties, with neither party being present.

At least **10 school days** before the meeting, the Governance Professional will:

- confirm and notify both parties of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible and
- inform both parties that copies of any further written material should be submitted to the Governance Professional at least **7 school days** before the meeting. Any evidence submitted after this, including on the day of the hearing, will only be considered in exceptional circumstances with the agreement of the panel, whose decision is final.

Any written material will be collated and circulated by the Governance Professional to all parties so that it is received at least **3 school days** before the date of the meeting. The Panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

Attendees at the meeting

The Governance Professional will invite the following parties as applicable:

- a panel of three people involved in school governance, one or more of whom is independent;
- the complainant;
- the Headteacher;
- investigating member of SLT (if appropriate);
- the Stage 2 investigator, who dealt with the complaint at Stage 2;
- relevant witnesses.

The complainant may ask to be accompanied to the meeting by a supportive companion, interpreter or advocate. It is not advisable for this person to be a member of the school community, for reasons of confidentiality and to avoid conflict of interest. The complainant must advise the Governance Professional to the Complaint Review Panel of the name and role of this additional person prior to the hearing, and the Governance Professional will seek agreement from the chair of the Panel. If the additional person is attending as an advocate, they will be presenting the complainant's case and speaking on their behalf, and therefore the complainant will not be able to address the Panel

directly. If the additional person is attending as a supportive companion, they will not be able to address the Panel directly.

If assistance with the request is required, for example because of a disability, please inform the Governance Professional to Trustees who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

The Hearing is an internal process, not legal proceedings, and legal representation is therefore inappropriate and unnecessary. If the Parent wishes to be accompanied by a relative or friend who is legally qualified, the Parent is required to notify the Governance Professional to Trustees in the initial request for a Panel meeting. The Parent should note that the Complaint Review Panel will wish to speak to that person directly prior to the meeting, and they will not be permitted to act as an advocate or address the Complaint Panel at the meeting unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Complaint Review Panel.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

Parents may withdraw their request for a Hearing at any point up to and including the intended date of the panel meeting.

Conduct of the meeting
The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations. Financial compensation is not a possible outcome of the process.

The Panel will consider the complaint as submitted at Stage 1 and 2. Any new issues will need to be dealt with by a separate complaint procedure.

The Panel will not only consider the handling of the complaint at the previous stages, but will also consider those aspects of the original complaint which the complainant believes have not been fully addressed.

The meeting will be held in private and is confidential. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or additional needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations are recorded. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media (including social media).

The Complaint Review Panel members will appoint one of their number to be the Chair of the Complaint Review Panel throughout the proceedings.

The format of the meeting is that the complainant is given a set amount of time to make their case. The Panel and the school may then ask the complainant questions for clarification. The school then has the same amount of time to make their case. The Panel and complainant then have the opportunity to seek clarification from the school. Both parties then leave the meeting and the Panel will deliberate.

All those present during the meeting are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the meeting may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the meeting is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his/her comment will be minuted.

The Panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and will come to their decisions on the balance of probabilities. The Panel can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- determine that all or part of the complaint is out of their scope to consider.

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, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Panel will provide the complainant and the Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, and a copy of the minutes of the Panel hearing, within **10 school days**.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the DfE and Ofsted if they believe that their complaint has been handled unreasonably or unlawfully by the Trust.

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 Trust / School 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.

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, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All 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 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

The complaint investigator/the Chair of the Complaint Review Panel will ensure that a copy of all relevant information relating to the complaint is kept at the school in a secure, confidential file, separate from staff and pupil records. This information should be retained for six years from the date of the complaint, in line with guidance from the Information and Records Management Society (*www.irms.org.uk*) and in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). The complainant should be informed that this will be done.

If a duplicate complaint is received by a new complainant following completion of the Stage 3 procedure, the School will inform the new complainant that the matter is closed.

22. Possible further action

Referring to the Department for Education (DfE)
If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school or trust complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the DfE. They will not overturn the school or trust's decision about a complaint but will intervene if a school or trust has:

- Breached a clause in its funding agreement;
- Failed to act in line with its duties under education law;
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions.

If the complaints procedure is found not to meet regulations, the trust will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

You can contact the DfE via the following address: School Complaints Compliance Unit, Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD.
https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk

Ofsted
It is Ofsted's expectation that all "local routes" are exhausted before any contact is made to them.

Ofsted's only power is to determine if a school inspection is needed in response to a qualifying complaint. *Generally, the complainant must have followed the Trust's own complaints procedure before referring to Ofsted. Ofsted will only consider complaints about* ***whole school*** *issues and not those regarding individual pupils.*

Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD
www.ofsted.gov.uk

23. Procedure for managing serial and unreasonable complaints

The Trust 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.

22.1 Unreasonable complaints

The Trust 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 engage with an investigator via telephone or email or in writing;
- 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 which 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 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;
- orchestrating, inciting, or encouraging collective campaigns or group grievances among other parents in support of an individual concern, thereby undermining the confidential and individual nature of the complaints procedure.

The Trust will ultimately use its own discretion to deem what is unreasonable.

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.

Whenever possible, the school/Trust will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Trust will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it. For complainants who excessively contact a school/Trust causing a significant level of disruption, we may:

- 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 Citizens Advice;
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary;
- Review the parameters in place after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the school premises.

22.2 Serial/persistent complaints

If the complainant makes contact again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. We may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:

- We have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns;
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the Trust's position and their options;
- The complainant makes contact repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.

The case to stop responding is stronger if:

- The complainant's communications are often or always abusive or aggressive;
- The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff;
- There is reasonable belief that the individual is making contact with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience.

Where we decide to stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will consider any new complaints they make provided the concerns raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern.

22.3 Duplicate complaints

If the School/Trust has resolved a complaint under this procedure and received a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, the Trust will assess whether there are aspects that hadn't previously been considered, or any new information that needs to be taken into account.

If the Trust is satisfied that there are no new aspects, it will:

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

22.4 Complaint campaigns

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

- Publishing a single response on the School/Trust website
  Sending a template response to all of the complainant

Where an individual complainant attempts to actively organize a collective campaign or mobilise other parents around their specific personal concern, the Trust reserves the right to suspend or void the individual complaints process on the grounds that it compromises a fair and confidential investigation.

If complainants are not satisfied with the School's/Trust's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

Appendix A – School contact details

Contact details for the Headteacher: The Headteacher can be contacted via the School Office. A Headteacher's or governor's personal Lumen Learning Trust email contact should never be used by a complainant to avoid the process as a whole from being compromised.

Contact details for Governance Professional and Clerk to the Trustees: clerktogovernors@lumenlearningtrust.co.uk

Contact details for the CEO of the Trust: The CEO can either be contacted via the School Office or the Governance Professional and Clerk to Trustees.

School Contact Details

Darley Dene Primary
Garfield Avenue, Addlestone KT15 2NP
Tel: 01932 847674 office.darleydene@lumenlearningtrust.co.uk

Ewell Grove Primary & Nursery School
29 West Street, Ewell, Epsom KT17 1UZ
Tel: 020 8393 4393 office.ewellgrove@lumenlearningtrust.co.uk

The Echelford Primary School
Park Road, Ashford TW15 1EX
Tel: 01784 253233 office.echelford@lumenlearningtrust.co.uk

Riverbridge Primary School
Park Avenue, Staines-upon-Thames TW18 2EF
Tel: 01784 227960 office.riverbridge@lumenlearningtrust.co.uk

Saxon Primary School
Briar Road, Shepperton TW17 0JB
Tel: 01932 563035 info.saxon@lumenlearningtrust.co.uk

Southfield Park Primary School
Long Grove Rd, Epsom KT19 8TF
Tel: 01372 743104 info.southfieldpark@lumenlearningtrust.co.uk

Walton Oak School
Ambleside Avenue, Walton-upon-Thames KT12 3LN
Tel: 01932 259604 office.waltonoak@lumenlearningtrust.co.uk

Appendix B form – Stage 1 Headteacher Investigation

Please complete and return to *Headteacher via the School Office* who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. Alternatively, you can complete this form online via this link: https://forms.gle/LBhvGsh6Akiz6WcL8.

Your name:			
Name of pupil and year group:			
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):			
Contact address:			
Contact telephone Day:		**Contact telephone Mobile:**	
Contact email address:			

Please give details of your complaint (adding extra pages if necessary):

No.	**Details of issue**	**What action has been taken to resolve the matter, by whom and when?**
1		
2		
3		

What solutions have been offered and the reason this was not a satisfactory resolution for you?
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 who:	
Complaint referred to:	
Action taken:	
Date:	

Appendix C form – Stage 2 Trust Level Investigation

Please complete and return to *Governance Professional* who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. Alternatively, you can complete this form online via this link: https://forms.gle/dSzuGVbrjxupLxx47.

Your name:			
Name of pupil and year group:			
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):			
Contact address:			
Contact telephone Day:		**Contact telephone Mobile:**	
Contact email address:			

Please give details of your complaint (adding extra pages if necessary):

No.	Details of issue	What action has been taken to resolve the matter, by whom and when?
1		
2		
3		

How does this concern impact on your child and their education?
Have you kept your concern confidential between yourself and the School? If no, please give details
Have you raised a complaint or concern about the School's provision before? If yes, please give brief details along with relevant dates
What solutions have been offered and the reason this was not a satisfactory resolution for you?

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage? (Keeping in mind how this resolution might benefit your child's education?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
Signature:	
Date:	
Official use	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By who:	
Complaint referred to:	
Action taken:	
Date:	

Appendix D form – Stage 3 Complaint Review Panel Meeting

Please complete and return to *Governance Professional* who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. Alternatively, you can complete this form online via this link: https://forms.gle/tVb7uPzsetFrtu5Y6.

Your name:			
Name of pupil and year group:			
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):			
Contact address:			
Contact telephone Day:		**Contact telephone Mobile:**	
Contact email address:			
Reasons for requesting a Stage 3 Complaint Review (reasons why you feel your concerns have not been fully addressed, and any evidence that you feel has not been fully considered). Please include dates, times, locations of any events or meetings undertaken up to this point.			
Which element(s) of your complaint remain unresolved from the previous stage?			
What outcome are you seeking from the Stage 3 Complaint Review?			

What action would you like to be taken to resolve the problem?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
Signature:	
Date:	
Official use	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By who:	
Complaint referred to:	
Action taken:	
Date:	

Appendix E – Complaints from those who are not a parent/s of a pupil on roll at a Lumen Learning Trust school

Only the following stages of this policy will apply:

- *Informal concern or complaint*
  Complainants should first address their complaint informally to the relevant school via the school's office email address or, if not relevant to a particular school, to the Trust via the Governance Professional and Clerk to Trustees by emailing clerktogovernors@lumenlearningtrust.co.uk.

- *Stage 1 – Headteacher Investigation.*
  The complainant is required to submit the Stage 1 complaint form.

- *Stage 2 – Governor / CEO / Chair of Trustees Investigation*
  The complainant is required to submit the Stage 2 complaint form. The person appointed to investigate at Stage 2 is at the discretion of the Trust.

The procedures set out for each stage can be found in the main body of this policy.

Trust staff may seek to meet with the complainant in order to resolve the concerns, but are not obliged to do so.

There may be occasions where an individual raises a complaint while they have a child/ren on roll at a Lumen Learning Trust school and, during the course of the complaint process, their child is removed from roll. If this occurs, the complainant will no longer be eligible to have their complaint heard by a panel at Stage 3.

Appendix F – Guidance on using AI tools to raise concerns or complaints

This Appendix 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 copy and paste the example prompt below into your chosen AI tool.

Prompt:

"I need help drafting a clear, polite, and factual complaint to my child's primary school about [insert brief summary of the issue, e.g., an unaddressed friendship incident on the playground].

Please format my text using these strict guidelines:

1. Use plain English, a respectful tone, and clear bullet points.
2. Stick strictly to the facts I provide below—do not add assumed facts or extra details.
3. Clearly state how this situation has directly impacted my child.
4. State the outcome I am seeking [insert desired outcome, e.g., a meeting with the Class Teacher / a review of lunchtime supervision].
5. DO NOT include references to laws, acts of parliament, legal jargon, or statutory frameworks.

Here are the details of what happened:

- Date(s): [Insert dates]
- What occurred: [Insert brief bullet points of the incident]
- Impact on my child: [Insert details]"