

FOOTSTEPS TRUST COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Policy Statement

Footsteps Trust Academy is committed to maintaining positive relationships with students, parents, carers, commissioners and other stakeholders. We value feedback and aim to resolve concerns promptly, fairly and transparently.

We recognise that concerns and complaints provide an opportunity to improve services and strengthen relationships. All complaints will be handled in accordance with principles of natural justice, confidentiality and fairness.

This policy reflects:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026
- Independent School Standards Regulations
- Equality Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR
- Department for Education guidance on handling complaints

Complaints relating to safeguarding concerns, allegations against staff, child protection matters or whistleblowing will be managed under the appropriate policy and statutory procedures.

1. Principles

The Academy will ensure that complaints are:

- Taken seriously.
- Treated respectfully and confidentially.
- Investigated fairly and impartially.
- Resolved as quickly as possible.
- Used to improve practice where appropriate.

No complainant will be treated unfavourably because they have raised a concern in good faith.

2. Scope

This procedure applies to complaints from:

- Parents and carers.
- Students (where appropriate).
- Commissioners and referring schools.
- Members of the public.
- Other stakeholders.

The procedure does not apply to:

- Child protection concerns.
- Allegations against staff.
- Whistleblowing complaints.
- Staff grievances.
- Data protection complaints.
- Special Educational Needs tribunal matters.

These concerns will be dealt with through separate procedures.

3. Expectations

All parties involved in a complaint are expected to:

- Treat one another with courtesy and respect.
- Communicate calmly and appropriately.
- Provide relevant information honestly.
- Respect confidentiality.

The Academy reserves the right to manage unreasonable, abusive, vexatious or persistent complaints appropriately while ensuring access to due process.

4. Informal Resolution

Most concerns can be resolved quickly through informal discussion.

Concerns should initially be raised with the most appropriate member of staff either:

- In person.
- By telephone.
- By email.
- In writing.

The staff member will normally acknowledge the concern within **2 working days** and seek to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Date of Issue: September 2026

Date of Review: September 2027

Where concerns relate to student wellbeing or safeguarding, they will immediately be referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) where appropriate.

5. Stage 1: Formal Complaint to the Principal

If informal resolution is unsuccessful, a formal complaint should be submitted in writing to the Principal.

The complaint should include:

- The nature of the complaint.
- Relevant dates and events.
- Any actions already taken.
- The outcome sought.

Acknowledgement

The Principal will acknowledge receipt within **3 working days**.

Investigation

The Principal may:

- Meet with the complainant.
- Review documentation.
- Interview staff.
- Speak to students where appropriate.
- Gather witness statements.

Throughout the process, appropriate consideration will be given to safeguarding, equality, SEND and confidentiality.

Outcome

A written response will normally be provided within **10 working days**.

Where this is not possible due to complexity or absence of key individuals, the complainant will be informed of revised timescales.

The response will include:

- Findings.
- Reasons for decisions.
- Any actions to be taken.
- Information regarding escalation to Stage 2.

Footsteps will not pay financial compensation as a response to complaints, though may spend money on a relevant educational purpose (e.g. paying a fee for a repeat examination).

6. Complaints About the Principal

Where a complaint concerns the Principal, the complaint should be submitted directly to the Chair of the Proprietor Board or Trustees.

The Principal will be given an opportunity to respond to the complaint.

The matter will proceed directly to Stage 2 if informal resolution is not appropriate.

7. Stage 2: Complaint Panel Hearing

If the complainant remains dissatisfied following Stage 1, they may request a panel hearing by writing to the Chair of Trustees within 10 working days of receiving the Stage 1 outcome.

Acknowledgement

The request will be acknowledged within **2 working days**.

Panel Membership

A Complaints Panel will consist of:

- At least three individuals.
- Individuals not previously involved in the complaint.
- At least one person independent of the management and running of the Academy.

This meets Independent School Standards requirements.

Hearing

The panel hearing will normally take place within **15 working days** of the request being received.

The complainant may:

- Attend the hearing.
- Be accompanied by a friend, advocate or representative.
- Submit additional written evidence.

The Academy may also present evidence and call relevant witnesses.

8. Panel Decision

The Panel will consider:

- All written evidence.
- Verbal representations.
- Relevant policies.
- Whether procedures were followed correctly.
- Whether decisions were reasonable and proportionate.

The Panel may:

- Uphold the complaint in full.
- Uphold part of the complaint.
- Not uphold the complaint.
- Recommend actions or improvements.

The decision will normally be communicated in writing within **5 working days** of the hearing.

The Panel's decision is final within the Academy's internal complaints procedure.

9. Safeguarding Complaints

Where a complaint raises safeguarding concerns:

- The matter will immediately be considered by the DSL.
- Child protection procedures may take precedence over the complaints process.
- External agencies may be involved where required.

The Academy will always prioritise the safety and welfare of children.

10. Equality and Accessibility

The Academy will make reasonable adjustments to enable complainants to access this procedure, including:

- Alternative formats.
- Interpreters.
- Advocacy support.
- Additional communication support.

The Academy is committed to ensuring that no individual is disadvantaged when making a complaint.

11. Record Keeping

The Academy will maintain a written record of:

- Informal concerns.
- Formal complaints.
- Investigations undertaken.
- Outcomes reached.
- Actions taken.

Records will be:

- Kept securely.
- Treated confidentially.
- Retained in accordance with data protection requirements.

Records may be made available to inspectors or regulatory bodies where legally required.

12. External Referral

Following completion of the Academy's complaints procedure, complainants may contact the appropriate external body if they remain dissatisfied.

For independent schools, this may include:

Department for Education (DfE) School Complaints Unit

The Academy will provide current contact details upon request.

13. Monitoring and Review

The Principal and Proprietor Board will monitor:

- Number and type of complaints.
- Themes and trends.
- Resolution times.
- Actions arising.



Lessons learned from complaints will inform service improvement, safeguarding practice and quality assurance.