Complaints Policy

Version	2.0
Date Policy Reviewed	July 2026
Policy Reviewed by	Operations Director
Date of Next Review	July 2027

1. Policy Statement

The organisation is committed to receiving, recording, investigating and resolving complaints fairly, consistently and in a timely way.

The welfare, safety and rights of children, young people and vulnerable adults take priority over routine complaint handling timescales.

The organisation will make its complaints arrangements accessible, proportionate, evidence-based and suitable for both internal and external stakeholders, and will use complaint learning to improve service quality, safety and compliance.

2. Purpose

This policy sets out the organisation's overall framework for complaint handling and the standards that apply to complaint receipt, triage, investigation, escalation, record keeping, oversight and learning.

It supports compliance with safeguarding expectations, data protection law, equality and accessibility duties, recruitment and employment business requirements, and governance expectations relevant to standard provision, alternative provision and commissioned services.

It also aligns with the Department for Education's 2025 Voluntary National Standards for non-school alternative provision, which emphasise safeguarding, attendance, health and safety, support, communication, quality assurance and commissioner oversight.

3. Scope

This policy applies to complaints raised by learners, parents or carers, schools, academies, local authorities, commissioners, staff, tutors, workers, agency workers, contractors, candidates and other service users.

It covers complaints about service delivery, conduct, safeguarding, welfare, communication, quality, attendance, accessibility, equality, data handling, recruitment and onboarding, and commissioned provision.

It applies across office-based, online, home-based, school-based and community-based delivery and supports both internal operational handling and external assurance for commissioners, audits and tenders.

4. Definitions

Complaint: any expression of dissatisfaction that requires a response.

Complainant: the person, learner or representative raising the complaint.

DSL: Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Low-level concern: a concern about an adult's behaviour that does not meet the harm threshold but still requires recording and review.

Commissioner: a school, academy, local authority or other body commissioning services from the organisation.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

All staff, tutors, workers and contractors must recognise complaints, pass them on promptly and escalate immediately where safeguarding or urgent welfare risk is indicated.

The receiving manager is responsible for initial triage, immediate action, complaint logging and ensuring the complaint reaches the correct owner without delay.

The DSL or deputy DSL is responsible for immediate safeguarding oversight where a complaint includes child protection, vulnerable adult protection or allegations against adults working on behalf of the organisation.

Investigating managers are responsible for proportionate fact-finding, written outcomes and accurate records.

Senior leaders are responsible for final review decisions, trend oversight and ensuring learning is embedded into practice.

6. Policy Requirements

Every complaint must be triaged at receipt as a general service complaint, safeguarding concern, allegation against an adult, low-level concern, data protection complaint, equality or accessibility complaint, SP/AP or commissioned provision complaint, recruitment or employment business complaint, or another specialist route.

Complaints must be handled respectfully, without victimisation, and with reasonable adjustments where required.

Information must be shared on a need-to-know basis, while recognising that data protection law does not prevent information sharing for safeguarding purposes.

Where services involve commissioned standard provision or alternative provision, commissioners must be informed where the complaint affects safety, suitability, attendance, welfare, behaviour, continuity, quality or risk.

The organisation will apply a safeguarding-first approach and will not allow standard complaint processes to delay immediate protective action.

Data protection complaints must be recognised even where the complainant does not use legal terminology and must be handled in line with the Data Protection Act 2018, UK GDPR and Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 requirements.

Complaint handling must be fair and accessible across Great Britain and Northern Ireland, recognising that the Equality Act 2010 applies in Great Britain and that Northern Ireland has separate equality laws.

7. Procedures

Complaints may be raised by email, telephone, letter, webform, in person with written follow-up, through a member of staff or through an agreed commissioner route.

All complaints must be triaged on the day they are received. Where there is any indication of immediate risk of harm, the person receiving the complaint must act straight away and contact the DSL, emergency services, local authority safeguarding teams or the relevant commissioner as required.

The complaint owner must record the complaint type, risk level, immediate actions taken, the person responsible for next steps and whether another process is being used instead of, or alongside, this policy.

Complaints that raise safeguarding concerns, allegations against adults, low-level concerns, data protection issues, equality issues or recruitment compliance concerns must be routed to the correct specialist process without delay.

Where a complaint concerns commissioned SP or AP provision, the organisation must review the learner plan, attendance history, session reports, risk assessments, venue suitability, staffing continuity and commissioner communications before deciding the appropriate route or outcome.

Data protection complaints must be acknowledged within 30 calendar days and complainants must be informed of the right to escalate to the Information Commissioner's Office if dissatisfied.

Complaint outcomes and learning must be fed into the detailed complaints procedure and central governance arrangements.

8. Training and Communication

Managers and complaint owners must receive guidance on complaint triage, safeguarding escalation, equality and accessibility, data protection complaints and record keeping.

Frontline staff, tutors, workers and contractors must understand how to recognise a complaint, how to pass it on and when immediate escalation is required.

This policy should be made available in a clear and accessible form to relevant staff, tutors, contractors, commissioners, learners and families where appropriate.

9. Monitoring and Compliance

All complaints must be logged centrally with clear categorisation, ownership, actions, outcome, closure date and lessons learned.

Safeguarding, equality, data protection and commissioned provision complaints must be identifiable on the log so trends can be monitored separately.

Senior leaders must review themes regularly and use complaint data to improve service delivery, policy compliance, commissioner assurance and operational controls.

KPIs may include complaint volume by type, response timeliness, stage reached, outcomes, repeat complaints, overdue actions and completion of learning actions.

10. Breaches of Policy

Failure to follow this policy may result in corrective action, management action, retraining, disciplinary action, contract review or escalation through safeguarding, compliance or governance routes where appropriate.

Serious or repeated failures in complaint handling may be treated as a significant compliance issue.

11. Related Documents and Guidance

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Complaints Procedure
- Department for Education 2025 Voluntary National Standards for non-school alternative provision

12. Review and Approval

This policy is owned by the Operations Director and approved by the appropriate senior leader.

This policy was reviewed in July 2026 and is scheduled for next review in July 2027.

Earlier review may be triggered by legislative change, safeguarding developments, commissioner requirements, audit findings, material incidents or operational change.

13. Version Control

Version	Date	Author	Summary of Changes	Approved By	Next Review Date
2.0	July 2026	Operations Director	Unified master policy created for dual-branded issue with identical wording across branded outputs.	Appropriate senior leader	July 2027