

Pele Trust Complaints Procedure for use by parents and members of the public

This procedure is to be used for complaints against an academy within Pele Trust, a member of staff, the Academy Committee or the Board of Directors. There are separate arrangements, laid down by law to cover the following:

- Complaints against the curriculum, collective worship and religious education
- Appeals against admissions
- Appeals against exclusions
- Appeals about assessments and statements of special educational needs

For further guidance on any of the above please contact the Academy Headteacher or Pele Trust Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

Stage One: Informal stage

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the academy can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To that end, if members of staff are made aware of the procedures, they know what to do when they receive a complaint.

In the first instance the complaint should be discussed between the person making the complaint and the Headteacher. They will jointly agree whether to include the member of staff involved in a follow up meeting. If a complainant indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a complaint with that particular member of staff the matter can be handled by the Headteacher alone. Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher, or a member of the Academy Committee, the complainant should be referred to the Chair of the Academy Committee. If the complaint concerns the Chair and/or the Academy Committee the complainant should refer the matter to the CEO of Pele Trust.

Similarly, if the Headteacher or Academy Committee Chair feels too compromised to deal with a complaint it should be referred to an appropriate member of staff or another Academy Committee member; if no such person can be identified the matter should be referred to the CEO. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial and it is also important to give an indication of timescale if it is found that the complaint requires further investigation.

If a complainant first approaches an Academy Committee member directly, he/she should be referred to the Headteacher or the Academy Committee Chair. **Individual Academy Committee members should not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or be involved at the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a hearing panel at a later stage of the procedure.**

It is hoped the majority of complaints can be resolved at this stage.



Stage Two: Formal stage

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the way the complaint has been handled at Stage One and wishes to pursue their initial complaint, they will be asked to put their complaint in writing to the Headteacher and/or Academy Committee Chair, as appropriate.

NB: The CEO should be informed of the complaint at this stage if they have not been involved previously.

The person making the complaint should have their written complaint acknowledged and be informed that a formal investigation is underway; they should also be informed that they will receive a response within 25 working days. If it is likely that the investigation process will be delayed beyond the 25 days then the complainant should be informed by letter.

The Headteacher and/or Academy Committee Chair may delegate the task of investigating the complaint to another senior staff member or Academy Committee member. The Headteacher and/or Academy Committee Chair may also, in exceptional circumstances wish to commission an investigating officer report to be undertaken by someone external to the academy; the CEO will arrange this, if required.

Once the relevant facts have been established the Headteacher and/or Academy Committee Chair should relay the decision, and the reason for the decision, in writing to the complainant.

Stage Three: Panel hearing

If the complainant is still dissatisfied with the outcome he/she should write to the Headteacher and/or Academy Committee Chair giving details of the complaint within 10 school days of receipt of the decision letter. The CEO will then convene a complaints Panel hearing, if they consider it appropriate, after considering the report of the investigating officer.

If called, the Panel hearing will consist of a minimum of three individuals; two Academy Committee members and a Pele Trust Director. The Pele Trust Director will chair the Panel hearing. A clerk will be appointed to record details of the hearing.

The complainant will be informed in writing that he/she is entitled to attend the Panel hearing and may be accompanied if they wish. They should be given reasonable notice of the hearing date. We recognise that attending a Panel hearing may be a stressful and emotive experience however we will insist on the highest standards of behaviour from all involved. Inappropriate conduct may include any of the following: raised voices, interrupting others, offensive language, belligerence, aggression and insults - please note this is not intended to be an exhaustive list. The Chair of the Panel hearing will issue a verbal warning should an individual exhibit inappropriate conduct; if the inappropriate conduct continues the Chair will ask the person to leave the hearing and the business of hearing the complaint will continue in their absence.



The Panel hearing will make a decision as to any action to be taken in response to the complaint. For example they may choose to:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- recommend changes to the Trust's and/or academy's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

In reaching a decision the Panel hearing committee may wish to take the advice of the Pele Trust Human Resources and/or legal representatives.

Following the hearing, the clerk of the hearing committee will inform both parties in writing of the decision within 5 school days.

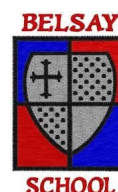
Key contacts

Position	Ponteland High School Headteacher	Chair of Academy Committee	Pele Trust CEO
Name	Kieran McGrane	Prof. Barry Hirst	Kieran McGrane
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If, after following the Trust's complaints procedure, the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome, or if there are reasons why they cannot use that procedure - for example, they feel their complaint has not been or will not be given a fair consideration due to a conflict of interest – they can forward their complaint to the Department for Education, using the online [school complaints form](#).

Making a complaint to the Department should only happen once all other routes have been followed. The exception to this may be where there is a Child Protection concern, or where a child is missing education.

If a complaint has been made by a number of parents and it is about whole school issues they may, at any stage of the procedure, ask the Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of schools to investigate their complaint. The Chief Inspector may or may not require the school's complaints procedure to be exhausted before she decides whether or not to investigate.



Example of a complaint form

Please complete and return to the academy Headteacher or Academy Committee Chair who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Pupil's name (if applicable):

Your relationship to the pupil (if applicable):

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint.

**What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint.
(Who did you speak to, when, and what was the response)?**

