Pioneer Educational Trust

preparing the way for others to follow

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Key document details

Equality Impact Assessment required?	Yes / No
If yes, date of EIA	
Ratified:	Summer2 2026
Approver:	Trust Board
Next review:	Summer2 2027

1 Aims and application

1.1 The aims of the procedure are to deal with complaints and concerns:

- about a school within Pioneer Educational Trust, Pioneer Educational Trust or any individual connected with it by following the correct procedure
- thoroughly, and
- in an open, honest and fair manner

1.2 This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children who are registered at one of the schools within Pioneer. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to an individual school within Pioneer, or the trust itself, about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Part 1 of this policy outlines how parents/carers of registered pupils currently attending schools within Pioneer can raise a concern or complaint. Concerns or complaints from other persons will be dealt with in accordance with Part 2 of this policy.

1.3 This procedure does not apply to concerns and complaints relating to the matters listed in Annex 1.

1.4 Anonymous concerns or complaints will not normally be investigated under this procedure. The Headteacher or CEO will determine whether there are exceptional circumstances to justify conducting an investigation into the issues raised.

1.5 All staff will be made aware of this complaints procedure and are expected to review this policy regularly in order that they are familiar with our process of dealing with complaints and can be of assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

1.6 In this procedure:

- ‘complaint’ means an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action
- ‘concern’ means an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought
- ‘meeting’ means an in person or virtual meeting (i.e. telephone or video conference where all parties can participate verbally), virtual meetings will only be held in the event that all parties have access to appropriate equipment to attend and are happy to do so
- 'parent' means a parent, carer or anyone with legal responsibility for a child
- ‘school days’ excludes weekends and school holidays and periods of partial or total school closure

1.7 The timeframes referred to in this policy are our usual timeframes and we will seek to adhere to these timeframes where possible.

1.8 Reasonable adjustments will be made to this procedure where required to ensure that all complainants can access and complete this complaints procedure. For example, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

2 Key principles

2.1 Pioneer expects all complainants to make reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution.

2.2 Pioneer encourages parents and others to approach the school with any concerns and refrain from airing concerns about the school and its staff on social media sites. Posting negative comments on social media can cause damage and upset and is often counter-productive to pupil education.

2.3 To investigate your complaint properly and fairly, we have implemented a staged approach. We anticipate that almost all complaints that arise will be resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2 outlined below.

2.4 We expect our members of staff to be addressed in a respectful manner and for communication to remain calm at all times. The procedure under Part 3 will only be used on very rare occasions to deal with repetitious and/or vexatious complaints or complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner.

2.5 Concerns or complaints should be brought to our attention as soon as possible. Any matter raised more than 3 months after the incident being complained of (or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 3 months of the last of these incidents) will not be considered unless the Headteacher or CEO accepts that there are good reasons to explain the delay or the complaint is about a particularly serious matter.

2.6 Where a complaint is received outside of term time, we will consider it to have been received on the first school day following the holiday period.

2.7 On rare occasions, a school or Pioneer may receive complaints from a number of individuals relating to the same issue. In order to deal with these complaints efficiently we will follow the procedure set out in Part 4.

2.8 If it becomes necessary to alter the time limits and deadlines set out within this procedure, you will be advised accordingly and given an explanation as to why this has been the case and provided with revised timescales. If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority safeguarding teams or tribunals/courts, 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. It may also be necessary to alter time limits if an independent investigating officer needs to be appointed. Where a complaint is raised but we do not have clarity from the complainant on the issues and/or desired outcomes, we will inform the complainant what information we need to progress the complaint and pause this procedure until reasonable clarity is achieved.

2.9 Complainants should not approach individual governors or trustees to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis, and it may prevent them from considering complaints at later stages. If approached governors or trustees should direct the complainant to the complaints procedure.

2.10 If a complainant commences legal action against Pioneer in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether it would be appropriate to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

2.11 If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

3 Records of complaints

3.1 A record will be kept of all written formal complaints, including at what stage they were resolved and action taken by us as a result of those complaints regardless of whether they were upheld. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where:

- access is requested by the Secretary of State
- disclosure is required in the course of an inspection
- an individual has a legal right to access their own personal data contained within such documentation, or
- under other legal authority

3.2 We will make the findings and recommendations of the Complaints Panel available for inspection on the school premises by Pioneer or the Headteacher.

3.3 The progress of any complaint and the final outcome will be recorded by Pioneer and/or the school. These findings will be made available to the complainant either in whole or redacted and, where relevant, the person complained about, and will be available for inspection by the CEO/Headteacher. At the end of any meeting or telephone call, the member of staff will ensure that the complainant and Pioneer/school have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls will be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

4. Data Protection complaints

4.1 If your complaint relates to how we have handled your personal data, please refer to our Data Protection Policy for details on how to complain.

5. Monitoring and evaluation

5.1 The Board of Trustees will monitor the level and nature of complaints using the records kept by Pioneer/school. Wherever possible, complaints information shared with the Board of Trustees/Local Committee will not name individuals. The policy will be evaluated in the light of complaints made and their resolution and changes made to the policy where necessary.

5.2 The Board of Trustees will review the outcomes of the monitoring exercise on a termly basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary.

Part 1: Complaints procedure for parents

Stage 1: Informal concerns

1.1 An informal concern can be raised in person or by telephone. Concerns may also be raised by a third party acting on behalf of a parent, as long as they have appropriate authority to do so. Most enquiries and concerns can be dealt with satisfactorily by the class teacher/form tutor/key stage team/head of department (but not the subject of the complaint or a trustee/governor or other members of staff without the need to resort to the formal procedure). We value informal meetings and discussions and encourage parents to approach staff with any concerns they may have, and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding.

There may be no need for the complaint to be put in writing, which would formalise matters and may lead parents to feel less prepared to articulate concerns, perhaps because of a fear that such action may prejudice the interests of their child. The complaint should be responded to within 5 school days. Following a Stage 1 complaint, if the complainant wishes to take the matter further, they are requested to complete the complaints form and return it to the school within 5 school days. The CEO/Headteacher is informed and Stage 2 is implemented.

1.2 It is always helpful if you can fully explain the nature of the concern and identify the outcome you are looking for. Where appropriate, you may be invited to an informal meeting with the member of staff most appropriate for dealing with that concern. The member of staff dealing with the concern will make sure that you are clear on what action (if any) has been agreed. Complaints will be handled in a timely manner. Parents can expect to receive a follow up communication on their complaint. This may be put in writing if appropriate.

1.3 If the matter is brought to the attention of the Headteacher they may decide to deal with your concerns directly at this stage. If the concerns are about the Headteacher these should be referred directly to the Clerk of Pioneer's Board of Trustees under Stage 2.

1.4 The school will respect the views of a parent who indicates that they would have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff. In this case, the Headteacher will refer the parent to another designated member of staff. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved in the circumstances leading to the concern feels too compromised to deal with it, the Headteacher may consider referring the parent to another member of staff. The member of staff may be more senior, but this is not essential.

1.5 There is no suggested timescale for resolution at this stage given the importance of dialogue through informal discussion, although it would be expected that most issues will be resolved within 15 school days. Where no satisfactory solution has been found, you will be advised that if you wish your concerns to be considered further you should write to the Headteacher under Stage 2 of this procedure within 15 school days.

Stage 2: Formal written complaints

2.1 If your concerns are not resolved under Stage 1, you are entitled to put your complaint in writing and send this to the Headteacher of the relevant school. Where the complaint is against the Headteacher or a member of Pioneer's Executive Leadership Team, it should be addressed to the CEO and, where it is against the CEO, it should be addressed to the Clerk to the Board of Trustees.

2.2 It is very important that you include a clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint. We strongly encourage you to use the Complaint Form provided at Annex 2 of this procedure. In all cases your written complaint must include:

- the nature of the complaint
- details of how the matter has been dealt with so far
- the names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events and copies of all relevant documents, and
- a clear statement of the actions that you would like us to take to resolve your complaint

2.3 Your complaint will normally be acknowledged in writing within five school days of receipt. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of Pioneer's complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This will normally be within 15 school days of receipt.

2.4 If appropriate, the Headteacher (or someone appointed by them) may invite you to a meeting to clarify your complaints and to explore possible resolutions. Where possible, this meeting will take place within 10 school days of receipt of the written complaint.

2.5 If necessary, witnesses will be interviewed and statements taken from those involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, they will usually be interviewed. Pupils will normally be interviewed with their parent present, but if this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint or if the pupil has specifically said that they would prefer that their parents were not involved, another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable will be present. If the matter includes a complaint relating to a member of staff, the member of staff will have the opportunity to respond to the complaint.

2.6 Once the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, you will be provided with a written response to the complaint, including an explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. This will include what action will be taken to resolve the complaint (if any). You will be advised that if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, you may request that your complaint be heard by the Complaints Panel under Stage 3 of this procedure.

2.7 Pioneer may engage an independent, external person to carry out the investigation into the Stage 2 complaint or to review the investigation and response at Stage 2. This may be appropriate where the complaint is particularly complex or involves legal issues. In this case, the timeframes may need to be adjusted and you will be advised accordingly.

Stage 3: Referral to the Complaints Panel

3.1 If you are dissatisfied with the decision under Stage 2, you may request that a Complaints Panel be convened to consider your complaint. The Complaints Panel will principally consider how the complaint was handled at the previous stages but has discretion to review other aspects of the complaint as it sees fit. The Complaints Panel will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

3.2 To request a hearing before the Complaints Panel, you should write to the Clerk of the trustees within 10 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 2. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. You should ensure that you provide copies of all relevant documents and state all the grounds for your complaint and the outcome that you are looking for.

3.3 Your written request will be acknowledged within five school days of receipt.

3.4 The Clerk will arrange for a Complaints Panel to be convened, made up of at least three committee members. It should consist of the CEO, one Trustee/Governor (who are not Staff Governors and, ideally, not Parent Trustees/Governors and who have not previously been involved in the case) and one member who is independent of the management and running of the school or central function; if needed, someone from a Local Committee within the MAT who has no conflict of interest or prior knowledge of the complaint may be the independent panel member. If the CEO is not suitable to be on the panel either because they have been previously involved e.g. at Stages 1 and 2 of the procedure, or could not be seen as being impartial, or for any other valid reason, another Trustee/Governor should replace them on the panel.

The Board of Trustees reserves the right to substitute a Trustee with a Governor, who is not a staff or parent Governor, from one of the Local Committees in the MAT or with a Trustee/Governor, who is not a staff or parent Trustee/Governor, from a school/academy/MAT/governing board outside the MAT.

The hearing will have a clerk in attendance.

The clerk will write to the complainant, CEO/Headteacher/Head and panel members giving details of the meeting, requesting copies of any documents to be put before the meeting and the names of any witnesses that either party may wish to attend.

The clerk will inform the complainant of the right to be accompanied.

The clerk shall appoint one of the panel members to be the Chair of the Panel.

3.5 Every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within 20 school days of the receipt of your request. As soon as reasonably practicable and in any event at least five school days before the hearing, you will be sent written

notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the committee members who will be present. Fair consideration will be given to any bona fide objection to a particular member of the committee. You will also be informed of the name of the person who will be presenting the case on behalf of the school/trust (referred to in this policy as the 'school representative'). This may be the person who is the subject of the complaint, the person who undertook the investigation at Stage 2 and/or another person with sufficient knowledge of the matter.

3.6 You have the right to be accompanied to the hearing. You should notify the Clerk in advance if you intend to bring anyone to the hearing. We do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the Complaints Panel meeting. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend. The Complaints Panel itself may take legal advice and/or be supported by a legal advisor at the hearing on matters of law and procedure.

3.7 A copy of the complaint and any other documents provided by you in support of your complaint, or by the school representative in defence of the complaint, will be provided to the Complaints Panel as soon as practicable upon receipt. Copies of these documents shall also be provided to you or school representative (as applicable) at least 3 school days before the hearing. The Complaints Panel reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented by either party less than 3 school days prior to the hearing. The Complaints Panel is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. The committee will not normally accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

3.8 The hearing will be conducted to ensure that each party has the opportunity to address the Complaints Panel. The procedure to be followed during the hearing will be explained to the parties by letter in advance of the hearing. The Clerk will ensure that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken or actions agreed. Electronic recordings of the hearing will not normally be permitted and, in any event, would require the consent of all those present.

3.9 Unless otherwise stated, the procedure for the Stage 3 hearing is as follows:

- the parent and school representative will enter the hearing together
- the Chair of the Committee will introduce the committee members and outline the process
- the parent will explain the complaint
- the school representative and committee members will question the parent
- the school representative will explain the school's/trust's actions
- the parent and the committee members will question the school representative
- the parent will sum up their complaint
- the school representative will sum up the school's/trust's actions
- the Chair of the Committee will explain that both parties will hear from the committee within five school days
- both parties will leave together while the committee decides
- the Clerk, and any legal advisor assisting the committee (if applicable), will stay to assist the committee with its decision making

3.10 The Clerk and/or Complaints Panel reserves the right to modify the above procedure at their sole discretion, for example requiring the parent and the school representative to present their complaint/actions separately to the Complaints Committee in the absence of the other party.

3.11 A Complaints Panel may be adjourned if the Complaints Panel require further evidence or in exceptional circumstances (for example, if clarification sought by the Complaints Panel is essential to the proceedings). The adjourned date must be as soon as possible.

3.12 After the hearing, the Complaints Panel will consider their decision and inform you and, where relevant, the person complained about of their decision in writing within five school days. The letter will set out the decision of the committee together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The committee can (by a majority if necessary):

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes to the school or trust systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again

Stage 4: Referral of complaint to Department for Education

4.1 If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Complaints Committee, you are entitled to refer your complaint to the Department for Education. The DfE will only investigate whether the complaint was handled properly and in accordance with education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

4.2 If the complainant believes the school/Pioneer did not handle their complaint in accordance with this Complaints Procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 3.

4.3 The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Pioneer Educational Trust. They will consider whether the school/MAT has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

4.4 The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE online at: https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe, or by writing to:

Ministerial and Public Communication Division
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Part 2: Roles and Responsibilities

4.5 The role of the Clerk of the Board of Trustees

The Clerk of the Board of Trustees is the contact point for the complainant and the Complaints Panel, and should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff, the CEO and Chair of the Board of Trustees (as applicable) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be mindful of the timescales to respond to complaints
- 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)
- ensure that the Complaints Panel has access to legal advice, where appropriate
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, taking reasonable steps to find a date that is convenient to all parties 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
- minute the meeting
- notify all parties of the Complaint Panel's decision
- assist the school/trust in issuing a summary letter to the complainant

4.6 The role of the Headteacher (or other party investigating as applicable in accordance with the procedure) at Stage 2

- to ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- to ensure that the correct procedure has been followed
- to ensure that an investigation is carried out, and a report compiled
- to meet the complainant, if appropriate
- if the complaint is being referred to Stage 3, notify the Clerk of the Board of Trustees to arrange the Complaints Panel

4.7 The role of the Chair of the Complaints Panel

The Chair of the Complaints Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child.
- the remit of the Complaints Panel is explained to the complainant
- the written material is seen by everyone in attendance (provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR)
- key findings of fact are made, and that any issues not previously mentioned in writing should not be raised at the meeting and, if they are mentioned at the meeting, these should not be noted or considered by the Complaints Panel
- both the complainant and the school/trust are given the opportunity to make their case, and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting, or verbally in the meeting itself
- the Complaints Panel is open-minded, acts independently and no committee member has an external interest in the outcome or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted

Part 3: Concerns or complaints from other persons

Part 1 of this complaints policy applies only to complaints made by parents or carers of current registered pupils of the trust. However, the trust wishes to work closely with other members of the local community and will deal with their concerns and complaints as follows:

1 **Stage 1** - a concern regarding a school or its operations may be made to any member of staff. That member of staff will attempt to resolve the matter immediately or may, if appropriate, refer the matter to their line manager or member of the senior leadership team (SLT) who is best placed to deal with the concern. It is expected that most concerns will be responded to orally or in writing within five school days. If a longer period is required, you will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation.

2 **Stage 2** - where a concern is not resolved at Stage 1, or you wish your concerns to be dealt with immediately as a formal complaint, you should put your complaint in writing and send this to the Headteacher of the relevant school to investigate. The Headteacher may delegate the task of investigation and/or responding to the complaint to a member of SLT or may escalate the complaint straight to Stage 3. A formal response to the complaint will usually be provided within 15 school days of receipt of the letter of complaint although if a longer period is required to respond, you will be kept updated.

3 **Stage 3** - if you are not satisfied with the response at Stage 2, you may request a review by writing to the Clerk of the Local Committee of the school. You should write to the Clerk of the Local Committee within 15 school days of receipt of the letter at Stage 2. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. The Clerk of the Local Committee will arrange for a governor to consider the complaint alone or may refer the matter to the Clerk of the Board of Trustees to convene a Complaints Committee on the same terms as set out in Part 1 of this complaints policy. The decision at this stage will usually be sent to you within 15 school days of receipt of the request for a review or within five school days of the Complaints Committee hearing (as applicable).

4 **Stage 4** - if you are dissatisfied with the decision at Stage 3, you are entitled to refer your complaint to the Department for Education as outlined in Part 1 of this complaints policy.

Concerns or complaints regarding the Headteacher or the trust should be referred direct to the Clerk of the Board of Trustees who will arrange for the stages above to be considered by an appropriate person.

Part 4: Repetitious and vexatious complaints and complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

There are rare circumstances where we will deviate from the Complaints Procedure set out in Parts 1 and 3. These include, but are not necessarily limited to:

Repetitious, including serial and/or persistent, complaints

Where the complainant's complaint is the same, similar to or based on the same facts of a complaint which has already been considered in full and we have:

- taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns; and
- given the complainant a clear statement of our position and their options,

we will write to the complainant to advise that the complaints procedure has been exhausted and that we will not be responding to any further correspondence in relation to these matters. The complainant will be referred to Stage 4.

Vexatious complaints

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator defines the characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint as:

- complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitious
- insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason
- insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner
- complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance, and / or
- demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value

Examples include but are not limited to:

- refusal to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refusal to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- refusal to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insistence on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introducing trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raising large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insisting they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeking to have them replaced
- changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- seeking an unrealistic outcome, such as the inappropriate dismissal of staff
- making 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
- knowingly providing falsified information
- publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

Complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

The majority of complaints can be handled effectively through the informal or formal stage of Pioneer's Complaints Procedure.

However, there are occasions when complainants behave in an unreasonable manner when raising and/or pursuing concerns. The consequences are that the actions of the complainants begin to impact negatively on the day-to-day running of the school and directly or indirectly the overall wellbeing of the children or staff in the school. In these exceptional circumstances the school may take action as outlined below.

1 Aims:

The aim of this procedure is to:

- uphold the standards of courtesy and reasonableness that should characterise all communication between the school and/or Pioneer Educational Trust and persons who wish to express a concern or pursue a complaint
- support the wellbeing of students, staff and everyone else who has legitimate interest in the work of the school and/or Trust, including governors, trustees, members and parents
- deal fairly, honestly, openly and transparently with those who make persistent or vexatious complaints and those who harass members of school and/or Pioneer Educational Trust staff while ensuring that other stakeholders suffer no detriment

2 General principles:

2.1 When a complaint or concern has been raised formally or informally, the complainant can expect the school and/or Pioneer Educational Trust to:

- regularly communicate to parents/carers in writing
- make the complainant aware of Pioneer Educational Trust's Complaints procedure
- make the complainant aware of Pioneer Educational Trust's procedure for dealing with persistent or vexatious complaints/harassment
- respond within a reasonable time
- be available for consultation within reasonable time limits bearing in mind the needs of the pupils within the school and the nature of the complaint
- respond with courtesy and respect
- attempt to resolve concerns or issues using reasonable means in line with the Complaints Procedure, other policies and practice, including any statutory guidance

2.2: When a complaint or concern has been raised formally or informally, the school and/or Pioneer Educational Trust can expect the complainant to:

- treat all staff with courtesy and respect
- respect the needs and wellbeing of pupils and staff in the school
- avoid any use, or threatened use, of violence to people or property
- avoid any aggression or verbal abuse
- recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond
- recognise that resolving a specific issue or concern can sometimes take some time
- follow and adhere to Pioneer Educational Trust's Complaints Procedure

3 Who is a persistent complainant?

For the purpose of this procedure, a persistent complainant is a parent/carer or member of the public who complains about issues, either formally or informally, or frequently raises issues that the complainant considers to be within the remit of the school and/or Pioneer Educational Trust, and whose behaviour is unreasonable. Such behaviour may be characterised by:

a. actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious
b. prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail or telephone contact about a concern or complaint
c. use of the Freedom of Information Act to make excessive and/or unreasonable requests
d. an insistence upon pursuing unsubstantial complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes
e. an insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner
f. an insistence on only dealing with the Head and/or CEO on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the school and/or Pioneer Educational Trust to deal with such matters

g. an insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but cannot be changed, for example, if the desired outcome is beyond the remit of the school because it is unlawful

3.1: For the purpose of this procedure, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions as listed in (a) to (g) above in such a way that they:

a) appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school/Trust staff and/or
b) cause ongoing distress to individual member(s) of staff and/or
c) have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community and/or
d) are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health.

4 Actions to be taken when dealing with persistent or vexatious complaints/harassment

In the first instance the school and/or Pioneer Educational Trust will verbally inform the complainant that their behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable/unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this procedure. This will be confirmed in writing.

If the behaviour is not modified there will be a joint decision between the Head and CEO (or CEO and Chair of the Trust Board, if the behaviour is directed at Pioneer Educational Trust) as to the actions (some or all of the following as necessary) to be taken having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:

a) inform the complainant in writing that their behaviour is now considered by the school/Pioneer to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this
b) inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties
c) inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the school should be by letter only
d) (in the case of physical, or verbal aggression) take advice from the Trust's HR provider and consider warning the complainant about being banned from the school site; or proceed straight to a temporary ban
e) consider taking legal and/or HR advice on pursuing a case under anti-harassment legislation
f) consider taking legal and/or HR advice on putting in place a specific procedure for dealing with complaints from the complainant, i.e. the complainant will not be able to deal directly with the Head/CEO but only with a third person to be identified by the Local Committee of the school or Board of Trustees, who will investigate, determine whether or not the concern / complaint is reasonable or vexatious and then advise the Headteacher/CEO accordingly

If a complainant's persistent complaining/harassing behaviour is modified and is then resumed at a later date within a reasonable period of time, the school and/or Pioneer Educational Trust may resume the process identified above at an appropriate level. In these circumstances, legal and/or HR advice may be sought in the first instance.

Part 5: Complaint campaigns

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint campaign is defined as a complaint from three or more separate individuals (whether or not connected with the school or Trust) which are all based on the same subject.

Depending on the subject in question, we may deviate from the procedure set out in this policy and instead:

- send a template response to all complainants, and/or
- publish a single response on the school's website (as applicable)

Annex 1

Matters excluded from the scope of this policy

Excluded Matters	Signposting
Admissions	The process for challenging admissions decisions is set out in our admissions policy in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.
Child protection matters	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 Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
Exclusions	The process for challenging exclusions decisions is set out in the DfE's statutory guidance and information can be found at: School suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
National Curriculum content	Please contact the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk/contactus
School re-organisation proposals	Where concerns are not adequately addressed by the school, complaints can be raised directly with the Department for Education.
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.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Certain complaints about staff may need to 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 assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with the respective local authority.
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 whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus Volunteer staff who have concerns should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of the complaint.

Annex 2

Complaints Form

Your name:
Pupil's name:
Your relationship to pupils:
Your address and postcode:
Your daytime telephone number:
Your evening telephone number:
Your email address:
Your complaint is: (if you have more than one complaint, please number these)
What action have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint(s) in accordance with Stage 1 of this complaints procedure? (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)

What would you like as an outcome from your complaint(s)?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, give details here:

Your signature…… Date ……

All functions of the complaints procedure must adhere to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Please complete and return to the PA to the Headteacher addressed to the or Clerk of the Board of Trustees (as appropriate).

Office use

Date received ……

Date acknowledgement sent ……

Responsible member of staff ……

Annex 3

Summary of Complaints Procedure for Parents & Carers (Part 1)

Stage 1: Informal concerns	Parent brings complaint to attention of member of staff
	Issue to be resolved (guide: within 15 school days)
	Where no satisfactory solution has been found, parent to be advised that they should proceed to Stage 2
Stage 2: Formal Written Complaint	Parent to put complaint in writing using Complaint Form
	Complaint to be acknowledged within five school days
	Meeting with parents within 10 school days (where appropriate)
	Response to the complaint sent within 15 school days
Stage 3: Referral to Complaints Panel	Parent to request hearing within 15 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 2
	Request to be acknowledged within five school days
	Hearing to take place within 20 school days of receipt of request
	Notification of date, time and place of the hearing and details of the committee members present sent at least five school days before the hearing
	School representative and parents to submit evidence in support of their case to Clerk of the Board of Trustees at least 3 school days before the hearing
	Complaints Panel decision sent not more than five school days after the hearing