



Complaints Policy

The Diamond Learning Partnership Trust

Approved by: Chief Executive Officer **Date:** April 2026

Last reviewed on: April 2026

Next review due by: April 2029

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1) Purpose and Legal Basis

This policy sets out how concerns and complaints are raised and managed across DLPT schools. DLPT adopts a three-stage model consistent with the Department for Education's best-practice guidance for academies and the Independent School Standards (England) Regulations 2014, Schedule 1, Part 7.

To support parents, DLPT links directly to the Parentkind Parent Guide to School Complaints to help families decide whether an issue is feedback, a concern, or a formal complaint, and to communicate clearly at each step. We believe complaints should be dealt with quickly at the lowest possible level and this policy links to this guidance.

The Parentkind Guidance can be found here <https://www.parentkind.org.uk/assets/parents-resources/Parent-Guide-to-School-Complaints.pdf>

Publication: Each DLPT school must publish this policy and the Parentkind link on its website.

2) Scope

This policy covers complaints from parents/carers about DLPT schools' provision for their child. Some matters are handled through separate statutory procedures (e.g., admissions, exclusions, staff grievances/disciplinary, safeguarding allegations) and therefore fall outside this policy's scope. DLPT will signpost appropriately where an alternative route applies.

3) Definitions and Core Principles

- Concern: an expression of worry or doubt seeking reassurance; best handled informally and swiftly.
- Complaint: an expression of dissatisfaction (about an action or lack of action) requiring a formal response.

DLPT aims to resolve issues at the earliest possible stage through clear, respectful communication. Parents are encouraged to use Parentkind's "What kind of issue is it?" checklist and "Who do I go to?" flow to direct concerns to the right person first (e.g., class teacher → senior leader → headteacher), supporting early resolution.

4) Accessibility, Support and Communication

How to submit: In person, by phone, or in writing using the school's DLPT Complaints Form (Appendix A / school website).

Support: On request, schools can provide help to complete forms (accessible versions, translation, or note-taker).

Time limit: Complaints should normally be raised within 2 months of the event unless there are safeguarding or other justified reasons to extend.

Outside term time: Complaints received in school holidays are treated as received on the first school day after the break.

DLPT promotes respectful, constructive dialogue and discourages use of social media to escalate or inflame matters.

5) Overview of DLPT Stages (DfE-aligned)

DLPT operates three stages: Informal (Stage 1), Investigation (Stage 2), and Panel Review (Stage 3). Timelines below are working targets; where complexity or staff availability makes these impractical, DLPT will explain the reasons and keep parties updated.

- Stage 1 – Informal: aim to conclude within 10 school days
- Stage 2 – Investigation: aim to conclude within 15 school days
- Stage 3 – Panel Review: aim to convene within 25 school days of escalation

6) Stage 1 — Informal Resolution (Target: 10 school days)

Purpose: Resolve concerns swiftly with the person closest to the issue (e.g., class teacher, pastoral lead, SENDCo, DSL).

Process:

- 1) Contact the relevant staff member to discuss the issue.
- 2) Conversation/meeting explores the issue and possible solutions consistent with school policies.
- 3) Confirmation in writing of what has been agreed (email or letter) is provided to the parent.

Parentkind alignment: Parents are encouraged to follow the guide's steps on who to contact first and how to frame the issue to support quick resolution.

Next step: If unresolved, parents may escalate to Stage 2 – Investigation.

7) Stage 2 — Investigation (Target: 15 school days)

Purpose: Provide an impartial review of the complaint and evidence.

Investigator:

- Normally a senior leader at the school.
- If the complaint is about the Headteacher, it will be investigated by the CEO, an external reviewer or an appropriate DLPT central leader.

Evidence may include interviews (staff, pupils, parents), document review (plans, policies, logs), SEND records, and (where lawful) CCTV. Decision is on the balance of probabilities; parts of a complaint may be upheld in part.

Outcome: A written outcome letter is issued to the complainant and the school, setting out steps taken, findings, decision, reasons, and recommendations for improvement.

Parentkind alignment: The guide explains when formal action is appropriate and what response times parents can expect.

Next step: If still dissatisfied, the complainant may request a Stage 3 – Panel Review.

8) Stage 3 — Panel Review (Target: 25 school days)

Purpose: Review whether the complaint was handled fairly and in line with this policy. This is not a re-investigation unless significant new evidence arises.

Composition: A panel of three governors (typically two from the school's LGB and one from another DLPT school) with a Clerk to record proceedings. Panels may be supported by the CEO or Complaints lead (advisory only).

Format: Held on Microsoft Teams by default; in-person is available on request. Both sides may submit a written evidence pack; each gives a short summary at the hearing, followed by panel questions.

Decision: Panel issues a written outcome (summary, decision, reasons, and recommendations) to both parties. This is the final stage within DLPT.

Parentkind alignment: The guide clarifies when it is appropriate to involve governors and emphasises respectful conduct to avoid derailing the process.

9) After Stage 3 — External Next Steps

If the complainant believes the process has not been followed properly, they may raise the matter with the Department for Education via “Complain about a school” (for academies).

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe>

10) Complaints against the Trust or CEO

DLPT is committed to ensuring that complaints concerning the **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)** are managed with independence, fairness and full transparency. As the CEO holds overarching responsibility for the leadership and operation of the Trust, any complaint relating to their conduct, decision-making or professional behaviour must be overseen directly by the **Trust Board**, rather than by the executive team. This mirrors the approach taken across other multi-academy trusts, where CEO complaints are routed straight to governance for impartial consideration.

Any complaint about the CEO or Trust must be submitted **in writing** to the **Chair of the Trust Board**, via the Trust Clerk.

- Contact details for the Clerk will be published on the Trust website in line with DfE best-practice guidance for academies.
- The complaint should set out the key concerns, relevant dates, and the desired outcome.

This process ensures appropriate independence from the executive leadership and aligns with the structures adopted in other MAT complaints frameworks.

Initial Review by the Chair of the Trust Board

On receiving a complaint, the Chair (or a designated Trustee with no prior involvement) will:

1. Acknowledge receipt within a reasonable timeframe;
2. Determine whether the complaint falls within the scope of this policy or another procedure (e.g., whistleblowing, safeguarding, staff conduct);
3. Decide whether the matter may be resolved informally or requires escalation to a **formal Stage 3 review**.

If a formal review is required, this becomes the **first and only stage** for CEO complaints, as there is no executive level below the Board that can independently investigate. The Chair of the Board will convene a **CEO Complaints Panel**, consisting of **three Trustees** who:

- Have had no prior involvement in the matter;
- Have no conflict of interest or close working relationship with the CEO;
- Are able to act objectively and impartially.

Where appropriate, the Board may appoint an **external, independent investigator** (e.g., a governance consultant, HR professional or legal adviser) to support the panel in gathering and reviewing evidence. Many MATs use this approach to ensure the highest degree of independence.

Evidence considered may include:

- Written submissions from the complainant;
- A written response from the CEO;
- Witness statements or interviews;
- Relevant Trust policies, procedures, decision records or communications.

The panel will normally meet virtually or in person to consider the evidence. The complainant is not usually invited to attend unless the panel considers it necessary for clarity; this is consistent with common Trust practice for CEO-level complaints.

Outcome of the Panel Review

The panel will issue a **written outcome** setting out:

- Whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld;
- The reasons for its decision;
- Any recommendations for action by the CEO, the Trust, or the Board.

Recommendations may include:

- Process improvements;
- Leadership behaviour expectations;
- Training requirements;

- Adjustments to Trust systems or communication procedures.

The decision of the panel is **final within DLPT**, mirroring standard practice for executive-level complaints across the sector

If the complainant believes that DLPT has **not followed its procedures correctly**, they may refer the matter to the **Department for Education**, via the Academy Complaints Unit:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe>

11) When Complaints Become Challenging

Where communication becomes difficult (e.g., multiple duplicate emails, unreasonable time demands), DLPT may implement a communication plan and a single point of contact to keep the process moving fairly for all.

Panel challenges: In specific circumstances, DLPT reserves the right to hold a paper/evidence-only panel (e.g., pupil has left the school; complainant's behaviour makes attendance on premises unsafe/inappropriate).

Vexatious complaints: Where a complaint is repeated without new evidence or accompanied by abusive/threatening behaviour, DLPT may either conclude the process or proceed without further input from the complainant.

12) Record-Keeping, Confidentiality and Data Protection

DLPT records complaints at each stage and retains documentation in line with its Records Management schedules and UK GDPR obligations.

Schools will maintain logs to support learning and improvement; panel outcomes and any recommendations will be monitored for implementation.

Complaint information is handled confidentially and shared only with those who need to know to manage the process.

13) Equality, Reasonable Adjustments and Safeguarding

- DLPT will make reasonable adjustments for disability, language or other accessibility needs.
- Safeguarding concerns raised within a complaint are triaged immediately with the Designated Safeguarding Lead and managed under DLPT's Safeguarding Policy and statutory guidance.

14) Roles and Responsibilities (Summary)

- Complainant (Parent/Carer): Raises issues courteously, provides information, engages constructively, and considers Parentkind guidance.
- School Staff / Senior Leader: Listen, respond promptly, seek early resolution, and escalate appropriately.
- Headteacher / External reviewer : Ensure fair investigation and proportionate timelines; quality-assure outcomes.

- Panel & Clerk: Conduct impartial review; ensure a fair hearing and clear record of the decision.

15) Website and Communications Requirements

Each DLPT school must:

- 1) Publish this policy and Parentkind Guide link prominently on its website complaints page.
- 2) Provide the Parentkind link in Stage 1 responses, Stage 2 acknowledgements, and Stage 3 invitations.
- 3) Explain expected response timelines and who to contact first.

Appendices

Appendix A — DLPT Complaint Form (for parents/carers)

Tip: Before completing this form, read the Parentkind Parent Guide to check whether your issue is feedback, a concern, or a complaint, and to help you frame your key points clearly:

<https://www.parentkind.org.uk/assets/parents-resources/Parent-Guide-to-School-Complaints.pdf>

1. Your details

- Name:
- Address:
- Phone / Email:
- Pupil's name and class:

2. About your issue

- Briefly describe what happened (include dates/times and who was involved):
- What steps have you already taken (who did you speak to and when)?
- What outcome are you seeking?

3. Accessibility

- Do you need adjustments (language/format/meeting support)?

4. Consent

- I consent to DLPT using the information I provide to manage this complaint in line with the DLPT Privacy Notice. Signature / Date:

Appendix B — Stage Checklists (for school use)

Stage 1 — Informal

- Acknowledge contact and offer meeting/phone call.
- Clarify issue (feedback / concern / complaint) and desired outcome.
- Agree actions & timescales; confirm in writing.
- Signpost Parentkind guide and policy if escalation may be needed.

Stage 2 — Investigation

- Appoint investigator (senior leader / external reviewer if about Headteacher).
- Plan and gather evidence (interviews, records, CCTV if lawful).
- Decide on balance of probabilities; draft written outcome with reasons and recommendations.

Stage 3 — Panel Review

- Clerk arranges panel (3 governors; one independent of school), sets date (aim: 25 school days), circulates evidence pack, confirms format (online/in-person).
- Panel hears both sides, questions for clarification, deliberates, then issues written decision with reasons and recommendations.

Appendix C — Panel Running Order (model agenda)

- 1) Welcome & introductions (Chair)
- 2) Process explained and scope of review confirmed (Clerk/Chair)
- 3) Complainant summary (10–15 mins)
- 4) School summary (10–15 mins)
- 5) Panel questions to each side
- 6) Any brief closing points (each side)
- 7) Private deliberation (panel & Clerk)
- 8) Decision issued in writing within agreed timescale

Evidence-only option (where appropriate per Section 10): Panel may proceed on papers only.

Key External References (for publication with this policy)

- Parentkind Parent Guide to School Complaints (PDF):
<https://www.parentkind.org.uk/assets/parents-resources/Parent-Guide-to-School-Complaints.pdf>
- Parentkind overview page: <https://www.parentkind.org.uk/parent-guide-to-raising-concerns-with-your-childs-school>
- DfE — Best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/setting-up-an-academies-complaints-procedure/best-practice-guidance-for-academies-complaints-procedures>