BELONG
CE Multi Academy Trust

Complaints Policy

Archbishop Blanch School



Version Number: 02

Ratified by Trustees: 1st September 2026

Next Review Date: September 2027

Love, Hope, Community and Compassion

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Aims

At Belong Multi Academy Trust, rooted in the Christian values of **Hope, Love, Community, and Compassion**, we aim to respond to complaints with integrity, fairness, and respect for all individuals as unique creations of God.

We are committed to meeting our statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents/carers of pupils at our schools, and—where appropriate—from other stakeholders in our community.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Treat complainants with dignity, respect, and courtesy
- Ensure decisions are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair, and proportionate
- Keep complainants informed throughout the process
- Reflect on complaints to inform school and trust-wide improvement

We seek to resolve complaints informally wherever possible. Where this is not achievable, formal procedures will be followed. We will ensure complainants have the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

This policy will be publicised on the Belong Trust website and on the websites of our schools. Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties and make reasonable adjustments where needed.

This policy should be taken and used as part of Archbishop Blanch Church of England School's overall strategy and implemented within the context of our Vision Statement and Instrument of Government aims.

As a Church of England School, we accept and respect all members of our community as unique children of God, precious in His sight and of infinite worth.

We aim to "not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth" (1 JOHN 3:18)

2. Legislation and Guidance

This policy complies with:

- Part 7 of the schedule to the *Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014*
- Best practice guidance from the *Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)*
- Our Trust's *Funding Agreement* and *Articles of Association*

3. Who Can Make a Complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children registered at our schools. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Belong Multi Academy Trust about any provision of facilities or services we provide.

Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

The Local Governing Body (LGB) has delegated responsibility on behalf of the Trust Board for each school and for ensuring that all pupils receive an appropriate and high standard of education. The Headteacher is responsible for making decisions on a daily basis about the school's internal management and organisation. Therefore, complaints should be made to the school in most circumstances.

4. The Difference Between a Concern and a Complaint

- A **concern** is an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered important, for which reassurances are sought.
- A **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Belong takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve matters quickly and informally.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views and refer you to another staff member. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important than seniority.

We understand that there are occasions when concerns need to be raised formally. In such cases, Belong will attempt to resolve the issue internally through the stages outlined in this policy.

5. How to Raise a Concern or Make a Complaint

A concern or complaint can be made:

- In person
- In writing
- By telephone
- By a third party acting on behalf of the complainant (with appropriate consent)6.

6. Scope

This policy does not cover complaints relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline
- Withdrawal from the curriculum (e.g. religious education or collective worship)

Please refer to our separate policies for these areas.

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to schools	Each school is the admissions authority and as such concerns about admissions should be raised with the local governing body.

Statutory Assessments of Special Needs	Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with local authorities. Please find further guidance provided by the DfE : Appeal EHC Plan Decision The SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) is a statutory service which is run at 'arm's length' from the Local Authority and provides free, confidential, impartial advice, guidance and support to parents/carers of children with special educational needs and children and young people with SEND. Please see links below: Liverpool and Knowsley
School re-organisation proposals	Concerns regarding school re-organisation proposals should be directed to the Belong CE Board of Directors using the following e-mail address and addressed "FAO Clerk to the Board of Directors". contactus@belongce.org.uk
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	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). Liverpool MASH Liverpool Safeguarding
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusions can be found at: www.gov.uk/schooldiscipline-exclusions/exclusions. *complaints about the application of the Behaviour For Learning policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.
Whistleblowing	The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education 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 about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the Trust's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the Trust'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.

Data Protection and UK GDPR Complaints	Please see Appendix 5 of this Policy
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 directly.

Complaints about services provided by external organisations using Trust premises should be directed to the provider concerned.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, 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. If this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against Belong CE in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 The Complainant

Complainants will receive a more effective and timely response if they:

- Follow the procedures outlined in this policy
- Cooperate with the school or Trust throughout the process
- Respond to deadlines and communications promptly
- Request support if needed (e.g. translation or advocacy)
- Treat all involved with respect and courtesy
- Avoid approaching individual governors or trustees directly
- Refrain from publishing complaint details on social media

5.2 The Investigator

An appointed individual will:

- Interview relevant parties and keep accurate notes
- Review records and written evidence securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints committee

5.3 The Complaints Co-ordinator

This role may be fulfilled by:

- The Headteacher or CEO
- A designated complaints governor
- A staff member providing administrative support

They will:

- Keep the complainant informed at each stage
- Liaise with relevant staff, governors, trustees, and clerks
- Be mindful of third-party information and support needs
- Maintain accurate records

5.4 Clerk to the Local Governing Body and Trust Board

The clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and committee
- Circulate relevant papers and evidence
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and share minutes and outcomes

5.5 Committee Chair

The chair will:

- Lead the meeting respectfully and fairly
- Ensure all parties understand the process and can present their case

6. Principles for Investigation

At Belong Multi Academy Trust, we approach every complaint with a commitment to truth, reconciliation, and restoration—guided by our values of **Hope, Love, Community, and Compassion**.

When investigating a complaint, we will seek to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

We aim to ensure that all investigations are conducted fairly, respectfully, and with sensitivity to the dignity of all parties involved.

6.1 Timescales

Complaints should be raised within three months of the incident. If the complaint relates to a series of connected events, it must be raised within three months of the most recent incident.

We will consider exceptions to this timeframe where there are valid reasons for the delay and where a fair investigation remains possible.

Complaints received during school holidays will be treated as received on the first school day after the break.

If we are unable to meet the timescales outlined in this policy, we will:

- Set revised time limits in agreement with the complainant
- Communicate the new deadline and reasons for the delay

7. Stages of Complaint (Not Complaints Against the Trust, CEO or Trustees)

We follow a **3-stage process** for handling complaints:

- **Stage 1** – Informal resolution
- **Stage 2** – Formal investigation
- **Stage 3** – Local governing body panel hearing

7.1 Stage 1: Informal Resolution

We encourage early resolution of concerns through informal dialogue, reflecting our commitment to peace-making and reconciliation.

The complainant should raise the issue promptly, within the timescales set out in Section 6.1, with the relevant member of staff or the headteacher—either in person, by phone, letter, or email.

The Trust will acknowledge informal complaints within 5 school days and outline next steps, including expected timescales.

A meeting will be arranged between the complainant and the appropriate staff member (usually the headteacher or the subject of the complaint). A written response will be provided within 5 school days following the meeting.

If the complaint involves:

- The **headteacher** or a **local governor**, Stage 1 will be led by the **chair of the local governing body**.
- The **chair of the local governing body**, Stage 1 will be led by the **clerk to the governing body**, or **chair of the board of trustees**.

If unresolved, the complaint will proceed to Stage 2.

7.2 Stage 2: Formal Investigation

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless the complaint is about the Headteacher), via the school office. The complainant must submit the complaint in writing (preferably using the Belong Complaint Form – see Appendix A) or request reasonable adjustments if needed). The letter should include:

- Relevant dates and times
- Names of witnesses
- Desired resolution
- Supporting documents

All formal complaints should be clearly marked as Private and Confidential.

Where to Send the Complaint

- **General complaints**:
  Email: admin@blanch.org.uk
  Letter: Addressed to the headteacher, delivered to the school office
- **Complaints involving the headteacher or a governor**:
  Email: [Insert chair of local governing body email]
  Letter: Addressed to the chair, delivered to the school office
- **Complaints involving the chair of the local governing body**:
  Email: [ClerktoGovernors@blanch.org.uk
  Letter: Addressed to the clerk and to be delivered to the school office

Investigation Process

The complainant will receive written acknowledgement within 5 school days.

The headteacher or chair of the local governing body will conduct the investigation. If the complaint is:

- About both the **chair and vice-chair**
- About the **entire local governing body**
- About the **majority of the governing body**

Then the **CEO or Trust Board** will lead the investigation.

A written conclusion will be sent within 10 school days. If this deadline cannot be met, the complainant will be informed and given a revised timeline.

The response will include:

- Actions taken during the investigation
- A full explanation of the decision and reasoning
- Any steps to resolve the complaint

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may escalate to Stage 3 by writing to the clerk to the governing board within 10 school days.

7.3 Stage 3: Review Panel

Convening the Panel

If a complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 2, the complaint will be escalated to a review panel hearing**.**

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of Belong Multi Academy Trust and will consist of at least three individuals who were not directly involved in the complaint. At least one panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school**,** ensuring impartiality and fairness.

The panel must not consist solely of local governing body members, as they are not independent of school management.

If the complaint concerns:

- The **chair and vice-chair** jointly
- The **entire local governing body**
- The **majority of the local governing body**

Then the panel will include trustees and at least one independent member.

The panel will have access to the full record of the complaint's progress (see Section 10).

The complainant will be given reasonable notice of the hearing date. The clerk will aim to schedule the hearing within 15 school days of the request.

If the complainant declines three proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date and the hearing will proceed using written submissions from both parties.

All written materials will be shared with all parties at least 5 school days before the hearing.

The Trust will ensure the hearing is properly minuted.

At the Meeting

The hearing will be held in private. Electronic recordings are not permitted unless required as a reasonable adjustment, and only with prior consent from all parties. Consent will be documented in the minutes.

The complainant and school representatives will be invited to attend and may submit written or oral statements. The complainant may be accompanied if they wish.

Legal representation is generally discouraged, but may be considered on a case-by-case basis (e.g. if a staff member is called as a witness and wishes to be supported by a union representative).

Media representatives are not permitted.

Each party will present their case, and witnesses may be called. All parties will have the opportunity to ask and respond to questions.

After presentations, the panel will deliberate in private.

The Outcome

The panel may:

- **Uphold the complaint**, in whole or in part

- **Dismiss the complaint**, in whole or in part

If upheld, the panel will:

- Decide appropriate actions to resolve the complaint
- Recommend changes to school systems or procedures to prevent recurrence

The decision will be communicated in writing within 10 school days to:

- The complainant
- The individual subject to the complaint (if applicable)
- The Trust and headteacher (for inspection purposes)

8. Complaints About the Trust, CEO or Trustees

8.1 Stage 1: Informal

We strive to resolve concerns early through informal dialogue, reflecting our values of Community and Compassion.

Complaints should be raised promptly, within the timeframe set out in Section 6.1.

The complaint should be addressed to the relevant member of the Trust's central team or the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

If the complaint concerns the CEO, it should be directed to the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

If the complainant is unsure who to contact, they should reach out to the Trust office:
0151 330 5151
contactus@belongce.org.uk

The informal process will follow the same principles as outlined in Section 7.

8.2 Stage 2: Formal

If unresolved, the complainant must submit a formal written complaint.

Acknowledgement will be sent within 5 school days.

An investigating officer will conduct a fair and thorough investigation, following the process in Section 6, and respond in writing within 10 school days.

8.3 Stage 3: Panel Hearing

Convening the Panel

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, the complaint will be escalated to a panel hearing.

The panel will be appointed by the Trust and consist of three trustees/directors not involved in the formal investigation.

If the complaint concerns:

- The **chair and vice-chair** jointly
- The **entire trust board**
- The **majority of the trust board**

Then the panel will be made up entirely of independent members**.**

The complainant will be given reasonable notice of the hearing date. The clerk will aim to schedule the hearing within 15 school days.

If the complainant declines three proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date and the hearing will proceed using written submissions.

Written materials will be circulated at least 5 school days before the hearing.

The hearing will be properly minuted.

At the Meeting

The complainant and Trust representatives will attend and may present written or oral submissions. The complainant may be accompanied.

Each party will present their case, and witnesses may be called. All parties will have the opportunity to ask and respond to questions.

After presentations, the panel will deliberate in private.

The Outcome

The panel will:

- Uphold or dismiss the complaint (in whole or in part)
- Recommend actions or changes to Trust procedures

9. Referring Complaints on Completion of the School and Trust Procedures

At Belong Multi Academy Trust, we are committed to ensuring that every complaint is handled fairly, thoroughly, and in line with our values. If a complainant remains dissatisfied after completing the Trust's complaints procedure, they may refer their concern to the **Department for Education (DfE)**

If the complainant believes that the school or Trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure, or acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they may contact the Department for Education (DfE) once Stage 3 has been completed.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn decisions made by the Trust. Instead, they will consider whether Belong Multi Academy Trust has followed education legislation and any statutory policies relevant to the complaint.

Complainants can contact the DfE:

- **Online:** https://www.education.gov.uk/contactus
- **By telephone:** 0370 000 2288
- **By post:**
  Department for Education
  Piccadilly Gate
  Store Street
  Manchester
  M1 2WD

10. Unreasonable and Persistent Complaints

We recognise that most complaints are made in good faith and deserve to be treated seriously. However, in rare cases, a complaint may become unreasonable or persistent. In such instances, we remain committed to upholding dignity and compassion for all involved, while protecting staff and ensuring the smooth running of our schools.

10.1 Unreasonable Complaints

A complaint may be considered unreasonable if the complainant:

- Refuses to clearly articulate the complaint or desired outcomes
- Refuses to cooperate with the investigation process
- Insists on outcomes or procedures that are incompatible with our policy
- Introduces irrelevant or trivial information
- Makes excessive demands or repeated contact that disrupts school operations
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff or seeks their removal
- Changes the basis of the complaint during the investigation
- Repeats complaints that have already been addressed
- Refuses to accept findings from a properly conducted investigation
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes
- Uses threats, abusive or discriminatory language, or violence
- Knowingly provides false information
- Publishes unacceptable content on social media or public forums

This list is not exhaustive and decisions about what constitutes unreasonable behaviour will be made at the Trust's discretion.

We ask complainants to limit communication while their complaint is being processed, as excessive contact may delay resolution.

Steps We Will Take

We will:

- Take reasonable steps to address concerns
- Provide a clear statement of our position and available options
- Maintain objectivity and respect in all interactions

Before formally marking a complaint as unreasonable, we will attempt informal resolution. If behaviour continues, we will:

- Write to the complainant explaining our concerns
- Refer them to this policy
- Suggest appropriate behaviour moving forward

In cases of excessive contact or disruption, we may:

- Assign a single point of contact via email
- Limit contact to a fixed number of times per term
- Recommend the complainant engage a third party (e.g. Citizens Advice)
- Implement other reasonable strategies

In response to serious aggression or violence, we will:

- Inform the police immediately
- Communicate our actions in writing
- Consider barring individuals from school premises
- Provide support to affected staff

10.2 Serial or Persistent Complaints

We may stop responding to a complaint when:

- We have taken all reasonable steps to address the concern
- The complainant has received a clear explanation and options
- The complainant continues to raise the same issue repeatedly

This decision is reinforced if communications are abusive, aggressive, or intended to cause disruption.

We will inform the complainant of our decision to cease correspondence, and clarify that new complaints will be considered if they raise materially different or unrelated concerns.

10.3 Duplicate Complaints

If a resolved complaint is raised again by a different individual (e.g. a family member), we will assess whether new information has been presented.

If not, we will:

- Inform the new complainant that the issue has already been addressed
- Direct them to the **Department for Education (DfE)** if they remain dissatisfied

If new aspects are identified, we will follow the appropriate complaints procedure (Section 6 or 7).

10.4 Complaint Campaigns

If we receive a large volume of complaints on the same topic—particularly from individuals unconnected to the school—we may respond by:

- Publishing a single response on the school or Trust website
- Sending a template response to all complainants

If individuals wish to pursue the matter further, our standard complaints procedures will apply.

11. Record-Keeping and Confidentiality

At Belong CE Multi Academy Trust, we believe in transparency and accountability, balanced with compassion and respect for privacy.

We will maintain detailed records of all complaints, including:

- Actions taken at each stage
- The stage at which the complaint was resolved
- The final outcome

Records will include correspondence (letters and emails), meeting notes, and phone call logs. All materials will be treated as confidential, stored securely, and accessed only by those directly involved in the investigation or review panel.

For complaints concerning the Trust or central staff, records will be managed by the Clerk to the Board of Trustees/Directors and stored securely at the Trust's offices with restricted access.

Exceptions apply where:

- The **Secretary of State** (or their representative) requests access
- A **Freedom of Information (FOI)** or **Data Protection** request is made
- Material is required for a **school inspection**

Records will be retained only as long as necessary, in accordance with data protection law, our privacy notices, and **our** Record Retention Schedule.

To preserve impartiality, complaint details will not be shared with the full local governing body or Trust board unless required. If prior knowledge exists, we will (where reasonably practicable) convene an independent panel**.**

Complainants may also request an independent panel if they believe bias may affect proceedings. The local governing body will consider such requests reasonably and fairly.

12. Learning Lessons

We view complaints not only as challenges but as opportunities for growth and reflection, in line with our commitment to continuous improvement and the flourishing of all.

The Local Governing Body will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher / Senior Leadership Team**,** respecting confidentiality, to identify improvements in practice or procedures.

The Trust Board**,** CEO**,** or other relevant leaders will receive regular reports on the nature and types of complaints across our schools. These insights will inform strategic decisions, support structures, and policy development across the Trust.

13. Monitoring Arrangements

The Local Governing Body will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure at school level, ensuring that complaints are handled properly and respectfully.

This includes:

- Tracking the number and nature of complaints
- Reviewing any recurring themes or underlying issues (see Section 12)

Complaints records will be logged and managed by the school's Clerk.

At Trust level, the CEO will monitor the procedure's effectiveness across all schools.

This policy will be reviewed by the Trust every every 2 years and approved by the Trust Board.

13. Links with Other Policies

This policy is linked to other Trust and school policies that address specific types of complaints or related procedures, including:

- **Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy**
- **Admissions Policy**
- **Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Policy**
- **Staff Grievance Procedures**
- **Staff Disciplinary Procedures**
- **Special Educational Needs (SEN) Policy and Information Report**
- **Privacy Notices**

Appendix 1: Complaint Form – Private and Confidential

Please complete and return to Headteacher, via the school office who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: **Postcode:** **Day time telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:** **Email address:**
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature: **Date:**
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Action taken:
Date:

Appendix 2: Stage 3 Agenda

Name of School	
Name of Complainant	
Date	
Time	
Location	

Name of Participant	Position	Purpose
		Panel member 1 (Chair)
		Panel member 2
		Panel member 3
		Complainant
		Complainants Companion
		School Representative

Item No.	Item	Responsible
1	Introduction and meeting procedure	Chair
2	Summary of complaint	Complainant
3	Questions to the Complainant	Panel
4	Representations from the Investigator	Investigator
5	Questions to the Investigator	Panel
6	Summing up from the Complainant	Complainant
7	Summing up from the Panel	Chair
8	Withdrawal of Complainant, Investigator and Complainants Companion	Chair
9	Consideration of case by Panel	Panel
10	Return of Complainant, Investigator and Complainants Companion	Chair
11	Decision of the Panel	Chair

Item No.	Supporting Documentation Provided with Agenda
1	
2	
3	
4	

Love, Hope, Community and Compassion