CITY OF LONDON
PRIMARY ACADEMY
ISLINGTON

SERIAL AND PERSISTENT COMPLAINTS POLICY

(Whole school policy, including EYFS)

Responsibility:	Head Teacher & Governing Body
Updated:	September 2026
Approved by Board:	September 2026
Next Review Date:	September 2027

Policy for dealing with Serial and Persistent Complaints/Harassment, including aggressive behaviour from Parents/Carers and Members of the Public.

INTRODUCTION

The Head Teacher and staff deal with specific complaints as part of their day-to-day management of the school in accordance with the School's Complaints Procedure. The majority of complaints are handled in an informal manner and are resolved quickly, sensitively and to the satisfaction of the complainant. However, there are rare 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 on the overall well-being of the children or staff in the school. In these exceptional circumstances the school may take action in accordance with this policy.

AIMS OF THIS POLICY

The aims of this policy are to:

- uphold the standards of courtesy and reasonableness that should characterise all communication between the school and persons who wish to express a concern or pursue a complaint;
- support the well-being of children, staff and everyone who has a legitimate interest in the work of the school, including governors and parents;
- deal fairly, honestly and transparently with those who make persistent or vexatious complaints and those who harass members of staff in school, whilst at the same time ensuring that other stakeholders suffer no detriment.

PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents/carers/members of the public who raise either informal concerns or formal complaints with the school can expect the school to:

- respond with courtesy and respect;
- inform parents/carers how and when problems can be raised with the school, and where they can find a copy of the School's Complaints Procedure;
- 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;
- attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the School's Complaints Procedure and, in line with advice from the City of London Academies Trust (COLAT), keep complainants informed of progress towards a resolution of the issues raised;
- inform parents/carers, when necessary, of the existence of the Policy for dealing with Vexatious Complaints /Harassment, including aggressive behaviour from parents and visitors.

THE SCHOOL'S EXPECTATIONS OF PARENTS/CARERS/MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The school can expect parents/carers/members of the public who wish to raise problems with the school to:

- treat all school staff with courtesy and respect;
- respect the needs and well-being of pupils and staff in the school;
- follow the School's Complaints Procedure in the case of a complaint;

- recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond.

The following list is not exhaustive but illustrates the types of behaviour from parents/carers/members of the public that are considered unacceptable and will not be tolerated:

- shouting at members of the school community, either in person or over the telephone;
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or threats;
- physically intimidating a member of the school community including pushing, hitting, punching, kicking, spitting or standing very close in a threatening manner;
- the use of aggressive hand gestures, including finger pointing and/or shaking or holding a fist towards another person;
- repeatedly contacting the school and its SLT with disproportionate, excessive and regular correspondence which detracts from the smooth running of the school.
- any threatening behaviour towards a member of the school community including abuse via texts, emails and social media;
- spreading malicious, untrue and/or defamatory rumours about the school or a member of staff at the school in a manner designed to cause harm or distress. Statements will be sought from anyone who reports such behaviour;
- repeatedly making false and unsubstantiated allegations;
- breaching the school's security procedures.

WHO IS A SERIAL AND PERSISTANT COMPLAINANT?

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. For the purpose of this policy, a 'vexatious complainant' is a parent/carer or member of the public who frequently raises issues that the complainant believes to be within the remit of the school, either formally or informally, and is judged to be behaving unreasonably by the Chair of Governors.

A complainant may behave unreasonably if they:

- insist upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint that has already been resolved by following the School's Complaints Procedure, where the procedure has been fully and properly implemented;
- refuse to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint, including referral to the Department of Education;
- seeks unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value;
- insists upon pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, insubstantial or out of the scope of the School's Complaints Procedure;
- refuses to co-operate with the school's complaints investigation process;
- makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive;
- publishes unacceptable information in relation to the complaint on social media or other public forums;
- knowingly provides false information;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation goes on;
- engages in prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail or telephone contact about a concern or complaint;
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;

- pursues a valid complaint in an unreasonable manner e.g. by insisting the complaint is dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the School's Complaints Procedure;
- makes excessive and/or unreasonable use of Freedom of Information/SARS requests;
- insists on dealing only with the Head Teacher on all occasions, irrespective of the level of delegation in the school to deal with such matters;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- makes a complaint designed to cause disruption or excessive demands on school time.

For the purpose of this policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions, outlined above, in such a way that they:

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

Where a complainant tries to reopen the issue with the school after the School Complaints Procedure has been fully exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the CEO of the Multi Academy Trust (COLAT) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

THE SCHOOL'S ACTIONS IN CASES OF SERIAL, PERSISTENT OR UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS OR HARASSMENT

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns and provide a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as objective arbiters throughout the process. If the complainant continues to contact the school in a vexatious manner, the school will inform the complainant in writing that their behaviour is now considered to be unreasonable by the school, and if not modified, action may be taken in accordance with the terms of The School's policy on Vexatious Complaints and Harassment.

The following actions may be taken, as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community. The complainant may be:

- given a limit on the number of times they can make contact with the school, such as a fixed number per term;
- given a single point of contact for all communication with the school, except in emergencies, e.g. via a single email address;
- informed that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a governor present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties;
- asked to engage a third party on their behalf;
- informed that they may only deal with the Head Teacher or member of staff via a third party, to be identified by the Chair of Governors, who will investigate and determine whether the concern/complaint is reasonable or vexatious and advise the Head Teacher accordingly.

The school reserves the right to cease responding to the complainant when:

- all reasonable steps have been taken to address the complainant's concerns;
- a clear statement of the school's position and options open to the complainant have been provided.

The complainant will be informed of the school's intention to stop responding to communications. Legitimate new complaints may still be considered, even if the person making them is, or has been, subject to the Policy for Dealing with Vexatious Complaints and/or Harassment.

In response to any serious incident of verbal aggression or physical violence, the school will:

- immediately inform the police;
- consider taking advice from the LA on pursuing a case under anti-harassment legislation or request an Anti-Social Behaviour Order.

If a complainant's persistent complaining/harassing behaviour is modified and is then resumed at a later date, the school may resume the process identified above at an appropriate level. In these circumstances advice may be sought from the HR/Legal Services of the COLAT.

Duplicate Complaints

If the school has resolved a complaint under the School Complaints Procedure and receives a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, the duplicate complaint will be assessed as to whether there is any new information or any new issues raised which have not previously been considered. If there are no new issues raised, we will inform the duplicate complainant that:

- the complaint has already been investigated and the local process is now complete;
- the school is satisfied that there are no new aspects to the complaint;
- they must now refer to ESFA if they are dissatisfied with the original handling of the complaint.

Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- publishing a single response on the school website;
- sending a template response to all of the complainants.

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school/Trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with their published Complaints Procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their

duties under education law, they can contact the ESFA after they have completed Stage 3 – Appeal Panel.

The ESFA will not normally re-investigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on 0370 000 2288, or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
5, Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

This policy links to the COLAT Complaints Policy.

REVIEW - The School will review this policy every year or as deemed appropriate.