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SERIAL AND UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS POLICY

October 2026

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Spark Education Trust is a company limited by guarantee registered in England. Company Number: 10240712. VAT Number: 476496535.
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Introduction

Spark Education Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain.

The trust and its schools will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the trust/school but there may be occasions when complaints become classed as serial and/or unreasonable.

A complaint will be classed as serial when a complainant tries to re-open a complaint that has already been fully dealt with through the complaints procedure, and the trust/school has done everything it can to respond to the complaint. For example, a complainant repeatedly makes the same complaint, providing no new information, despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed. In these circumstances, the complainant will be notified in writing that the complaints policy has been exhausted, their complaint is closed and no further communication will be entered into regarding it.

The trust does not expect its staff to tolerate unacceptable and/or unreasonable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Unreasonable Behaviour

Spark Education Trust defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders the consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the trust/school, such as if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure.
- complains solely about trivial matters to an extent which is out of proportion to their significance.
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the trust's approved complaints procedure or with good practice.
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced.
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into a complaint where the trust's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed.
- seeks an unrealistic outcome.

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- makes excessive demands on trust/school time/resources by frequent/lengthy/complicated and/or stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and/or by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
- continually operates a 'scatter-gun' approach by lodging the same complaint in parallel with several bodies for investigation.
- continues to contact the trust/school with what is believed to be the intent to cause disruption.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint (either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically) does so:

- maliciously
- aggressively
- using threats, intimidation or violence towards staff, students or other members of the school community
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language
- knowing it to be false
- using falsified information
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as on social media, websites and newspapers, or other public forums

Whenever possible, the trust/Headteacher will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking to the complaint.

If the behaviour continues the trust/Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. If the behaviour continues unchanged, the trust/Headteacher will notify the complainant in writing that their complaint has been classed as unreasonable and no further communication will be entered into regarding it.

Communications

Complainants should limit the number of communications with the trust/Headteacher that relates to their complaint, while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone or email) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

For complainants who excessively contact the trust/school causing a significant level of disruption, the trust/school may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. A single point of contact may also be given for all communication with the trust/school, except in emergencies, e.g. safeguarding issues.

The communications plan will usually be reviewed after 6 months. Any communications about the complaint received outside the set communication plan will be ignored, and persistence non-adherence to the communication plan may result in the trust/school ceasing responding altogether, about matters other than

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those for which we have a statutory responsibility. If this decision is taken, the trust/school will write to the complainant advising them of this.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing and the police immediately informed. This may include banning an individual from a school under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996.

Should a complainant exhibit unacceptable behaviour whilst interacting with staff regarding their complaint, the meeting will be stopped. The trust requires complainants to conduct themselves in line with the expected behaviours outlined in Appendix 1.

If the trust/school has resolved a complaint under the complaints policy 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, the duplicate complainant will be informed that:

- the complaint has already been investigated and the process is now complete.
- the trust/school is satisfied that there are no new aspects to the complaint.
- if they have completed Stage 3 of the process, they are able to refer the matter to the Department for Education (DfE) if they are dissatisfied with the original handling of the complaint.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the trust/school. They will consider whether the trust/school 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.

Once internal procedures have been exhausted, the complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE as below:

Online at -
https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact_the_Department_for_Education

In writing to -
School Complaints Compliance Unit
Department for Education
2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate
Store Street Manchester M1 2WD

By telephone to - 0370 000 2288

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Appendix 1 – Complainant Conduct

It is recognised that making a complaint can be a stressful/emotional time for complainants. Whilst taking this into account, it is important for everyone involved in the complaints process to behave respectfully so that all parties have an equal opportunity to present their respective cases.

Any unreasonable conduct will be detrimental to the complaints process and may cause delays. The trust will not tolerate any abusive, aggressive or threatening behaviour from complainants, or those accompanying or representing them, at any stage of the complaints process. If such behaviour is exhibited, the trust reserves the right to refrain from meeting with the complainant in person or virtually and will conduct all necessary interactions via email or letter.

Complainants are asked to follow this non-exhaustive list of expected behaviours:

- Arrive punctually for any meeting.
- Bring any documentation with you that you wish to refer to.
- Switch off your mobile phone and any other electronic device to prevent disruptions.
- Notify the trust/school in advance of any reasonable adjustments you require.
- Ensure you have made alternative arrangements for any necessary childcare, should meetings take longer than expected.
- Note that unauthorised recordings are not permitted – hearings should not be recorded (either an audio recording or visual recording) without prior advance permission being given (such permission to be considered and granted on a case by case basis).

Be calm, respectful and courteous:

✓ Allow one person at a time to talk and speak when it is your time to speak.
✓ Don't interrupt or speak over other people.
✓ Use respectful language and tone: no rudeness, anger, swearing, no inappropriate physical expressions (banging on tables, aggressive gesturing etc).

Where meetings are online/virtual:

✓ Ensure you have the technical requirements to take part.
✓ Mute your microphone when not speaking, to avoid background noise.
✓ Avoid speaking over someone: the virtual "hand raise" should be used if you wish to speak.
✓ A neutral non-offensive and non-distracting virtual background should be used.
✓ Don't multi-task: avoid engaging in other activities or using other electronic devices during the hearing, to maintain focus.

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