Complaints
Policy & Procedure

Recommended by CEO:	December 2025
Ratified by Trustee board:	December 2025
Review Due:	December 2026

Contents

1 Purpose of the policy 3

2 Introduction 3

3 The Aims and Objectives of the Complaints Policy 4

4 The Benefits of an effective Complaints Policy 4

5 The Structure and Administration of the Complaints Policy 4

6 Stage 1: informal resolution 6

7 Stage 2: formal resolution 7

8 Stage 3: Complaint Panel 9

9 Complaints specifically about the Trust or the CEO or a Trustee 11

10 Next Steps for Complainant 13

11 Circumstances under which this procedure should not be used 14

12 Timescales for handling complaints 14

13 Confidentiality and data protection 14

14 Serial, Persistent or Vexatious Complaints 15

15 Complaint campaigns 17

16 Amendments to this policy 17

Appendix 1 – Complaint Panel Hearing Agenda (Exemplar – the chair of the panel will decide the specific agenda). 18

Appendix 2 - Contact Details 19

1 Purpose of the policy

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to set out the procedures for making and dealing with complaints. The policy is for parents/carers or other stakeholders wishing to raise a concern, problem or complaint regarding a school that is part of the Marlow Education Trust or the Marlow Education Trust.

1.2 A concern may be defined as '*an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*. A complaint may be defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action*'.

1.3 It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. The Marlow Education Trust takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

1.4 We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case the Marlow Education Trust and its schools will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

2 Introduction

2.1 This document meets the requirements of section 29 of the Education Act 2002, which sets out how complaints procedures should be drawn up and used effectively to handle complaints. It is also based on guidance for schools on complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE), including the model procedures for complaints and for managing serial and unreasonable complaints. In addition, the policy takes account of the Education and Skills Funding Agency best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures This policy complies with the Marlow Education Trust funding agreement and articles of association

2.2 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by a person or persons with a legitimate interest in the Marlow Education Trust or schools that are part of the Marlow Education Trust.

2.3 The Marlow Education Trust believes it is good practice that every effort should be made to resolve complaints by informal means.

2.4 Complainants should, however, be informed that formal procedures are available should they feel that their concerns cannot be resolved informally.

2.5 Complaints are not always easy to define. It is therefore important to keep in mind the distinction between concerns, problems and a complaint. It is not intended that the guidelines suggested in this document should replace the normal discussion, which takes place on day-to-day issues as they arise.

2.6 It is only when a Complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of such interaction that further steps may need to be taken. Once the formal procedure is instituted, the unresolved concern, problem or complaint will be treated as a formal complaint.

3 The Aims and Objectives of the Complaints Policy

3.1 The Marlow Education Trust has developed this policy to ensure that any complaint is dealt with fairly and appropriately. This policy:

3.1.1 encourages the resolution of concerns, problems or complaints by informal means wherever possible,

3.1.2 ensures that concerns, problems or complaints are dealt with fully and fairly and within clearly defined time limits,

3.1.3 provides effective response and, if appropriate, redress,

3.1.4 seeks to maintain positive relationships, and

3.1.5 makes clear the responsibility and accountability of decision making with regards to complaints for Trustees, the Chief Executive Officer, Local Governing Bodies and Headteachers.

3.2 These aims and objectives will be achieved by:

3.2.1 ensuring this Complaints Policy is clear and easy to follow; and

3.2.2 consistency and fairness in the treatment and handling of all complaints

4 The Benefits of an effective Complaints Policy

4.1 An effective Complaints Policy will add value to The Marlow Education Trust, supporting the Trust's objectives by:

4.1.1 building a reputation of trust and integrity

4.1.2 ensuring that complaints are dealt with sensitively and in confidence

4.1.3 enhancing a reflective ethos where there is a purposeful intention to learn from error

4.1.4 ensuring that processes and procedures are appropriate and are being adhered to by the Trust and its Schools

4.2 An effective Complaints Policy will also promote and facilitate for all stakeholders the successful and timely resolution of concerns, problems or complaints.

5 The Structure and Administration of the Complaints Policy

5.1 The Trustees have a fundamental role to:

5.1.1 agree the Complaints Policy, ensuring the policy is in line with The Marlow Education Trust's core values;

5.1.2 regularly review the Complaints Policy and approve changes or improvements to key elements of its processes and procedures;

5.1.3 serve on a Complaints Panel, if required.

5.2 The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) will:

5.2.1 operationally adhere to the Complaints Policy;

5.2.2 monitor and review the implementation of the Complaints Policy and approve changes or improvements to minor elements of its processes or procedures or to reflect changes in legislation or governmental guidance (any such changes or improvements to be notified to the Board of Trustees at its next meeting following the change or improvement);

5.2.3 record and retain such record of all formal complaints about the Marlow Education Trust (including progress, final outcome, whether they are resolved following Stage 2 of the procedure or proceed to a Complaints Panel and the action taken by the school or the Marlow Education Trust as result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld)).

5.3 Local Governors will:

5.3.1 operationally adhere to the Complaints Policy;

5.3.2 seek advice and support from the Headteacher, CEO and / or the Chair of the Trustees, as appropriate, when dealing with a formal complaint;

5.3.3 serve on a Complaints Panel, if required.

5.4 A Headteacher will:

5.4.1 operationally adhere to the Complaints Policy;

5.4.2 seek advice and support from the CEO and / or the Local Chair of Governors and/or the Chair of Trustees, as appropriate, when dealing with a formal complaint;

5.4.3 ensure all members of staff are aware of, understand and adhere to the Complaints Policy;

5.4.4 record and retain a record of all formal complaints about the school (including progress, final outcome, whether they are resolved following Stage 2 of the procedure or proceed to a Complaints Panel and the action taken by the school or the Marlow Education Trust as result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

5.5 The Complainant will:

5.5.1 explain the complaint in full as early as possible

5.5.2 co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint

5.5.3 respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint

5.5.4 ask for assistance as needed

5.5.5 treat all those involved in the complaint with respect

5.5.6 refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

5.6 The Investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:

5.6.1 sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved

5.6.2 interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint

5.6.3 consideration of records and other relevant information

5.6.4 analysing information

5.6.5 liaising with the Complainant as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

5.6.6 conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.

5.6.7 keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting

5.6.8 ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal

5.6.9 be mindful of the timescales to respond

5.6.10 prepare a comprehensive report that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

6 Stage 1: informal resolution

6.1 The main aim at all stages of this complaints procedure will be to ensure that any concern, problem or complaint is fully and fairly considered and is resolved to the satisfaction of the Complainant.

6.2 The timescale for dealing with individual concerns, problems or complaints will differ according to the complexity of the issue concerned. It is, however, reasonable that Complainants, unless there is good reason not to do so, should receive an email acknowledgement within 5 school days of making initial contact to raise their concern, problem or complaint.

6.3 The Complainant will have opportunity to discuss informally the concern, problem or complaint with an appropriate member of staff. This may be the class teacher or another member of staff who is most suited to resolve the issue. This discussion may be by email, phone or face-to-face meeting or a combination of all three.

6.4 The purpose of the discussion is for the member of staff to understand fully the concern, problem, or complaint. At the conclusion of the discussion, the member of staff will agree in writing the actions

they will take. This may include gathering information, consulting with the CEO/Headteacher/Senior Staff or other actions that may lead to the resolution of the issue. The member of staff will also confirm the timeframe within which the Complainant can expect feedback and by what method of communication.

6.5 The member of staff will provide written feedback to the Complainant as agreed in section 6.4. At this point, if the Complainant is satisfied with the feedback, the concern, problem or complaint ceases, and the issue will be treated as resolved.

6.6 It may however be the case during the feedback that it is apparent that there needs to be further action required to satisfy the issue. Once again, the member of staff will also confirm the timeframe when the Complainant can expect feedback and by what method of communication.

6.7 Whilst there are no strict periods regarding Stage 1, it is hoped that any concerns, problems or complaints will be resolved within 5 – 10 school days. This may not always be possible, and delays may take place. If this is the case, the member of staff dealing with the concern, problem or complaint will keep the Complainant fully informed in writing and be clear when they can expect to receive feedback. If the Complainant, acting reasonably, feels the time dealing with the concern, problem or complaint is excessive or unreasonable, they can at any time request the complaint is dealt with via Stage 2 (formal resolution).

6.8 If this Stage 1 has been exhausted and the issue remains unresolved to the Complainant's satisfaction, they should be advised of the avenues available to enable the complaint to be resolved formally. The Complainant should be referred to a copy of this policy, which outlines dealing with complaints via Stage 2 of the procedure (formal resolution).

7 Stage 2: formal resolution

7.1 If the Complainant is dissatisfied with the action or response from Stage 1 (informal resolution), then the Complainant must write an email requesting the issue, concern or complaint be handled at Stage 2 (formal resolution) unless the Complainant has a disability, learning difficulty or difficulties with the English language, in which case the Complainant may contact the school for assistance.

The email must be sent within 20 school days of the conclusion of Stage 1. The email should

7.1.1 give particulars of the complaint, the reason(s) the Complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 1 (informal resolution) and the action and/or outcome the Complainant seeks to resolve the complaint to their satisfaction and

7.1.2 provide such documents, evidence and other information as the Complainant wishes to be considered.

The email should be written to include all salient information as described in items 7.1.1 and 7.1.2, an email referring to previous emails provided under Stage 1 will not suffice, this will be returned to the compliant for the information referred to above to be provided.

7.2 The email must be addressed to the Headteacher or, if the Headteacher has already led Stage 1 (informal resolution) or the complaint is about the Headteacher, the Chair of the Local Governing Body or, if the complaint is about a Local Governor or Governors, the Local Governing Body Clerk (which shall be construed throughout this policy to include Clerk where applicable), and sent to the

school via the normal email address (marked private and confidential). The contact details for the schools are set out in the Appendix.

7.3 If the complaint is about an individual Local Governor, the Clerk will refer the complaint to the Chair of Local Governors or, if the complaint is against the Chair of Local Governors, the Chair of Trustees to investigate.

7.4 All Complainants should notify a complaint as soon as practicable. Complaints submitted 3 months after the issue of the subject of the complaint (or where there is a series of associated issues the last of these issues) will not be considered unless there are exceptional circumstances. These may include (but are not limited to) subsequent information about the complaint coming to light and a valid explanation of why it was not possible to give notification sooner, where the complaint is of an especially serious matter or where there is reasonable justification for why the Complainant has been unable to raise the complaint before this time. In such cases, the Headteacher or Chair of Local Governors or other person responsible for conducting Stage 2 (formal resolution) (as appropriate) will review the circumstances, seek advice from the CEO and determine whether the complaint should be considered.

7.5 The letter of complaint will be formally acknowledged within 3 school days of receipt.

7.6 The Headteacher or the Chair of the Local Governing Body (as applicable) or an independent investigator appointed by the school will investigate the complaint and review any and, so far as is practicable and available to them, all relevant documentation and information.

7.7 The Headteacher or the Chair of the Local Governing Body (as applicable) will decide whether the complaint should be dealt with via formal letter or formal meeting.

7.8 If the Headteacher or the Chair of the Local Governing Body decides to deal with the complaint by formal letter and without convening a formal meeting as contemplated in section 7.9, then they will respond in writing to the Complainant within 15 school days of acknowledgement of the complaint.

7.9 If it is decided that the complaint is best handled by first convening a formal meeting, then contact will be made with the Complainant within 5 school days to agree a mutually convenient time and date. The Complainant will be advised that they may, if they wish, have someone of their choice to accompany and assist them at the formal meeting.

7.10 The formal meeting will take place, so far as practicable, within 15 school days of receiving notification of the formal complaint in accordance with sections 7.1 and 7.2. At the formal meeting, the complaint will be considered in full and thereafter the Headteacher or Chair of the Local Governing Body (as applicable) will confirm in writing the outcome of the formal meeting to the Complainant within 5 school days of the meeting. The meeting will be recorded by the school in the form of written minutes.

7.11 If the complaint is against:

7.11.1 the Chair of the Local Governing Body or

7.11.2 the entire of the Local Governing Body or

7.11.3 a majority of the of the Local Governing Body

Stage 2 will be escalated to the Chair of Trustees who will investigate or designate another suitable Trustee, or an independent person (appointed by the Trust) to carry out the Stage 2 investigation.

7.12 If on receipt of a complaint, there is no Chair of the Local Governing Body in post, the Chair of Trustees is authorised to and shall appoint another Advisor (either on the Local Governing Body of the relevant school or another school in the Trust) to discharge the role of Chair of the Local Governing Body (as applicable) under this procedure.

7.13 Where a Chair of the Local Governing Body ceases to hold the office of Chair but remains an Advisor following the start of Stage 2 and before conclusion of the complaints process, then that person is authorised and shall continue to discharge the role of Chair under this procedure.

8 Stage 3: Complaint Panel

8.1 In the event that the Complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 (formal resolution), the Complainant can ask in writing for the complaint to be heard by a Complaint Panel.

8.2 This request must be made within 20 school days of the Complainant receiving the formal written response advising the outcome of Stage 2. The request should give particulars of why the Complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 and such documents, evidence and other information as the Complainant wishes to be considered, including any witnesses they wish the Complaint Panel to give permission to call. The request should be made in writing to the Clerk of the Marlow Education Trust.

8.3 The Clerk will convene a Complaint Panel. If the Complaint turns down at least two dates offered for the panel hearing, the Trust reserves the right to arrange the panel hearing without the Complaint being present.

8.4 The Complaint Panel will be made up of an Independent Person (as per Education Independent School Standards (England) Regulations 2014: Schedule1, Part 7) plus a Local Governor and a Trustee. The Local Governors may be Local Governors serving on the Local Governing Body of the school or another school in the Trust.

8.5 If the complaint is against:

8.5.1 the Chair of the Local Governing Body or

8.5.2 the entire Local Governing Body or

8.5.3 a majority of the Local Governing Body

the Complaint Panel will be made up of a suitable Independent Person and either two Trustees or a Trustee and a Local Governor serving on the Local Governing Body of another school in the Trust.

Members of the panel should be aware that the meeting must be independent and impartial and should be seen to be so. No governor / trustee may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.

We recognise that complainants may feel anxious or inhibited in a formal setting, and parents/carers often experience strong emotions when discussing matters that affect their child. The Trust and the schools will take reasonable steps to ensure the process is accessible and supportive, including

making adjustments where necessary.

The purpose of the complaints panel meeting is to:

- Review the complaint fairly and impartially.
- Establish the relevant facts based on the evidence presented.
- Decide whether the complaint is upheld in whole or in part.
- Where appropriate, make recommendations to resolve the matter and improve future practice.

The panel will not re-investigate the original issue but will consider whether the school's response was reasonable and in line with policy. While the outcome may not always align with the complainant's expectations, the process will be conducted in a respectful, non-adversarial manner. All parties will be given the opportunity to present their views, and the panel will ensure that discussions remain focused and constructive.

Extra care will be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting and careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated. Members of the panel shall respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults. If the child/young person is the complainant, the members of the panel should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the members of the panel considers is not in the child/young person's best interests. The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

8.6 It is a matter for the Marlow Education Trust to identify a suitable Independent Person. The Independent Person may not be in the employment or involved in the governance of the Marlow Education Trust. The Independent Person may be for example a Headteacher (serving or retired) or a person experienced in governance such as a serving trustee of another school trust or governor in a school outside the Trust.

8.7 No member of the Complaint Panel may be directly involved in the complaint.

8.8 The Complaint Panel hearing will be convened, as far as is practicable, within 20 school days of the Complainant informing the Clerk in writing that they are unsatisfied with the response at Stage 2 and requesting in accordance with section 8.2 their complaint be heard by a Complaint Panel.

8.9 The Complainant will be informed in writing of the Complaint Panel hearing time, date and location and advised that they may, if they wish, have a colleague, friend or relative of their choice to accompany and assist them. This person (i) may be a friend, colleague or relative of the Complainant, (ii) must be over the age of 18 and not a pupil of the school, (iii) must undertake to accept the confidentiality of the Complaint Panel and (iv) shall not have the right to address the Complaint Panel unless expressly invited to do so by the Complaint Panel. Legal representation will not ordinarily be appropriate and requires the approval of the Complaint Panel Chair in advance of the Complaint Panel hearing. If such approval is given, approval shall be subject to such conditions and directions as may be imposed by the Complaint Panel Chair.

8.10 The Complainant and the Complaint Panel members will all receive the Evidence Pack five school days prior to the agreed date for Complaint Panel hearing.

8.11 The Complaint Panel will listen to the complaint and make findings and recommendations. Please see Appendix 2 for the outline agenda for a Complaint Panel hearing.

8.12 A letter outlining the Complaint Panel findings and recommendations will be sent to the Complainant, the Headteacher and or/other appropriate parties; this includes the Chair of Trustees and the CEO. The decision of the Complaint Panel is final. There is no further internal process available once Stage 3 (Complaint Panel) has concluded. The Trust is not able re-investigate the original complaint.

9 Complaints specifically about the Trust or the CEO or a Trustee

9.1 If the Complainant has a complaint specifically about the Marlow Education Trust or the CEO or a Trustee, then the Complainant will have opportunity to discuss informally the complaint in line with Stage 1 (informal resolution) of the complaint procedure.

9.2 Typically, the appropriate person to discuss the complaint with will be the CEO or, if the complaint is about the CEO or a Trustee (but not the Chair of Trustees), the Chair of Trustees, or if the complaint is about the Chair of Trustees, the Vice Chair of Trustees or another appropriate Trustee.

9.3 Contact details for the CEO, Chair of Trustees and Vice Chair of Trustees are as follows:

9.3.1 CEO: kford@marlowet.org

9.3.2 Chair of Trustees: scooper@marlowet.org

9.3.3 Vice Chair of Trustees C/O Clerk to the Trustees: clerktrustees@marlowet.org

9.4 The appropriate person will follow the Stage 1 procedure as set out in section 6 of this policy (but with references to "member of staff" in section 6 interpreted to refer to the appropriate person as described in section 9.2).

9.5 Complainants should raise a complaint as soon as practicable. Complaints submitted 3 months after the issue the subject of the complaint (or where there is a series of associated issues the last of these issues) will not be considered unless there are exceptional circumstances (as described in section 7.4).

9.6 If the Complainant remains dissatisfied with the action or response from Stage 1 (informal resolution), then the Complainant must write a letter requesting the complaint be handled at Stage 2 (formal resolution) of the complaints procedure, unless the Complainant has a disability, learning difficulty or difficulties with the English language in which case the Complainant may contact the company secretary at the Trust for assistance.

9.7 The letter must be sent within 20 school days of the conclusion of Stage 1**.** The letter should (i) give particulars of the complaint, the reason(s) the Complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1 (informal resolution) and the action and/or outcome the Complainant seeks to resolve the complaint to their satisfaction and (ii) provide such documents, evidence and other information as the Complainant wishes to be considered. The letter must be addressed to the Clerk to the Trustees and sent to The Marlow Education Trust office via the normal email address or postal address set out below (marked private and confidential):

Postal address: Marlow Education Trust
c/o Sir William Borlases Grammar School
West Street
Marlow SL7 2BR

Clerk to the Trustees: clerktrustees@marlowet.org

9.8 If a complaint is received against the Chair of Trustees, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair of Trustees or another appropriate Trustee for investigation.

9.9 If the complaint is against:

9.9.1 both the Chair and Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees or

9.9.2 the entire Board of Trustees or

9.9.3 a majority of the Board of Trustees,

the complaint will be escalated to a Member of the Marlow Education Trust for investigation.

9.10 The letter of complaint will be formally acknowledged within 5 school days.

9.11 The CEO or Chair of Trustees or Vice Chair of Trustees or relevant Trustee or relevant Member (as applicable) will either investigate or arrange for an independent investigator appointed by the Trust to investigate and handle the complaint following the Stage 2 (formal resolution) process set out in section 7 of this policy.

9.12 In the event that the Complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2, the Complainant can ask for the complaint to be heard by a Complaint Panel.

9.13 This request must be made within 20 school days of the Complainant receiving the formal written response to the complaint under the Stage 2 process. The request should give particulars of why the Complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 and such documents, evidence and other information as the Complainant wishes to be considered including any witnesses, they wish the Complaint Panel to give permission to call. The request should be made in writing to the Clerk to the Trustees of the Marlow Education Trust.

9.14 The Complaint Panel will be made up of two Trustees and a suitable Independent Person (as determined by the Chair of Trustees) or, if the complaint falls within section 9.9 and has been investigated by a Member, two other Members and a suitable Independent Person (as defined in section 8.6 and determined by the Chair of Members) or, if the Chair of Members so determines, one Member and two Independent Persons. No member of the Complaint Panel may be directly involved in the complaint.

9.15 The Complaint Panel hearing will be convened, as far as is practicable, within 20 school days of the Complainant informing the Company Secretary that they are dissatisfied with the response at Stage 2 and requesting in accordance with section 9.13 their complaint be heard by Complaint Panel.

9.16 The Complainant will be informed in relation to the Complaint Panel Hearing as provided in section 8.9 and the Complaint Panel will fulfil the functions and actions specified in section 8.

9.17 A letter outlining the Complaint Panel findings and recommendations will be sent to the Complainant, the CEO, Chair of Trustees and Members. The decision of the Complaint Panel is final. There is no further internal process available once Stage 3 (Complaint Panel) has concluded.

10 Next Steps for Complainant

10.1 This is the end of The Marlow Education Trust's complaints procedure.

10.2 If the Complainant believes, a child is in danger they should contact the Local Authority or call the Local Police on 101.

10.3 If the Complainant believes the school or the Trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with this policy or the school or the Marlow Education Trust acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, the Complainant may contact the Department of Education after Stage 3 has been completed. The DfE will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint, but will intervene if a school has:

10.3.1 Breached a clause in its funding agreement

10.3.2 Failed to act in line with its duties under education law

10.3.3 Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions

10.3.4 If the school's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

10.4 For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage: www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

10.5 Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that a school is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements by emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. An online contact form is also available at https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts.

10.6 If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure and the complaint is regarding the school not meeting standards set by the DfE in any of the following areas, the complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE:

10.6.1 Education

10.6.2 Pupil welfare and health and safety

10.6.3 School premises

10.6.4 Staff suitability

10.6.5 Making information available to parents

10.6.6 The spiritual, moral, social or cultural development of pupils

10.7 The DfE will consider reports of a major failure to meet the standards. Where appropriate, it can arrange an emergency inspection to look at pupil welfare and health and safety, and make sure that

the school deals with serious failings. For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage: www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

11 Circumstances under which this procedure should not be used

11.1 This policy does not refer to areas for which separate statutory arrangements or Marlow Education Trust policies are provided. These include:

11.1.1 Admissions

11.1.2 Exclusions: further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions

11.1.3 Statutory Assessment of Special Educational Needs

11.1.4 Safeguarding: wherever a concern indicates that a child's well-being or safety is at risk, the school or, as the case may be, The Marlow Education Trust is duty bound to report this immediately. Any action taken will be in accordance with the Trust's safeguarding policy

11.1.5 Employee grievance, capability or disciplinary: this policy is distinct from formal staff grievance, capability and disciplinary proceedings for which there are separate Marlow Education Trust policies

11.1.6 Whistleblowing complaints: the Marlow Education Trust has a separate policy for whistleblowing which is published on The Marlow Education Trust website here.

11.1.7 Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information

12 Timescales for handling complaints

12.1 This school and the Marlow Education Trust will endeavour to complete the three stages of the complaints procedure promptly and within the timescale for each stage referred to in this policy.

12.2 However, if it becomes clear that for any reason this school or the Marlow Education Trust is unable to meet a particular timescale for completing a stage of the procedure, the Complainant will be advised of this promptly along with the reason for the delay and the revised timescale.

12.3 In calculating the number of days for the purposes of this policy, the day of receipt of the complaint and the day of dispatch of the response shall not be counted.

12.4 If other bodies are investigating aspects of a complaint (for example, the police, local authority safeguarding teams or any tribunal), this may impact on the school or Trust's ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or may result in the procedure being suspended until those bodies have completed their investigation.

13 Confidentiality and data protection

13.1 Informal concerns and complaints will be handled confidentially at all stages and following the conclusion of the procedure. Confidentiality should be maintained at all times by all involved. The Marlow Education Trust requests that concerns and complaints not be disclosed publicly, including

via social media. Data protection principles will be applied in line with the Trust's data protection policy.

13.2 Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection requests access to them.

13.3 All meetings will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

14 Serial, Persistent or Vexatious Complaints

14.1 A Complainant that repeats the same or very similar complaint may be viewed as serial, persistent, or vexatious. The Marlow Education Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. As such, the Trust will not normally limit the contact Complainants have with the school and the Trust. Equally, the Trust does not expect members of staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect members of staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

14.2 A complaint would be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

14.2.1 refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint;

14.2.2 refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;

14.2.3 refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;

14.2.4 insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;

14.2.5 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

14.2.6 makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;

14.2.7 changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;

14.2.8 repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);

14.2.9 refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the Trust's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education;

14.2.10 seeks an unrealistic outcome and demands redress that lack any serious purpose or value;

14.2.11 makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

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

14.3.1 maliciously

14.3.2 aggressively

14.3.3 using threats, intimidation or violence

14.3.4 using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language

14.3.5 knowing it to be false

14.3.6 using falsified information

14.3.7 publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

14.4 The characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint are:

14.4.1 complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious

14.4.2 insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason

14.4.3 insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner

14.4.4 complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance

14.4.5 demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value

14.5 Complainants should limit the number of communications with a school while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (by either letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

14.6 Whenever possible, the CEO or Chair of Trustees will raise any concerns with the Complainant informally before applying an ‘unreasonable’ marking. Any decision to stop responding to the Complainant will never be taken lightly. The decision will only be taken by the CEO or Chair of Trustees following a review that:

14.6.1 the Trust and/or school have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns

14.6.2 the complainant has been given a clear statement of your position and their options

14.6.3 the complainant contacts you repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

The Trust and/or school will not stop responding just because the Complaint is difficult to deal with or asks complex questions.

14.7 If the behaviour continues, the CEO or Chair of Trustees will write to the Complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it.

14.8 For Complainants who excessively contact the School or the Trust causing a significant level of disruption, the Trust may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

14.9 In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from a specific site or sites.

15 Complaint campaigns

15.1 For the purposes of this policy, a complaint campaign means a large volume of complaints from separate individuals or a focus group (whether or not connected with the school or the Trust) which all relate to the same subject.

15.2 Depending on the subject of the complaints and the specific circumstances, the school and/or the Trust may deviate from the procedures set out in this policy and instead:

15.2.1 send a template response to all complainants, and/or

15.2.2 publish a single response on the school and/or the Trust website (as applicable).

15.3 It shall be a matter for the CEO and the Chair of Trustees to determine if there is a complaint campaign and whether a school and/or the Trust will apply section 15.2.

16 Amendments to this policy

16.1 The CEO, the Company Secretary and/or any officer of the Trust nominated by the CEO is authorised to amend this policy to reflect changes in personnel or procedure or changes in legislation or Department for Education guidance.

16.2 Any such amendments must be reported to the next meeting of the Trust Board (or whichever Committee has oversight of and authority to approve this policy).

Appendix 1 – Complaint Panel Hearing Agenda (Exemplar – the chair of the panel will decide the specific agenda).

- After introductions, the complainant will be invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses (if any).

- The Headteacher/Chair of Governors / Investigating Officer may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.

- The Headteacher/Chair of Governors will then be invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses (if any).

- The complainant may question both the Headteacher/Chair of Governors and the witnesses after each has spoken.

- The panel may ask questions at any point.

- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.

- The Headteacher/Chair of Governors is then invited to sum up the school's actions and respond to the complaint.

- The Chair of the panel explains that both parties will hear from the panel within five school days.

- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.

- The Clerk remains to support the panel.

Appendix 2 - Contact Details

Marlow Education Trust
Postal address: % West Street, Marlow, Bucks, SL7 2BR.
Chief Executive Officer: kford@marlowet.org
Chair of Trustees: scooper@marlowet.org
Clerk: clerktrustees@marlowet.org

Sir William Borlases Grammar School
Postal address: West Street, Marlow, Bucks, SL7 2BR.
Headteacher: egoodall@swbgs.com
Chair of Governors: hmiall@swbgs.com
Clerk: bucksgovpro@outlook.com

Beechview Academy
Postal address: Guinions Road, High Wycombe, SL7 1JE.
Headteacher: lparry@beechview.org.uk
Chair of Governors: cmartin@beechview.org
Clerk: bucksgovpro@outlook.com

Great Marlow School
Postal address: Bobmore Lane, Marlow, SL7 1JE
Headteacher: gpendlebury@gms.bucks.sch.uk
Chair of Governors: mbilsborough@gms.bucks.sch.uk
Clerk: clerkgov@gms.bucks.sch.uk

Spinfield School
Postal address: 12 Terrington Hill, Marlow, SL7 2RF
Headteacher: head@spinfieldschool.co.uk
Chair of Governors: chairofgovernors@spinfieldschool.co.uk
Clerk: mark.tippins.clerking@outlook.com

Burford School and Nursery
Postal address: Marlow Bottom Road, Marlow Bottom, Marlow, SL7 3PQ
Headteacher: tmarshall@burfordschool.co.uk
Chair of Governors: shillyer@burfordschool.co.uk
Clerk: mark.tippins.clerking@outlook.com

Marlow Infant Church of England School
Postal address: Sandygate Road, Marlow SL7 3AZ
Headteacher: headteacher@marlowinfant.uk
Chair of Governors: rmcfarlane@marlowinfant.uk
Clerk: loweclerkingservices@gmail.com