



**“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit”
(John 15:5)**

The Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust Complaints Procedure

2020-2021



Reviewed and agreed by Mike Simmonds, Chair of Governors - May 2019

The Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust	
Approved by:	The Vine Schools Trust
Signature:	
Date:	May 2019

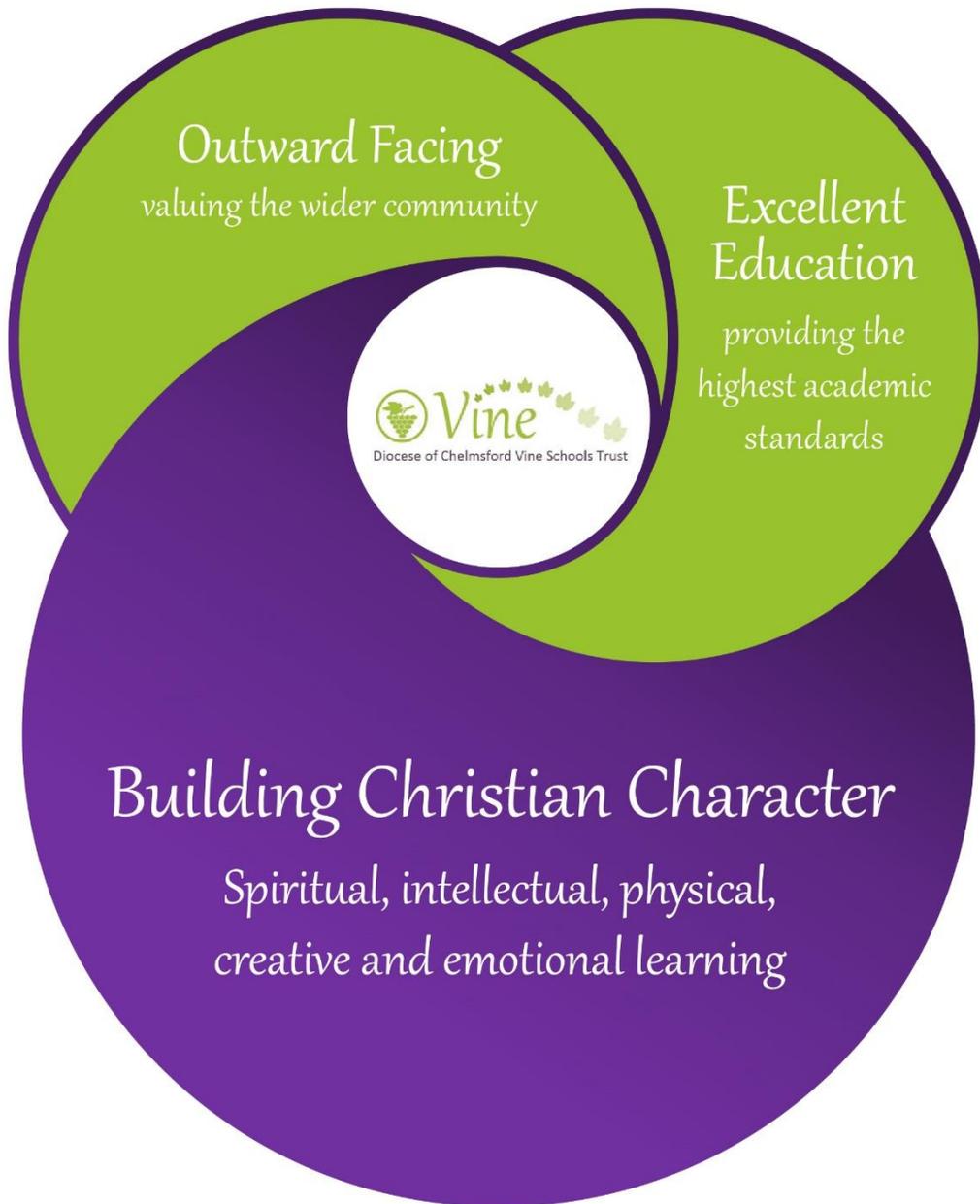
Bulphan Church of England Academy	
Approved by:	Local Governing Body/Local Board
Signed (Chair of Local Governing Body/Local Board)	
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May 2019 Changes/Amendments

- This policy has had substantial amendments and as such should be considered as a new policy.

Our Vision and Values



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 We encourage feedback or opinions from pupils, parents and the public. In practice, this dialogue is continuous. It may not always be possible to act immediately but pupils, the academy and the multi-academy trust always benefit so please don't hold back.
- 1.2 This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the academy. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that 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.
- 1.3 We encourage all parents and pupils to approach any member of staff in the first instance if they have a concern or complaint.
- 1.3 In the event that these initial approaches fail to resolve a complaint, this policy lays out the procedures that should be followed to allay any concerns about a particular issue.
- 1.4 If you do not understand any part of this policy please do not hesitate to contact the Headteacher or the Vine Academy Support Officer responsible for complaints (please contact the academy office in confidence to obtain contact details). Your complaint will then be investigated fully, ensuring all relevant facts are taken into consideration.

2. Difference between a Concern and a Complaint

- 2.1 A concern is defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.
- 2.2 A complaint is defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.
- 2.3 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. We take concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.
- 2.4 If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the headteacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the headteacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.
- 2.5 We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, we will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

3. How to Raise a Concern or Make a Complaint

- 3.1 A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.
- 3.2 Concerns should normally be raised in the first instance with the class teacher and then the

phase leader or headteacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

- 3.3 Complainants should not approach individual local governors or Vine directors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stages 2 and 3 of this procedure.
- 3.4 Complaints against academy staff (except the headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- 3.5 Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Local Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- 3.6 Complaints about the Chair of Local Governors, any individual governor or the whole local governing body should be addressed to (the Clerk to the Local Governing Body) via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- 3.7 Complaints against central academy staff (except the CEO) should be made in the first instance, to the CEO via the central office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- 3.8 Complaints that involve or are about the CEO should be addressed to the Chair of Trust Board, via the central office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- 3.9 Complaints about the Chair of the Trust Board, any individual director or the whole board of directors should be addressed to (the Clerk to the Trust Board) via the central office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- 3.10 For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.
- 3.11 In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

4. Anonymous Complaints

- 4.1 We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the headteacher, Chair of Governors, CEO or Chair of the Trust Board if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

5. Time Scales

- 5.1 You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will only consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

6. Complaints Received During Closed Periods

- 6.1 We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first academy day after the holiday period.

7. Scope of this Complaints Procedure

- 7.1 This procedure covers all complaints other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions to the academy during the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about admissions during the coordinated admissions round, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with the local authority. • For admission appeals please see the admissions policy.

<p>coordinate admissions round</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding. Details are in the Child Protection Policy.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whistleblowing 	<p>Please follow the procedure as set out in the whistleblowing policy. http://www.vineschoolstrust.co.uk/uploads/files/S007_Whistleblowing_Policy_(May_2018)_v2.pdf</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the grievance policy.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under our internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use academy premises or facilities 	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.</p>

7.2 If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, Ofsted 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.

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

8. Resolving Complaints

- 8.1 At each stage in the procedure, our policy will be to work towards resolving the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:
- 8.1.1 an explanation
 - 8.1.2 an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
 - 8.1.3 an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
 - 8.1.4 an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
 - 8.1.5 an undertaking to review academy policies in light of the complaint
 - 8.1.6 an apology.

9. Withdrawal of a Complaint

- 9.1 If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

10. Formal Complaint Stages – Stage 1

- 10.1 Formal complaints must be made to the headteacher (unless they are about the headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by telephone.
- 10.2 The headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within three academy days.
- 10.3 Within this response, the headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.
- 10.4 The headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the academy's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.
- 10.5 During the investigation, the headteacher (or investigator) will:
- 10.5.1 If necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
 - 10.5.2 Keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.
- 10.6 The headteacher will provide a formal written response within ten academy days of the conclusion of their investigation.
- 10.7 If the headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.
- 10.8 The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions that will be taken to resolve the complaint.
- 10.9 The headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.
- 10.10 If the complaint is about the headteacher a suitably skilled local governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1. If the complaint is about a member of the local governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled local governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1. If the complaint is about a member the Vine central team

the CEO will complete all the actions at Stage 1. If the complaint is about the CEO a suitably skilled director will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1. If the complaint is about a Vine director (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled director will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

10.11 Complaints about the headteacher, member of the local governing body, Vine central team or director must be made to the appropriate Clerk, via the academy office or central office.

10.12 If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair (of local governors or directors) or
- the entire local governing body / Vine Trust Board or
- the majority of the local governing body / Vine Trust Board

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Vine Trust Board. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

11. Formal Complaint Stages – Stage 2

11.1 If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the local governing body’s complaints committee, which will be formed of three, impartial, local governors, at least one of whom will be independent.

11.2 A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the appropriate Clerk, via the academy or central office, within **ten academy days** of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

11.3 The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within **three academy days**.

11.4 Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

11.5 The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within **twenty academy days** of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

11.6 If the complainant rejects the offer of two proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant’s absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

11.7 The complaints committee will consist of at least three local governors/directors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. At least one of the local governors must be independent. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee.

11.8 The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant’s needs.

11.9 If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

11.10 For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

11.11 Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

- 11.12 At least **ten academy days** before the meeting, the Clerk will:
- 11.12.1 Confirm the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
 - 11.12.2 Request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee.
- 11.13 Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least **five academy days** before the date of the meeting. The committee will not accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.
- 11.14 The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.
- 11.15 The meeting 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.
- 11.16 The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:
- 11.16.1 Uphold the complaint in whole or in part
 - 11.16.2 Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- 11.17 If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:
- 11.17.1 Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
 - 11.17.2 Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.
- 11.18 The Chair of the Committee will provide all parties with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within **ten academy days**.
- 11.19 The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education Funding Agency if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled.
- 11.20 If the complaint is:
- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair (of local governors or directors) or
 - the entire local governing body / Vine Trust Board or
 - the majority of the local governing body / Vine Trust Board
 - a member of the Vine central team

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent directors.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions that will be taken to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

12. Next Steps

- 10.1 If a complaint comes to the Education Schools Funding Agency (ESFA) they will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the academy. The ESFA will consider complaints about academies that fall into any of the following three areas:
- 10.1.1 Where there is undue delay or the academy did not comply with its own complaints procedure when considering a complaint.
 - 10.1.2 Where the academy is in breach of its funding agreement with the Secretary of State.
 - 10.1.3 Where an academy has failed to comply with any other legal obligation
- 10.2 The ESFA will not overturn an academy's decision about a complaint. However, they find an academy did not deal with a complaint properly they will request the complaint is looked at again and procedures meet the requirements set out in the Regulations.
- 10.3 ESFA complains can be submitted by following the link

https://form.education.gov.uk/fform.php?self=1&form_id=cCCNJ1xSfBE&type=form&ShowMsg=1&form_name=Contact+the+Department+for+Education&noRegister=false&ret=%2Fmodule%2Fservices&noLoginPrompt=1

Appendix A – Complaints Form

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the academy about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

<p>Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.</p>
<p>Signature:</p>
<p>Date:</p>
<p>Official use</p>
<p>Date acknowledgement sent:</p>
<p>By who:</p>
<p>Complaint referred to:</p>
<p>Date:</p>

Appendix B – Roles and Responsibilities

B1. Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the academy in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

B2. Investigator

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

- interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
- consideration of records and other relevant information
- analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems. The headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

B3. Complaints Coordinator (this could be the headteacher, designated complaints local governor or other member of staff providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, Chair of Local Governors, Clerk and VTB (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

B4. Clerk

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

B5. Committee Chair

The committee's chair should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy

- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.
- both the complainant and the academy are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the academy has one).

B6. Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so
- No local governor/director 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 academy and the complainant

B7. We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting
- Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting
- Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.
- The committee should 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 committee 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 committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

Appendix C – Managing Serial or Unreasonable Complaints

- C1. The Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust (and all of its academies) is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our academy. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.
- C2. The Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:
- C2.1 refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
 - C2.2 refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
 - C2.3 refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
 - C2.4 insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
 - C2.5 introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
 - C2.6 raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
 - C2.7 makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
 - C2.8 changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
 - C2.9 repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
 - C2.10 refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the academy's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Education Schools Funding Agency
 - C2.11 seeks an unrealistic outcome
 - C2.12 makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
 - C2.13 uses threats to intimidate
 - C2.14 uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
 - C2.15 knowingly provides falsified information
 - C2.16 publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.
- C3. Complainants should try to limit their communication with the academy that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.
- C4. Whenever possible, the headteacher or Chair of Local Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.
- C5. If the behaviour continues, the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the academy causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.
- C6. In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the academy site and academy activities.