

Parental Communication and Complaints Policy

Policy Code:	SW9
Policy Start Date:	September 2017
Policy Review Date:	September 2020

Please read this policy in conjunction with the documents listed below:

- Priory Contract
- Complaints to Ofsted about schools:
 - https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/387342/Complaints_to_Ofsted_about_schools.pdf
- Education Funding Agency's Complaints procedure:
 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure>

1 Policy Statement

Parents/Carers have a vital contribution to make to their child's progress and happiness. Each Academy acknowledges that it is complementary to the home in its mission to educate and that parents/carers are the first and most important educators of their children.

Wherever referred to, Academy or Trust throughout this policy includes The Robert De Cheney Boarding House at The Priory Academy LSST, the Keyworth Centre at The Priory City of Lincoln Academy, the Early Years Setting at The Priory Witham Academy and the French Centre.

2 Aim

- 2.1 Each Academy aims to be a welcoming, caring community that is committed to fostering good relations with students, parents, each other and the wider community. This commits each Academy to provide good systems of communication. Communication should be a two-way process which can be accessed quickly and effectively.
- 2.2 Good discipline and harmonious relationships are best achieved when students, parents/carers and teachers conform to the same standards. In our efforts to foster high standards, we are committed to keeping parents, students, each other and the wider community well informed.

3 Roles, Responsibilities and Implementation

- 3.1 Education & Standards Committee has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy and for ensuring compliance with the relevant statutory framework. This committee delegates day-to-day responsibility for operating the policy and ensuring its maintenance and review to the Head of Human Resources.
- 3.2 Leaders and managers have a specific responsibility to ensure the fair application of this policy and all employees are responsible for supporting colleagues and ensuring its success.

4 Standard Communication

- 4.1 Open and Induction evenings, parent teacher evenings, academic performance reports, letters of information, newsletters and a series of *proformas* are among the many channels of communication and information. Each Academy operates an 'open door' policy. It welcomes parental involvement at every level of Academy life. It is open to parents/carers at all reasonable times to discuss the progress of their child or to contribute to or ask about Academy developments. Where good, clear systems of communication exist between parents/carers and teachers, parents/carers are able to raise their questions and concerns and resolve them as part of the parent-teacher relationship.

4.2 In support of this close partnership, parents/carers are invited to enter into a Student/Teacher/Parent Contract. This agreement sets out the Academy's aims and values, as well as the responsibilities of the Academy and parents/carers, and our expectations of students. Through our programme of meetings between parents/carers and teachers, as well as through informal contact, we provide opportunities for parents/carers to raise matters of concern – about the curriculum or more general issues. If a concern is not resolved through discussion with a teacher or other member of staff, the parent/carer or the teacher can refer it to the Head of the Academy.

5 Implementation of Informal Communication

5.1 Parents/carers can communicate with the Academy by telephone, letter or a request for an appointment. In the case of a request for an appointment, the parent/carer will be referred, in the first instance, to an appropriate member of pastoral or senior staff, who will make the necessary arrangements.

6 Responding to Parents

6.1 In all cases of communication from parents, an appropriate member of staff should respond as soon as possible, even if such a response instigates a 'neutral' situation where further detail is being sought to answer the parent/carer's request in full at a later point.

6.1.1 Responding to telephone calls from parents/carers:

- **Telephone calls:** All calls from parents/carers are received through the main switchboard by the receptionist who connects callers to the appropriate extension.
- **Urgent calls:** If the teacher asked for is not available, the call will be put through to the most appropriate or available member of staff.
- **Non-urgent calls:** If the teacher asked for is not available, the receptionist will normally take details of the parent/carer's name, telephone number and reason for calling. This information will be given to the member of staff concerned who will respond at the earliest opportunity.
- **Messages for students:** In emergencies or at other times when it is unavoidable, reception staff will help parents/carers by taking messages for students. Normally, this will be done by making a written note and a staff member delivering the message. Parents are asked, therefore, not to abuse this system.
- **Telephone calls made at arranged times:** If members of staff have arranged with parents for them to receive calls at particular times of the Academy day,

those staff will try to ensure that the receptionist knows where they will be and they will try to make themselves available at those times.

6.1.2 Responding to letters and e-mails from parents/carers

- (i) The Academy will always try to acknowledge letters and e-mails received from parents on the same or the next Academy day.
- (ii) If more time is required to provide a fuller response or to arrange a meeting, staff will try to include in the acknowledgement details of when these will take place.
- (iii) Staff will aim to respond to the most pressing concerns of parents/carers as quickly as possible. It is our intention to try to respond to any letter or e-mail as soon as we can.

7 Implementation of The Complaints Procedure

7.1 The Trust hopes that the adoption of a clear complaints procedure will help to ensure that most complaints are resolved quickly and smoothly and as close to the source of the misunderstanding or problem as possible. In this way, complainants can feel assured from the outset of a fair hearing, in line with a defined procedure for dealing with issues that have not immediately been resolved. The Trust also hopes that a staged framework might prevent an early and unnecessary escalation of the problem. In addition, the Trust will ensure that lessons learned from the investigation of complaints will prove useful to improve the academies' policy and practice.

7.2 Should parents/carers consider that their concerns have not been resolved, they may pursue the issue by means of a written letter of complaint addressed to the Headteacher of the individual Academy. This is designed to provide a fair, equitable and consistent arrangement for the investigation of any complaint.

7.3 If the complaint made concerns the Headteacher, the complaint should be addressed to the Head of Human Resources.

8 Publicising the Complaints Procedure

8.1 The complaints procedure is summarised in the flow chart in appendix 1 within this Policy. A copy can also be accessed through the Academy Admin Office.

9 The Policy's Guiding Principles

9.1 The guiding principles behind our Complaints Procedure include:

- Simplicity - simple, well publicised stages;

Access	- complainants knowing exactly where, how and to whom they should complain;
Speed and Clarity	- complaints being dealt with promptly, effectively and professionally within stated time limits and at as early a stage as possible;
Action	- action being agreed and reviewed, with complainants kept informed of progress throughout each stage of the procedure;
Objectivity	- beyond the first informal stage of investigation of a complaint against an individual, the subject of the complaint will not deal with it but will instead refer it to their manager where appropriate;
Development	- opportunities for the Academy to consider changes to current practice on the basis of what complainants have said.

9.2 Those involved in the complaints process will ensure that it takes place in the context of the requirements of Child Protection, Special Educational Needs and other relevant procedures.

10 General Procedure for Handling Complaints

10.1 This section provides a definition of a complaint and clarifies the types of complaints which are dealt with under this procedure.

10.2 The definition of a complaint is as follows:

"....an expression of dissatisfaction made either orally or in writing and formally received by the Academy about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Academy or staff affecting an individual or group".

10.3 The general complaints procedure will be used to consider any complaints about the Academy, except those which relate to the following areas which have their own procedure:

- (i) Admissions;
- (ii) Exclusion of students;
- (iii) Special Education Provision;
- (iv) Academy Re-organisation Proposals;

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- (v) Curriculum and Religious Worship;
 - (vi) Complaints covered by the Children Act 1989;
 - (vii) Complaints which are the subject of Legal Proceedings or have been previously dealt with;
 - (viii) Complaints being considered by the Secretary of State for Education under any statutory power;
 - (ix) Complaints about the allocation of resources according to agreed criteria, such as awards and benefits.

10.4 In considering a complaint, if it appears that staff conduct should be investigated, then it may be appropriate for disciplinary or capability procedures to be used. It will be the decision of the Head of Academy to invoke such a procedure, following referral from the member of staff leading the complaints enquiry. It should be added that invocation of a disciplinary or capability procedure does not diminish the responsibility to ensure that this complaints procedure is followed 'in tandem' with the disciplinary or capability procedure. There may be circumstances in which the progress of a complaint through the complaints procedure may be suspended pending a disciplinary or capability enquiry. This must be a necessary and reasonable delay and in accordance with the requirements of the disciplinary or capability procedures. In such cases of delay, complainants must be informed immediately and in writing of the length of and reason for the delay.

10.5 All complaints will be treated as confidential. Only those members of staff concerned with investigating the complaint will have access to the file. No confidential information regarding the investigation will be made available publicly. However, it should be noted that if any action taken by a member of staff is the subject of a complaint, then that person should be advised of the complaint made against them.

10.6 A complaint may be raised by a member of the general public or a client/customer or member of staff of the Academy regarding a service directly provided by the Academy. Anyone aged 16 or over may use this procedure or may act on behalf of a complainant who is below this age.

10.7 All complaints are to be recorded in accordance with the academies' monitoring procedure and acknowledged without delay.

10.8 Complaints regarding child safety should be referred to the LADO representative from Lincolnshire County Council on 01522 554 674.

11 General Complaints Procedure - Complaints about Staff Conduct

- 11.1 It is for the Head of Academy to decide whether to invoke a procedure. On receipt of a complaint about staff conduct and as the appropriate authority, the Head of Academy will decide whether the complaint should be dealt with according to the Disciplinary Procedure, or according to this Complaints Procedure. The Head of Academy will notify the complainant in writing of any decision to deal with a complaint according to the Disciplinary Procedure. At the same time, the Head of Academy will inform the Director of Student Welfare and Head of Human Resources of the issues that have led to this decision; the Chief Executive will be apprised of the issues as appropriate.
- 11.2 If the Head of Academy decides that using this Complaints Procedure is appropriate, but considers that there is any possibility that the matters could at some future point lead to disciplinary proceedings, the Head of Academy will advise the staff member who is the subject of the complaint of that possibility. The Academy should allow that staff member to bring a Trade Union representative or colleague to any meeting about the complaint (including any Academy Complaints Committee meeting).
- 11.3 Nothing in this Complaints Procedure precludes an Academy's Complaints Committee deciding to refer the complaint back to the Head of Academy to deal with under the Disciplinary Procedure.
- 11.4 If the Head of Academy decides that a complaint about staff conduct should be dealt with according to the Disciplinary Procedure, the Head of Academy will ensure that any outstanding general Academy management issues which may arise from that complaint are dealt with under the Complaints Procedure.

12 Receiving a Complaint

- 12.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved immediately informally, then it may be necessary to apply Stages 2 and 3 of this procedure.
- 12.2 The Head of Academy will be made aware of any complaint that cannot be immediately resolved. Any oral complaint will be summarised in writing by the member of staff who receives it and will include the name and address of the complainant.

13 Dealing with the Complaint

- 13.1 Complaints received by the Academy will be dealt with in the first instance informally by the Head of Academy or their representative (Stage 1); if the complaint is not resolved then it will be dealt with formally (Stage 2); and then referred to the Academy Complaints Committee (Stage 3) if the complainant remains dissatisfied.

14 Complaints dealt with informally by the Head of Academy or their Representative (Stage 1)

- 14.1 In order to best deal with any complaints, they should be raised within three months of the issue to which they relate. The Trust will still consider complaints made out of this timeframe, but a resolution may be more difficult to achieve.
- 14.2 The Head of Academy or appropriate person will attempt to deal with any complaint as quickly as possible. The Trust will acknowledge a complaint either in writing or orally within 48 hours and will respond to a complaint within five working days. If it is not possible to meet these deadlines, then the complainant will be informed when they will receive a response.
- 14.3 Depending on the nature of the complaint, the Head of Academy may arrange a meeting with the complainant.
- 14.4 If a complainant remains unsatisfied with the resolution offered, or the Trust consider that a more in-depth investigation is required, the Trust will move on to stage two of this procedure.

15 Complaints dealt with formally by the Head of Academy or their Representative (Stage 2)

- 15.1 The written complaint or written summary of the complaint will be promptly referred to the Head of Academy or appropriate person.
- 15.2 The Head of Academy, or appropriate person, will decide whether to delegate the investigation of the complaint to another member of staff or whether to undertake the investigation themselves.
- 15.3 In exceptional circumstances, such as an incident which could have resulted or has resulted in personal injury, the Head of Academy must be informed immediately and may consider referring the matter for investigation direct to representatives of the Academy's Complaints Committee (Stage 3). In cases of a serious complaint against the Head of Academy, it may be appropriate for the Chair of the Academy Committee to seek further guidance from the Director of Student Welfare and Head of Human Resources.
- 15.4 Another body may be commissioned by the Academy to offer assistance to find a resolution to the complaint where required. This could include the provision of a mediation service, including facilitating meetings between the complainant and members of staff. An officer from the LA team may also be available to investigate a complaint and produce a report to the Head of Academy and/or Academy Complaints Committee, should this be requested by the Academy.

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- 15.5 The person investigating the complaint will ensure that a written acknowledgement is provided to the complainant within five working days of stage 2 commencing. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the Academy's Complaints Procedure and will give a target date for providing a response to the complainant, which should normally be within 10 working days. If this target cannot be met, a letter will be sent within 10 working days explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised target date.
- 15.6 The person investigating the complaint will seek to speak or meet with all appropriate people in order to establish all facts relating to the complaint. This includes the complainant, staff and any other person.
- 15.7 Once all the relevant facts have been established, the person investigating the complaint will produce a written response to the complaint, or may wish to meet the complainant to discuss/resolve the matter directly.
- 15.8 A written response will contain an outline of the complaint and a summary of the response to the complaint, including the decision reached and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, this will also include what action the Academy will take to resolve the complaint. This letter or report must be endorsed by the Head of Academy, and a copy shown to the Director of Student Welfare and Head of Human Resources. It will also inform the complainant that, if they are not satisfied by the results of Stage 2, then the complainant can request to move to Stage 3 of this procedure. Should this be the case, the complainant must send a written request stating this to the Head of Academy, within 25 working days of receiving the response.
- 15.9 If no further communication is received from the complainant within 25 working days, it will be assumed that the complaint has been satisfactorily resolved.

16 Complaints Referred to the Academy's Complaints Committee (Stage 3)

- 16.1 Upon receipt of a written request from the complainant for the complaint to proceed to Stage 3, the procedures outlined below must be followed.
- 16.2 The Clerk to the Academy Committee will write to the complainant to acknowledge receipt of the written request for the complaint to be heard by representatives of the Academy Complaints Committee (ACC). The acknowledgement must be sent within five working days and should also inform the complainant that the complaint is to be heard by the ACC within 20 working days of receiving the complaint. The letter should also explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further documents relevant to the complaint. These must be received within five working days of the date of the hearing to allow adequate time for the documents to be circulated.
- 16.3 The Clerk to the Academy Committee will request that the Chair convenes an ACC, which is elected from members of the Academy Committee. The panel must consist of at least three people. As required by The Education

(Independent School Standards) Regulations 2010, the ACC must include at least one member who is independent of the management and running of the school (eg a parent or local business person). It may be necessary for the Academy Committee to appoint reserves to this panel to ensure that members are available to carry out their functions within the set timescales.

- 16.4 The ACC should include the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Academy Governing Committee. It is not appropriate for the Head of Academy to have a place on this panel. The composition of the ACC should, as far as possible, be sensitive to issues of race, gender and religious affiliation. No member of the panel should have had any prior involvement in the complaint.
- 16.5 The Chair/Vice-Chair will ensure that the complaint is heard by the panel within 20 working days of receiving the letter. All relevant correspondence regarding the complaint will be distributed to each panel member as soon as the composition of the panel is confirmed.
- 16.6 The Chair/Vice-Chair will write and inform the complainant, Head of Academy, any relevant witnesses and members of the ACC, at least five working days in advance, of the date, time and place of the meeting. The notification to the complainant will also inform them of the right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend. The letter will also explain how the meeting will be conducted and the complainant's right to submit further written evidence to the panel.
- 16.7 The Chair/Vice-Chair of the Academy Committee will invite the Head of Academy to speak to the panel and/or prepare a written report for the ACC in response to the complaint. If the Head of Academy prepares a written report, a copy of this report will be sent to the complainant at least five working days before the date of the meeting. The Head of Academy may also invite members of staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant, to respond in writing or in person to the complaint. Any relevant documents relating to the complaint should be received at least five working days prior to the hearing.
- 16.8 The involvement of staff, from establishments other than the Academy, is subject to the discretion of the Chair of the ACC.
- 16.9 It is the responsibility of the Chair of the ACC to ensure that the meeting is properly minuted.
- 16.10 Should a complaint be raised against the complaints committee, the matter will be referred to a Trustee appointed by the Chair of The Trust.

17 Hearing the Complaint at the Meeting

- 17.1 The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the Academy and the complainant.

17.2 The panel should remember that many parents are not used to dealing with groups of people in formal situations and may feel inhibited when speaking to the panel. It is therefore recommended that the Chair of the Panel ensures that the proceedings are as informal as possible.

17.3 In the interests of natural justice, the introduction of previously undisclosed evidence or witnesses would be a reason to adjourn the meeting so that the other side has time to consider and respond to the new evidence.

17.4 The procedure recommended for the meeting is as follows:

- (i) The Chair of the Panel will welcome the complainant, introduce the panel members and explain the procedure.
- (ii) The Chair of the Panel will invite the complainant, or person accompanying the complainant, to explain the complaint.
- (iii) The ACC may question the complainant about the complaint and the reasons why it has been made.
- (iv) The Head of Academy will be invited by the Chair of the Panel to question the complainant about the complaint and why it has been made.
- (v) The Chair of the Panel will invite the Head of Academy to make a statement in response to the complaint. At the discretion of the Chair of the Panel, the Head of Academy may invite members of staff directly involved in the complaint to supplement their response.
- (vi) The ACC may question the Head of Academy and/or members of staff about the response to the complaint.
- (vii) The Chair of the Panel will invite the complainant to question the Head of Academy and/or members of staff about the response to the complaint.
- (viii) Any party has the right to call witnesses, subject to the approval of the ACC.
- (ix) The ACC, the Head of Academy and the complainant have the right to question any such witnesses.
- (x) The Head of Academy will be invited by the Chair of the Panel to make a final statement.
- (xi) The complainant will be invited by the Chair of the Panel to make a final statement.
- (xii) The Chair of the Panel will explain to the complainant and the Head of Academy that the decision of the Panel will now be considered and a written

decision will be sent to both parties within 15 working days. The Chair of the Panel will then ask all parties to leave, except for members of the ACC.

- (xiii) The ACC will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and:
- a) Reach a decision on the complaint and the reasons for it;
 - b) Decide upon the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
 - c) Where appropriate, suggest recommended changes to the Academy's systems or procedures to ensure complaints of a similar nature are not repeated.

17.5 The minutes of the meeting will be recorded and kept on file.

17.6 A written statement outlining the decision of the ACC must be sent to the complainant and Head of Academy. The statement sent to the complainant must explain that the decision of the ACC is final, unless they wish to appeal to the Chief Executive through the Trust.

17.7 The Academy must ensure a copy of all correspondence and notes are kept on file in the Academy's records.

18 Ofsted

18.1 Ofsted will not consider a complaint unless the parent has first followed the Academy's and Education Funding Agency's (EFA) complaints procedures. The EFA is responsible for funding and monitoring academies, university technical colleges, studio schools and free schooling.

Ofsted cannot consider an individual pupil issue. Its powers relate only to 'whole-school' issues.

Ofsted is also not able to consider a complaint when there are other statutory (legal) ways of pursuing it. This includes complaints relating to:

- admission procedures
- legal exclusions of individual pupils
- providing education for individual pupils with special educational needs
- religious education or the religious character of a school, or
- temporary changes to the curriculum.

It is also not in a position to:

- investigate incidents that are alleged to have taken place
- judge how well a school investigated or responded to a complaint
- mediate between a parent or carer and a school to resolve a dispute.

Ofsted can consider cases where:

- the school is not providing a good enough education
- the pupils are not achieving as much as they should, or their different needs are not being met

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- the school is not well led and managed, or is inappropriately managing finances
 - as a group, the pupils' personal development and well-being are being neglected.

18.2 Ofsted can be contacted through its website at www.ofsted.gov.uk/contact-us.

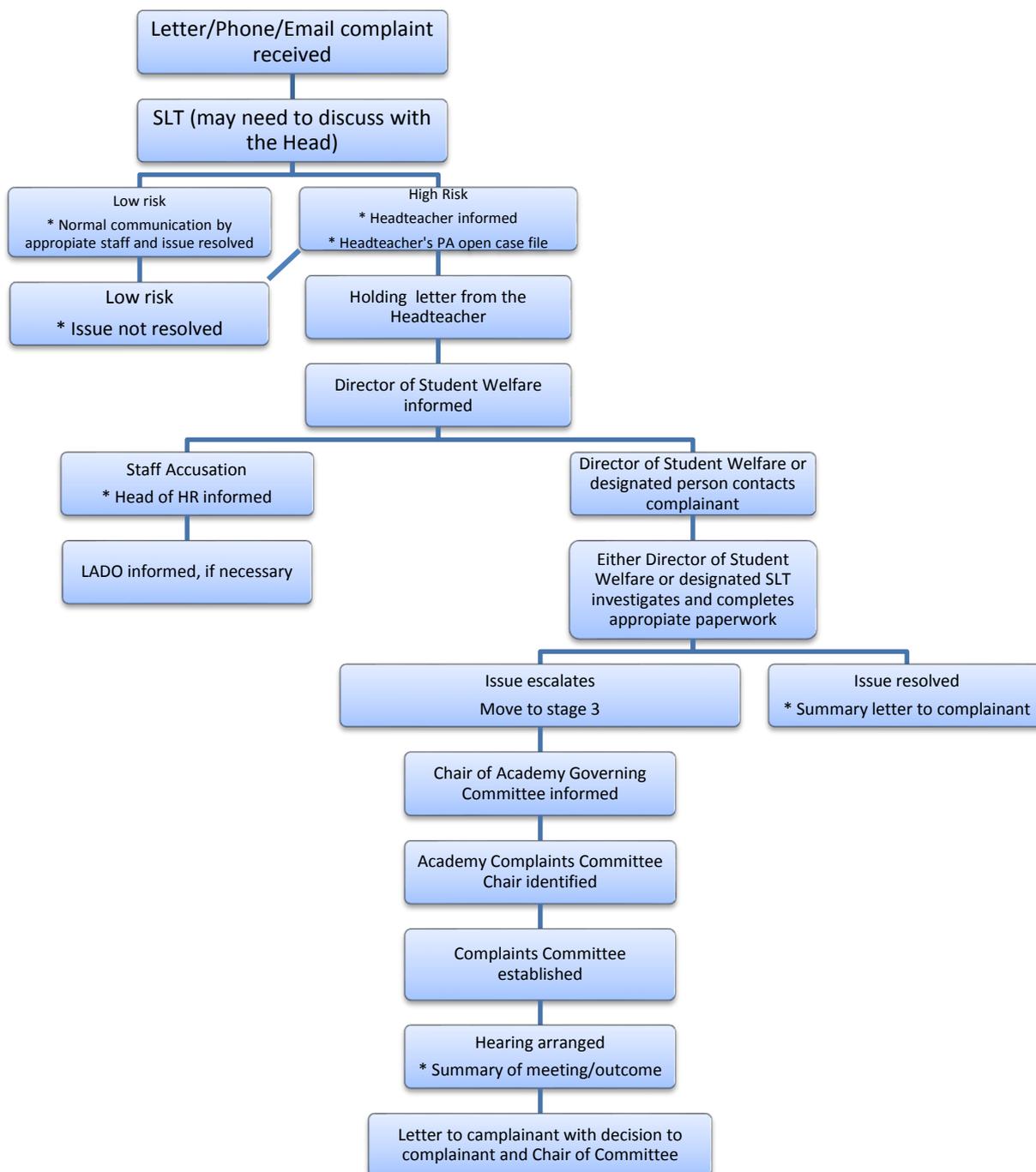
18.3 Ofsted's address for written communications is:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Tel: 0300 123 1231

19 Policy Changes

This policy may only be amended or withdrawn by The Priory Federation of Academies Trust.

Appendix 1 – Complaints Procedure Flow Chart





The Priory Federation of Academies Trust Parental Communication and Complaints Policy

This Policy has been approved by The Priory Federation of Academies Trust's
Education and Standards Committee:

Signed..... Name..... Date.....

Trustee

Signed..... Name..... Date.....

Chief Executive Officer

Signed..... Name..... Date.....

Designated Member of Staff

Please note that a signed copy of this agreement is available via Human Resources.

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