ZENITH MULTI ACADEMY TRUST

Castledon School
Unlocking Potential

Castledon School
(Wickford & Canvey Provisions)

Complaints Policy and Procedure

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Introduction

Before using this procedure, we encourage parents to read the 'Parent guide to school complaints' published by Parentkind, the Department for Education, Ofsted and the Improving Education Together board, which provides helpful guidance on how to provide feedback, resolve concerns and raise complaints. A copy of this guide is available at https://www.parentkind.org.uk/assets/parents-resources/Parent-Guide-to-School-Complaints.pdf

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Castledon (Wickford) or Castledon (Canvey) 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.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

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*'.

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. Castledon (Wickford) or Castledon (Canvey) takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey) will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey) 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.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Castledon (Wickford) or Castledon (Canvey) will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

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.

Complaints against school staff (except the head teacher) should be made in the first instance, to Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey) via the school office**.** Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher (Wickford) should be addressed to Mr D Peircey, Chair of Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential. Complaints that involve or are about the Head of School (Canvey) should be addressed to the Headteacher (Wickford), via the school office.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to Mrs S Waring, Clerk,(the Governance Professional to the Governing Body) via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a trustee of the Trust, should be addressed to Mr S Taylor, Chair of Trustees, via the trust office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure at Appendix 1. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask a third-party organisation for example like the Citizens Advice to help you.

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.

Please do not approach individual Governors, Trustees, or Members directly to raise concerns or complaints. They cannot act on their own and getting them involved too early may stop them from helping you at later stages.

Anonymous Complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey) or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Persistent complaints

There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the complaint procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. It is important for schools to recognise when they really have done everything they can in response to a complaint. It is not a good use of schools' time and resources to reply to repeated letters, emails or telephone calls making substantially the same points. If a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors can inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any), *and*
- The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive. The school will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- They have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, and/or
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, and/or
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff.

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint. This policy should therefore be reviewed in conjunction with our Parental Conduct Policy.

Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The school will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the school acts reasonably.

Complaint campaigns

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint campaign is defined as a complaint from three or more separate individuals (whether or not connected with the school/Trust) which are all based on the same subject.

Depending on the subject in question, we may deviate from the procedure set out in this policy and instead:

- send a template response to all complainants; and/or
- publish a single response on the relevant website (as applicable).

Time scales

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 consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

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

Scope of this complaints procedure

We ask that you keep your complaint and any supporting documents concise and proportionate to the issues raised. Complaints and supporting documentation that are excessively lengthy, repetitive or contain substantial amounts of irrelevant material may delay our ability to investigate and respond to your concerns. As a guide, we would not normally expect a letter or email to exceed two sides of A4 (approximately 1,000 words). If we think the amount of material you have sent is more than is needed, we may ask you to identify the key issues and relevant documents you wish us to consider and pause the timescales in this procedure until we have this. Please note that concerns or complaints that are pursued in a manner that we consider to be unreasonable may be dealt with under "persistent/complaint campaigns" section of this procedure.

If you choose to use artificial intelligence (AI) tools (such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini or similar) to help you draft or structure your concern or complaint, please read the guidance set out in Appendix 1 of this procedure before doing so. AI tools can be helpful in organising your thoughts and presenting your concern or complaint clearly, but they must be used carefully. You are responsible for the accuracy and content of anything you submit to us, regardless of whether AI was used to help prepare it.

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Castledon (Wickford) or Castledon (Canvey), other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Telephone: 0345 603 7627 or here.
• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. **complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.* Behaviour policy
• Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. 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.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Castledon (Wickford) or Castledon (Canvey) wants to resolve 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:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- 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
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a complaint

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

Stage One – Informal Complaints

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, year head / subject head or Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey). Complainants should not approach individual governors 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 Stage 3 of the procedure.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide an informal written response within 5 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Stage Two – formal Complaints

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey) (unless they are about the Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey), via the school office. This may be done in person or in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form, Appendix 1).

The Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey) will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 2 school days.

Within this response, the Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey) will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey) can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey) *may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.*

During the investigation, the Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey) (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to

be accompanied if they wish

- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey) will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey) is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

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 Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey) will take to resolve the complaint.

In some cases, we may invite you to a meeting (in-person or online) or arrange a telephone discussion with you to discuss your complaint and our findings. We encourage you to attend this meeting/discussion so we can explain why we have reached our decision and answer questions you may have. We will aim to hold this meeting within 10 school days of providing you with our written response.

The Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey) will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

Complaints about the Headteacher (Wickford) must be made to the Chair of Governors, via the school office.

Complaints about the Head of School (Canvey), must be made to the Headteacher (Wickford), via the school office, who will complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about a member of the governing body should be made to the Trust's Governance Professional via zmat@zmat.co.uk, who will arrange for this to be investigated, usually by a local Governor or a Trustee.

Complaints about the Chair of the Governing Body or the entire governing body, or the actions of a governing body, should be made to the Trust's Governance Professional, via zmat@zmat.co.uk, who will arrange for this to be investigated, usually by a Trustee.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a panel hearing consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

The complaints committee cannot reinvestigate your complaint at the hearing. The purpose of the hearing is to give you the opportunity to explain why you are not happy with our decision about your formal complaint, and to ensure due process was followed at stages 1 and 2. The committee will decide if they agree with your reasons and can make recommendations about how this can be put right. For this reason, the complaints committee will not consider new complaints or evidence that is not related to your original complaint. If you have other concerns or complaints, we encourage you to raise these as informal concerns first and, if you are not happy with the outcome of this, to raise these as new formal complaints.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Headteacher (Wickford)'s PA, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response. If the complaint is regarding the Headteacher (Wickford) or Head of School (Canvey), the request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Chair of Governors, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The Headteacher (Wickford)'s PA will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 2 school days.

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

The Headteacher (Wickford)'s PA will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Headteacher (Wickford)'s will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Headteacher (Wickford)'s PA 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.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

a Stage 3 will be heard by the trustees and an independent panel member, and should be made to the Trust's Governance Professional.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting 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.

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

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

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Headteacher (Wickford)'s PA will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of 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
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 7 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 4 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

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.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally 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.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Hearing Panel will provide the complainant and Castledon (Wickford) or Castledon (Canvey) with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education (DfE) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Castledon (Wickford) or Castledon (Canvey).

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 Castledon (Wickford) or Castledon (Canvey) will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

A Stage 3 Panel Hearing represents the final stage in the Trust's Complaints Policy. Once a complaint has been heard by a Stage 3 Panel Hearing the decision of that Panel will represent the completion of all the stages of the Trust's complaints procedures.

Complaints escalated to / about the Trust, CEO or Trustee

If a complaint is escalated to Zenith Multi Academy Trust ("the Trust"), as outlined previously, or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the Trust, then the complaint should be sent to the CEO to be investigated. This would include a complaint about a member of the central team.

The CEO will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 2 school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

Following the investigation, the CEO will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 15 school days of the date that the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the CEO will write to the Complainant within 11 school days of the date that the letter was received**,** explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

In some cases, we may invite you to a meeting (in-person or online) or arrange a telephone discussion with you to discuss your complaint and our findings. We encourage you to attend this meeting/discussion so we can explain why we have reached our decision and answer questions you may have. We will aim to hold this meeting within 10 school days of providing you with our written response.

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a Trustee, the complaint should be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board. If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation.

NB. Where the Chair of the Trust Board has investigated the complaint, they will write the letter of outcome to the Complainant and provide a copy to the CEO.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Governance Professional to the Trust Board asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel, within 5 school days.

The complaints committee cannot reinvestigate your complaint at the hearing. The purpose of the hearing is to give you the opportunity to explain why you are not happy with our decision about your formal complaint, and to ensure due process was followed at stages 1 and 2. The committee will decide if they agree with your reasons and can make recommendations about how this can be put right. For this reason, the complaints committee will not consider new complaints or evidence that is not related to your original complaint. If you have other concerns or complaints, we encourage you to raise these as informal concerns first and, if you are not happy with the outcome of this, to raise these as new formal complaints.

The Trust's Governance Professional will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 2 school days.

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

The Trust's Governance Professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Trust's Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Trust's Governance Professional 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.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or

- the entire trust board or
- the majority of the trust board

a Stage 3 will be heard by a completely independent committee panel.

The Complaint Panel will consist of three members. None of the three members of the Complaint Panel will have been involved in the incidents or events which led to the complaint, or have been involved in dealing with the complaint in the previous stages, of have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint.

One of the Complaint Panel members will be independent of the management and running of the Academy Trust. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will not be a Trustee or an employee of the Trust.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting 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.

For instance, if a trust employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally 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.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Governance Professional will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of 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
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 7 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 4 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

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.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally 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.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Hearing Panel will provide the complainant and Zenith Multi Academy Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education (DfE) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Zenith Multi Academy Trust.

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 Zenith Multi Academy Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

A Stage 3 Panel Hearing represents the final stage in the Trust's Complaints Policy. Once a complaint has been heard by a Stage 3 Panel Hearing the decision of that Panel will represent the completion of all the stages of the Trust's complaints procedures.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school / trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the DfE after they have completed Stage 3.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by a school. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE online, via this link. If the complainant has difficulty accessing this link they can contact the DfE's Customer Help Portal by emailing: programme.improvement@education.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Guidance on using AI tools to raise concerns or complaints

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools (such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini, and similar large language model applications) can help you organise your thoughts, structure your concern or complaint clearly, and express yourself effectively. However, these tools have significant limitations and must be used with care. This Appendix provides practical guidance on how to use AI tools effectively when raising a concern or complaint under this procedure, and what to avoid.

If you are unsure about how to use AI tools when raising a concern or complaint, or if you would like help preparing your concern or complaint, please contact the School Office and we will arrange for a member of staff to assist you.

How AI tools can help you

AI tools can be useful for:

1. Organising your thoughts and structuring your concern or complaint in a clear and logical way;
(a) Helping you express what happened in plain, clear language if you find writing difficult;
(b) Summarising a timeline of events based on information you provide;
(c) Suggesting what outcome you might want to ask for; and
(d) Checking your draft for clarity, tone and spelling before you submit it.

Important limitations and risks

You should be aware of the following limitations and risks when using AI tools:

(a) AI tools do not know what happened – they can only work with the information you give them, and they may fill gaps with invented details that sound convincing but are untrue (this is sometimes called 'hallucination');
(b) AI tools may generate references to laws, regulations, policies or legal rights that do not exist, are out of date, or do not apply to your situation;
(c) AI tools may produce language that is overly formal, legalistic or aggressive, which may not reflect your genuine concern and may make it harder for us to resolve the matter constructively;
(d) any personal data (including names, dates of birth, or other identifying information about your child, other children, staff or other individuals) that you enter into an AI tool may be stored, processed or used by the AI provider in ways that are outside your control and may breach data protection law; and
(e) AI-generated complaints that do not accurately reflect your experience and may cause delays in resolving your concern, as we may need to spend time clarifying what actually happened.

What to do and what to avoid

Do	Don't
Write down the key facts yourself first (what happened, when, who was involved, and what you would like us to do) before using an AI tool.	Copy and paste AI-generated text without reading and checking it thoroughly.
Use AI to help you structure and clarify what you have already written, rather than to generate the complaint from scratch.	Submit a complaint that contains facts, events or details that you have not personally verified as accurate.
Read everything the AI produces carefully, and remove or correct anything that is inaccurate, exaggerated, or that you did not experience.	Rely on any legal advice, references to legislation or statements about your rights generated by an AI tool without checking them independently.
Use your own words where possible – your complaint should sound like you.	Enter the names or personal data of your child, other children, staff members or any other individuals into an AI tool.
Remove all personal data (names, dates of birth and other identifying information about individuals) before entering any information into an AI tool – you can use placeholders such as 'my child', 'the class teacher' or 'Teacher A' instead.	Use AI to generate multiple or repetitive complaints about the same issue.

Example prompts for using AI tools effectively

The following example prompts illustrate how AI tools can be used effectively to help you prepare a concern or complaint.

In each case, you should replace the descriptions in square brackets with your own details, taking care not to include any personal data or names.

Example 1 Organising your thoughts:
"I want to raise a concern with my child's school about [describe the issue in general terms, e.g. 'how a bullying incident was handled']. The key things that happened are: [list the main events in the order they happened, using descriptions such as 'my child', 'the class teacher' etc. instead of names]. Can you help me organise these into a clear, chronological summary that I can use when speaking to the school?"

Example 2 – Structuring a written complaint:
"I need to write a formal complaint to my child's school. The issue is [describe the issue]. I have already tried to resolve this informally by [describe what you did]. The key facts are [list the facts].

The outcome I am looking for is [describe what you want to happen]. Can you help me structure this into a clear letter, using plain language and a respectful tone? Do not add any facts or details that I have not provided."

Example 3 – Checking tone and clarity:
"I have drafted the following complaint to my child's school: [paste your draft, with names removed]. Can you suggest how I could make this clearer and more constructive in tone, without changing the facts or adding anything new?"

Example 4 – Identifying what outcome to request:
"I am raising a complaint with my child's school about [describe the issue]. I am not sure what outcome to ask for. Based on the facts I have described, can you suggest some realistic outcomes I could request? Please do not suggest legal remedies or refer to specific laws."

Appendix 2

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to S Waring, Governance Professional, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Student's/Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the student/pupil (if relevant):
Address: **Postcode:** **Day time telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:** **Email address:**
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature: **Date:**
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Action taken:
Date: