



Policy: Serial and unreasonable complaints

Policy reference no: 038

Date: September 2025

Person responsible for policy: Stephen Dean, Chief Executive Officer

Authorised by: Board of Trustees

Review date: December 2027

This Policy applies to all schools within the Primary QuEST Multi-Academy Trust. Primary QuEST is a Church of England Trust which seeks to ensure all pupils flourish, together in a supportive and caring environment.

Flourishing Together Through LIFE

The Primary QuEST complaints policy provides a mechanism for concerns and complaints which are made in good faith to be raised, investigated and resolved as well as providing a framework for lessons to be learnt and improvements to be made. The process of handling complaints is intentionally both formal and thorough, and this can be both time-intensive and stressful for staff to manage. It is important in this context to ensure that our staff are not subjected to behaviour which is abusive, continual, offensive or threatening, and that the handling of complaints does not impact negatively on the day-to-day running of the school or the overall wellbeing of the pupils and/or staff.

In exceptional cases where complaints are considered to be serial or unreasonable, Primary QuEST reserves the right to disapply the regular complaints policy. Such cases may be characterised by:

- Actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitive.
- Prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail, dojo messages or telephone contact about a concern or complaint.
- An insistence upon pursuing unsubstantial or unfounded complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes.
- An insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner.
- An insistence on only dealing with the head teacher and/or the CEO of the Primary QuEST trust on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the school to deal with such matters.
- An insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but cannot be changed, for example, if the desired outcome is beyond the remit of the school.
- Actions which appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff.
- Actions which are likely to cause on-going distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or to have a significant adverse effect on the wider school community and/or are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health.
- The likelihood that they will take up an unreasonable and disproportionate amount of staff time.

The school's role in cases of Serial or Unreasonable Complaints

In the first instance, the school will communicate either in writing or verbally (confirmed with a letter) to inform the complainant that his/her behaviour is becoming unreasonable/unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this policy.

If the behaviour is not modified, the school will take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:

- Inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable/unacceptable.
- Inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties;
- Inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the school should be by letter only;
- In the case of physical, or verbal aggression or other forms of intimidating behaviour, take appropriate advice and consider warning the complainant about being banned from the school site; or proceed straight to a temporary ban;
- Consider taking appropriate advice on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation;
- Inform the complainant that the regular complaints policy will be disappplied and their complaints will be treated as serial or unreasonable.

In the event of extreme situations or events, the school may take the decision to implement one or more of the above steps immediately. In this situation the complainant will be informed in writing.

Disapplying the Complaints Policy

A decision to disapply the complaints policy for serial and unreasonable Complaints will be taken by the CEO of Primary QuEST following discussions with the Chair / Vice Chair of the Trust Board. In addition to some or all of the measures listed above, while the complaints policy is disappplied the following alternative measures will apply:

- All complaints from the complainant will initially be received and dealt with by a single named contact person (e.g. a senior member of staff or a Local Advisor or Trustee) who will normally be nominated by the Chief Executive of Primary QuEST. This person will consider whether or not any such concern / complaint is reasonable or vexatious and then advise the headteacher as appropriate.
- Legitimate new complaints may still be dealt with under the standard complaints policy even if the person making them is, or has been, subject to this Policy for Dealing with Serial and Unreasonable Complaints.
- In the case of ongoing serial or unreasonable complaints, the named contact person will consider and investigate the complaint and take a view as to whether it warrants further attention, taking into account the specific circumstances of the complaint alongside the wider interests of the whole school community. If it warrants further attention he/she will liaise as necessary with the CEO of Primary QuEST to agree on the next steps.
- Where the complaints policy has been temporarily disappplied the school will be under no obligation to respond to ongoing serial or unreasonable complaints. They will however be retained on file.
- The School will review as appropriate, and at a minimum once in a school year, any sanctions applied in the context of this policy.
- If a complainant's persistent complaining or harassing behaviour is modified and is then resumed at a later date within a reasonable period of time, the school may resume the process identified above at an appropriate level.

Biblical underpinning for Church of England Schools

Jesus pushed back at those who complained he healed a woman on the Sabbath. They said "There are six days for work. So come and heal on those days, not on the Sabbath". Jesus said to the complainers, "You hypocrites..." for they would give their donkey a drink, that is, "work" on a Sabbath. (Luke 13. 10-15).

In a similar way we may at times 'push back' with this PQ policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints.