Maiden Erlegh Trust

SCHOOL COMPLAINTS POLICY

MAIDEN ERLEGH TRUST

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This Complaints policy sets out how Maiden Erlegh Trust and its schools will deal with concerns and complaints.

Each school is an academy and is therefore governed by the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014 (as amended) ("the Regulations"). This Complaints policy has been formulated to comply with Schedule 1, Part 7 of the Regulations (as well as equality legislation and the rules of natural justice). In the case of any variance between the procedure outlined in this Complaints Policy and the Regulations, the procedure outlined in the Regulations and the Best Practice Guidance for Academies Complaints Procedures (16 July 2020) will apply. As this policy is based on Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, it only applies to complaints from parents of students/pupils at Maiden Erlegh Trust schools. We will refer to "Understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility" (3 September 2018) where there are questions of parental responsibility.

This policy has been prepared to meet the responsibilities set out under the Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage; the Education and Skills Act 2008; the Childcare Act 2006 as well as the General Data Protection Regulations and Data Protection Act 2018.

1. Principles

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.

If a person has difficulty discussing a concern or complaint with a particular member of staff, they will be referred to another staff member. Similarly, if a member of staff feels unable to deal with a concern, the concern will be referred to another staff member.

If any person, including members of the public, wishes to raise their concerns more formally or make a complaint to the Trust or one of its schools about any provision of facilities or services that they provide, there will be an attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this Complaints policy; except that, for matters subject to a separate statutory policy as listed in section 2 of this policy, the stated policy will be followed.

The Trust will handle complaints from people who are not parents of children at its schools respectfully and expediently, and as far as is appropriate in line with this Complaints policy; except that for such complaints the Trust reserves the right to amend the policy and omit a hearing before a panel with an independent member.

In accordance with equality law, the Trust will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable Complainants to access and complete this

Complaints policy. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting Complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Maiden Erlegh Trust and its schools will always deal with complaints in a courteous and reasonable manner and follow their agreed policies. We ask that those with concerns and complaints present them in a similarly reasonable manner.

At each stage of this policy, the Trust/school will seek to resolve the complaint. If a Complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, they should notify the Trust/school in writing.

2. Exceptions to the Complaints Policy

Certain matters are dealt with under separate policies and not through the Complaints policy (information on these policies can be found on the School and Trust website or by contacting the school or the Trust):

- Complaints about child protection matters are handled under the Trust's Child Protection and Safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.

- Complaints about the administration of the appeals process for admissions to schools within the Trust are dealt with through the Admissions Appeals process.

- Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with local authorities.

- Representations against a student/pupil's suspension or exclusion from school are dealt with under the Trust's Behaviour and Exclusions policy and the relevant statutory guidance.

- Complaints from Trust staff will be dealt with under the Trust's Staff Grievance policy.

- Complaints about the conduct of Trust staff will be considered under the Trust's Staff Disciplinary policy. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint but will be notified that the matter is being addressed and allowed to progress their complaint through the Complaint policy.

- The Trust's Whistleblowing Policy applies to all employees of Maiden Erlegh Trust, agency workers, SAB (School Advisory Board) members and Trustees, volunteers, contractors and others working on Trust premises. This provides the means to raise a concern around conduct, risk, malpractice and behaviour deemed inappropriate. Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with the relevant local authority.

Students/pupils of any school within the Trust, who have concerns or complaints should in the first instance take them up through their teacher, head of year or phase leader, rather than through the Complaints policy.

Complaints about third-party users of school premises or facilities should be taken up with the third party directly, and not through the Complaints policy.

3. Raising a concern or making a complaint

If a person has a concern about Maiden Erlegh Trust or one of its schools, they should in the first instance contact the Trust/school by telephone, email or letter, via the member of staff they have been dealing with to discuss the matter with an appropriate member of staff, and it will be dealt with under this Complaints policy.

A concern may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a Complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

When a concern has not been resolved by informal means, the Complainant can submit the matters raised as a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this policy.

Complaints about school staff should be made in the first instance, marked Private and Confidential, to the Headteacher. If the complaint is directly about actions and/or decisions of the Headteacher this should be made in the first instance, marked Private and Confidential, to the Lead Governance Professional by email to governors@maidenerleghtrust.org.

If a person has a concern or complaint about Maiden Erlegh Trust as a whole, an executive officer of the Trust, a School Advisory Board (SAB) member or SAB of any school in the Trust, or a Trustee of the Trust, it should be taken up via the member of staff they have been dealing with, or via Lead Governance Professional at trustees@maidenerleghtrust.org and it will be dealt with under this Complaints policy.

Anonymous complaints will not be investigated.

Complaints made outside of school term will be considered to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If a SAB member, Trustee or member of staff of the Trust is contacted directly by a Complainant in relation to a complaint about a school in the Trust, then they should refer the matter to the Headteacher of the school to be dealt with under this Complaints Policy.

If a SAB member, Trustee or member of school staff is contacted directly by a Complainant in relation to a complaint about the Trust as a whole, then they should refer the matter to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to be dealt with under this Complaints policy.

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual concerns and 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 and will be retained in line with the Data Protection Policy and Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

A written record will be kept of all complaints and whether they are resolved following a formal policy or proceed to a panel hearing and the action taken by the Trust/school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

4. The Stages of the Complaints Policy

The Complaints policy has three stages that must be followed consecutively:

- Stage 1 Informal resolution.
- Stage 2 Formal complaint.
- Stage 3 Complaints panel.

Once a complaint has been addressed under Stage 1, the Complainant may escalate it to Stage 2 if they are not satisfied, or the Headteacher may refer the matter to Stage 2 so that it can be dealt with more effectively. Once a complaint has been addressed under Stage 2, the Complainant may escalate it to Stage 3 if they are not satisfied.

If a complaint is received at Stage 2 or Stage 3, the Complaint Lead may suggest to the Complainant that it is referred back to the previous stage if it has not been carried out or if further consideration at that stage could be a more effective way of seeking resolution.

A complaint at school level may, where appropriate and at any stage, be referred to the Trust to be dealt with under the Complaints policy by the CEO and a complaint made to the Trust may, where appropriate and at any stage, be referred back to the relevant school, to be dealt with under the Complaints policy by the Headteacher, if that would be a more effective way of dealing with it.

At any meeting with school staff, SAB members or any panel, the Complainant may be accompanied by a friend and/or interpreter; and the Headteacher or any other school staff may be accompanied by a fellow employee or professional representative.

The school will need written consent from the Complainant before they can disclose any information about their complaint to a third party.

Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to any meeting.

The meetings will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted unless a Complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before recording of meetings or conversations takes place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

There may be occasions where it may be reasonable to deviate from this policy, including not doing something the policy states will, should or may be done, or meeting

stated timeframes; any deviations from the policy must be agreed by the CEO and properly documented.

4.1 Stage 1: Informal resolution

In the first instance, if a person has a concern or complaint, they should contact the school by telephone, email or letter, via the member of staff they have been dealing with.

Most concerns should be resolved at this informal stage.

A Complainant may find it helpful to write down the main substance of their complaint before contacting the school.

An appropriate member of school staff will seek to find a resolution through discussion and meetings with the Complainant, informally.

The Headteacher may arrange for a member of staff from outside the school, or a volunteer or SAB member to meet with the Complainant, where they believe that an independent perspective may help to resolve the matter.

At the conclusion of Stage 1 the person who has sought to resolve the complaint, or the Headteacher or their nominee, will provide an informal response to the Complainant in writing or by email.

If it does not prove possible to reach a resolution, the Complainant may put their complaint formally in writing using the complaint form (annex 1) to the Headteacher, or the Headteacher may refer the matter to Stage 2 so that it can be dealt with more effectively.

Maiden Erlegh Trust has not set strict time limits on Stage 1 as the aim is to seek a resolution informally, and the time that will take will depend on the nature and complexity of the issues involved. The school will ensure that the concern or complaint raised is dealt with promptly.

4.2 Stage 2: Formal complaint

If the complaint has not been resolved informally, the Complainant may put their complaint formally in writing, using the complaint form (annex 1) addressed for the attention of the Headteacher and sent to the School Office email address.

A complaint will not normally be considered if it is lodged formally in writing more than three months after the incident being complained about took place. Additional time can be given in exceptional circumstances.

If the Complainant has sufficient reason to request a reasonable adjustment, an alternative method of lodging the complaint and corresponding will be made available.

In all cases, the Complainant must outline how they would like the complaint resolved.

We ask that you keep your complaint and any supporting documents short and focused on the issues that matter. If what you send us is too long, repeats the same points or includes information that is not relevant, it may take us longer to look into and respond to your concerns. As a guide, we would not expect a letter or email to be longer than one side of A4 (about 500 words). If you send us more than we need, we may ask you to tell us which issues and documents are most important and put the timescales in this procedure on hold until you do. If we think a concern or complaint is being pursued in a way that is unreasonable, we may deal with it under Part 7 of this procedure

On receipt of a formal complaint the Headteacher may, if they think it may yet resolve the matter:

- refer the matter back to an appropriate member of staff for further consideration and to seek a resolution informally under Stage 1; or

- meet with the Complainant themselves, to seek to resolve the matter informally under Stage 1. Otherwise, the Headteacher will address the complaint as a formal complaint under Stage 2.

The Headteacher will arrange for the complaint to be investigated. The investigation will seek to address all the points at issue and enable the Headteacher to give an effective response and propose appropriate redress. The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to an appropriate member of school staff, but not the decision or the formal response.

The Headteacher may arrange for a member of staff from outside the school, or a volunteer or SAB member, to meet with the Complainant where they believe that an independent perspective may help to resolve the matter.

The Headteacher will endeavour to give a written response to the Complainant within 15 school days of receipt of the formal complaint.

However, the thorough investigation of a complaint may involve a number of members of staff and progress will depend on their availability; timescales are likely to be extended during school holidays.

If the matters that are the subject of the complaint are also subject to other proceedings within the school (as set out in section 2 of this Policy) or external proceedings (e.g., DfE, local authority or Police), those proceedings may take precedence over this Complaints policy and may require the timeframes in this policy to be extended.

Complainants will be advised of the reason for any delay beyond 15 school days.

After the investigation and having sought a resolution, the Headteacher will write to the Complainant setting out their response to the complaint and advising the Complainant of their right to take the matter to a Complaints Panel under Stage 3.

4.3 Stage 3: Complaints Panel

If the Complainant is not satisfied with the outcome to their formal complaint or the way that it has been handled under Stage 2, they may take the matter to a Complaints Panel appointed by the Trust Board, by writing to the Lead Governance Professional at trustees@maidenerleghtrust.org, within 20 school days of the written response from the Headteacher, enclosing a copy of the original formal written complaint, and indicating which matters remain unresolved and/or why they are not satisfied with how the complaint has been handled. No new complaints may be included.

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

If Stage 2 has not been carried out, the matter may be referred the matter back to Stage 2 for further investigation and attempts to seek resolution.

The Lead Governance Professional will establish a Complaints Panel made up of at least three people who do not have any conflict of interest and have not been involved with the matters that are the subject of the complaint, at least one of whom is independent from the direct management and running of the school. In the event a Headteacher from outside of the Trust is unavailable to fulfil the independent role, a member of the direct Senior Leadership or SAB member (School Advisory Board member) from another school within the Trust, with no prior knowledge or involvement in the complaint can be called upon.

Details of the complaint will be sent to the Headteacher, who will provide their response for consideration by the Complaints Panel to the Lead Governance Professional. The school will be represented at the Complaint Panel Hearing by the person who dealt with the complaint under Stage 2, which will usually be the Headteacher or senior leader. This person will be referred to as the "School's Representative" for the purposes of Stage 3. The school's representative may also choose to be accompanied by the complaint investigating officer.

The Lead Governance Professional will arrange a meeting of the Complaints Panel at a convenient time for all parties, within 20 school days of receipt of the Complainant's letter.

The Complainant will be informed in writing of the Complaint Panel hearing time, date and location and advised that they may, if they wish, have a colleague, friend or relative of their choice to accompany and assist them. This person (i) may be a friend, colleague or relative of the Complainant, (ii) must be over the age of 18 and not a pupil of the school, (iii) must undertake to accept the confidentiality of the Complaint Panel and (iv) shall not have the right to address the Complaint Panel unless expressly invited to do so by the Complaint Panel.

Legal representation will not ordinarily be appropriate for either the Complainant or the school and requires the approval of the Complaint Panel Chair in advance of the Hearing. If such approval is given, approval shall be subject to such conditions and directions as may be imposed by the Complaint Panel Chair.

If the Complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates without good reason, the Lead Governance Professional will decide when to hold the Complaints Panel meeting. The Complaints Panel will then proceed in the Complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

Details of the complaint will be sent to the Headteacher, who will provide their response for consideration by the Complaints Panel to the Lead Governance Professional. The school will be represented at the Complaint Panel Hearing by the person who dealt with the complaint under Stage 2, which will usually be the Headteacher. This person will be referred to as the "School's Representative" for the purposes of Stage 3.

Any documents from either the Complainant or the Headteacher and/or their nominee to be considered by the Panel and the names of any witnesses who may be called should be received by the Lead Governance Professional at least 5 school days before the meeting.

Electronic recordings are not accepted as evidence. However, transcripts of recordings may be accepted if independently notarised and with the written consent of all recorded parties. Recordings obtained covertly or without informed consent of all parties being recorded will not be accepted under any circumstances.

The agenda for the meeting and copies of all papers submitted will be sent to members of the Panel, the Complainant and the Headteacher and/or their nominee at least 5 school days before the meeting. The Headteacher and/or their nominee will copy relevant papers to any school staff named in the complaint.

The Complaints Panel will choose one of their number to chair the meeting.

The Complaints Panel will consider the complaint on the basis of the papers they receive and what is said at the meeting. The Panel should seek reconciliation on and ways to put right things that may have gone wrong.

In the event of either party not attending the meeting, the Chair of the Panel has the discretion to proceed or to adjourn the meeting.

Procedure at the Complaint Panel Hearing

The Complaint Panel Hearing will be conducted as follows:

- The Clerk to the Complaint Panel will greet the Complainant, the Complainant's supporter and the school's Representative and welcome them into the room where the Complaint Panel has convened (any witnesses will remain outside of the room until they are called in to give their account);

- The Complainant will be invited by the Complaint Panel to give an account of their complaint;
- The school's Representative will be invited to ask the Complainant questions, if any;
- The Complaint Panel will ask the Complainant questions, if any;
- At the discretion of the Chair of the Complaint Panel, the Complainant's first witness will be invited into the room to give an account of what they saw or know;
- The school's Representative will be invited to ask the Complainant's witness questions, if any;
- The Complaint Panel will ask the Complainant's witness questions, if any;
- The Complainant's witness will be asked to leave the room;
- If the Complainant has any further relevant witnesses, at the discretion of the Chair of the Complaint Panel, they will be invited into the room individually to provide their accounts and be questioned as outlined above;
- The school's Representative will be invited by the Complaint Panel to respond to the complaint and make representations on behalf of the school;
- The Complainant will be invited to ask the school's Representative questions, if any;
- The Complaint Panel will ask the school's Representative questions, if any;
- At the discretion of the Chair of the Complaint Panel, the school's relevant first witness will be invited into the room to give an account or what they saw or know;
- The Complainant will be invited to ask the school's witness questions, if any;
- The Complaint Panel will ask the school's witness questions, if any;
- The school's witness will be asked to leave the room;
- If the school has any further relevant witnesses, at the discretion of the Chair of the Complaint Panel, they will be invited into the room individually to provide their accounts and be questioned, as outlined above;
- The Complainant will be invited by the Complaint Panel to summarise their complaint;
- The school's Representative will be invited by the Complaint Panel to summarise their response to the complaint and the school's stance;
- The Complaint Panel Hearing will conclude and the Complainant and the school's Representative will be asked to leave.

Once the Complaints Panel has heard from both parties, both parties will withdraw so that the Panel can make its decision. The Panel may:

- Uphold the complaint in full;
- Uphold the complaint in part; or

- Dismiss the complaint.

Or they may give a more complex response.

The Complaints Panel may make findings and recommendations and may refer issues of principle or general practice to the Headteacher, CEO and Trust Board. It is not within the powers of the complaints panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions.

The Complainant, any staff complained about, the Headteacher and/or School Representative and Chair of the School Advisory (Governing) Board will be advised in writing or by electronic mail of the outcome of the meeting, including relevant findings and recommendations, within 10 school days of the meeting.

The Complainant will be advised of their right to make a complaint to the Department for Education – see section 6 of this policy.

5. Variations to the Policy

The complaint should be sent to the Lead Governance Professional at trustees@maidenerleghtrust.org in the event of a concern/complaint relating to an individual/group listed below:

Stage 1, 2 and 3 relating to:	**Complaint to be marked for the attention of:**
Headteacher *A complaint may be presented as being 'about the Headteacher', but if it is a complaint about the policies of the school and/or Trust and their implementation, rather than the personal conduct of the Headteacher, the Director of Education may refer it back to the relevant school to seek a resolution under the Complaints policy.*	**Director of Education** *Refer to section 4 - 'Headteacher' will be read as 'Director of Education'; the Director of Education will arrange for its investigation and will write the formal response.*
Trust Senior Leadership Group *(excluding CEO*)	**CEO** *Refer to section 4 - 'Headteacher' will be read as 'CEO'; the CEO will arrange for its investigation and will write the formal response.*
CEO or CEO has been directly involved in matters	**Chair of the Trust Board** *Refer to section 4 - 'Headteacher' will be read as 'Chair of the Trust Board'.*
SAB member or School Advisory Board	**CEO** *The CEO will arrange for the complaint to be investigated and will write the response.*

Trustee *(other than the Chair)*	**Chair of the Trust Board** *Refer to section 4 - 'Headteacher' will be read as 'Chair of the Trust Board'.*
Chair of the Trust Board or the majority of Trustees	**Members** *The Members will nominate one of their number or may appoint an independent person to consider the complaint and write the response; that person may appoint an impartial external investigator.* *At Stage 3 the complaint will be heard by a completely independent panel.*
Members	**For external investigation** *The Lead Governance Professional will appoint an independent person from outside of the Trust to consider the complaint and write a response.* *At Stage 3 the complaint will be heard by a completely independent panel.*

6. Complaints to the Department for Education

If a complaint has been considered in accordance with the three stages of this policy, but the Complainant is still not satisfied, then the Complainant can make a complaint to the Department for Education).

The DfE will normally only consider a complaint after this Complaints policy has been exhausted.

The DfE cannot review or overturn decisions about complaints made by the school or the Trust; they can only investigate whether the school and/or Trust has considered the complaint appropriately and may request the Trust to re-consider the complaint or to review its policy.

If a Complainant wishes to refer their complaint to the DfE, they should write to:
Ministerial and Public Communication Division
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Or use the online enquiry form on the DfE website.

7. Complaint campaigns and serial, persistent and vexatious complaints

If Maiden Erlegh Trust or one of its schools receives a complaint that is on the same subject as a complaint that has already been investigated and responded to in accordance with this Policy, the Headteacher and/or CEO/Director of Education may use relevant aspects of that investigation and response in responding to the new complaint, rather than repeating them.

If Maiden Erlegh Trust or one of its schools receives a large number of complaints all based on the same subject, the school and/or Trust may send a common response to all Complainants and/or publish a single response on the school and/or Trust website.

If Maiden Erlegh Trust or one of its schools receives a number of similar complaints from persons unconnected with the school and/or Trust, the school and/or Trust may send a common response to all Complainants and/or publish a single response on the school and/or Trust website.

If a Complainant tries to re-open the same issues that have been addressed through all stages of the Complaints policy, the Headteacher and/or CEO/Director of Education will inform the Complainant that the policy has been completed and that the matter is now closed.

If a Complainant continues to raise the same issues that have been addressed through all stages of the Complaints policy, the Headteacher and/or CEO/Director of Education may deem the complaint to be 'serial' or 'persistent'; in which case the Headteacher and/or CEO/Director of Education will inform the Complainant that the complaint has been addressed in accordance with the Complaints policy and correspondence in the matter is now closed.

Complainants are responsible for the accuracy and content of anything that is submitted in the complaint regardless of whether AI was used to help prepare it. A complaint will be considered unreasonable if it uses artificial intelligence (AI) tools to draft complaints or to cite laws, regulations or guidance, where the AI-generated content is inaccurate, misleading or makes the complaint more complex than necessary.

If a complaint is deemed persistent or serial, that does not prevent the Complainant contacting Maiden Erlegh Trust or one of its schools about other matters or raising other complaints.

If an individual:

- seeks to pursue a complaint in a manner which is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious, excessive, unreasonable, abusive or offensive, or is designed to cause disruption or annoyance;
- insists upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or outcomes that are unrealistic;
- demands redress that lacks any serious purpose or value or is beyond the remit of the school and/or Trust; or

- behaves in a way that causes a significant level of disruption, regardless of whether or not they have raised a complaint; then the Headteacher and/or CEO may deem it to be a vexatious complaint.

If a Complainant pursues a vexatious complaint, the Headteacher and/or CEO may:

- restrict the individual to a single named member of school and/or Trust staff or single point of contact via a school and/or Trust email address;
- limit the number of times the individual can make contact with the school and/or Trust, and/or the number of times the school and/or Trust will respond, such as a fixed number of times per term;
- prohibit the individual from communicating with specific school and/or Trust staff or groups of staff;
- place other appropriate and reasonable restrictions on the individual in the interests of the safe and efficient operation of the school and/or Trust.

If an individual persists to the point that may constitute harassment of members of staff of Maiden Erlegh Trust or one of its schools, the Headteacher and/or CEO may bar the individual from school and/or Trust premises and the school and/or Trust may seek legal remedy to safeguard its staff and students/pupils.

8. Reporting and monitoring

The Headteacher/CEO/Director of Education and/or their nominee will:

- record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome.
- record whether the case progressed to a panel hearing.
- record the action taken by the school or the trust, regardless of outcome.
- determine who is responsible for these records and make sure the data is kept secure and in accordance with the Data Protection policy.

The findings and recommendations of the Panel at Stage 3 will be copied to relevant senior managers in the school and Trust, and to the relevant Local Advisory Board and/or Trust Board, so that services can be improved, and will be made available for inspection on the school/Trust premises by the Headteacher/CEO/Director of Education.

9. Review

The CEO of the Trust will conduct an annual review of the complaints central record for each school and an anonymised summary report will be provided to the Trust Board.

Headteachers will conduct an annual review of the school complaint record and will provide an anonymised summary with the School Advisory Board.

This policy will be kept under review by the CEO. Factual changes to named persons and contact details in the policy will be updated and authorised by the CEO. Minor

technical changes to the policy that are required by changes to legislation or DfE guidance may be made and authorised by the CEO.

Proposals for more significant changes to the policy will be considered and approved by the Board of Trustees.

ANNEX 1 – MAIDEN ERLEGH TRUST FORMAL COMPLAINT FORM

This form should be used if you wish your complaint to be dealt with at Stage 2 of the Complaints process.

The school will acknowledge receipt of the formal complaint and explain what action will be taken.

We encourage you to complete and submit your formal complaint form online by clicking on the relevant school below:

Birch Hill Primary School and Nursery
Great Hollands Primary School
Hamilton School
Horizons AP Academy
John Rankin Schools
Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge
Maiden Erlegh School ***(Silverdale Road)***
Maiden Erlegh School in Reading ***(Crescent Road)***
River Academy
Oak Tree School
Maiden Erlegh Trust

Alternatively, please complete the form below and return to the school.

Your Name:	Pupil/student's Name: School Year and Tutor Group/Class:
Your Relationship to Pupil/student:	Pupil/student's DOB:
Address and Postcode:	Daytime Telephone Number:
	Evening Telephone Number:
Has this complaint already been raised as a Stage 1 (informal) concern with the school?	YES / NO
Full details of complaint (including the names of all persons involved and the dates of incidents referred to) **Please keep to a 500-word count for your complaint to be considered under our policy:**	

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint (for example, who did you speak to and what was the response)?	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
By signing this form, you consent to the School/Trust disclosing information to a third party where appropriate, in order to help investigate and/or deal with the complaint fully.	
Signature:	**Date:**
For Official Use:	
Date Acknowledgement Sent:	
Name of Person Complaint Referred To:	
Signature:	*Date:*

ANNEX 2 - GUIDANCE ON USING AI TOOLS TO RAISE CONCERNS OR COMPLAINTS

Introduction

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 Annex 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:

- Organising your thoughts and structuring your concern or complaint in a clear and logical way;
- Helping you express what happened in plain, clear language if you find writing difficult;
- Summarising a timeline of events based on information you provide;
- Suggesting what outcome you might want to ask for; and
- 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;

e) AI-generated complaints that do not accurately reflect your experience may cause delays in resolving your concern, as we may need to spend time clarifying what actually happened; and

f) AI tools work by predicting the most likely answer based on the information they have been trained on. They do not check whether their output is accurate or relevant to your particular situation, and the most likely-sounding answer is not always the correct one. AI tools are also designed to make you feel helped and understood, which means they may agree with your point of view, use an overly sympathetic tone, or present your complaint in a one-sided way rather than giving a balanced account of what happened. This can wrongly reinforce your point of view and make you more fixed in your position, which may make it harder for us to work together to resolve the matter.

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?"*

Why this helps: Before writing a formal complaint, it can be difficult to know where to start, particularly if a number of things have happened over a period of time. This prompt helps you to present the key events in a logical order, making it easier for us to understand your concern and for you to feel confident that nothing important has been left out.

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."*

Why this helps: A well-structured complaint is more likely to be understood and dealt with effectively. This prompt helps you to set out the issue, the steps you have already taken, the relevant facts, and the outcome you are seeking in a clear and logical way, without the AI tool adding anything you have not told it.

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?"*

Why this helps: When raising a concern or complaint, it is natural to feel frustrated or upset. This prompt allows you to check that your draft communicates your concern clearly and constructively, which is more likely to lead to a productive response, without altering the substance of what you have written.

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."

Why this helps: It is not always easy to know what to ask for when raising a complaint. This prompt can help you to think through realistic and proportionate outcomes, whilst ensuring that the AI tool does not stray into providing legal advice, which it is not equipped to give.