

Chorus Education Trust

Data Protection Complaints Policy

Important: This document can only be considered valid when viewed via one of the following sources: the trust or school website, internally via the central policies and procedures intranet (SharePoint / MLE)

If this document has been printed or saved to another location, you must check that the version number on your copy matches that of the document in the above locations.

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1. Purpose

This policy sets out the process for submitting and managing complaints regarding data protection compliance, privacy concerns, or handling of personal data.

Please note there are separate policies to follow for all other/non- data protection related complaints:

- Chorus Education Trust **Complaints Policy**
- National Specialist SCITTs **ITE Complaints Policy**

These can be found on the appropriate website.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All employees, trainee teachers, pupils, contractors, and volunteers.
- All individuals whose personal data is processed by Chorus Education Trust or representatives acting on their behalf.

3. Definition of a Data Complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction relating to:

- The organisation's compliance with data protection laws (**UK GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018, Data (Use and Access) Act 2025, Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 (PECR)**)
- The handling of a Subject Access Request (SAR) or other data subject rights.
- The handling of a Freedom of Information request (FOI), (**Freedom of Information Act 2000**)
- The security or confidentiality of personal data.
- Any suspected data breach or misuse of personal data.

4. How to Submit a Data Complaint

Data complaints can be submitted:

- By email to: info@chorustrust.org
- In writing to: Chorus Education Trust, Unit 4 Acres Hill Business Park, Acres Hill Lane, Sheffield S9 4LR

Complaints should include the following (see **Appendix 1 and or Appendix 2**):

- Name and contact details of the complainant.
- Details of the issue, including dates and relevant context.
- Any supporting evidence.
- Details of expectation of how the issue could be resolved.
- What stage you would like to raise the complaint at.

Please see the sections below on how to raise matters effectively and the use of AI.

Raising matters effectively

When raising data protection concerns or complaints, it is very important that you explain clearly:

- What your concern/complaint is;
- What has already been done to try and resolve it;
- Names of any witnesses, dates and times of what happened and copies of any relevant documents; and
- What you would like us to do about it to put things right.

We encourage you to:

- Focus on the relevant facts - what happened, when and who was involved;
- Remain objective and direct your concern towards processes or decisions rather than target individuals; and
- Suggest clear and realistic outcomes so that we can see what is possible and we can try to resolve the matter constructively.

For the avoidance of doubt, certain outcomes are not available under this procedure. These include but are not limited to:

- outcomes relating to staff disciplinary action — any disciplinary matters will be handled confidentially under our internal staff procedures and you will not be informed of any action taken; and
- financial compensation or payments of any kind.

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 two sides of A4 (about 1,000 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 **section 10** 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 the next section 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.

For formal complaints, please complete all sections of the complaint form at **Appendix 1**. When asking for our response to your formal complaint to be reviewed, please complete all sections of the complaints review request form at **Appendix 2**. Put 'complaint' in the subject line of your email or clearly on any correspondence so we can deal with it quickly.

If you need help with writing or escalating your complaint, please contact the school and we will arrange for a member of staff to help you. You can also ask organisations like Citizens Advice to help you.

To assist us in investigating your complaint fairly and thoroughly, we ask that you refrain from discussing the details of your complaint publicly, including on social media, while the matter is being considered under this procedure. This helps to protect the privacy of all individuals involved and supports the integrity of the investigation. Nothing in this paragraph prevents you from discussing the matter privately with a companion, advisor or support organisation from whom you are seeking advice or support.

Using AI tools to raise concerns or complaints

Individuals must ensure that any information they provide is accurate, factual and written by them. While they may use technology to help structure or present their complaint, they must not submit AI-generated narratives, allegations or evidence that may be inaccurate, fabricated or unduly long and repetitive.

The use of AI will not be an automatic bar to processing a complaint and Chorus Trust will be mindful of the benefits to some individuals of being supported by AI. Where artificial generation has rendered a complaint vexatious and unreasonable, the provisions of **Section 10** may be applied.

Staff handling complaints are encouraged not to address every bullet point submitted where rounded responses can be given to a range of matters. They will also be supported where, in their professional opinion, a complaint is vexatious by reason of being artificially generated.

Guidance

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 section 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 relevant school/ Trust 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:

- 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');
- 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;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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
- 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 Subject Access Request 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 data protection 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 data protection 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 Subject Access Request 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

5. Stages of Data Complaint

We use a step-by-step approach to deal with data feedback, concerns, and complaints fairly and proportionately. The stages are:

Stage 1 - Informal Data Complaint

We encourage complainants to always try to resolve matters informally first. This is usually the quickest way to sort things out and most issues can be resolved at this stage. At this stage you may wish to share:

- Feedback – where you want to share your voice with us without needing us to respond, but you want us to listen and take it on board;
- Concerns – where you have a worry or doubt over an important issue and you are looking for reassurance, or
- Complaints – where you are dissatisfied with our actions or lack of actions.

Stage 2 - Formal Data Complaint

If the matter is not resolved at the informal stage, you can make a formal complaint in writing. Your formal complaint will be investigated, and you will receive a written response explaining our decision and any action we will take.

Stage 3 - Data Complaint Review

If you are not happy with the outcome of your formal complaint at stage 2, you can ask for it to be reviewed.

The reviewer will consider your reasons for disagreeing with our decision at the formal complaint stage and can make recommendations about how to put things right. This is the final stage of this policy and procedure.

Stage 4 - Right to complain to the Information Commissioner

If you remain dissatisfied, you have the right to raise the matter with the Information Commissioner. Generally, the Information Commissioner will not entertain a data complaint until complainants have exhausted an organisations own data complaints process. Further information can be found on their website www.ico.gov.uk.

The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

- Information Commissioner's Office Wycliffe House Water Lane Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF
- Tel: 0303 123 1113.

6. Chorus Education Trust Responsibilities and Timescales

This policy sets out timescales that we will work to try to resolve your concern or complaint in a timely way. We will always try to meet these timescales. However, sometimes we may need more time than set out in this policy. If so, we will explain why and give you new timeframes.

If we need more information from you to try to understand your concern or complaint or the outcomes you are seeking, we will let you know and pause the timescales in this procedure until we have the information from you.

Stage 1 – Informal data complaint

Upon receiving an informal data complaint, Chorus Education Trust will:

- Acknowledge receipt within **5 working days**.
- Assess the complaint and determine if further information is required.
- Investigate the matter promptly and impartially.
- There is no set timeframe for informal concerns, but we would expect most matters to be resolved within **15 working days**, or explain any delay. If we can not find a solution, we will let you know so that you can move to make a formal complaint in writing.

Stage 2 – Formal data complaint in writing

Upon receiving a formal data complaint, Chorus Education Trust will:

- Acknowledge receipt within **5 working days**.
- Assess the complaint and determine if further information is required.
- Investigate the matter promptly and impartially.
- Respond with findings and actions within **30 working days**, or explain any delay.

Stage 3 – Review

- Acknowledge receipt within **5 working days**.
- Assess the complaint and determine if further information is required.
- Investigate the matter promptly and impartially.
- Respond with findings and actions within **30 working days**, or explain any delay.

7. Confidentiality

All complaints will be handled confidentially and in accordance with data protection principles.

8. Record-Keeping

Chorus Education Trust will maintain a log of all complaints, investigations, and outcomes for audit and compliance purposes.

9. Dealing with concerns/complaints – an explanation of the process

This policy aims to ensure that concerns and complaints are addressed promptly and, wherever possible, informally. Most issues can be resolved at an early stage, provided they are directed in the first instance to the level most appropriate to their nature.

At all stages, when considering concerns or complaints, Chorus Education Trust will:

- gather appropriate information in relation to the concern/complaint, by thorough investigation
- keep accurate records of all relevant conversations and meetings held in relation to the concern/complaint.
- Advise line managers, senior leaders, governors/trustees as appropriate regarding concerns/complaints and ensure that formal complaints are reported to local governing boards and the board of trustees.

The person investigating will seek ways to resolve the complaint satisfactorily and may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation;
- an acknowledgement that the complaint is valid in whole or in part and/or acknowledgement that the situation could have been handled differently or better (this is not the same as an admission of negligence);
- an assurance and an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an apology;
- An undertaking to review procedures in light of the concern/complaint.

It is helpful for complainants to have an idea of what they seek by way of resolution and this information is requested on **the Formal Complaint Form (Appendix 1)**.

10. Guidance for managing serial, vexatious and unreasonable complaints

Chorus Education Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with us, however, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour or harassment and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

In rare cases, we may not follow the usual procedure. This includes where your concern or complaint is classified as repetitious, vexatious or pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner.

The decision to classify your concern or complaint in this way will be made by an appropriately senior member of staff, such as a Headteacher, Compliance and Complaints Manager, Director of MIS, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Executive Officer or chair of governors/trustees (as appropriate).

Repeated complaints

If you make a complaint that is the same, substantially similar or based on the same facts as one we have already fully considered, and we have:

- Done everything we can reasonably do to address your concerns; and
- Given you a clear explanation of our position and your options;

we will write to tell you that the complaints procedure is finished, and we will not respond to further correspondence about these matters. We will tell you how to contact the ICO if you wish to take things further.

If we have already fully considered a complaint about the same subject from another member of your family, we may inform you that the matter has already been considered and the local process is complete. We will advise you to contact the ICO if you are dissatisfied with our handling of the original complaint.

Vexatious concerns/complaints and concerns/complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

A concern or complaint may be considered vexatious if it:

- Is obsessive, persistent, harassing, or repetitive;
- Pursues matters that have no merit, or seeks unrealistic outcomes;
- Pursues matters in an unreasonable way;
- Is designed to cause disruption or annoyance; or
- Demands action that has no serious purpose or value.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- Refusing to explain your concern or complaint or what outcome you want, even when we offer to help;
- Refusing to cooperate with our investigation;
- Refusing to accept that some issues are not covered by this procedure;
- Insisting we deal with your concern or complaint in ways that do not fit with this procedure or good practice;
- Raising trivial or irrelevant information and expecting us to respond to it;
- Asking many detailed but unimportant questions and demanding immediate answers;
- Changing what your concern or complaint is about as we investigate;
- Seeking unrealistic outcomes, such as asking for staff to be dismissed;
- Making excessive demands on staff time through frequent, lengthy, or complicated contact while we are dealing with your concern or complaint;
- Knowingly providing false information;
- Posting information about your concern or complaint on social media or other public forums — sharing your complaint on social media can be harmful to those involved, is unlikely to lead to a quicker resolution and may be considered unreasonable behaviour;
- Encouraging or coordinating with other people to submit multiple complaints about the same issue - your complaint should be specific to you and your child, and organising others to raise the same matter may be treated as a complaint campaign and may not be dealt with under the usual complaints process; or
- Using 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.

We will not accept behaviour or language towards us that is aggressive, abusive, offensive, discriminatory, or threatening or makes insulting personal comments or threats about staff.

Action we may take

In these situations, we may:

- Issue a verbal or written warning setting clear expectations for your future conduct, which may include putting in place a communication plan to manage future contact;
- Pause the complaints process until the unacceptable behaviour stops;
- Hold a complaints review based on written documents only; and/or
- Refuse to consider your complaint any further and direct you to the Information Commissioners Office.

Where you continue to send correspondence raising matters that are the same as, or broadly similar to, issues that are already being considered under this procedure, we may decide not to review or respond to such further correspondence until the existing complaint has been fully considered and responded to at the current stage of this procedure. We will write to let you know if we decide to do this. Any matters that are genuinely distinct from your existing complaint should be raised separately and will be considered on their own merits.

We may also restrict your access a school, the Trust or our staff or governors/trustees, e.g. requesting contact in a particular form (for example, in writing only), requiring contact to take place with a named person only or limited to a particular email address, restricting telephone calls to specified days and times or number of contacts, or banning you from the school/Trust's premises in line with our **Parent/Staff/Trainee Code of Conduct**. Any decision to cease responding to correspondence or to decline to consider a complaint further will be communicated to you in writing, with reasons for the decision.

Where behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the safety and welfare of staff, governors, trustees, or members, we will consider other options, for example, reporting the matter to the police, or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give you prior warning of that action

APPENDIX 1: Stage 2 - Formal Data Protection rights Complaint Form

This form is designed to assist you with the information you need to include in your complaint, before completing this form, please refer to the section on Raising Matters effectively. **Please send complaint to info@chorustrust.org**

Name	
Date	
Address	
Data Subject's name (if applicable)	
Relationship to Data Subject (if applicable)	
Address (if different from above)	
Contact number(s) (if you have a preferred time within the school day, please state it)	
Email address	
Details of Complaint Including dates and relevant context, stage of complaint, attach any supporting evidence.	
What action have you already taken to try and resolve your data complaint? Who did you speak with and what was the response?	
What action(s) do you believe Chorus Education Trust can take to resolve this complaint? (response compulsory)	

APPENDIX 2: Stage 3 - Request for Data Protection Complaint Review

This form is designed to assist you with the information you need to include in your complaint, before completing this form, please refer to the section on Raising Matters effectively. **Please send to info@chorustrust.org**

Name	
Date	
Address	
Data Subject's name (if applicable)	
Relationship to Data Subject (if applicable)	
Address (if different from above)	
Contact number(s) (if you have a preferred time within the school day, please state it)	
Email address	
What action have you already taken to try and resolve your data complaint? Who did you speak with and what was the response?	
Why are you not happy with the decision about your formal data complaint?	
What would you like the reviewer to do to resolve the matter? (response compulsory)	