

## Complaints Policy

<b>Policy Title</b>		BASCITT Complaints Policy	
<b>Author / Reviewer</b>		Governance Lead/ BASCITT Programme Director	
<b>Board/Committee</b>		Board of Trustees	
<b>Signed by Lisa Goodall (Chair of Trustees)</b>			
<b>Reviewed:</b> January 2021	<b>Approved :</b>	February 2021	<b>Next Review:</b> February 2023

## **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 Basingstoke Alliance School Centred Initial Teacher Training (BASCITT) regarding 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. BASCITT 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 BASCITT Programme Director will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the BASCITT Programme Director 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, BASCITT 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 of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complaints against BASCITT staff or trainees (except the BASCITT Programme Director) should be made in the first instance, to the BASCITT Programme Director via Dove House School office. Please mark any correspondence as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the BASCITT Programme Director should be addressed to the Headteacher of Dove House School Academy, via Dove House School office. Please mark any correspondence as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Trustees, any individual trustee or the whole Board of Trustees should be addressed to the Governance Lead of Dove House School Academy via Dove House School office. Please mark any correspondence as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact Dove House School office. You can also ask a third-party organisation, for example 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.

### **Anonymous complaints**

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the BASCITT Programme Director, Headteacher or Chair of Trustees, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

### **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**

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

<b>Exceptions</b>	<b>Who to contact</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation</li></ul>	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO - 01962 876364/ <a href="mailto:child.protection@hants.gov.uk">child.protection@hants.gov.uk</a>) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whistleblowing</li> </ul>	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>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: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>.</p> <p>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 local authority or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff grievances</li> </ul>	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff conduct</li> </ul>	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against BASCITT in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

### **Resolving complaints**

At each stage in the procedure, BASCITT 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 1 – Informal complaints**

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

Concerns should be raised with a member of the BASCITT staff. Complainants should not approach individual Trustees 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 10 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 2 – Formal complaints**

Formal complaints must be made to the BASCITT Programme Director (unless they are about the BASCITT Programme Director), via Dove House School office. This may be done in person or in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form).

The BASCITT Programme Director will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Within this response, the BASCITT Programme Director will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The BASCITT Programme Director can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

*Note: The BASCITT Programme Director 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 BASCITT Programme Director (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 BASCITT Programme Director will provide a formal written response within 20 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the BASCITT Programme Director 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 BASCITT will take to resolve the complaint.

The BASCITT Programme Director will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

If the complaint is about the BASCITT Programme Director, the Headteacher of Dove House School Academy will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

The Headteacher of Dove House School Academy will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher of Dove House School Academy or a member of the Board of Trustees (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled Trustee will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2. They will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

Complaints about a member of the Board of Trustees must be made to the Governance Lead, via Dove House School office.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Board of Trustees or
- the majority of the Board of Trustees

Stage 2 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Board of Trustees. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

### **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 BASCITT. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Governance Lead, via Dove House School office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response, although exceptions to this time frame may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The Governance Lead will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

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

The Governance Lead 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 2 request. If this is not possible, the Governance Lead will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Governance Lead 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 Board of Trustees or
- the majority of the Board of Trustees

then Stage 3 will be heard by a committee of independent, co-opted governors/trustees.

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 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 Lead 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 3 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 panel will provide the complainant and BASCITT with a full explanation of the panel's decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The response (known as the completion of procedures) 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 BASCITT 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 at Dove House School Academy by the proprietor and the BASCITT Programme Director.

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.

The letter, which can be classed as a completion of procedures (COP) to the complainant will include details of how to contact either the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) or the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been resolved or handled by BASCITT.

### **Next Steps**

If the complainant is/was a student with BASCITT then they can raise the matter with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). The OIA is an independent organisation that considers student complaints.

They can be contacted by telephoning 0118 959 9813 or emailing: [enquiries@oiahe.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@oiahe.org.uk)

Their website is: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/myoia/>

The area for complaints can be found at:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/contact/complaints-and-notifications/making-a-complaint-to-a-higher-education-provider>

Students have 12 months to take their complaint to the OIA starting from the date the COP letter was issued. The student only needs to send the COP letter and their completed and signed complaint form. They can complete the complaint form online via the online portal.

The OIA will decide whether the student's complaint is one they can look at under their rules and will let both the student and the provider know.

If the complainant believes BASCITT 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 could also consider contacting the ESFA after they have completed Stage 3.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by BASCITT. They will consider whether BASCITT 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 ESFA online at: [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus), by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit  
Education and Skills Funding Agency  
Cheylesmore House  
5 Quinton Road  
Coventry  
CV1 2WT

## **Complaint Form**

Please complete and return to the BASCITT Programme Director (Headteacher or Governance Lead where appropriate) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

<b>Your name:</b>
<b>Address:</b>  <b>Postcode:</b> <b>Day time telephone number:</b> <b>Evening telephone number:</b> <b>Email address:</b>
<b>Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.</b>

**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 whom:**

**Complaint referred to:**

**Action taken:**

**Date:**

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Complainant**

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible.
- co-operate with BASCITT in seeking a solution to the complaint.
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint.
- ask for assistance as needed.
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect.
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

### **Investigator**

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
  - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved.
  - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
  - consideration of records and other relevant information
  - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting.
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal.
- be mindful of the timescales to respond.
- prepare a comprehensive report for the BASCITT Programme Director, Headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The BASCITT Programme Director, Headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision

to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

## **Governance Lead**

The Governance Lead is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale.
- record the proceedings.
- circulate the minutes of the meeting.
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

## **Committee Chair**

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Governance Lead) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy.
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person.
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant.
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting.

- both the complainant and BASCITT are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed.
- key findings of fact are made.

- the committee is open-minded and acts independently.
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure.
- the meeting is minuted.

### **Committee Member**

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and therefore no Trustee may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between BASCITT and the complainant.
- we recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Complainants often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects them.