

The Academies regulatory review and school complaints

25 April 2023

The Department for Education (DfE) recently published the Academies Regulatory and Commissioning Review, which sets out a framework for increasing the impact of the academies system and includes a commitment to looking at [parent complaints](#).

As pledged in the Schools White Paper in March 2022, the DfE launched a review of school accountability and regulation in June 2022, intending to “*future proof*” the role of academy trusts and “*pave the way*” for the conversion of all schools to academy status. It formed part of the plan to get all schools either into multi-academy trusts or in the process of joining one by 2030.

The Academies Regulatory and Commissioning Review has now been published and explains that the review has “*focused on the near-term changes we can make to: improve our regulatory structure so it is more proportionate and effective; make better and more transparent commissioning decisions; and enhance the way the department supports trust improvement and growth to facilitate a self-improving system*”.

Understanding the short-term implications of the review

We look at each of these three themes in turn and consider the implications for schools and trusts between now and the next general election, in [this webinar taking place Thursday 27 April 2023](#) and available on demand thereafter.

As part of this review, the DfE has promised to look at parent complaints.

Reviewing how parental complaints are handled

We have seen a steady increase in the number and complexity of complaints, particularly complaints from parents, and schools/trusts are spending an increasing amount of time managing complaints, which eats into precious staff time and resource.

Whilst there are some legal requirements for all academy/trust complaints procedures (as set out in the Education (Independent School Standard) Regulations 2014), schools/trusts have flexibility to set their own complaints procedures. As a result, procedures can vary in quality, with some unclear or overly complex.

The review also identified that parents/carers are unclear about how to raise complaints and will therefore submit their complaint to multiple agencies, including local authorities, local MPs, Ofsted etc. This creates additional burdens for all agencies as well as dissatisfaction for parents.

Streamlining an overly complex system

There is also confusion about the role that the various agencies have to play in parent complaints, and where powers and responsibilities lie. The complexity of the system “*makes it harder for regulators to identify themes and emerging risks*”.

In the short term, the DfE has committed to updating the GOV.UK page on complaints to clarify:

- which organisations should be engaged on certain complaints and at different stages
- what is in or out of scope for different organisations
- the ways in which complaints data informs key processes and its limits

The DfE has also committed, by Autumn 2023, to introduce a revised data sharing agreement with Ofsted, to support better information sharing around safeguarding and complaints, alongside continued work to reduce duplication.

In addition, they are trialling a “*virtual assistant*” for parents and carers, which will “*help direct queries on a range of issues, including the school complaint process, attendance and admissions.*”

The DfE’s commitment to look at the approach to processing parent complaints and ensuring that the system is less duplicative is to be welcomed. However, whether the changes have a significant impact on staff and governors dealing with complaints on the ground remains to be seen.

Immediate support available

In the meantime, to enable schools and trusts to handle complaints as efficiently as possible, we have put together a [complaints management support pack](#). Our model complaints procedure included in the pack meets the legal requirements and follows best practice guidance, and template letters and documents will help to ensure you are adhering to the procedure to help avoid challenge down the line. The resources in the complaints management support pack will:

- help ensure consistency in your approach to complaints
- give you confidence that the policy and letters you use are comprehensive, up to date, legally compliant and reflect best practice
- save you time and resource by helping you to ‘get this right’ from the outset

[Find out more and download your support pack here](#) →

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