

# Complaints Policy



**Approved by:** Governing Body

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## 1. Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents/carers of pupils at the school.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person if necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We recognise that everyone makes mistakes. What is important, however, is that when mistakes are made there is a clear and fair approach to putting things right.

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the parent/carer the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

## 2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on [creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations](#), and refers to [good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

This document meets the requirements of section 35 of the schedule to [the Education \(Non-Maintained Special Schools\) \(England\) Regulations 2011](#), which states that non-maintained special schools must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints relating to their school.

It also refers to [good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

### 3. Definitions and scope

The scope of this policy is set out in part 7 'manner in which complaints are handled', The Education (ISS) Regulations 2014. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints by parents/carers.

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint. **A concern is defined as**, 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'. **A complaint is defined as**, 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible and will aim to resolve complaints informally where possible at the earliest possible stage. There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures that fall outside the scope of the complaints policy. These relate to:

- Admissions
- School re-organisation proposals
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters which should be handled in accordance with the school's safeguarding procedures
- GDPR
- Exclusions
- Whistle blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline
- Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned. This includes school to school transport which is provided by the Local Authority.

### 4. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

We also intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits will be set for each action within each stage.

Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline with an explanation for the delay. The school expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and no later than 2 months afterwards.

## **5. Stages of complaint (not against the Head Teacher or Governing body)**

Notwithstanding these stages, the process and requirements set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022 will take precedent in any complaints. This is particularly so when the matter is raised by, or is received via, the LADO.

### **Stage 1: informal**

The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Head Teacher as appropriate, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them they should contact the school office.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 5 school working days (this being a total of 5 days where the school is open and does not include holidays or times where the school is closed.) The school will investigate and provide a response within 10 school working days (this being a total of 10 days where the school is open and does not include holidays or times where the school is closed.) The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the Head Teacher (or designated member of the senior leadership team), as appropriate.

When a complaint is raised staff should keep in mind ways in which it could be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following;

- An apology
- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- An undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint

If the complaint is not resolved informally it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

### **Stage 2: formal**

The Head Teacher should be informed in writing of the escalation of an informal complaint. This letter should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The Head Teacher (or designated member of the senior leadership team) will call a meeting to clarify concerns and seek a resolution. The complainant may be

accompanied to this meeting and should inform the school of the identity of their companion in advance.

In certain circumstances the school may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case the school will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment.

The Head Teacher (or other person appointed by the Head Teacher for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 5 school working days (this being a total of 5 days where the school is open and does not include holidays or times where the school is closed).

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the Chair Governors in writing within 5 school working days (this being a total of 5 days where the school is open and does not include holidays or times where the school is closed). This letter should set out the details of the complaint including evidence as set out above. The complainant should also specify what they feel would resolve the complaint and how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently. An investigation will then be undertaken.

A written record of a formal complaints will be kept whether they are resolved following a formal procedure or proceed to a hearing. A record of action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld) will be kept and all correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting and inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them. Personal data will be handled under GDPR regulations and personal data will be erased once there is no reason for retaining the data.

### **Stage 3: submit the complaint to hearing**

Complaints will be escalated to a hearing if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal, stage.

A hearing is appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and consists of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and at least one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school. They must also not have been directly involved in any matter detailed in the complaint.

A parent/carer may attend and may be accompanied to the panel hearing if they so wish.

The panel may make findings and recommendations and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. These findings and recommendations will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Head Teacher.

The panel will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 school working days (this being a total of 5 days where the school is open and does not include holidays or times where the school is closed).

A written record of a complaint that resulted in a hearing before a panel will be kept. A record of action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld) will be kept and all correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to 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. Personal data will be handled under GDPR regulations and personal data will be erased once there is no reason for retaining the data.

## **6. Complaints against the Head of School or a Governor**

Complaints made against the Head Teacher should be directed to the Chair of the Governors. Where a complaint is against the Chair of Governors or any member of the Governing body, it should be made in writing to the clerk to the Governing body in the first instance.

Complaints against members of the Governing body can be categorised as follows:

- those from other Governors on the local Governing body;
- from members of the public which includes parents;
- members of the school staff.

Irrespective of the category of complaint, the responsibility for dealing with the complaint is that of the Governing body, which would normally fall to the Chairperson to manage.

Where the complaint is made against the Chairperson then:

- it could be passed to the Deputy-Chairperson; or
- by agreement of the Governing body, passed to the Chairperson of another school management committee or Governing body to investigate.

The Governing body need to consider to what extent the internal investigation of a complaint against a member by another member generates a conflict of interest or prejudice. No member of the school staff, including the Head Teacher should be involved in the investigation of a complaint against a member other than as a witness.

## **7. Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure**

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the above complaints procedure and the complaint is regarding the school not meeting standards set by the DfE, the complainant can refer their complaint directly to the DfE if it relates to any of the following areas:

- Education
- Pupil welfare and health and safety
- Staff suitability
- Making information available to parents
- The spiritual, moral, social or cultural development of pupils

The DfE will consider reports of a major failure to meet the standards. Where appropriate, it can arrange an emergency inspection to look at pupil welfare and health and safety, and make sure that the school deals with serious failings.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

## **8. Persistent complaints**

Where a complainant tries to re-open a complaint with the school after the complaints procedure or one of the other school procedures has been exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can, the Chair of the Governing body (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the Chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any), *and*
- The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The school will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, *and/or*
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, *and/or*
- The individual makes or has made insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff, *and/or*
- The complaint has been previously deemed malicious or there is compelling and overwhelming evidence that the complaint is malicious or false.

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive, intimidating, aggressive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint.

Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

Where unreasonably persistent complaints are received the school will write to the individual and outline why it is deemed as such and will deal with the matter as a persistent complaint.

## **9. Record-keeping**

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters, emails, phone call records and notes relating to meetings and conversations.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally. Such material will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the Secretary of State (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept for 10 years.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole Governing body in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

## **10. Learning lessons**

The Governing body will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Head of School, where appropriate and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

## **11. Monitoring arrangements**

The Governing body will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The Governing body will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 10.

The complaints records are logged and managed by school administrator.

This policy will be reviewed by the Governing body every year. At each review, the policy will be approved the Governing body.

## **12. Links with other policies**

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- Whistle blowing procedures