



Complaints policy and procedures
APPROVED

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Section 1: Aims

Governing Bodies are required by law to have a procedure in place to deal with complaints relating to aspects of the school or the provision of facilities or certain services at the school.

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to students complaints at the school and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to do the following.

- Be impartial and non-adversarial.
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary.
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response.
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality.
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy.
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair, and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law.
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process.
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes.
- We try to resolve concerns or complaints by the informal stage of our complaints process, wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.
- Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

Section 2: Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements of Section 29 of the Education Act 2002, which states that schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides. It is also based on the schools guidance on complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE), including the model procedure for dealing with unreasonable complaints.

Section 3: Definitions and scope

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint.

- A concern is defined as “an expression of worry or doubts over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought,” which can be resolved informally.
- A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action, which can be resolved informally or may need to be addressed under the formal process.

3.1 Scope

The school intends 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 outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs
- Exclusions
- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievances (*)
- Staff discipline procedures (*)

Copies of policies relating to the above can be found on our website (except those marked (*)).

Arrangements for handling complaints from parents and carers of children with special educational needs (SEND) about the school's support are within this policy's scope. Our SEND policy includes information about the rights of parents and carers of students with disabilities who believe that our school has discriminated against their children.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

Section 4: Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The complainant

The role of the complainant is as follows:

- To cooperate with the school throughout the process and to respond to deadlines and communicate promptly.
- To ask for assistance as needed.
- To treat all those involved with respect.
- To not publish details about the complaint on social media.

4.2 The complaints handler

The role of the complaints handler is as follows:

- Receives the complaints.
- Log the complaints.
- Send the complainant an email acknowledging the complaint and the timescales for a response.
- Share the complaint with the headteacher and governors where required.
- Send the complaint to the complaints investigator appointed by the headteacher.
- Inform the appointed complaints investigator of the timelines for a response.
- Ensure that the complaints investigators are familiar with the policy and manage the process in a compliant manner.
- Log all responses and keep a copy in the complaints file.
- Acts as the contact point (unless a matter is escalated to stage two of the process, where the clerk to the governors assumes the role.)

4.3 The investigating officer

An individual will be appointed to investigate the formal complaint and establish the facts. The role of the investigating officer is as follows:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes.

- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely.
- Respond to the complainant within the timescales as far as practicable.
- If necessary, prepare a comprehensive report to the headteacher or complaints committee, which includes the facts and potential solutions.

4.4 Clerk to the governors

The role of the clerk to the governors (hereafter referred to as “the clerk”) is as follows:

- Acts as the contact point for the complainant and the complaint panel members at formal stage two, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints panel hearings and arranging the hearing date.
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing.
- Capture the key discussion points of the panel’s deliberations, which will provide the basis for the outcome letter.
- Agree on the outcome letter’s content with the chair of the complaint panel hearing and write the letter, which the school will then send to the complainant.

4.5 Chair of the complaint panel

The role of the chair of the complaint panel (hereafter referred to as “the chair”) is as follows:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout.
- Ensure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee and present their case.
- Lead the deliberations with panel members and agree the panel’s decision.
- Approve the draft letter as drafted by the clerk.

Section 5: Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, the school will aim to clarify the below:

- what happened
- who was involved
- what the complainant feels would put things right.

5.1 Time scales

The complainant must raise the complaint within three months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within three months of the last incident.

The school will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time, and the complaint can still be investigated fairly for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, the school will consider them received on the first school day after the holiday period.

The school will specify the time scales for each stage of the complaints procedure. If at any point these cannot be met, the school will:

- agree new time limits with the complainant.
- send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay.

Section 6: Stages of complaint (not complaints regarding data-handling concerns (see section 7) or against the headteacher or chair of governors. See section 8)

6.1 The informal stage

The school aims to address most complaints informally, through the informal stage process. For most complaints, this process will provide a satisfactory outcome. The school will take informal complaints seriously and make every effort to resolve matters quickly. It may be the case that clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible by emailing the school through the school's postbox (accessible through the school's website). If the complainant is unable to submit a written complaint, they should call the school for support.

The complaints handler will acknowledge informal complaints within five school days. The headteacher will be notified, who will delegate the complaint to the appropriate staff member. Under the informal stage, this can be any member of staff. A staff member will aim to resolve the matter informally through either a meeting, phone call or written response to the complainant.

The complainant should receive a response within ten days from the date their complaint was acknowledged.

6.2 Formal stage one

If the complainant feels that their complaint has not been resolved at the informal stage or is not appropriate to deal with the matter informally, they can request that their complaint be dealt with under the formal stage one process. Complaints in the stage one process are formally investigated by the headteacher or designate (e.g., a member of the senior leadership team) and follow the procedure outlined below.

The complainant must put the complaint in writing, addressed to the school's headteacher, setting out briefly the facts and stating what it is that the complainant considers should have been done or where the school has not met reasonable expectations. Any documentation relied upon by the complainant should be attached to the formal complaint.

Receipt of the complaint must be acknowledged in writing within five days. The acknowledgement letter will confirm the date that the formal complaint was received, the action to be taken, including the investigating officer's name, and the expected time scale within which the investigation will be conducted. This can vary depending upon circumstances, e.g., the complexity of the matter or witnesses' availability. Still, the inquiry should generally be completed within fifteen school days of the acknowledgement letter being sent to the complainant. If the investigation extends beyond this, then a holding letter outlining the reasons should be sent by the headteacher to the complainant with a revised date.

The process of formal stage one is detailed below.

6.3 Investigating officer appointed

Depending on the circumstances, the headteacher may decide to appoint a senior leadership team

member, e.g., a deputy headteacher with no prior involvement in the complaint as investigating officer. They will then undertake the investigation and report to the headteacher with their findings and any recommendations. This process enables the headteacher to exercise a greater sense of objectivity when determining any potential outcomes.

6.4 Management of investigation

The investigating officer will be provided with the records gathered as part of the informal procedure (if applicable) within five days of receipt of the formal complaint and will then proceed to investigate the complaint. This will involve obtaining and considering all documentation held by the school relevant to the complaint. If further information is required from the complainant, this may be requested from them over the telephone or in writing.

The investigating officer may consider it appropriate to meet with the complainant at the outset of the investigation to build a rapport and clarify any matters which are unclear. This will also provide the complainant with the reassurance that their complaint is being dealt with properly and a fuller understanding of what the investigative process may involve.

During the investigation, it is likely that the investigating officer will need to speak to the person(s) who were involved in the matters raised by the complainant. Where there is an issue raised about the conduct of a member of staff, that member of staff will be offered the option of having another staff colleague or Trade Union/Professional Association Representative present during the interview.

A written record of all interviews conducted will be made, which will include the key discussion points, and those persons present will be asked to read, sign and date the interview notes to confirm their accuracy. In the case of pupils, the appropriate accompanying adult (e.g., the parent/carer or independent member of staff) will also be asked to sign and date the record of the conversation.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example, the police, local authority safeguarding teams or tribunals, this may impact 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 a parent/carer commences legal action against the school in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

6.5 Investigation report

At the conclusion of the investigation, the investigating officer will compile a written report of their findings and any recommendations to the headteacher. This will include any actions the school can reasonably take to resolve the matter satisfactorily. The headteacher will then review the investigation and consider whether any further steps need to be taken before informing the complainant of the outcomes of the investigation in writing.

6.6 Informing the complainant

A letter from a member of the senior leadership team will be sent to the complainant within twenty school days of receipt of the original written complaint at stage one, setting out the conclusions from the investigation and any actions taken to address the complaint. If the investigation is not completed within

this time frame, a holding letter informing the complainant will be sent by the headteacher setting out the reasons for extending the time frame and a new date by which the investigation will be concluded.

The letter will also inform the complainant that if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the stage one investigation, they should write to the school and request that the complaint is escalated under the formal stage two process. The complainant's request to proceed to formal stage two should be made to the school in writing within 10 school days from receipt of the outcome letter.

The complaint procedure is designed to be non-adversarial, and stage one is intended to facilitate a dialogue between those who understand context and need: the parents/carers and the school. Involving legal counsel at this stage can shift the relationship from a partnership to a formal dispute, potentially impacting on future cooperation. Additionally, routing correspondence through solicitors inevitably adds significant delays and administrative burdens to a process meant to provide swift remedy. For this reason, the school will not engage with solicitors directly. Should a complainant instruct a solicitor for advice, the school's response will be communicated directly with the complainant.

In the interests of fairness, the school is open to making reasonable adjustments where necessary. If the complainant is unable to effectively communicate due to a disability, the school will accept a representative to act as a 'bridge.' A representative may accompany the complainant to any meetings held as part of the stage one process, however this is within the remit of 'support not advocacy' and will have no active role.

6.7 Formal stage two: request for a complaint panel hearing

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the review under the formal stage one of this complaints policy, they may write to the school and request that the matter is dealt with under the formal stage two process.

The aim of stage two is to achieve a fair and transparent resolution, and to restore confidence and trust in the school. This is done by:

- conducting a thorough review of the stage one investigation by an independent person who has not previously been involved (e.g., member of senior leadership team, governor or external partner)
- reaching a clear, evidence-based outcome and communicating the findings, decisions and/or actions the school may take, including system and procedural improvement.

When writing, the complainant should not repeat the matters raised in their original letter or attach documentation already provided but should clearly set out the reasons why they do not accept the findings made under the formal stage one. The complainant will receive an acknowledgment within five days.

Upon receipt of the request to escalate to stage two, the complaints handler will collate all evidence and final stage one report, and provide this pack to the headteacher. If appropriate, the headteacher will request independent documentary review of the investigation by a suitably qualified/experienced governor. The purpose of this independent review is to provide reassurance that the complainant's dissatisfaction has been taken seriously without the need, where possible, to convene a complaints panel hearing which can cause considerable stress to the complainants (and witnesses.) The reviewing

governor's findings will be sent to the complainant by the clerk to the governors.

Should the headteacher feel a documentary review is inappropriate, or the reviewing governor deems it necessary (*but without prejudice*), the matter will be referred to the clerk to organise a panel of three governors (excluding the reviewing governor) to form the complaints hearing panel.

The panel should not have detailed knowledge of the complaint or be connected to the complainant in any way. Once the chair and panel members have been appointed, the headteacher (or delegate) will appoint a school representative to attend the complaint panel hearing.

Matters which have previously been escalated to a stage two review cannot be returned to the panel for a second hearing. Separate but related matters may be considered and, in such cases, all previous documentation including the hearing findings will be provided to the panel members.

6.8 School response to the request for a complaint panel hearing

On receiving the complaint, the chair of the complaints panel hearing (hereafter referred to as "the chair") will invite the school to put in writing its response to the complainant's grounds for not accepting the outcome of formal stage one, which should be submitted within five school days of receipt.

6.9 The time scale for the complaint panel hearing

The hearing will be held as soon as practicable, having consideration for the need to find a date that is reasonably convenient for the complainant, the school and the members of the complaints panel. Whenever possible, the hearing will be held within twenty school days of the letter from the complainant requesting that the matter be escalated to formal stage two.

At the hearing, the complainant will be entitled to be accompanied by a friend but legal representation will not be allowed. The complainant will have the opportunity to put her/his reasons for dissatisfaction and to enlarge them but may not introduce reasons that were not previously put in writing. The school will have the opportunity to present its case and each side, as well as the panel members, will be able to ask questions. The complainant and the school representative will have the opportunity to make final comments to the panel.

6.10 Non-attendance

Complainant: If the complainant does not confirm attendance or fails to attend on the day of the hearing, without compelling reasons, the complaint hearing panel will decide whether to proceed with the hearing.

Panel Member: The complaints panel should consist of three governors. If, due to unforeseen circumstances, a panel member is unable to attend without notice, the hearing may be postponed. The chair will ask the complainant if they wish to proceed with only two panel members present. If the complainant declines, the hearing will be adjourned to another date. If the complainant wishes to proceed, this decision will be recorded in the minutes.

6.11 School representative

The school will be represented at the complaint panel hearing, and this may include the formal stage one investigating officer and/or the headteacher.

6.12 Clerk to the complaint hearing panel

The complaint panel hearing minutes will be taken by the clerk to the complaint panel (hereafter referred to as “the clerk.”) The clerk will also agree the contents of the final outcomes with the chair of the complaints panel and write the letter.

6.13 Documentation for the complaint panel hearing

The complaints handler will provide copies of all paperwork relating to the complaint to the clerk. This will consist of the original letter (email) of complaint, record of the informal procedure (if applicable), all documentation relating to the formal stage one process and any further documentation provided by the complainant. Now the point of contact, the clerk will forward copies of all paperwork to the complainant, the school’s representative and the three complaint panel members.

The names of individuals other than the complainant, the complainant’s family, members of the school’s staff and governors will be redacted and replaced with a letter relevant to that individual (for example, “Jane Brown” will be replaced with “A” throughout, “John Jones” will be replaced with “B” throughout) unless they have provided their written consent for their name to be disclosed.

If the complainant wishes the complaint panel to consider any additional information, they should forward this documentation to the clerk at least five school days before the complaint panel hearing to enable the clerk to forward it to the school’s representative and the complaint panel members.

6.14 Witnesses

The chair of the complaint panel will decide, at their absolute discretion, which witnesses will be permitted to attend the complaint panel hearing to give a verbal statement rather than relying on a written statement or record of the meeting which has been signed by the witness.

If the complainant wishes to rely on a witness account, they should ask the witness to write down, sign and date their account and forward it to the clerk at least five school days before the complaint panel hearing to enable the clerk to forward it to the school’s representative and the complaint panel members.

6.15 Child witnesses

Witnesses under the age of eighteen, other than the complainant’s own family, will only be allowed to attend the complaint panel hearing at the discretion of the complaint panel chair, and then only if they are accompanied by a parent or carer. Any written accounts provided by the complainant relating to witnesses under the age of eighteen must be signed and dated by the witness and their parent or carer.

6.16 School staff witnesses

Members of school staff involved in the matters which gave rise to the complaint will usually have provided a signed written account or have signed interview notes during the previous stages, which will have been forwarded to all parties with the other complaint documentation in the usual way. Members of staff will not usually be required to attend the complaint panel hearing to give a verbal statement unless their conduct is an issue or their account is contentious, and the rules of natural justice suggest that the complainant should be allowed to ask that member of staff questions.

6.17 Unauthorised recordings.

In accordance with Department for Education (DfE) guidance and the Data Protection Act, 2018 the school maintains a strict policy prohibiting the unauthorised recording of any meetings, discussions or consultations held on school premises or via digital platforms (online meetings.)

The recording of meetings without the express written consent of all participants constitutes a breach of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR.) Such actions infringe upon the privacy rights of staff, students and other parties and can compromise the integrity of the school's professional environment.

Adjustment: If a parent/carer requires a recording as a 'reasonable adjustment' under the Equality Act, 2010, this should be discussed in advance of the meeting. The school, as 'data controller,' may facilitate recording and, where a written transcript/summary is inappropriate, any subsequent provision of the recording will be made to all parties present.

Should such a breach be committed by a parent/carer the meeting may be terminated immediately and all future communication restricted to written correspondence. Should a member of staff be found in breach of the policy, the issue will be dealt with as a discipline matter.

This policy relates (but is not limited) to formal meetings with parents/carers/visitors, internal staff briefings and multidiscipline reviews and, as such, this section is also embedded within the discipline, grievance, whistleblowing and visitor behaviour policies.

6.18 Panel findings

In most cases, the complaint panel will deliberate immediately after the hearing and reach their findings in the presence of the clerk to the panel. The clerk's role is to make a record of their findings and any recommendations, but they do not take any part in the decision-making process.

Having agreed and formulated their findings, the clerk will inform all parties in writing of the outcomes. The letter will be sent out at the earliest opportunity and in any event within ten school days of the conclusion of the hearing. The written record of the panel's findings and the clerk's minutes of the hearing will be retained securely at the school for a minimum period of three years.

6.19 Procedure at the complaint panel hearing

The complaint panel hearing will be conducted as follows:

- The clerk will greet the complainant (and companion) and the school's representative and welcome them into the room simultaneously where the complaint panel has convened. (Any witnesses will remain outside the room until they are called 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 of 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 school's representative will be invited by the chair to summarise their response to the complaint and the school's stance.
- The complainant will be invited by the chair to summarise their complaint.
- The complaint panel hearing will conclude. The complainant and the school's representative will be asked to leave.

6.20 Factors for the complaint panel to consider

It is important that the complaint panel hearing is independent and impartial, and that it is seen to be so. No person may sit on the complaint panel if they have had prior involvement in the matters which gave rise to the complaint or have prior detailed knowledge of the complaint or are well known to the complainant, e.g., as a friend or associate.

Panel members should ensure that they are familiar with Highlands School complaints policy and Procedures in advance of the hearing so that they are able to determine whether due process has been followed.

The aim of the complaint panel hearing, which must be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it must be recognised that there are occasions when the complainant may not be satisfied with the outcome if the complaint panel does not find it wholly in their favour. It is therefore important that the complainant feels a sense of fairness around the process, if not the panel's findings.

An effective complaint panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The chair will ensure that the complaint panel hearing is as welcoming as possible while ensuring that it is procedurally fair to all parties. The layout of the room will set the tone, and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not substantially adversarial.

Extra care needs to be taken when there are child witnesses present to ensure that they do not feel intimidated. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the complainant the opportunity to suggest which parts of the hearing, if any, the child should attend, with the chair retaining discretion.

6.21 Role of chair of complaint panel

The chair of the complaint panel will play a key part in the complaint panel hearing, ensuring that:

- the remit of the complaint panel is explained to the parties, and each party has the opportunity of making representations without undue interruption.

- all the issues raised in the complaint are addressed.
- key findings of fact are made applying the threshold test of the balance of probabilities.
- each party treats the other with respect and courtesy.
- the complaint panel is open-minded and acts independently of the school.
- no member of the complaint panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings.
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions.
- written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises during the complaint panel hearing, it would be appropriate to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.
- The complaint panel will convene in private, immediately after the complaint panel hearing, and will consider all the documentation and everything that they have heard at the hearing.

6.22 Findings of Fact

The complaint panel will decide which facts are established to be true on a balance of probabilities (i.e., more likely than not). If a fact is not deemed relevant, the complaint panel will not consider it further. The complaint panel will make a written record of the facts that have been established, those which have not been established, and those which are not relevant, with their reasons for making these findings.

6.23 Recommendations

The complaint panel will consider the facts which they have established and will make recommendations based upon them. These recommendations may be aimed at achieving reconciliation between the parties (for example, a written apology), improving procedures, or preventing a recurrence in the future. The complaint panel will keep a written record of their recommendations, with reasons.

6.24 Notification of the complaint panel's decision

The clerk will write, within ten school days of the complaint panel hearing, to the:

- complainant
- school's Representative
- person complained about

6.25 The outcome

The complaints hearing panel can do the following:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part.
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part.
- If the complaint is upheld, the committee will:
 - Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint.
 - Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

Section 7: Complaints regarding data protection.

Under Data Use and Access Act 2025, any concern regarding data handling must be addressed to the school before approaching the Information Commissioner's Office.

The school takes the security and privacy of personal data very seriously. Any concern regarding misused, mishandled or insecure data should be reported as soon as possible. Whilst many concerns can be resolved through the schools standard complaints procedure, the school is committed to investigating a data protection issue without undue delay.

Please note that when investigating data protection complaints, proof of identity (and/or written authorisation if you are acting on behalf of another) may be required.

7.1 Investigating the complaint

- The complaint will be recorded and acknowledged by the complaints handler (within 30 days of receipt.)
- The matter will be investigated by staff including but not limited to the IT manager and data protection officer.
- Evidence will be preserved and staff interviewed (if necessary.)
- A full report of the investigation will be documented.
- A response will be sent to the complainant within 60 days of receipt of the complaint.
- If the matter is complex and the investigation cannot be completed within the timeframe, the complainant will be notified of the need for an extension to the deadline and updates will be provided.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the school's response, a complaint may be lodged direct with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) at ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/

Please note: Section 7 does not apply to dissatisfaction regarding Subject Access Requests responses. In brief, a request for internal review should be sent to the school's data protection officer (DPO) within one month of receiving the response. If necessary, the matter can be escalated via the standard school complaints process (see section 6.) Only when the school's internal process has been exhausted, should the matter be referred to the ICO. This should be done within three months from last contact with school.

Section 8: Complaints against the headteacher, a governor or the governing board

Complaints made against the headteacher should be directed to the chair of governors and sent to the school via the school post box.

Complaints against members of the governing board should be sent to the chair of governors via the school post box.

Complaints against the chair of governors should be sent to the vice-chair of governors via the school post box.

Section 9: Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure.

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the DfE. The DfE will not re-investigate the matter of the complaint. It will look at whether the school's complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies that the school holds were adhered to. The DfE also looks at whether the school's statutory policies adhere to education legislation. It may direct the school to re-investigate the complaint where it is clear the school has acted unlawfully or unreasonably.

For more information or to refer to a complaint, see the following webpage: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

This information is included in the complaints panel outcome letter.

Section 10: Persistent complainants

If a complainant attempts to reopen an issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this complaints policy and procedures, the headteacher may write (by email or letter) to the complainant to inform him/her that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter closed, and that continued correspondence may be considered vexatious and that the school will not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue. The normal circumstance in which the school will not respond is if:

- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs.
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school position and their options (if any).
- The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time.
- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school/ school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience.
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive.
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff.
- Unreasonable behaviour that is abusive, offensive, or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint.

10.1 Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website.
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants.

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

Section 11: Unreasonable complaints

The school 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 the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive, or threatening.

The school defines unreasonable complainants as 'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints.'

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint does the following:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaint's procedure.

- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways that are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be considered and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced.
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed).
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the Department for Education.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated, and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email, and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically. Examples of this are listed below.

- Maliciously.
- Aggressively.
- Using threats, intimidation, or violence.
- Using abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language.
- Knowing it to be false.
- Using falsified information.
- Publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

Complainants should limit the number of communications with the school while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email, or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the headteacher or the chair of the local governing board will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately, and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from the school site.

section 12: Audio or video evidence

Complainants should make sure they obtain informed consent from all parties present before recording conversations or meetings.

The school does not normally accept electronic recordings as evidence when we are asked to consider a complaint. However, we may accept independently notarised transcriptions of recordings. We may also ask for the written consent of all recorded parties.

Unless exceptional circumstances apply, the school will refuse to accept evidence or recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded. This will be made clear in complaints procedures.

Section 13: Record keeping

A written record will be kept of all complaints that were resolved at the formal stage of the complaint's procedure. Records will contain details of whether the complaint was resolved at formal stage one or stage two. The action taken by the school or the school as a result of a complaint (regardless of whether they are upheld) will also be recorded.

Section 14: Withdrawal of a complaint

If the complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Section 15: Confidentiality

Correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

Furthermore, all aspects of the Complaints Policy and Procedure management will comply with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

Section 16: Learning lessons

The governing board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the headteacher, 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.

Section 17: Monitoring arrangements

- The governing board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly.
- The governing board will track the number and nature of complaints and review underlying issues, as stated in section eleven.
- The complaints records are logged and managed by the complaint's handler.
- This policy will be reviewed by the School Priorities Committee every two years.
- At each review, the policy will be approved by the full governing board.

Section 18: Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include: *(to be linked to refreshed policies)*

- Safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Exclusions policy
- SEN policy
- SEN information report
- Privacy notice

Copies of above can be found on our website.