

# Complaints Policy

**Policy Title:** Complaints Policy

**Date:** February 2026

**Review Date:** February 2027

**Owner:** Executive Headteacher

**Approval:** Governing Board

## 1. Introduction

This policy covers all complaints about our provision, including any facilities and services we provide. All stakeholders can make a complaint therefore; this policy is not limited to parents/carers of current pupils only.

This policy sets out the difference between:

- **A concern:** an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important
- **A complaint:** an expression or statement of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action

We recognise that the cohort of pupils in Alternative Provision often have complex needs, and it is important that we are aware of the additional risk of harm that our pupils may be vulnerable to. This policy reflects our commitment to addressing concerns and complaints in a way that is sensitive to the needs of our pupils and their families.

## 2. What This Policy Covers

This complaints procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by our provision, except for complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures.

### 3. What This Policy Does Not Cover

We cover complaints about the following issues in separate statutory procedures:

- Admissions to our school
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters – including allegations of abuse against staff
- Exclusions
- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff conduct
- Complaints about other providers who use our premises (they should have their own complaints procedures)

Our policy has a time limit for a person to raise a formal complaint of 3 months from the date of the incident. We will consider whether to accept or progress any complaint that falls outside our time limit if there are exceptional circumstances.

### 4. Roles and Responsibilities

**The Executive Headteacher will:**

- Ensure the complaints procedure is followed correctly
- Monitor information about complaints to identify any trends or issues
- Report regularly to the proprietor / governing body about complaints

**The Clerk to the Governing Body /Complaints Panel will:**

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints panel
- Arrange the complaints panel hearing
- Ensure the panel hearing is conducted properly

**The Complaints Panel will:**

- Consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint
- Include at least one member who is independent of the management and running of the provision

### 5. Principles for Investigation

All investigations should be:

- **Fair:** the complainant and the subject of the complaint should be allowed to give their statements. The appointed investigator shouldn't have prior knowledge of the complaint
- **Full:** we will make every effort to establish the validity of the complaint and look at all evidence that might be relevant
- **Proportionate:** we will consider the scope and scale of the investigation, including the need for

## 6. Stage 1: Informal Resolution

We will address any concern as early as possible without following formal procedures, but we will still take informal complaints seriously and make every effort to resolve matters quickly.

### Process:

- The informal stage may involve a meeting between the person who has raised the concern, the subject of the concern, and the Executive Headteacher (or another senior leader, as appropriate)
- We will establish a comfortable environment by avoiding interruption
- We will manage expectations by warning the person complaining that, while we'll take them seriously, the outcome may not be what they expect
- We will bear in mind the wellbeing of all parties involved
- We will take breaks if necessary

**Timeframe:** We aim to resolve informal concerns within 10 working days.

If we can't resolve the issue informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

## 7. Stage 2: Formal Complaint

### How to Make a Formal Complaint:

Formal complaints should be put into writing to the Executive Headteacher, or another senior member of staff, who will pass the complaint to the Executive Headteacher. The Executive Headteacher will either investigate the matter themselves, or if they are conflicted in any way, they will appoint a named investigator – who will have no prior knowledge of the issue. The aim of the investigation is to establish all the facts and to try to resolve the issue.

We recognise that under the Equality Act 2010, we must make reasonable adjustments for those who:

- Have learning difficulties
- Have disabilities

We will also try to make the process as accessible as possible to people who speak English as an additional language. This can include:

- Calling the school
- Scheduling an interpreter

**Investigation Process:** The investigator will:

1. Acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 3 working days
2. Interview the complainant to understand the complaint fully
3. Interview the subject of the complaint and any witnesses
4. Review any relevant documentation
5. Prepare a written report with findings and recommendations
6. Send the report to the complainant within 15 term time days of receiving the complaint

**Possible Outcomes:**

- Complaint upheld (in full or in part)
- Complaint not upheld
- Recommendations for improvement

## 8. Stage 3: Panel Hearing (Appeal)

If the complainant isn't happy with the investigation or its outcome, it progresses to a hearing where the matter is discussed afresh in front of a Complaints Panel. The Complaints Panel will include governors and/or management committee members. The Complaints Panel **must** include at least one person who is independent of the organisation.

**Requesting a Panel Hearing:**

The complainant must submit their request for a panel hearing in writing within 10 working days of receiving the Stage 2 outcome, stating:

- Why they are dissatisfied with the Stage 2 outcome
- What they believe would resolve the complaint

**Panel Composition:**

The panel will consist of at least 3 people who:

- Don't have prior knowledge of the complaint
- Don't have any conflict of interest in the complaint
- At least one panel member must be wholly independent of the organisation.

**The Panel Hearing:**

- The complainant may attend and be accompanied if they wish
- The hearing will normally take place within 20 working days of receipt of the request
- All parties will receive at least 5 working days' notice of the hearing
- The panel will consider all evidence presented

- The panel will make findings and recommendations
- The panel's decision is final

**Timeframe:** The panel will provide a written response within 10 working days of the hearing.

## 9. Managing Aggressive or Persistent Complaints

### **Aggressive Behaviour:**

We will try and separate the complaint and the complainant. If the complainant is behaving aggressively or displaying other unacceptable conduct, we will send any communication about their conduct.

Staff (including the Executive Headteacher) shouldn't be:

- Placed in upsetting or dangerous situations
- Expected to respond to abusive communications, or to attend meetings where someone is behaving aggressively

We will make it clear that meetings will be stopped or cancelled if any visitors, including parents/carers, don't follow the code of conduct.

It's a criminal offence to cause or permit "a nuisance or disturbance" on school premises. This means that complainants can be legally removed from the site if they're acting in an abusive or threatening way at meetings.

### **Persistent Complaints:**

Once we have followed all the stages of our complaint procedure, the Chair of Governors or the Proprietor can tell the complainant that the matter is closed. If the complainant tries to re-open the same issue, this can be classed as a persistent or 'serial' complaint.

We will only take the decision to close serial or persistent complaints and stop responding when:

- We have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and what their options are
- The complainant is contacting us repeatedly, but making the same points each time

## 10. Alternative Approaches to Complaints Procedures

### **Mediation:**

We may use mediation:

- In the informal stage, to provide a mechanism for discussion when a concern is raised
- Following a formal investigation, to help rebuild the relationship between parties

We won't use mediation as a substitute for investigation at the formal stage

#### **Virtual or Written Submissions:**

Where there are concerns about safety or where face-to-face meetings are not appropriate, we may:

- Hold virtual meetings using secure platforms
- Accept written submissions only
- Arrange meetings at neutral locations

## **11. Complaints About Other Families**

We do not alienate the parent or carer complaining by dismissing their complaints about other families. However, we will make it clear, our priority is to address pupils' needs. Unless the issue is directly school-related, parents/carers shouldn't expect us to resolve disputes between themselves.

## **12. Record Keeping**

We will keep records of complaints including:

- Records of the progress of the complaint, and its outcome
- Notes of meetings and phone calls
- Copies of letters or emails related to the complaint

We will keep the following documents relating to individual complaints confidential:

- Correspondence
- Statements
- Records

We will only keep these records if we need to, in line with our data protection practices.

## **13. Escalation to the Department for Education**

If we've followed our procedure in full and the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome, they can refer their complaint to the DfE. The DfE won't re-investigate the complaint, but it will look at whether:

- Our provision followed its complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies
- Our statutory policies comply with education legislation

**Contact details for the DfE:** Department for Education Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD  
Tel: 0370 000 2288 Website: [www.gov.uk/contact-dfe](http://www.gov.uk/contact-dfe)

## 14. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the governing body

We will monitor:

- The number and nature of complaints received
- Outcomes of complaints
- Lessons learned and improvements made

## Appendix A: Complaint Form

### CONFIDENTIAL

#### Your Details

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (daytime): \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (evening): \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Your relationship to the provision:  Parent/Carer of current pupil  Parent/Carer of former pupil

Member of the public  Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

#### Pupil Details (if applicable)

Pupil's Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Year Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Details of Your Complaint

What is your complaint about? (Please be as specific as possible)

When did the incident(s) occur?

Date(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Where did the incident(s) occur?

Who was involved? (Please provide names and roles if known)

**Are there any witnesses?** If yes, please provide names:

### **Steps Taken So Far**

**Have you tried to resolve this issue informally?**  Yes  No

**If yes, who did you speak to and when?**

**What was the outcome?**

**What Would Resolve Your Complaint?**

**What outcome are you seeking?** (Please be specific)

### **Supporting Evidence**

**Do you have any documents or evidence to support your complaint?**  Yes  No

**If yes, please list what you are attaching:**

### **Accessibility and Communication Needs**

**Do you require any reasonable adjustments to participate in the complaints process?**  Yes  No

**If yes, please specify:**

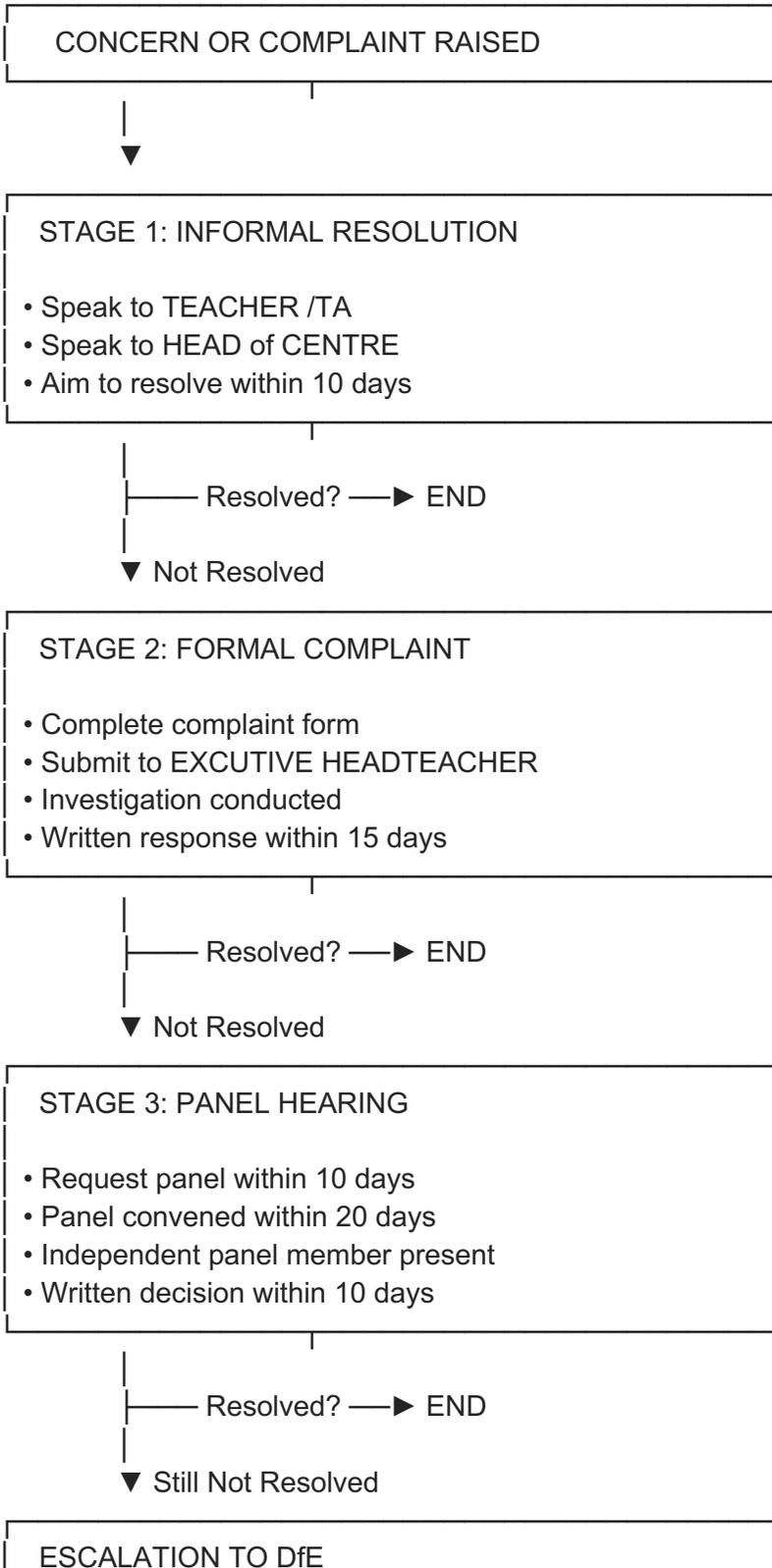
**Preferred method of communication:**  Email  Telephone  Letter  Face-to-face meeting

**Declaration**

I confirm that the information provided in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Complaints Process Flowchart



- Complainant may refer to DfE
- DfE reviews process for compliance

## Appendix C: Guidance for Complainants

### How to Make a Complaint

We value feedback and take all complaints seriously. This guidance will help you understand how to raise a concern or complaint.

### What is the Difference Between a Concern and a Complaint?

- **A concern** is an expression of worry or doubt over an issue you consider important
- **A complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action

### Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Most concerns can be resolved quickly by speaking to the right person. We encourage you to:

1. **Speak to your child's teacher first**
2. **If unresolved, speak to a senior leader**
3. **Arrange a meeting if needed**

We aim to resolve informal concerns within **10 school days**.

### Stage 2: Formal Complaint

If your concern cannot be resolved informally, you can make a formal complaint by:

1. **Completing a complaint form** (Appendix A)
2. **Submitting it to the Executive Headteacher**
3. **Within 3 school days**, we will acknowledge your complaint
4. **We will investigate your complaint**
5. **Within 15 school days of the investigation** we will provide a written response

### Stage 3: Panel Hearing

If you're not satisfied with the Stage 2 response, you can request a panel hearing by:

1. **Writing to the Clerk to Governors / Complaints Panel** within **10 school days** of receiving the Stage 2 response
2. **Explaining why you're dissatisfied** and what would resolve the complaint
3. **The panel will be convened within 20 school days**
4. **You may attend and bring someone with you**
5. **The panel's decision is final**

### What Happens Next?

If you remain dissatisfied after Stage 3, you can contact:

**Department for Education** Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD

Tel: 0370 000 2288 Website: [www.gov.uk/contact-dfe](http://www.gov.uk/contact-dfe)

The DfE will check whether we followed our complaints procedure correctly, but will not re-investigate your complaint.

**Support and Accessibility**

We want to make sure everyone can access our complaints procedure. If you need:

- Help completing the form
- An interpreter
- Documents in a different format
- Any other reasonable adjustment

Please contact us on [telephone number] or [email address].

**Confidentiality**

We will treat your complaint confidentially and only share information with those who need to know to investigate properly.

## **Appendix D: Terms of Reference for Complaints Panel**

### **Purpose**

The Complaints Panel is convened to hear appeals against decisions made at Stage 2 of the complaints procedure.

### **Composition**

The panel will consist of **at least 3 people** who:

- Were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint
- Have no prior knowledge of the complaint
- Have no conflict of interest

**At least one member must be independent** of the management and running of the provision.

### **Role of Panel Members**

Panel members will:

- Review all written evidence submitted
- Listen to oral representations from the complainant and the school
- Ask questions to clarify understanding
- Consider whether the complaint was handled appropriately at Stage 2
- Make findings and recommendations
- Produce a written decision

### **Role of the Chair**

The Chair will:

- Ensure the hearing is conducted fairly and properly
- Ensure all parties have the opportunity to present their case
- Manage the time effectively
- Ensure the panel reaches a decision
- Sign off the written decision

### **Role of the Clerk**

The Clerk will:

- Arrange the date, time and venue for the hearing
- Circulate papers to all parties at least 5 school days before the hearing
- Attend the hearing and take minutes
- Notify all parties of the panel's decision in writing

### **Possible Outcomes**

The panel may:

- Uphold the complaint in full or in part
- Dismiss the complaint in full or in part
- Make recommendations for action

- Make recommendations for policy or procedure changes

**The Panel's Decision is Final**

There is no further right of appeal within the school. The complainant may refer their complaint to the DfE if they believe the school did not follow its complaints procedure correctly.

## Appendix E: Complaint Investigation Checklist

**Complaint Reference Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date Complaint Received:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Investigator Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Initial Actions

- Complaint acknowledged within 3 school days
- Complainant informed of investigation timeframe
- Relevant staff informed (maintaining confidentiality)
- Safeguarding concerns identified and reported (if applicable)
- External advice sought (if needed)

### Planning the Investigation

- Terms of reference established
- Key questions identified
- Evidence requirements identified
- Interview list prepared
- Timeline for investigation agreed

### Gathering Evidence

- Interview with complainant conducted
- Interview with subject of complaint conducted
- Witness interviews conducted
- Documentary evidence reviewed:
  - Policies
  - Records
  - Correspondence
  - CCTV (if applicable)
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Analysis

- All evidence reviewed
- Findings established for each aspect of complaint
- Conclusions reached
- Recommendations identified (if applicable)

### Reporting

- Written report prepared including:
  - Summary of complaint

- Investigation process
- Evidence considered
- Findings
- Conclusions
- Recommendations

- Report reviewed by senior leader
- Response letter drafted
- Response sent to complainant within 15 school days

**Follow-up**

- Recommendations implemented
- Relevant staff informed of outcome
- Records filed securely
- Complaint logged for monitoring purposes
- Lessons learned identified

**Notes**

## Appendix F: Panel Hearing Procedure

### Before the Hearing

**At least 5 school days before the hearing**, all parties will receive:

- Notice of the date, time and venue
- A copy of the complaint and all supporting documents
- A copy of the Stage 2 investigation report
- Names of panel members
- This procedure document

### Who May Attend

- **The complainant** (and one companion if desired)
- **The investigating officer** from Stage 2
- **The panel members** (at least 3, including one independent member)
- **The clerk** to take minutes
- **Witnesses** (only while giving evidence)

Neither the complainant nor the school should bring legal representation. The hearing is not a legal proceeding.

### Hearing Structure

#### 1. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Chair welcomes everyone and introduces panel members
- Chair explains the purpose and procedure
- Chair confirms everyone has received the papers

#### 2. Complainant's Case (20 minutes)

- Complainant (or companion) presents their case
- Complainant may call witnesses
- Panel may ask questions
- Investigating officer may ask questions

#### 3. School's Case (20 minutes)

- Investigating officer presents the school's response
- Investigating officer may call witnesses
- Panel may ask questions
- Complainant may ask questions

#### 4. Summing Up (10 minutes)

- Complainant summarises their case
- Investigating officer summarises the school's position

#### 5. Deliberation (Private)

- All parties except panel members and clerk leave
- Panel considers all evidence

- Panel reaches a decision

## **6. Decision**

- Panel will provide a written decision within 10 school days
- The decision will include findings and any recommendations

### **Panel's Powers**

The panel may:

- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- Recommend action to be taken
- Recommend changes to policies or procedures

### **After the Hearing**

The clerk will:

- Send the written decision to all parties
- Ensure recommendations are followed up
- File all records securely

## **Appendix G: Model Letters**

### **G1: Acknowledgement of Formal Complaint**

[Date]

[Complainant Name] [Address]

Dear [Name],

#### **Re: Formal Complaint – Reference Number [XXX]**

Thank you for your complaint received on [date] regarding [brief description].

I am writing to confirm that your complaint has been logged and will be investigated under Stage 2 of our complaints procedure.

[Name], [Job Title] has been appointed to investigate your complaint. They will contact you within [number] days to arrange a convenient time to discuss your concerns in more detail.

We aim to provide you with a full written response within 15 school days of receiving your complaint, by [date].

If for any reason we cannot meet this deadline, we will contact you to explain why and provide a revised timeframe.

If you have any questions about the process, please contact me on [telephone] or [email].

Yours sincerely,

[Name] Complaints Co-ordinator

## **G2: Stage 2 Investigation Outcome Letter**

[Date]

[Complainant Name] [Address]

Dear [Name],

### **Re: Formal Complaint – Reference Number [XXX]**

Thank you for bringing your concerns to our attention. I have now completed my investigation into your complaint regarding [brief description].

**Summary of Complaint** [Summarise the key points of the complaint]

**Investigation Process** To investigate your complaint, I:

- Interviewed you on [date]
- Interviewed [names] on [dates]
- Reviewed [list documents/evidence]

**Findings** [For each aspect of the complaint, state whether it is upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld, with clear reasoning]

**Conclusion** [Overall conclusion about the complaint]

**Actions and Recommendations** [Detail any actions taken or recommended as a result of the investigation]

**Next Steps** I hope this resolves the matter to your satisfaction. If you remain dissatisfied with this response, you have the right to request a panel hearing under Stage 3 of our complaints procedure.

To request a panel hearing, you must write to the Clerk to the Governing Body at [address] within 10 school days of receiving this letter, explaining why you remain dissatisfied and what you believe would resolve the complaint.

If you have any questions about this response, please contact me on [telephone] or [email].

Yours sincerely,

[Name] [Job Title]

## **G3: Invitation to Panel Hearing**

[Date]

[Complainant Name] [Address]

Dear [Name],

### **Re: Complaint Panel Hearing – Reference Number [XXX]**

Further to your request for a panel hearing, I am writing to invite you to attend a hearing of the Complaints Panel.

**Date:** [Date] **Time:** [Time] **Venue:** [Location and room]

**Panel Members:**

- [Name], [Role] (Chair)
- [Name], [Role]
- [Name], [Role] (Independent Member)

**Attendees:**

- Yourself (and one companion if you wish)
- [Name], Investigating Officer from Stage 2
- [Name], Clerk to the Panel

**Documents:** Enclosed with this letter are:

- Your original complaint and supporting documents
- The Stage 2 investigation report
- The panel hearing procedure

Please confirm your attendance by [date] by contacting me on [telephone] or [email].

If you wish to bring a companion, please let me know their name and relationship to you. Please note that legal representation is not appropriate for this hearing.

If you wish to submit any additional written evidence, please send this to me by [date – at least 3 days before the hearing].

If you have any accessibility needs or require any reasonable adjustments, please let me know as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

[Name] Clerk to the Governing Body / Complaints Panel