

COMPLAINTS POLICY

NEWBURY SCHOOL

Version 2.0



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Overview

This procedure deals with complaints relating to the school and to any services that the school provides.

A framework of principles can be found at paragraph 8. Please note, there are certain complaints which fall outside the remit of this complaints procedure, for example, staff grievances or disciplinary procedures.

Legislation

This policy was written in respect of the following legislation; The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulation 2014.

Part 1: General Principles of Complaints

Dealing with Complaints – Initial Concerns

When dealing with issues raised, in the first instance, the school will work with the complainant to establish the difference between a concern and a complaint. We take informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage.

These key messages deal with complaints but the underlying principle is that concerns will be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. The requirement to have a complaints procedure need not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern informally. In most cases staff in school will receive the first approach. Where possible, and where staff are able, issues should be resolved immediately.

Dealing with Complaints – Formal procedures

The formal procedures will be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

Framework of Principles

The Newbury Independent School Complaints Procedure will:

- encourage resolution of problems by **informal** means wherever possible;
- be easily **accessible** and **publicised**;
- be **simple** to understand and use;
- be **impartial**;
- be **non-adversarial**;
- allow **swift** handling with established **time-limits** for action and keeping people informed of the progress;
- ensure a full and **fair** investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- respect people's desire for **confidentiality**;
- address all the points at issue and provide an **effective** response and



- **appropriate** redress, where necessary;
- provide **information** to the school's leadership team so that services can be improved.

Investigating Complaints

At each stage, the complaints co-ordinator (or designated investigator), will make sure that they:

- establish **what** has happened so far, and **who** has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of the interview.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure the school will keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in 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 assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review the school policies in light of the complaint.

Complainants will be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

We will attempt to identify areas of agreement between the parties and clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Vexatious Complaints

Our complaints procedure aims to limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the chair of the Governing Body is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.



Time Limits

Wherever possible, complaints will be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. Realistic time limits will be set for each action within each stage. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

Part 2: The Formal Complaints Procedure

The Stages of Complaints

A flow chart of stages can be found in Appendix 3. At each stage, the complaints officer will clarify exactly who will be involved, what will happen, and how long it will take. There may, on occasion, be the need for some flexibility; for example, the possibility of further meetings between the complainant and the member of staff directly involved and further investigations may be required by the Head Teacher after a meeting with the complainant.

There are three school-based stages:

- Stage one: Complaint heard by staff member (though not the subject of the complaint);
- Stage two: Complaint heard by Head Teacher;
- Stage three: Complaint heard by Governing Body's Complaints Appeal Panel.

An unsatisfied complainant can take a complaint to the next stage and complain to the LA for an independent appeal or review.

Where the complaint concerns the conduct of the Head Teacher or a governor, the complainant should make representation to the Chair of Governors. Where the Head Teacher or governor has been involved in the issue previously, representation should be made to another member of the governing body. Where the complaint is directly against the Chair of Governors representation should be made to the LA.

An example of a complaints procedure can be found in Annex B.

Part 3 – Managing and Recording Complaints

Recording Complaints

The school will record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing. Complainants may use the complaint form found in Appendix 4. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls taken by staff may be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

The complaints co-ordinator is responsible for the records and holds them centrally.

Governing Body Review



The Governing Body monitors the level and nature of complaints and reviews the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary. Complaints information shared with the whole Governing Body will not name individuals.

As well as addressing an individual's complaints, the process of listening to and resolving complaints will contribute to school improvement. When individual complaints are heard this enables us to identify underlying issues that need to be addressed. The monitoring and review of complaints by the school and the Governing Body will be a useful tool in evaluating the school's performance.

The number of complaints registered under formal procedures in the last academic year = 0

Appendix 1

Section 29 of the Education Act 2002 requires that:

- (1) The governing body of a maintained school (including a maintained nursery school) shall –
 - (a) establish procedures for dealing with all complaints relating to the school or to the provision of facilities or services under section 27, other than complaints falling to be dealt with in accordance with any procedures required to be established in relation to the school by virtue of a statutory provision other than this section, and
 - (b) publicise the procedures so established.
- (2) In establishing or publicising procedures under subsection (1), the governing body shall have regard to any guidance given from time to time (in relation to England) by the Secretary of State.

Section 39 of the Education Act 2002 provides the following:

“maintained school” means a community, foundation or voluntary school, a community or foundation special school or a maintained nursery school;

“maintained nursery school” means a nursery school which is maintained by a local education authority and is not a special school;

Appendix 2

An example of a Complaints Procedure

Stage One: Complaint heard by Staff Member

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the school can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To that end, if staff are made aware of the procedures, they know what to do when they receive a complaint.

It would assist the procedure if the school respected the views of a complainant who indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. In these cases, the complaints co-ordinator can refer the complainant to another staff member. Where the complaint concerns the headteacher, the complaints co-ordinator can refer the complainant to the chair of governors.

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the complaints co-ordinator may consider referring the complainant to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial.

Where the first approach is made to a governor, the next step would be to refer the complainant to the appropriate person and advise them about the procedure. It would be useful if governors did not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or be involved at the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the procedure.

Stage Two: Complaint heard by Head Teacher

The Head Teacher's influence will already have shaped the way complaints are handled in the school. At this point, the complainant may be dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at stage one as well as pursuing their initial complaint. The head may delegate the task of collating the information to another staff member but not the decision on the action to be taken.

Stage Three: Complaint heard by Governing Bodies Complaints Appeal Panel

The complainant needs to write to the Chair of Governors giving details of the complaint. The Chair, or a nominated governor, will convene a GB complaints panel; the Proprietor will ensure that one member of the panel hearing will be independent of the management and running of the school.

The governors' appeal hearing is the last school-based stage of the complaints process, and is not convened to merely rubber-stamp previous decisions.

Individual complaints would not be heard by the whole GB at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

The governing body may nominate a number of members with delegated powers to hear complaints at that stage, and set out its terms of reference. These can include:

- drawing up its procedures;
- hearing individual appeals;
- making recommendations on policy as a result of complaints.

The procedure adopted by the panel for hearing appeals would normally be part of the school's complaints procedure. The panel can be drawn from the nominated members and may consist of three or five people. The panel may choose their own chair.

The Remit of The Complaints Appeal Panel

The panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

There are several points which any governor sitting on a complaints panel needs to remember:

- a. It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the panel, governors need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of governor and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.
- b. The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.
- c. An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.

- d. Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.
- e. The governors sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaints procedure.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Role of the Clerk

The Department strongly recommends that any panel or group of governors considering complaints be clerked. The clerk would be the contact point for the complainant and be required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- notify all parties of the panel's decision.

The Role of the Chair of the Governing Body or the Nominated Governor

The nominated governor role:

- check that the correct procedure has been followed;
- if a hearing is appropriate, notify the clerk to arrange the panel;

The Role of the Chair of the Panel

The Chair of the Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease;
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;
- the panel is open minded and acting independently;
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;

- 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 it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

Notification of the Panel's Decision

The chair of the panel needs to ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, with the panel's response; this is usually within a set deadline which is publicised in the procedure. The letter needs to explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.

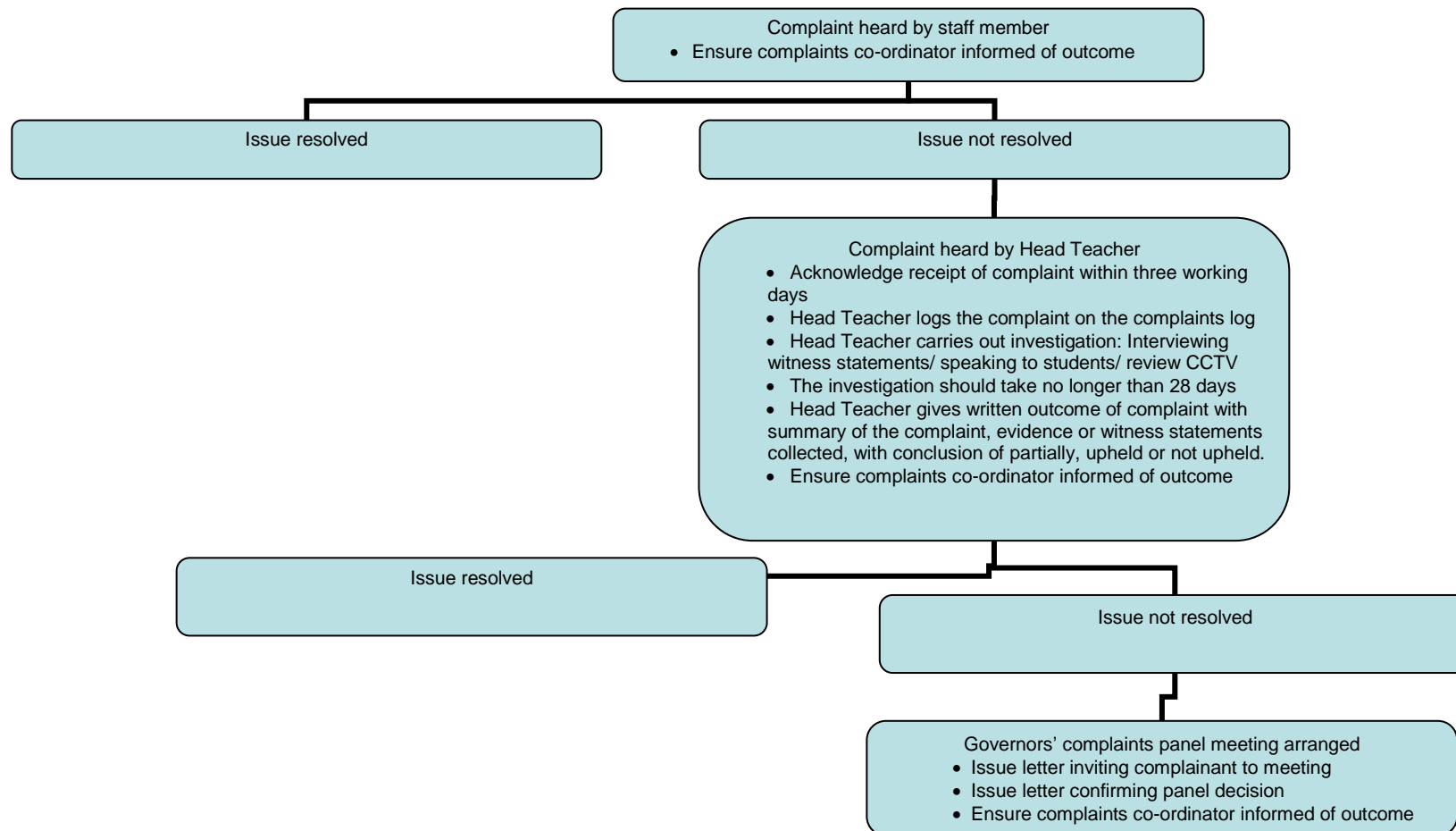
Checklist for a Panel Hearing

The panel needs to take the following points into account:

- The hearing is as informal as possible.
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.
- The Head Teacher may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Head Teacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses.
- The complainant may question both the Head Teacher and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The parent/guardian is allowed to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish.
- The Head Teacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within a set time scale.

Flowchart

Summary of Dealing with Complaints



What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details

Signature:

Date:

Please can you indicate your preferred method of contact by ticking one of the boxes below:

Tel

Email

Post

Official use only

Date acknowledgement sent:
Letter/Email/Telephone

Response due by:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT POLICY CHECKLIST

Equality Impact Assessment of Policy						
Title of Policy	Complaints Policy					
PART 1	Positive Impact – reducing inequalities					
<p><i>Statutory duty/equality legislation: Equality Impact Assessment undertaken or is satisfied.</i> <i>D = Disability, GA = Gender reassignment, P = Pregnancy & Maternity, R = Race, R/B = Religion or Belief, S = Sex, SO = Sexual Orientation,</i> <i>A = Age, M/CP = Marriage and Civil Partnerships</i></p>	<p>How is the policy likely to have a <u>significant positive impact</u> on equality by reducing inequalities that already exist? This policy ensures that all members of the community have access to make a complaint and to have it dealt with thoroughly and appropriately. It ensure right of appeal should the complainant feel that the complaint is not dealt with appropriately</p> <p>Could the policy have a <u>significant negative impact</u> on equality in relation to each of the following groups or characteristics? No – this policy ensure a consistent process for managing complaints which applies to all equally. Failure to follow due process could result in a negative impact.</p>					
Characteristics Indicate areas of likely impact	Promote equal opportunities	Get rid of discrimination	Get rid of harassment	Promote good community relations	Promote positive attitudes	Promote/ protect human rights
✓						
D	✓			✓	✓	✓
GA	✓			✓	✓	✓
P	✓			✓	✓	✓
R	✓			✓	✓	✓
R/B	✓			✓	✓	✓
S	✓			✓	✓	✓
SO	✓			✓	✓	✓
A	✓			✓	✓	✓
M/CP	✓			✓	✓	✓
Equality Impact Assessment of NIS Policy	Records					
Name of person responsible for policy						
Date of Policy						

A = Age, M/CP = Marriage and Civil Partnerships –applies in respect of employment framework policies

Equality Impact Assessment of Policy	Evidence
PART 2	
<p>Statutory duty/equality legislation: Equality Impact Assessment undertaken or is satisfied.</p> <p><i>D = Disability, GA = Gender reassignment, P = Pregnancy & Maternity, R = Race, R/B = Religion or Belief, S = Sex, SO = Sexual Orientation, A = Age, M/CP = Marriage and Civil Partnerships</i></p>	<p>What is the evidence for your answers above? (list any quantitative and qualitative)</p> <p>All complaints are documented using standard forms and retained as a central record by the complaints manager. Annual reports are made to the Governing body which quantify complaints – records maintain the qualitative information on resolution.</p>

Equality Impact Assessment of Policy	Conclusion
PART 3	
Summary of findings	Current procedures meet statutory requirements and are fully maintained.

Equality Impact Assessment of Policy	Next steps		
PART 4			
Category	Actions	Target Date	Person responsible
Next Steps – Action Plan			
Practical changes required to reduce adverse impact	None required		
Monitoring and evaluation and Review (publish revised policy)	Annual report to Governing Body		

This policy has been written & authorised by:

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DATE:	APRIL 2022
NEXT REVIEW DATE	APRIL 2023
AUTHORISED BY:	A WATSON