



Highsted Grammar School

Complaints Policy

COMPLAINTS POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Under Part 7, Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the School is required to have in place a procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils.

This procedure is provided:

in the information given to new parents when their children join the School and is available on the School website.

This procedure does not apply to complaints about:

- Admissions;
- Suspensions and exclusions;
- Curriculum and provision of collective worship and religious education;
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs;
- Complaints about other children or parents (rather than steps taken by the School); Matters likely to require a child protection investigation, which will be referred to the local authority designated officer and/or the multi-agency safeguarding hub; Whistleblowing;
- Staff grievances; and
- Matters relating to services provided by other suppliers who may use School premises or facilities.

School complaints may be raised under this policy about staff conduct, however such complaints will be dealt with under the Trust's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, and complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken as a result.

It is the School's intention that this Complaints Procedure will:

- encourage resolution of problems by **informal** means wherever possible;
- 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 senior management team so that services can be improved.

The School's Complaints Co-Ordinator is the Deputy Headteacher.



SPECIFIC PROVISIONS

Changes of Personnel

Where a complaint is lodged concerning the conduct of the Headteacher or a governor (or where a Headteacher or governor has been involved in the issue previously), references to 'Headteacher' in the Procedure set out below will include references to a governor appointed to take on the roles otherwise allocated to the Headteacher.

If the subject of the complaint is the Headteacher, then the Complaint Form should be submitted to the Chair of Governors who will appoint a governor to take on the role otherwise allocated to the Headteacher in Stage 2 below.

The School may also in appropriate circumstances adjust or modify the timeframes contained within this procedure where the particular circumstances of the complaint warrant it.

Safeguarding and Early Help

Where, during the handling of a complaint, information emerges which indicates a pupil may be suffering or likely to suffer harm, or may otherwise benefit from additional support, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will be informed immediately. In line with *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025*, the DSL will consider whether the matter should be referred to Children's Social Care, the Local Authority Designated Officer, or other statutory agencies, and whether the child and/or family may benefit from Early Help. The school will seek parental consent for Early Help referrals wherever appropriate (unless doing so would place the child at further risk) and will work with multi-agency partners to coordinate support. Any such action will take priority over the complaints procedure where necessary to protect the welfare of the child.

Exclusions and Exceptional Circumstances

Where an anonymous complaint is received, the Academy/Trust will use its reasonable endeavours to consider the complaint as best as it reasonably can. However, the Academy/Trust will not be required to consider the complaint pursuant to any specific process and will handle anonymous complaints on a case by case basis.

A complaint relating to matters more than 3 months in the past will only be accepted and investigated in exceptional circumstances.

Exceptional Circumstances typically include:

- Safeguarding/Child protection issues;
- Bullying allegations.

In such cases, the School may either involve appropriate external agencies or conduct its own internal review to test whether there is any corroborative evidence which might trigger a formal investigation.

Unreasonable Complainant Conduct

Complainants (and/or anyone acting on their behalf) may be deemed by the Headteacher and /or the Chair of Governors to be unreasonable if they have behaved in any of the following ways (this list is not exhaustive):

- Posed any kind of threat to a member of School staff
- Physical intimidation or abuse
- Use of foul or abusive language
- Any kind of aggressive conduct

Whatever the nature of the complaint, a parent should not arrive at School without an appointment and 'demand' to see the Headteacher or another member of staff. It is likely that the member of staff concerned will have existing commitments which make an immediate consultation impossible and is likely to need time to consider the detail of the complaint before being able to make an informed response. Nor should parents circulate by whatever means information relating to their complaint to members of the public or other members of the School community.



The School reserves the right to reject a vexatious complaint. Vexatious complaints may be characterised (but are not limited to) the following:

- Complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
- Insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
- Insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- Complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance;
- Demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value; and/or
- Circulation of details relating to their complaint to members of the public or other members of the School community.

Please note this list is not exhaustive, nor does one single feature on its own necessarily imply that the complaint will be so defined.

School

The School may decide to deal with such complaints in one or more of the following ways, for example:

- a. Setting out a code of behaviour for the complainant to comply with if the School is to continue processing the complaint.
- b. To require contact to take place with a named individual only.
- c. To restrict telephone calls to specified days and times.
- d. To restrict contact with the complainant to one form of contact only.

Whether or not such steps have been taken, if the Chair of Governors considers the complaint to be vexatious, s/he may write to the complainant to inform them that the complaint is deemed to be vexatious and that the School will not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue. S/he will then authorise staff to terminate contact with the complainant (except in matters directly related to the education and welfare of their child) and to discontinue any further investigation being carried out. Any further contacts from the complainant in writing will be read and placed on file. Telephone calls relating to the complaint will be terminated and logged.

Once a complaint has been addressed formally via this procedure, the matter will be closed and further correspondence will not be responded to. A sample letter is set out on page 12.

Complaint campaigns

If the School is subject to a complaint campaign, they may employ a separate procedure under this policy to respond to this. For the purpose of this policy a complaint campaign is defined as large volumes of complaints from multiple parties all based on the same subject matter. This could include from parents/guardians as well as from complainants unconnected with the School. In these instances, the School may respond by:

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- Sending a template consolidated response to all complainants with the same message; or
 - Publishing a single response on the Trust website.

Confidentiality

A written record will be kept of all complaints that reach the formal stage, whether they are resolved following Stage 2, or proceed to a panel hearing (Stage 3) and any action taken by the school as a result (regardless of whether they are upheld). Complaint records will be maintained securely and in line with the School's data protection and retention policy. 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 2008 Education and Skills Act requests access to them.

Removal of a Child

Where a child is not on the School roll, or ceases to be on the School roll during the investigation of a complaint presented on their behalf, the complaint may be closed and no further action taken.

THE PROCEDURE

Stage One (informal): Complaint Heard by Staff Member

Where a parent has a concern, they should in most cases raise it with their child's form teacher or a member of staff who is most directly related to their complaint.

The School does recognise that there may be circumstances in which: -

- it would be difficult for a particular complainant to discuss a complaint with a particular member of staff; or
- the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with the complaint.

In these cases, the parent should contact the Deputy Headteacher (the Complaints Co-ordinator) via admin@highsted.kent.sch.uk who can refer the complainant to another staff member (or, in the case of a complaint concerning the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors) for informal resolution. Such alternative member of staff may be more senior, but does not have to be, and they are simply required to consider the complaint objectively and impartially.

Parents should be able to expect an acknowledgement within 3 school days. This may be by way of email or telephone call. If a meeting is to be arranged to resolve the complaint, this should then be arranged as soon as possible after that acknowledgement has been conveyed depending upon the complainant's availability.

This should generally enable a concern to be resolved at the earliest possible stage and avoid any need for it to escalate into a formal complaint.

Members of staff dealing with such concerns should keep a written record of the concern and the steps taken to deal with it. This is particularly important where the concern is raised (and resolved) verbally.

If an acceptable resolution is not reached, the member of staff should direct the individual to the next stage of this procedure.

Where a complaint is received which has not first been raised informally as set out in this stage of the procedure and which does not indicate that there is good reason why this has not been done, the usual next step would be to refer the complainant to the appropriate person and advise them to endeavour to resolve their complaint at Stage 1.

It is within the discretion of the Headteacher or Chair of Governors to refer a complaint immediately to Stage 2.

Where a complainant is not happy with the steps taken by the School to resolve the complaint, they may proceed to the next stage of the Complaints Procedure. They should do this within 10 school days of any contact made by the relevant staff member who has endeavoured to resolve their complaint.

Stage Two (formal): Complaint Heard by Headteacher

A formal complaint should be issued to the School in the form set out on page 10: Annex 1, or at least including all the matters covered in that form.

The School will promptly acknowledge the complaint (usually within five school days). The Headteacher will be the person to consider it and reach the decision upon any action to be taken. She may investigate the complaint herself or appoint another suitable person to investigate the complaint and produce a report which the Headteacher will consider in reaching her decision. The investigation may involve a meeting with the complainant, and the Headteacher will confirm her decision in writing within 15 school days of the date upon which the acknowledgement of the complaint was sent or the meeting between the investigator and the complainant.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at this stage of the Complaints Procedure they may proceed to the next stage of the Complaints Procedure.

Stage Three (formal): Appeal

To progress to Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure, the complainant should write to the Clerk to the Governing Board giving details of the complaint and the reasons why they disagree with the Headteacher's decision at Stage 2, no later than 10 working days from the date of receipt of the Headteacher's decision letter. This will be acknowledged by the Clerk to the Governors within 5 school days. The Clerk will then take steps to convene a Stage 3 Panel Hearing to take place within 20 school days and a letter will be sent to the complainant inviting them to attend the hearing giving the complainant a minimum of 10 school days' notice of the date, time, and venue of the hearing and invited to submit final documentation at least (not less than) 5 school days before the hearing.

Should the complainant submit a reasonable request at least 5 school days prior to the meeting for an alternative date, endeavours will be made to set a mutually convenient time for the meeting.

In order for them to prepare for the hearing, the Panel and all participants should receive in advance (in particular but not exclusively): -

- A summary of the steps taken at Stage 1;
- The formal complaint lodged at Stage 2;
- The investigation report setting out the steps taken by the School to investigate the complaint;
- The Headteacher's decision; and
- The complainant's correspondence requesting escalation to Stage 3, and any supporting documentation submitted by the complainant or the School.

In most cases, the Stage 3 Hearing will be attended by: -

- The panel (made up of at least three individuals, one of whom will be independent of the management and running of the School), with one individual chosen to act as Chair;
- The complainant (may be accompanied by a relative or a friend if they wish);
- The Headteacher;
- An appropriate individual to advise the panel;
- A clerk.

It will not normally be expected for the subject of the original complaint to attend, nor for witnesses to attend and give evidence in person, but this will be within the discretion of the panel.

CONDUCT OF THE PANEL HEARING

At the hearing, the complainant will be given a full and fair opportunity to present the grounds of their complaint and any supporting evidence, together with their reasons for being dissatisfied with the Headteacher's decision at Stage 2. It should be made clear what resolution is sought by the complainant and why this is considered appropriate.

The Panel's decision will usually be reached on the basis of the documentary evidence available. The Panel's role is not to re-investigate the case, but to review the steps taken to date.

In order to retain the non-adversarial approach recommended by the DfE, the following approach will apply to the hearing:

- The Panel Chair will welcome the complainant and introduce those present.
- The complainant may restate the nature of the complaint if they choose.
- The complainant may be asked questions by the Committee and the Headteacher.
- The Headteacher may be asked to make a statement to the Committee regarding the complainant and may be asked questions by the Committee and/or the complainant.
- The complainant will have the opportunity to ask questions, via the panel.
- The Headteacher, complainant and any friend or representative will be asked to leave.

- After the withdrawal of the Headteacher, complainant and any friend or representative, the Committee will consider the complaint and any relevant information in order to reach its decision as to whether the complaint will be upheld, rejected or investigated further.

THE PANEL'S DECISION

The Panel will have to consider the issues raised by the complainant and the evidence supporting their complaint.

The Panel will consider the complainant's appeal and may: -

- 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.

Dismissal of a complaint may be done where: -

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld; or
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence; or
- The matter has been fully investigated and that appropriate procedures are being followed, which are strictly confidential.

This will be confirmed in writing to the complainant as soon as reasonably practicable (usually within 10 term time days).

A copy of findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. As set out above, complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against individual members of staff as a result of their complaint.

The Panel's review is final and is the last stage of the complaints process.

The Panel's findings will also be available for inspection by the complainant on the School premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Headteacher will report on the operation of the Complaints Procedure to the Governing Body once a year. This report will include:

- the number of formal complaints that have been made.
- the number that have been satisfactorily dealt with at the point of the original



investigation.

- the number of occasions on which the Appeal Panel has met.
- any significant amendments to School policy or practice as a result of the complaints made.
- any issues that have arisen in the operation of the Complaints Procedure.

The Headteacher's report will respect the confidentiality of the individual; correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential. In the light of the Headteacher's report, the Governing Body will consider whether or not the complaints procedure should be amended in any way.

Annex 1 Complaint Form

This is a Complaint Form intended to instigate Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure, after attempts to resolve the concern informally under Stage 1 have not provided you with a resolution you consider satisfactory.

Stage 1 should only be omitted in exceptional circumstances (and in such cases the reasons why should be set out below). If the School does not consider that Stage 1 has been appropriately omitted, it reserves the right to refer your complaint back to that stage.

Please complete and return to the Deputy Headteacher (Complaints Co-ordinator) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

An editable version of this form is available on request from admin@highsted.kent.sch.uk

Your name:		Pupil's name:	
Address:		Your relationship to the pupil:	
		Daytime telephone number:	
		Evening telephone number:	
<p>Please give concise details of your complaint.</p> <p>Please include, where possible, dates, names of witnesses, etc. as this will enable the School to properly investigate your complaint.</p>			
<p>What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint.</p> <p>(Who did you speak to and what was the response)?</p>			



<p>If you have not taken such action, please set out here your reasons.</p>	
<p>What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?</p>	
<p>Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.</p>	
<p>Signed:</p>	
<p>Dated:</p>	
<p><u>Official Use</u></p>	
<p>Date acknowledgement sent:</p>	
<p>By who:</p>	
<p>Complaint referred to:</p>	
<p>Date:</p>	

Annex 2: Example Rejection Letter

Dear

Following receipt of your communications and careful consideration of the same, I regret that I am unable to deal with this matter under the School's Complaints Procedure as:

Please select appropriate wording from the following:

- You have not identified any specific actions of which you might complain
- Your concerns are presented as conclusions rather than specific actions of which you complain.
- The concerns that you identify relate to historical actions and as such will not be investigated.
- The substance of your complaint has been addressed under this procedure already.
- The concerns that you raise do not fall within the scope of this procedure. [I have enclosed a copy of the [NAME] policy.]
- The School offered to resolve the matter informally and, in my judgement, you refused unreasonably to take advantage of this.

If you wish my decision to be reviewed then you may write to the Clerk to the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher
Or Chair of Governing Body

The Remit of the Complaints Panel

Any individual sitting on a complaints panel should bear the following in mind:

- a. It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No one 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, in addition to one member of the panel being independent of the running and management of the School, governors should be mindful of 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. In doing so, it is the panel's role to establish the facts and make recommendations in order to satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour.
- 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. The governors sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaint's procedure.

Policy Review

Approved by:	Governing Body	Date: March 2024
Last reviewed on:	September 2025	
Next review due by:	September 2026	