



**NESTON**  
HIGH SCHOOL

## Complaints Procedure

Policy owners/leads:	TPH/KR
Notes:	DFE Model
Statutory:	Yes
Website:	Yes
Review period:	2 Yearly

Date	Action	Comments / Follow Up
Aug 2024	HD Review	Next review Aug 2026

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# 1. Aims

- 1.1 Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.
- 1.2 When responding to complaints, we aim to:
  - ✦ 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
- 1.3 We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.
- 1.4 The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.
- 1.5 To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.
- 1.6 Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

# 2. Legislation and guidance

- 2.1 This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the [Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.
- 2.2 It is also based on the Department for Education's (DfE) model complaints procedure.

# 3. Definitions and scope

- 3.1 Definitions
  - 3.1.1 A concern is defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought". The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible
  - 3.1.2 A complaint is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action"
  - 3.1.3 If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases the complaints co-ordinator will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern the complaints co-ordinator will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

## 3.2 Scope

- 3.2.1 The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.
- 3.2.2 There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.
- 3.2.3 This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:
- ✦ Admissions
  - ✦ Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
  - ✦ Safeguarding matters (including matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation)
  - ✦ Exclusion of pupils from school
  - ✦ Whistle-blowing
  - ✦ Staff grievances
  - ✦ School re-organisation proposals
  - ✦ Staff discipline
  - ✦ Staff conduct
  - ✦ Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities
  - ✦ The National Curriculum
  - ✦ Withdrawal from the curriculum (parents and carers can withdraw their child from any aspect of religious education, including the daily act of collective worship. They do not have to explain why.

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on 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 complainant 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.

## 4. Roles and responsibilities

### 4.1 The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- 4.1.1 Follow these procedures
- 4.1.2 Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- 4.1.3 Treat all those involved with respect
- 4.1.4 Not publish details about the complaint on social media

### 4.2 The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- 4.2.1.1 Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes

- 4.2.1.2 Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- 4.2.1.3 Prepare a comprehensive report to the headteacher or complaints committee which includes the facts and potential solutions

#### 4.3 The complaints coordinator

##### 4.3.1 The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- 4.3.1.1 The Headteacher
- 4.3.1.2 The designated complaints trustee
- 4.3.1.3 Any other staff member providing administrative support

##### 4.3.2 The complaints coordinator will:

- 4.3.2.1 Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- 4.3.2.2 Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the headteacher, Chair of Trustees and Clerk to the Board of Trustees.
- 4.3.2.3 Be aware of issues relating to:
  - ✦ Sharing third party information
  - ✦ Additional support needed by complainants, for example interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person

#### 4.4 Clerk to the Board of Trustees

The clerk will:

- 4.4.1 Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings
- 4.4.2 Arrange the complaints hearing
- 4.4.3 Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

#### 4.5 Committee chair

The committee chair will:

- 4.5.1 Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- 4.5.2 Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

## 5. Principles for investigation

### 5.1 When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

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

## 6. Time scales

- 6.1 The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.
- 6.2 We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there are exceptional circumstances and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

- 6.3 When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the next school day.
- 6.4 If at any point we cannot meet the time scales we have set out in this policy, we will:
  - 6.4.1 Set new time limits with the complainant
  - 6.4.2 Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

## 7. Stages of complaint

### 7.1 Stage 1: informal

- 7.1.1 The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.
- 7.1.2 The complainant should first approach the class teacher of the pupil concerned or alternatively another school employee. If the complainant is not a parent or guardian of a pupil he/she should direct the complaint to the headteacher.
- 7.1.3 The complainant may raise his/her complaint in person, by telephone or in writing.
- 7.1.4 The Complainant should be prepared to give details of the circumstances which have given rise to the complaint that he/she wishes to raise, and express how he/she would like the matter to be dealt with or how he/she sees a resolution being achieved. It may be necessary to put these details in writing.
- 7.1.5 There may be some occasions where the complaint can be resolved on the spot. If that is achievable, details of the concern and the resolution will be recorded by the member of staff for monitoring purposes.
- 7.1.6 There may be some complaints which require further enquiries, with accounts being taken from other parties involved. The member of staff dealing with the complaint at Stage One will make a record of the issues raised, and will carry out those enquiries. The member of staff shall endeavour to conclude the enquiries within five school days from the date when the complaint was made.
- 7.1.7 Once the enquiries have been concluded, the member of staff will contact the complainant and provide:
  - 7.1.7.1 a summary of his/her understanding of the complaint raised;
  - 7.1.7.2 a summary of the information which he/she has discovered as part of his/her Stage One enquiries (if required to be undertaken);
  - 7.1.7.3 provide a response to the complaint and an explanation as to how the response has been reached;
  - 7.1.7.4 confirm whether any action is to be taken; and,
  - 7.1.7.5 confirm that the matter will be logged and that a record will be retained to ensure that steps can be taken to avoid the issue arising again.
- 7.1.8 If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

## 7.2 Stage 2: formal

- 7.2.1 If the complainant is not satisfied that the matter has been resolved at stage one he/she can progress the complaint to the formal procedure under stage two.
- 7.2.2 The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint to the headteacher in a letter or by email.
- 7.2.3 The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint. Complainants which fail to particularly particularise a complaint may be rejected. We will invite complainants to address any lack of detail or information to allow for the complaint to be considered prior to making a decision to rejecting a complaint.
- 7.2.4 If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office 0151 336 3902 or admin@nestonhigh.com.
- 7.2.5 The headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days. The letter of acknowledgement will:
  - 7.2.5.1 provide contact details of the person dealing with the complaint at stage 2; and
  - 7.2.5.2 specify that the complaint will be investigated within 15 school days.
- 7.2.6 The headteacher (or other person appointed by the headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct the investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within fifteen school days.
- 7.2.7 During the stage 2 investigation the complainant is required to keep the details of the complaint private and confidential. This is to enable a just and fair investigation to be undertaken. Any steps taken by the complainant which do not preserve the confidentiality of the complaint may undermine the efficiency and effectiveness of the investigation and could require separate action to be taken to address any such breach of confidentiality.
- 7.2.8 The complainant may be invited to attend a meeting with the person appointed to deal with the complaint at stage 2 to discuss the complaint.
- 7.2.9 The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.
- 7.2.10 If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the clerk to the board of trustees in writing within ten school days. If there is no requirement to proceed to Stage 3, review panel, within 10 school days then the complaint will be considered to be resolved.
- 7.2.11 If the complaint is about the headteacher or a member of the governing body a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at stage 2. Complaints about the headteacher or a member of the governing body must be made to the clerk via the school office.
- 7.2.12 If the complaint is about the chair and vice chair, the entire governing body or the majority of the governing body stage 2 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

### **7.3 Stage 3: review panel**

- 7.3.1 Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal, stage.
- 7.3.2 Stage 3 is the final stage of the complaints procedure.
- 7.3.3 A request to escalate to stage 3 must be made to the clerk to the trustees within 5 school days of receipt of the stage 2 outcome.
- 7.3.4 The clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.
- 7.3.5 The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.
- 7.3.6 If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.
- 7.3.7 Representatives from the media will not be permitted to attend.

#### **7.3.8 Convening the panel**

- 7.3.8.1 The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and will consist of at least 3 trustees who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at stage 3.
- 7.3.8.2 Prior to the meeting the trustees will decide amongst themselves who will act as the committee chair.
- 7.3.8.3 The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 10).
- 7.3.8.4 The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The clerk will within five school days aim to set a date for the hearing taking into consideration the time required to disseminate all written material to all parties for the review panel hearing. If this is not possible the clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.
- 7.3.8.5 If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.
- 7.3.8.6 Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least five school days before the date of the meeting.
- 7.3.8.7 The committee will normally not accept as evidence recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.
- 7.3.8.8 The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

#### **7.3.9 At the meeting**

- 7.3.9.1 The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.



- 7.3.9.2 At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.
- 7.3.9.3 The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish. We don't encourage either party to bring legal representation, but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union.
- 7.3.9.4 Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.
- 7.3.9.5 At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.
- 7.3.9.6 The panel, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave, and evidence will then be considered.  
The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the proprietor and headteacher.

### **7.3.10 The outcome**

The committee can:

- 7.3.10.1 Uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- 7.3.10.2 Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld, the committee will:

- 7.3.10.3 Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- 7.3.10.4 Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

7.3.11 The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within five school days.

7.3.12 The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school.

If the stage 3 complaint is about jointly the chair or vice chair, the entire governing body or the majority of the governing body stage 3 will be heard by a committee of independent governors.

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

- 8.1 If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the ESFA. The ESFA will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school. The ESFA will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint, but will intervene if a school or trust has:
  - 8.1.1 Breached a clause in its funding agreement
  - 8.1.2 Failed to act in line with its duties under education law
  - 8.1.3 Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions.

- 8.2 If the school's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.
- 8.3 For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:  
<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

## 9. Persistent complaints

### 9.1 Unreasonably persistent complaints

- 9.1.1 Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, complaint may become unreasonable if the person:
- 9.1.1.1 Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure or previously found to be groundless
  - 9.1.1.2 Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory, or repetitive
  - 9.1.1.3 Knowingly provides false information
  - 9.1.1.4 Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure
  - 9.1.1.5 Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refused to co-operate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames it sets out
  - 9.1.1.6 Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
  - 9.1.1.7 Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
  - 9.1.1.8 Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation goes on
  - 9.1.1.9 Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance, or excessive demands on school time
  - 9.1.1.10 Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value
  - 9.1.1.11 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 a referral to the DfE.
  - 9.1.1.12 Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
  - 9.1.1.13 Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums
- 9.1.2 Steps we will take
- 9.1.2.1 We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.
  - 9.1.2.2 If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place. We may:
    - ✦ Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address

- ✦ Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- ✦ Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as Citizens Advice
- ✦ Put any other strategy in place as necessary

### 9.1.3 Stopping responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when all these factors are met:

- 9.1.3.1 We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- 9.1.3.2 We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- 9.1.3.3 The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

9.1.4 Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

9.1.5 In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from our school site.

## 9.2 Duplicate complaints

9.2.1 If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

9.2.2 If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- 9.2.2.1 Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and the local process is complete
- 9.2.2.2 Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint
- 9.2.2.3 If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

## 9.3 Complaint campaigns

9.3.1 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.

9.3.2 The DfE and EFSA acknowledge that there are occasions when it is necessary or reasonable for us to deviate from our published complaints procedure. The school considers that a complaint campaign constitutes such an occasion.

9.3.3 In the event that we believe a complaints campaign is being pursued we will write to the complainants and advise them that we are to adopt an alternative approach to the complaint which addresses the issues raised but also ensure a fair and proportionate use of our resources can be applied.

9.3.4 If the complaint relates to a school within the school, Headteacher will consider the matters raised and issue a response to the complainants or publish it on the school's website, whichever is deemed to be the most efficient way to respond.

9.3.5 If the complaint is about the Headteacher then the Chair of Trustees will consider the matters raised and issue a response. If the Chair of Trustees is the subject of the complaint another Governor will be appointed to consider the complaint and respond. If the complaint includes all of the Local Governing Body an independent investigator will be appointed to respond.

9.3.6 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

9.3.7 If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, they will be directed to the Department for Education.

## 10. Record keeping

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

10.2 This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel or for monitoring and inspection purposes. There may also be times when there is a legal obligation to permit a third party to inspect the records or for them to be provided as evidence to relevant agencies or in judicial proceedings.

10.3 Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and records management policy/record retention schedule.

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

## 11. Learning lessons

11.1 The Board of Trustees 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.

## 12. Monitoring arrangements

12.1 The Board of Trustees will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The Board of Trustees will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 11.

12.2 The complaints records are logged and managed by the Business Manager.

12.3 This policy will be reviewed by the Business Manager every two years.

12.4 At each review, the policy will be approved by the Board of Trustees.

## 13. Links with other policies

13.1 Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- ✦ Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- ✦ Admissions policy
- ✦ Exclusions policy
- ✦ Staff grievance procedures
- ✦ Staff disciplinary procedures
- ✦ SEN policy and information report
- ✦ Privacy notices