

Complaints Policy and Procedures

Approved by:	Full Governing Body	Date: May 2025
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Last reviewed on:	19.05.25
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Principles

- Wherever possible, concerns should be addressed without the need for formal procedures.
- Concerns will be handled in an open, fair and timely manner.
- Complaints will be handled in an open, fair, and timely manner and without prejudice.
- All parties are encouraged to seek resolution of concerns and complaints through informal means wherever possible.
- Everyone involved in the process is expected to uphold appropriate standards of confidentiality throughout.

Introduction

It is in the best interests of everyone that any concerns and complaints are resolved as quickly and appropriately as possible. Whenever possible, we will aim to resolve issues informally (see 'How to raise a concern' on page 2).

We welcome any feedback that helps us improve and all issues will be dealt with fairly and sensitively.

This policy outlines the 5 stages for dealing with complaints. Stage 1 is informal, Stages 2-5 are formal. Stages 3-5 should only be undertaken in exceptional circumstances. Complainants who have missed out stages in the procedure will be referred back to the appropriate stage.

If you need to make a complaint, please follow the stages of the complaints procedure carefully.

Before continuing with this procedure, please refer to the 'Scope of this Complaints Procedure' list on pages 6-7, which outlines the complaints that are dealt with under different statutory procedures.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A **concern** may be defined as ‘an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought’. A **complaint** may be defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action’.

(Ref: DfE Model Complaints Procedure for Schools 2019)

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing (email, letter or complaint form) or by telephone. It may also be made by a third party acting on your behalf, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

If you wish to raise a concern, i.e., seeking reassurance about a particular issue, your first point of contact is usually your child’s form tutor. If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, please contact the Headteacher, who will refer you to another member of staff. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, they may refer you to another staff member, who may be more senior but does not have to be. You should expect to receive a written acknowledgement within five school working days and a full response within 20 school working days of receiving the concern.

If you wish to make a formal complaint, you should follow the stages outlined in this procedure (pages 4 to 5). It is helpful if you complete the school’s complaint form (available under the Complaints policy link on the school website) as it ensures the school has all the necessary details about the complaint. However, you may also raise your complaint in person or by telephone, in which case the person you raise the complaint with will complete the form.

Complaints that specifically relate to the Headteacher’s misconduct should be addressed to the Chair of Governors by emailing the Clerk to Governors or via the school office. Please mark them as private and confidential. Complaints about the Chair of Governors, or any individual governor, or the whole governing board should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body by email or via the school office. Please mark them as private and confidential.

Please do not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis, and it may prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.

Accessibility

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure, for example, providing information in alternative formats, helping to complete the form or holding meetings in accessible locations. Please contact the school office if you require any assistance.

Who can make a complaint?

Any person, including members of the public, can make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services we provide. This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. However, please check the list on pages 6-7 first to ensure the complaint is not covered by a different procedure. The complaints procedure does not cover either school or educational policy.

Timescales

You must raise the complaint within 30 days of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 30 days of the last of these incidents.

If other public bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint (for example, the police, safeguarding teams or a tribunal), 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 legal action has been taken against the school in relation to the complaint, we may suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

Dorothy Stringer School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible, by offering a response, an explanation of events or, if appropriate, a recognition that the situation could have been handled differently or better. If this is the case, we will explain any steps that will be taken to help ensure it will not happen again, with an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made.

Withdrawal of a complaint

If you wish to withdraw a complaint, please confirm this in writing to the Headteacher, via email or letter to the school office.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. The Headteacher and/or Chair of Governors will determine whether the anonymous complaint warrants an investigation. Please note that any complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy – see page 6.

Governing board review of complaints

The governing board will ensure any specific actions for resolution of complaints are completed. Any learning from complaints can be used to inform the review of the complaints procedure and also other procedures and policies within the school.

Stages of the formal Complaints Procedure

The stages are outlined below:

Stage 1: Within 30 days of the incident write, meet or speak to the relevant teacher, their immediate manager or a senior manager in an attempt to resolve the issue. Most concerns can be resolved satisfactorily at this stage. The staff member who receives the concern may feel it more appropriate to refer the complainant to a more senior or experienced member of staff who will try to resolve the concern informally.

In the first instance of receiving a complaint it may be possible to resolve the issue by offering to the complainant one or more of the following:

- An explanation of events
- A recognition that the situation could have been handled differently or better and:
- An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again. Details relating to staff discipline and capability must remain confidential to the Headteacher, but the complainant will be informed that the school has taken appropriate follow-up action.
- An undertaking to review school policies in light of the findings of the complaint.

The complainant may choose to take no further action or take their complaint to the next stage.

Stage 2: If not satisfied after stage 1, write to the Headteacher within 10 days of completion of stage 1. The Headteacher (or their nominated representative from the senior team) will acknowledge the complaint/concern within 5 working school days, investigate the complaint/concern and respond in writing within 20 working school days. This is a formal stage of the process, and you are requested to be specific as to the matter requiring investigation by the Headteacher (or nominated representative).

If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide you with an update and revised response date. 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.

Stage 3: If you are not happy with the process or how the investigation was conducted after stage 2, write to the Clerk to the Governors within 10 days of completion of stage 2. The Clerk will acknowledge the complaint/concern within 5 working school days, appoint a governor to investigate the complaint and respond in writing within 20 working school days from the date of the acknowledgement. This is a formal stage of the process, and you are requested to be specific as to the matter requiring investigation. The appointed governor will determine the most appropriate way to consider the complaint and respond.

Stage 4: If you are not satisfied after stage 3, write to the Clerk to the Governors within 10 days of completion of stage 3. The Clerk to the Governors will arrange a panel of three governors to hear the complaint within 20 working school days. The panel will determine the

most appropriate way to consider the complaint, which can include requesting additional information from the complainant or the school if required, and if the panel considers it necessary to its investigation may involve requesting the complainant, the school's representative and any witnesses to meet with them. Neither the Headteacher nor the Chair of the Governing Board can be members of the panel if they have been involved in handling the earlier stages of the complaint.

Stage 5: If you think your complaint was not dealt with correctly, you can ask the DfE to consider your complaint if you've followed all the steps in the school's complaints procedure. The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

You can refer your complaint to the Department for Education via an online form at <https://www.gov.uk/contact-dfe>.

Alternatively you can write to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel 0370 000 2288

Upholding or not upholding formal complaints

At each formal stage of the complaints procedure the conclusion will be either:

- That the complaint is upheld (in part or full) and where appropriate some form of action is taken.

Or

- That the complaint is not upheld and reason(s) for this, where appropriate, are clearly given.

The decision will be communicated in writing to all parties within 5 working school days. If it is not possible to meet this deadline, the panel chair will contact both parties with a revised date.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Dorothy Stringer School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Complaints NOT covered by this procedure:

Type of complaint	Who to contact
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection and safeguarding matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have immediate concerns that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering <i>significant</i> harm please contact Front Door for Families: Tel 01273 290400 (office hours) or 01273 335905 (out of office hours). <u>https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/frontdoorforfamilies</u>
Admissions to schools	School Admissions Team (local authority): Tel 01273 293653 <u>SchoolAdmissions@brighton-hove.gov.uk</u> in the first instance, who will advise on the correct procedure to follow.
Exclusion of children from school*	Access to Education Team (local authority): Tel 01273 293480 <u>attendanceteam@brighton-hove.gov.uk</u> <u>https://new.brighton-hove.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/absent-school/what-happens-if-your-child-excluded-school</u> *However, complaints about the application of the behaviour policy on the <u>school website</u> can be made through the school's complaints procedure.
Statutory assessments of SEN	Special Educational Needs Team (local authority): Tel 01273 293552 <u>sen.team@brighton-hove.gov.uk</u>
Complaints about other providers who may use the school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about the service. Please contact them direct or ask the school office for their contact details.
Staff grievances, capability or conduct	The school's internal personnel procedures will be used. You are not entitled to participate in proceedings or receive any detail about the outcome, but you will be informed that the matter is being addressed.
Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information requests	Refer to the school's Data Protection Policy and Freedom of Information policy.
Whistleblowing (for serious wrongdoing that cannot be covered by other procedures)	Refer to the school's whistleblowing procedure, which can be used by members of staff and the general public. For those who do not wish to raise matters direct with the school, referrals can be made to the Department of Education:

	www.education.gov.uk/contactus
National Curriculum - content	Contact the Department for Education: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

The school policies referred to above can be found on the [school website](#), or you can ask for a copy from the school office. There is further information about different types of complaints at <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>.

Appendix 1

Serial and unreasonable complaints

Dorothy Stringer School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and we will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Dorothy Stringer School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same or similar complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (by letter, phone or email), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher (and/or Chair of Governors, if appropriate) will discuss any of the above issues with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the school, causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

Any threat or action of aggression or violence will be reported to the Health and Safety department at the local authority.

In the case of 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 the school.

Barring from the School Premises

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Schools will therefore act to ensure they remain a safe place for students, staff and other members of their community.

If a parent's behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask him/her to leave the school premises. In serious cases, the Headteacher or the local authority can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent/carer may wish to make. Schools should always give the parent/carer the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing.

The decision to bar should then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent/carer and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent/carer should be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the Headteacher or Chair of Governors. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the Department for Education. Once the school's own complaints procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.