



COMPLAINTS POLICY

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1 Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carer of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to the school about any provision of facilities or services that are provided. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures, such as appeals relating to admissions or exclusions, this policy will be used.

2 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 lack of action.'*

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally without the need to use the formal stages of the complaint's procedure. All concerns will be considered seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff your views will be respected. In these cases, you will be referred to a different member of staff. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern you will be referred to a different member of staff. The member of staff may be more senior, but this may not always be the case. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is imperative.

It is understood however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case the school will attempt to resolve the issue internally through the stages outline later in this policy.

3 How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. This may also be done by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant if they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or the headteacher. If the matter remains unresolved the next step would be to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may prevent them being involved at stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff, with the exception of the headteacher, should be made to Mr Linzi Goodman via the school office. Please mark the document as private and confidential.

Complaints that involved or are about the headteacher should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governors. Please mark as private and confidential.

For ease of use a template is included at the end of this policy as appendix 1. Please complete and return this form to the school office. If you require assistance with this, please contact the school office or you can ask a third party such as the Citizens Advice Bureau to do so.

In accordance with equality law reasonable adjustments may be made if required to enable complainants to access and complete this procedure. This could be to provide information in different formats or holding meetings in accessible locations.

4 Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints will not usually be investigated. The Headteacher or Chair of Governors will consider whether such complaints warrant an investigation.

5 Timescales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident, or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last such incident. Complaints received outside this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

6 Complaints received outside term time

Complaints made outside of term time will be treated as if they have been received of the first school day following that holiday period.

7 Scope of this complaint's procedure

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

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions to school Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs School re-organisation proposals 	<p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be made to the local authority</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matters likely to require a child protection or safeguarding investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are managed under the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with the relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) LADO contact – 01908 254307 MASH contact - 01908 253169 or 01908 253170 MASH email – children@milton-keynes.gov.uk</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at School discipline and exclusions: Exclusions - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p> <p><i>*Complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing 	<p>There is an initial whistleblowing policy for all employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters directly with their employer. Referrals can be made at Contact the Department for Education (DfE) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about the school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain directly to the local authority or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of the complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff conduct will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures if appropriate.</p>

	Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint, they will however, be notified that the matter is being addressed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about their service.</p> <p>The provider should be contacted directly.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Curriculum - content 	<p>Please contact the Department for Education at</p> <p>Contact the Department for Education (DfE) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p>

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or tribunals, this may impact the school's ability to adhere to the timescales details within this policy or result in the investigation being suspended by the school until those public bodies have concluded their investigation.

If a complainant commences legal action against the school in relation to the complaint the school will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to the complaint until the legal proceedings have concluded.

Complaints about the school's data management practices or the provision of information given in response to a subject access request (SAR) or Freedom of Information (Fol) request, will receive a reply at stage 1 of this procedure only. If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome to their complaint about data management or the school's response to a SAR or Fol, they can ask the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) if they will consider whether the school has complied with the relevant legislation. This includes the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations 2018. The ICO's contact details are available online at: [Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\)](http://www.ico.org.uk)

8 Resolving complaints.

At each stage in the procedure the school wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate there will be an acknowledgment that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, one of the following may be offered:

- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been managed differently, or if appropriate in a better way
- An assurance that there will not be a recurrence of the incident
- An explanation of the steps taken or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- An undertaking to review the school's policies in light of the complaint
- An apology

9 Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing.

10 Stage 1 – Informal complaints

It is hoped that most complaints can be resolved on an informal basis.

Formal complaints must be made to the headteacher (unless they are about the headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by email. 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 5 school days. Within this response, the headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would

like to see. The headteacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this. Note: The headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken. During the investigation, the headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within 20 school days of the date of acknowledgment of receipt of the complaint.

If the headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant 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 Howe Park School will take to resolve the complaint.

The headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the headteacher, or a member of the governing board (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the headteacher or member of the governing board must be made to the Complaints administrator (*this could be the Chair of Governors / Chair of the Complaints Committee / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support*), via the school office. Governing Board to nominate the complaints administrator.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing board or
- the majority of the governing board

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing board. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

11 Stage 2 – Formal complaints

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the governing board's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing board or
- the majority of the governing board

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent governors.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the complaint administrator via the school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The complaint administrator/Chair of Governors 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.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Howe Park School available, the Chair of Governors will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA's Governor Services team, to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

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.

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.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

The complaint administrator/Chair of the Complaints Committee will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of acknowledgment of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Chair of the Complaints Committee will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Chair of the Complaints Committee will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Chair of the Complaints Committee will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 2 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

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.

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 must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Howe Park School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Howe Park School.

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 Howe Park school will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

12 Next steps

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Howe Park School. They will consider whether Howe Park School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint. The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: [Contact the Department for Education \(DfE\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk), by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

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

13 Roles and responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - o sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - o interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - o consideration of records and other relevant information
 - o analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints administrator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Administrator (this could be the headteacher / Chair of Governors / Chair of the Complaints Committee / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints administrator is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure

- liaise with staff members, headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk to the hearing and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale

Clerk to the Complaints Committee

The Clerk to the Complaints Committee should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the complaints administrator
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting
 - Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.
 - The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
 - If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.
 - However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

Policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints

Note

This policy can also be adapted to manage unreasonable or persistent contact not directly associated with, or resulting from, formal complaints

Howe Park 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 will take action to protect our staff from that kind of behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Howe Park 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 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 (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns 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 Howe Park 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.

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 Howe Park School.

Appendix A Complaints Form

Please complete and return to Head Teacher or, if the complaint is about the Head Teacher, to the Chair of Governors who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Pupil's name (if relevant):

Address:

Postcode:

Daytime telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Email address:

Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it:

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

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Are you attaching paperwork? If so please give details

Signature:
Date:

Official use only

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:
