



Complaints Policy

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Introduction

- 1 This policy covers complaints. It has been reviewed against the DfE advice to meet the standards set out in the Education (Independent School Standards (England)) Regulations 2014 Schedule 1 Part 7. Also using the Education Funding Agency (now ESFA) guidance for creating an academy complaints procedure January 2015. This policy addresses complaints about school issues. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 109 of the 2008 Act requests them.

Complaints and Concerns

- 2 The majority of issues raised by parents/carers, or students are concerns rather than complaints. Alderbrook School is committed to taking concerns seriously at the earliest stage, in the hope of keeping the number of formal complaints to a minimum and avoiding recourse to formal procedures. However, in those instances where a parent does not feel a concern has been addressed, or it is of sufficient gravity, then the school's formal complaints' procedure should be used. The prime aim of Alderbrook School's policy is to resolve the complaint as fairly and speedily as possible. Formal complaints will be dealt with in a sensitive, impartial and confidential manner. Complaints are dealt with using a staged approach.
- 3 The Alderbrook School Complaints Policy has six main stages.

Stage 1 Informal - Raising a concern

- 4 Concerns can be raised with the school at any time by any communication method, and will often generate an immediate resolution. Concerns may also be raised during the school's normal Parental Consultation Evenings, or other arranged meetings with specific staff.
- 5 The school requests that parents make their concerns known to the school as soon as possible, so that they can be discussed with the relevant member of staff. In most cases, this will be either the subject teacher, pastoral manager or form tutor.
- 6 On some occasions, the concern raised may require investigation, or discussion with others, in which case there will be an informal but informed response usually within three working days. It is anticipated that the vast majority of concerns will be satisfactorily dealt with in this way.
- 7 Complainants can often feel frustrated because the resolution being sought may not include details of any sanctions issued against third parties, in order to protect third party confidentiality. The complainant may be assured that the school will have issued sanctions as appropriate in compliance with our policies and procedures.
- 8 However, if you are not satisfied please contact the school within ten working days and state what you would like the school to do. If it is not possible to resolve the issue, it may be necessary to proceed to the next stage.

Stage 2 - Making a formal complaint

- 9 Formal complaints should be addressed to the Headteacher in writing, or by using Appendix A. The School will normally acknowledge receipt of the complaint within two working days of receiving it and pass it to an appropriate designated member of staff. This complaint will be

reduced to stage 1 if the complainant has not previously given the school the opportunity to resolve the concern raised. In some cases, it may be possible to report immediately on the action the school has taken to resolve the issue.

- 10 Where this is not possible, a face-to-face meeting may be convened to discuss the matter further with the appropriate members of staff, to allow the complainant to air their grievances and present all the relevant information with the hope that a resolution can be reached.
- 11 This meeting will take place within ten working days of the receipt of the formal complaint.
- 12 If the Headteacher feels that the matter is too serious to be dealt with at stage 2, then it may be passed directly to Stage 3. The aim will however always be to resolve the matter as speedily as possible.
- 13 Formal complaints will be confidential except where the Secretary of State or an inspecting body requires access to such statements.
- 14 The complainant has ten working days from sending the response to notify the school if they wish to proceed to stage 3

Stage 3 Formal - Further Investigation

- 15 If the matter has not been resolved at Stage 2, the Headteacher, or another senior member of staff, will undertake a further investigation.
- 16 Following the investigation, the school will normally give a written response within ten working days.
- 17 If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome, you need to let the school know within ten working days of receiving the response.
- 18 At this stage a further face to face meeting will be arranged with the Headteacher within ten working days, to allow the complainant to air their grievances and present all the relevant information with the hope that a resolution can be reached.
- 19 In cases where the complaint concerns the conduct of the Headteacher, both the Secretary to the Governors and the Headteacher will be informed of the complaint and the Governors will arrange for the matter to be further investigated. The school will normally give a response within ten working days.
- 20 The complainant has ten working days from sending the response to notify the school if they wish to proceed to stage 4.

Stage 4 Formal – Appeal to Chair of Governors

- 21 If the matter has still not been resolved at Stage 3, the complainant should send their written complaint to the Chair of Governors, c/o The Secretary to the Governors. The Chair of Governors may request that a face-to-face meeting is held within ten working days and a written outcome will be issued. Alternatively, following a further investigation, the Chair may respond directly to the complainant in writing.
- 22 The complainant has ten working days from sending the response to notify the school if they wish to proceed to stage 5.

Stage 5 Appeal to Independent Governors' Complaint Panel

- 23 If the complaint is not resolved following the response from the Chair of Governors, the complainant may request an Independent Governors' Complaints Appeal Panel to consider the complaint. This will normally occur within 15 working days. The Independent Governors' Appeal Panel will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in this complaint, one of whom must be independent of the management and running of the Academy. The panel will allow the complainant to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they should wish. The roles and responsibilities of the Independent Governors' Complaints Appeal Panel and the format of the appeal hearing are detailed in Appendix C.
- 24 The aim of the Appeal Panel Hearing is to impartially resolve the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. All parties will be notified of the Panel's decision in writing within three working days of the date of the hearing.
- 25 The letter will also contain details of any further rights of redress available. Outcomes from the hearing may include but are not limited to:
- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
 - Uphold the complaint in whole or in part
 - Decide on 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

The appeal hearing is the last school-based redress. A complainant may move to stage 6. The Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) would expect the complainant to have attempted to seek resolution with the school by following the school's complaints procedure.

Stage 6 Formal – Appeal to the Education & Skills Funding Agency

- 26 A further appeal is possible by contacting the Education & Skills Funding Agency, either by using the online school complaints form at:
<https://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/schoolperformance/school-complaints-form>, or by post to:

Department for Education
2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate
Manchester M1 2WD

Recording of Complaints

- 27 All complaints will be recorded and the outcome noted. A form for recording the timeline of a complaint is attached in Appendix B; this is for office use only. However, at the end of each meeting a summary will be made by the Chair of the meeting to ensure that all parties have the same understanding of what has been discussed and agreed. The Secretary to the Governing Body will hold these notes in a Complaints file.

Learning Lessons

- 28 The Governors will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher and leadership team as appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, identify areas of improvement that the school can make to its procedures or practices to improve systems.

- 29 The Governing body will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure to ensure complaints are handled properly.
- 30 The Headteacher will report to the Chair of Governors on the frequency and nature of formal complaints, the effectiveness of the resolutions and any subsequent actions. The complaints policy will be reviewed every two years.

Anonymous Complaints

- 31 Anonymous complaints will not be dealt with unless the Headteacher deems there to be a serious safeguarding issue. All complaints are treated in a confidential manner (see paragraph 1) therefore negating the need for anonymity.

Persistent Complaints

- 32 Where a complainant tries to re-open an issue with the school after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the Chair of Governors (or another other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the Chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.
- 33 If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstances in which we will not respond is if:
- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concern
 - The redress sought by the complainant is incompatible with the complaints procedure, or goes against good practice, other school policies or current procedures
 - The complainant has already been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options
 - The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time

Vexatious Complaints

- 34 The school will consider a complaint vexatious where we have reason to believe a complainant is contacting the school with the intention of causing unnecessary or repeated disruption or inconvenience. For example by making excessive numbers of calls, leaving multiple voicemail messages or sending multiple emails to school, insisting on immediate responses or attempting to pursue multiple complaints simultaneously.
- 35 A vexatious complainant may be identified for example, as a person who makes detrimental, personal or abusive comments regarding the school or persons employed by the school, directly in person, by phone, in emails or on social media. A person who inappropriately escalates a complaint externally at the same time as, or instead of, following the school's complaints procedures.
- 36 Whilst any complaint when raised will be investigated, the complainant's vexatious behaviour or harassment of staff or students (as detailed in the Parental Engagement Policy) will also be logged, to allow any repeating pattern of these types of behaviour to be identified.
- 37 Schools have a duty to safeguard the health, safety and well-being of staff and students. Parents and carers that act in ways that may cause harm to the safety, mental health and / or the well-being of staff or students may be dealt with separately by means of the Parental Engagement Policy.

Appendix A – Complaints Form (optional)

For moving from a stage 1 concern to a stage 2 formal complaint

Your Name

Student's Name

Your relationship to the student

Address for correspondence

Email address

Phone number (s)

Please provide a brief summary of your original concern

What action if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your concern? Who did you speak to and what was the response?

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

Please give details of any attachments. These may include a more detailed account of the complaint.

Signature

Date

Official Use:

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Appendix B - FOR OFFICE USE ONLY - Recording of complaints

NB Resolutions must respect confidentiality of third party persons; therefore, any appropriate sanction issued may not be disclosed to the complainant.

Complaint log - used to record timelines and resolutions of formal complaints										
STAGE 1 - Log of original concern raised			Date received			Resolution summary within 3 days				
			Acknowledged by							
			Delegated to							
			Reply method							
			Reply date							
Stage of Complaint	Escalation and Resolution	Date received	Acknowledged by name	Investigation delegated to	Time for resolution	Type of resolution	Author(s) of resolution	Date of resolution	Time limit for the complainant to proceed to next stage	
2	First Formal letter in writing to HT (App A)	concern above is unresolved			ten working days	Face-to-face meeting	Designated staff		ten working days	
3 part 1*	Second Formal letter in writing to HT	Further investigation			ten working days	Response in writing	SLT member		ten working days	
3 part 2	Third Formal letter in writing to HT	Follow up meeting			ten working days	Face-to-face meeting	Headteacher		ten working days	
4	Fourth Formal letter in writing to Chair of Govs via Gov Secretary	Further investigation		Chair of Governors	ten working days	Face-to-face meeting and/or Response in writing	Chair of Governors		ten working days	
5 part 1	Independent Governors' complaint appeal panel	Impartial resolution hearing		Three Panel members:-	Usually in 15 working days	Panel hearing & deliberation	Independent panel	Written reply in 3 working days	Not applicable	
5 part 2	Independent Governors' complaint panel decision	Deliberation & panel outcome			Written response in 3 working days	followed by panel decision in writing	Chair of panel		This ends school based procedure	
Stage 6	Formal appeal to ESFA									
* Where the complaint concerns the conduct of the Headteacher, both the Secretary to the Governors and Headteacher will be informed of the complaint.				Delegated by the Chair of Governors to _____	ten working days	Response in writing	Chair of Governors		ten working days	
Persistent complaints		Where the complaints policy and processes have been exhausted, the complainant is informed in writing that the matter is closed. No further responses needed.								
Vexatious Complaints		Please see the Parental Engagement Policy; whenever the Parental Engagement policy is enacted, the Headteacher and the Chair of Governors are notified.								

Appendix C – Roles and Responsibilities for a Stage 5 complaint

Independent Governors' Complaints Appeal Panel Hearings

The Secretary to the Governors is the main point of contact and is required to:

- Set the time, date and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- Collate any written material and distribute to the parties in advance of the hearing
- Meet and welcome all parties as they arrive
- Record the proceedings
- Notify all parties of the panel's decision

The Chair of the Governing Body should:

- Ensure correct procedure has been followed
- Notify the Secretary to arrange a panel

The Chair of the Panel should:

- Explain the remit of the panel to all parties and ensure each party has a chance to present their case
- Ensure that that no member of the panel has a stake in the outcome of the proceedings, nor was involved in any earlier stages of the procedure
- Ensure that the issues are addressed
- Ensure that key findings of the facts are made known to all parties
- Ensure that parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such hearings are put at ease
- Ensure that the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy
- Ensure that the panel keeps an open mind and acts independently
- Ensure that all parties see written material
- Ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision in writing along with details of any further rights of redress available as school based resolution has been exhausted

Format for the Panel Hearing

- The hearing will be as informal as possible. Witnesses will only be required to attend for the part of the meeting in which they give their evidence
- After introductions, the complainant will be invited to explain their complaint followed by their witnesses
- The Headteacher and designated senior members of staff may attend the meeting and question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken
- The panel may ask questions at any point
- At the end of the hearing, the complainant will be invited to sum up their complaint
- The Headteacher will be invited to sum the school's actions and response to the complaint
- The Chair of the panel will confirm that both parties will hear from the panel within a set time scale of three working days. For possible outcomes see paragraph 25

This process completes the school-based redress of the complaint