



**HEDINGHAM SCHOOL**  
AND SIXTH FORM  
A MATHS & COMPUTING COLLEGE  
ACHIEVEMENT & EXCELLENCE

## **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES**

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## **OUR PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH GENERAL CONCERNS**

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The majority of concerns from parents, carers and others are handled under the following general procedures.

The procedure is divided into three stages:

**Stage 1** aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school (as described on pages 2 and 3 of this guidance).

**Stage 2** is the first formal stage at which written complaints are considered by the Chairman of Governors.

**Stage 3** is the next stage once Stage 2 has been worked through. It involves a complaints review Panel of governors.

How each of these stages operates is explained below:

### **STAGE 1 – YOUR INITIAL CONTACT WITH THE SCHOOL**

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1. Parents/Carers should contact the school office who will arrange for an appropriate person to respond as soon as possible.
2. We will ensure that parents are clear what action or monitoring of the situation, if any, has been agreed.
3. We will speak directly to all appropriate persons who may be able to assist with enquiries into the concern.
4. We will discuss with Parents/Carers (normally within ten working days) the progress of the enquiries. Parents/Carers will have the opportunity of asking for the matter to be considered further, once we have responded to the concern.
5. If Parents/Carers are still dissatisfied following this informal approach, their concern will become a formal complaint and the school will deal with it at the next stage.

### **STAGE 2 - FORMAL CONSIDERATION OF YOUR COMPLAINT**

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This stage in this procedure deals with written complaints. It applies where Parents/Carers are not happy with the informal approach to dealing with the concern, as outlined under Stage 1 above.

1. Normally, Parents/Carers written complaint should be addressed to the Headteacher. If, however, the complaint concerns the Headteacher personally, it should be sent to the school marked "For the attention of the Chairman of Governors".
2. We will acknowledge the complaint in writing as soon as possible after receiving it. This will be within seven working days.
3. We will enclose a copy of these procedures with the acknowledgement.
4. Normally we would expect to respond in full within fifteen working days but if this is not possible we will write to explain the reason for the delay and let Parents/Carers know when we hope to be able to provide a full response.
5. As part of our consideration of your complaint, we may invite Parents/Carers to a meeting to discuss the complaint and fill in any details required. If Parents/Carers wish, they can ask someone to accompany them to help them explain the reasons for the complaint.
6. The Headteacher, or his representative, may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.

7. Following the meeting, a Senior Member of Staff will, where necessary, talk to witnesses and take statements from others involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, we will talk to the pupil concerned and, where appropriate, others present at the time of the incident in question.
8. If the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the school's internal confidential procedures, as required by law.
9. The Investigating Staff will keep written/typed, signed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation.
10. Once we have established all the relevant facts, we will send Parents/Carers a written response to the complaint. This will give a full explanation of the Headteacher's decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, we will indicate what we are proposing to do. We may invite Parents/Carers to a meeting to discuss the outcome as part of our commitment to building and maintaining good relations with Parents/Carers.
11. The person investigating the complaint may decide that the school has done all it can to resolve the complaint, in which we may use our discretion to close the complaint at this point. Please see the next page for further information about this process.
12. If the school does not close the complaint after Stage 2, Parents/Carers may wish to proceed to Stage 3, as described below.

## **CLOSURE OF COMPLAINTS**

- Very occasionally, a school will feel that it needs, regretfully, to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied.
- We will do all we can to help to resolve a complaint against the school but sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes. Sometimes it is simply a case of "agreeing to disagree".
- If a complainant persists in making representations to the school – to the Headteacher, Chairman of Governors or anyone else - this can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from our responsibility to look after the interests of all the children in our care.
- For this reason, we are entitled to close correspondence (including personal approaches, as well as letters and telephone calls) on a complaint where we feel that we have taken all reasonable action to resolve the complaint.
- In exceptional circumstances, closure may occur before a complaint has reached Stage 3 of the procedures described in this document. This is because a complaints Panel takes considerable time and effort to set up and we must be confident that it is likely to assist the process of investigating the complaint.
- The Chairman of Governors may decide, therefore, that every reasonable action has been undertaken to resolve the complaint and that a complaints review Panel would not help to move things forward.
- This does not, of course, prevent Parents/Carers from referring their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

## **STAGE 3 - CONSIDERATION BY A COMPLAINTS REVIEW PANEL**

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- If the concern has already been through Stages 1 and 2 and Parents/Carers are not happy with the outcome, we may agree to set up a complaints review Panel to consider it. This is a formal process, and Parents/Carers ultimate recourse at school level. The Chairman of Governors has discretion to agree to this form of meeting where he or she feels it would be helpful in resolving the complaint.
- The purpose of this arrangement is to give Parents/Carers complaint a hearing in front of a Panel of governors who have no prior knowledge of the details of the complaint and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice.

- The aim of a complaints review Panel is to resolve the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between the school and the parent. We recognise, however, that it may sometimes only be possible to establish facts and make recommendations which will reassure Parents/Carers that we have taken the complaint seriously.
- The complaints review Panel operates according to the following formal procedures:
  1. The Clerk to the Governing Body will aim to arrange for the Panel meeting to take place within 20 working days.
  2. The Clerk will ask Parents/Carers whether they wish to provide any further written documentation in support of your complaint. Parents/Carers can include witness statements, or ask witnesses to give evidence in person, if they wish.
  3. The Headteacher will be asked to prepare a written report for the Panel. Other members of staff directly involved in matters raised in the complaint will also be asked to prepare reports or statements.
  4. The Clerk will inform Parents/Carers, the Headteacher, any relevant witnesses and members of the Panel by letter, at least five working days in advance, of the date, time and place of the meeting. We hope that Parents/Carers will feel comfortable with the meeting taking place in the school; but we will do what we can to make alternative arrangements if Parents/Carers prefer.
  5. With the letter, the Clerk will send you all relevant correspondence, reports and documentation about the complaint and ask whether Parents/Carers wish to submit further written evidence to the Panel.
  6. The letter will explain what will happen at the Panel meeting and the Clerk will also inform Parents/Carers that you are entitled to be accompanied to the meeting. The choice of person to accompany Parents/Carers is their own, but it is usually best to involve someone in whom they have confidence but who is not directly connected with the school. They are there to give Parents/Carers support but also to witness the proceedings and to speak on Parents/Carers behalf if they wish.
  7. With the agreement of the Chairman of the Panel, the Headteacher may invite members of staff directly involved in matters raised by Parents/Carers to attend the meeting.
  8. The Chairman of the Panel will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating for Parents/Carers and will do his or her best to put you at your ease.
  9. As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses previously undisclosed should be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the meeting will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to the new evidence.
  10. The Chairman of the Panel will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted. Please understand that any decision to share the minutes with Parents/Carers, the complainant, is a matter for the Panel's discretion and Parents/Carers do not have an automatic right to see or receive a copy. Since such minutes usually name individuals, they are understandably of a sensitive and, therefore, confidential nature.
  11. Normally, the written outcome of the Panel meeting, which will be sent to Parents/Carers, should give them all the information they require. If, however, Parents/Carers feel that they would like to have a copy of the minutes it would be helpful if they could indicate this in advance. If the Panel is happy for the minutes to be copied to Parents/Carers, the Clerk can then be asked to maintain confidentiality in the minutes.
  12. During the meeting, Parents/Carers can expect there to be opportunities for:
    - them to explain the complaint;
    - them to hear the school's response from the Headteacher;
    - them to question the Headteacher about the complaint;
    - them to be questioned by the Headteacher about the complaint;
    - the Panel members to be able to question Parents/Carers and the Headteacher;
    - any party to have the right to call witnesses (subject to the Chairman's approval) and all parties to have the right to question all witnesses;
    - Parents/Carers and the Headteacher to make a final statement.

13. In closing the meeting, the Chairman will explain that the Panel will now consider its decision and that written notice of the decision will be sent to the Headteacher and Parents/Carers within two weeks. All participants other than the Panel and the Clerk will then leave.
14. The Panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in order to:
  - reach a unanimous, or at least a majority, decision on the complaint;
  - decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
  - recommend, where appropriate, to the Governing Body changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.
15. The Clerk will send Parents/Carers and the Headteacher a written statement outlining the decision of the Panel within two weeks. The letter will explain what further recourse, beyond the Governing Body, is available to you.
16. We will keep a copy of all correspondence and notes on file in the school's records but separate from pupils' personal records.