



COMPLAINTS POLICY

Agreed by the Governing Body on	Awaiting review – to be approved March 2020
Review Date	September 2019
Review Schedule	Annual
Person(s) Responsible	Principal

This policy should be used in conjunction with the DfE Guidance (Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2016) and alongside (Hope Community School's Home/School Agreement) and alongside New Generation Community School Trust's Grievance Policy.

1.0 Introduction

The majority of issues raised by parents, or pupils, are concerns rather than complaints. Hope Community 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 without 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 the 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.

This policy and procedure has been developed with due regard to the 2002 Education Act, guidance published by the DfE in 2016 and The EFA's guidance on creating an academy complaint's procedure (taking into account schedule 1 part 7 of Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014).

The policy will be available also via the website and provided, on request, in hard copy to parents of pupils at the School and to parents of prospective pupils, on request. Written records of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing will be kept.

The following details outline the stages that can be used to resolve complaints.

2.0 The School's Policy has four main stages.

In summary they are as follows:

Stage 1 – A concern is raised informally with an appropriate member of staff. Most concerns will be resolved at this stage. If not then stage 2 begins:

Stage 2 – The school receives a formal written complaint. This complaint must be received within three months of the incident. The matter will be investigated and resolved (within 10 working days). If not then stage 3 begins

Stage 3 – The Principal hears the details of the complaint and what investigations that have already occurred and arranges a further investigation (within ten working days) to resolve the matter. If the matter cannot be resolved, then the complaint goes to:

Stage 4 -The Governing Body's Complaints' Panel for a formal hearing of the complaint (within three weeks from the completion of Stage 3) Their decision is final.

2.1 Stage 1 – Raising a concern

Concerns can be raised with the School at any time and will often generate an immediate response, which will resolve the concern. The School requests that complainants who are parents make their first contact with their son's/daughter's class teacher.

On some occasions the concern raised may require investigation, or discussion with others, in which case there will be an informal but informed response within two days. It is anticipated that the vast majority of concerns will be satisfactorily dealt with in this way.

2.2 Stage 2 – Making a complaint

Formal complaints should be in writing and sent to the School, addressed to the Principal. The complaint will be logged, including the date it was received. The school will normally acknowledge receipt of the complaint within two working days of receiving it and report on the action the School will take to resolve the issue. Any investigation will, at this stage, be led by someone other than the Principal. The outcome of the investigation will be communicated in writing within 10 working days. Where this is not possible the School will communicate in writing within 10 working days to explain when it can be resolved.

Note Regarding Complaints Against the Principal

In cases where the matter concerns the conduct of the Principal, the Governing Body, the Board of New Generation Community School's Trust. The Principal will be informed of the complaint and the Governors will arrange for the matter to be investigated. The school will

normally give a response within five working days but in any case within no more than ten working days.

Note Regarding Complaints Against the Chair or Governors

If the complaint is about the Chair or any individual governor the complaint should be made by writing to the Clerk to the Governing Body.

2.3 Stage 3 – Further Investigation

If the matter cannot be resolved at Stage 2, another designated member of staff will review the information and may undertake a further investigation. Following the investigation, the school will give a written response within ten working days. Where this is not possible the school will communicate in writing within 10 working days to explain when it can be resolved.

At each stage of the process the complainant will be asked to confirm whether or not the matter has been resolved.

2.4 Stage 4 – Complaints’ Panel

If the matter has still not been resolved at Stage 3, then the school will advise the complainant of the right to refer to the Governing Body who will establish a panel of at least 3 people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. Complainants should send their written complaint to the Chair of Governors asking for the matter to be considered by the Governors’ Complaints’ Panel with delegated powers to hear complaints. The hearing will normally take place within ten working days of the receipt of the written request for Stage 4 investigation. The panel will be two governors and one person who is independent of the management and running of the School. Complainants will be allowed to attend the panel hearing and may be accompanied if they so wish.

Complainants have the right to request an independent panel, if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. Hope Community School will consider the request but ultimately, the decision is made by the governors.

The aim of the 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 five working days after the date of the hearing. The decision of the panel is final.

The panel will make findings and recommendations and these will be sent to the complainant. They will also be available for the Principal, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Board of New Generation Community Schools Trust to inspect.

N.B: Written records will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing.

All correspondence, statements and records of complaints are confidential (except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 162 of the 2002 Act requests access to them).

If the complainant is not satisfied about the handling of the complaint they need to contact the Education Funding Agency through the school complaints form:

https://form.education.gov.uk/fillform.php?self=1&form_id=cCCNJ1xSfBE&type=form&ShowMsg=1&form_name=Contact+the+Department+for+Education&noRegister=false&ret=%2Fmodule%2Fservices&noLoginPrompt=1

3.0 Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

The Governing Body monitors the complaints procedure, in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. The Principal logs all formal complaints received by the School and records how they were resolved.

Governors examine this log on an annual basis and consider the need for any changes to the procedure. The policy will be promoted and implemented throughout the school.

The Board of New Generation Community Schools Trust will also examine the log on an annual basis to ensure that the correct procedures are being adhered to.

4.0 GOVERNORS' APPENDICES

4.1 Appendix A: Further Details of Formal Complaints Procedure

The following Guidance from the DfE should be referred to by all those involved in any complaints procedure.

4.11 Stage 1 is the informal raising of a concern. These following stages may proceed if the concern requires further investigation.

4.12 Stage 2: Complaint Heard by Staff Member

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the school can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To that end, if staff are made aware of the procedure, they know what to do when they receive a complaint.

The school respects the views of a complainant who indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. In these cases, the Principal can refer the complainant to another staff member. Where the complaint concerns the Principal, the complaint must be sent to the Chair of Governors.

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the Principal may consider referring the complainant to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial.

Where the first approach is made to a governor, the next step is to refer the complainant to the appropriate person. In normal circumstances governors will not be involved at the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the procedure.

4.13 Stage 3: Complaint heard by Principal

At this point, the complainant may be dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at stage one as well as pursuing their initial complaint. The Principal may delegate the task of collating the information to another staff member but not the decision on the action to be taken.

4.14 Stage 4: Complaint heard by Governing Body Complaints' Panel

If still dissatisfied the complainant should write to the Chair of Governors giving details of the complaint. The Chair, or a nominated governor, will convene a Governing Body

complaints panel consisting of at least three people none of whose members will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. One of the members of the panel must be independent of the management and running of the school. If the complainant requests an independent panel, the Governing Body will consider this request and make a decision regarding the composition of the panel.

The governors' / independent panel hearing is the last school-based stage of the complaints process, and is not convened to merely rubber-stamp previous decisions.

Individual complaints would not be heard by the whole Governing Body at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

The Remit of the Complaints' Panel

The panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the 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.

There are several points that any governor sitting on a complaints panel needs to remember:

a. It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the panel, governors need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of governor and sensitive to the issues of race, gender, gender orientation and religious affiliation.

b. The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations that will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

c. Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of

adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.

d. Where the complainant is a parent they should be allowed to attend the panel hearing, and, if they wish, to be accompanied.

e. The governors sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaints procedure.

4.16 Roles and Responsibilities

4.17 The Role of the Clerk

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and required to:

- set the date, time 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 send it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- notify all parties of the panel's decision

4.18 The Role of the Chair of the Governing Body / Nominated Governor

The Nominated Governor role:

- check that the correct procedure has been followed;
- if a hearing is appropriate, notify the Clerk to arrange the panel;

4.19 The Role of the Chair of the Panel

The Chair of the Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease;
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;
- the panel is open minded and acting independently;
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;

- written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it. All relevant documentation is kept confidential
- recommendations and findings should be recorded and distributed as appropriate.

4.2 Checklist for a Panel Hearing

The panel will take the following points into account:

- The hearing is as informal as possible.
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.
- The Principal may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Principal is then invited to explain the School's actions and be followed by the School's witnesses.
- The complainant may question both the Principal and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Principal is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The Chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within a set time scale.

4.3 Notification of the Panel's Decision

The Chair of the Panel needs to ensure that the complainant, Chair of Governors, and where relevant, the person complained about is notified of the panel's decision, findings and recommendations, by electronic mail or otherwise, within four weeks. A copy of the findings and recommendations should be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair of Governors and Principal. The letter needs to explain if there are any further rights of

appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed. The letter needs to explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.

5.0 Appendix B:

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Principal who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Child's name:

Your relationship to the child:

Address:

Postcode:

Daytime telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint.

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

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage? Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred

to: Date:

6.0 APPENDIX C: Model Letters

C1: Letter of Acknowledgement to Complainant regarding establishment of Governing Body Complaints Panel

Dear

Parental Complaint from Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss

I am writing with regard to your complaint, which has been passed to me by the Chair of the School Council and will now be considered by a panel of the School Council under the School's complaints procedure. The panel must consider your complaint within 10 working days of receiving it, and give you at least five day's notice of the date of the meeting. The panel have asked me to invite you to attend a meeting at (time) on (date) at the School, (or other venue as appropriate). You are entitled to have a friend or a representative attend this meeting with you.

I have enclosed copies of the relevant correspondence, reports and documentation about the complaint with this letter.

Please let me know if:

- there is any other documentation you wish the panel to consider
- there are any witnesses you want to bring to the meeting
- you want to have a friend or representative with you
- you are unable to attend on this date

You can contact me by writing to, or by telephoning me on (number), or by email at

I enclose a copy of the 'Procedure for a Governing Body Complaints Panel Hearing' for your information.

Yours sincerely

Clerk of the Governing Body Complaints Panel

C2: Letter from Chair of School Council Complaints Panel to Complainant following Hearing

Dear

Parental Complainant from Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss

Thank you for attending the hearing of the School Council Complaints Panel on..... I am writing on behalf of the Panel to let you know its conclusions.

The Panel has given careful consideration to your complaint about, which raises the following issues:

1.
2. etc

The Panel's conclusions are as follows:

Issue 1

As regards your complaint that, the Panel considered the following factors:

.....
.....
.....

In the light of these considerations, the Panel does/does not uphold this aspect of your complaint.

Issue 2

As regards your complaint that, the Panel considered the following factors:

.....
.....
.....

In the light of these considerations, the Panel does/does not uphold this aspect of your complaint.

In addition to its conclusions on your complaint, the Committee will also be making the following recommendations to the full Governing Body:

.....

.....

(N.B. There is no obligation to make recommendations) This completes the Panel's conclusions.

Finally, please note that the hearing of the Governing Body Complaints Panel and the appointed documentation must be treated as confidential by all parties, including yourself.

If you are unhappy with the findings of the panel you may appeal to The Secretary of State, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1 3BT, on the grounds that the Governing Body has failed to discharge a statutory duty or that the Governing Body had acted, or was proposing to act, unreasonably.

Yours sincerely

Chair of Governing Body Complaints Panel

Appendix D.

This complaint should be received with three months of the incident. However, in exceptional cases, this time limit can be extended.)

Complaint timeline.

