Complaints Policy and Procedure

1. Rationale and principles

We value positive relationships with parents, carers and the wider community. We welcome feedback and seek to resolve concerns promptly, fairly and respectfully. We recognise that raising a concern can be difficult and will approach all matters with openness, sensitivity and impartiality.

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt about an important matter for which reassurance is sought. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about action taken or a lack of action. We aim to resolve concerns informally wherever possible, but a person may make a formal complaint where appropriate.

This policy is informed by the Department for Education model complaints procedure and section 29 of the Education Act 2002. The school operates a two-stage formal procedure: Stage 1 is considered by the Executive Headteacher and Stage 2 by a panel of three impartial governors. Stage 2 is the final internal stage.

2. Who may complain and what is covered

Parents, carers, and members of the public may raise concerns or complaints. Complaints about services provided independently by third parties using school premises should be directed to the provider.

Some matters have separate statutory or internal procedures and are not considered under this policy, including admissions; statutory special educational needs assessments; suspensions and permanent exclusions; child protection investigations; whistleblowing; staff grievances and disciplinary matters; and complaints about the content of the National Curriculum. The school office can advise on the appropriate route.

Where a complaint raises safeguarding concerns, the school will act in accordance with its safeguarding and child protection procedures. Investigations by the police, local authority or other statutory bodies, or relevant legal proceedings, may require the school to pause or adjust its complaints process.

3. Raising a concern informally

We encourage concerns to be raised initially with the class teacher or relevant member of staff. The school will listen, clarify the issue and seek a constructive resolution. Where a concern cannot be resolved informally, or the complainant wishes to make a formal complaint, the stages below will apply. An informal discussion is not a compulsory prerequisite to a formal complaint.

4. Making a formal complaint

Formal complaints should be submitted in writing to the school office, in an envelope clearly marked “Private and Confidential - Complaint”. The school office will forward the complaint to the appropriate person without unnecessary circulation. Where assistance or reasonable adjustments are needed to make a complaint, please contact the school office; we will consider alternative formats and appropriate support.

The complaint should explain what happened, the relevant dates and people involved, steps already taken and what the complainant would like the school to do to resolve the matter. A request for a particular sanction, dismissal or other employment action against a member of staff is not an appropriate or available outcome under this procedure. Supporting documents may be enclosed. The complaint form at Appendix 1 may be used but is not mandatory.

The school will acknowledge receipt in writing within two working days. Complaints received during school holidays will normally be treated as received on the first school day following the holiday. Complaints must normally be raised within one calendar month of the incident, or within one calendar month of the last incident in a connected series. The school may consider a later complaint where exceptional circumstances justify doing so.

For the purposes of this policy, "school days" means days when the school is open to pupils; "working days" means Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays. Where a deadline cannot reasonably be met, the complainant will receive an explanation and a revised date.

5. Formal complaints procedure

Stage 1: Executive Headteacher

Formal complaints will be considered in the first instance by the Executive Headteacher, who will investigate the concerns fairly, consider relevant information and provide a reasoned written outcome within 15 school days of receipt. This may involve meeting the complainant, speaking with those involved and reviewing records. The outcome will explain whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld, any appropriate steps to resolve the matter, and how to request Stage 2 consideration if dissatisfied. The Executive Headteacher may delegate fact-finding but retains responsibility for the Stage 1 decision.

Stage 2: Governors' complaints panel (final stage)

A complainant who remains dissatisfied with the written Stage 1 outcome may request Stage 2 consideration by writing to the Chair of Governors via the school office, marked "Private and Confidential- For the Chair of Governors". The request should be made within 10 school days of the Stage 1 outcome and explain why the decision is disputed. Stage 1 must be completed before an ordinary complaint can proceed to Stage 2: complainants cannot bypass Stage 1 or go directly to governors. Exceptional late requests may be considered where justified.

A panel of three governors who have had no previous involvement in the complaint, will be convened. Stage 2 is a review of the Stage 1 handling, findings and decision; it is not an automatic reinvestigation. The panel will consider the Stage 1 papers, the reasons for escalation and any relevant additional evidence, and may make proportionate further enquiries where necessary to reach a fair decision. The complainant and school will have a fair opportunity to make representations. The school will acknowledge the Stage 2 request within two working days and aim to convene the panel and issue the panel's reasoned written decision within 20 working days of receipt. If additional time is necessary, the complainant will be informed of the reasons for the delay and will be provided with a revised response date. The panel may uphold, partially uphold or dismiss the complaint and recommend appropriate remedial action. Its decision concludes the school's internal complaints procedure.

Complaints specifically about the Executive Headteacher

Where the complaint concerns the Executive Headteacher personally, it should be addressed to the school office and marked "Private and Confidential- for the Chair of Governors". The Chair of Governors will acknowledge receipt within two working days.

A panel of three governors who have had no previous involvement in the complaint, will be convened. The governors will consider the complaint fairly, obtain relevant evidence and give those involved an opportunity to respond. They may consider written submissions or convene a private meeting. The panel will provide a reasoned written decision within 20 working days of receipt, or notify the complainant of a revised deadline if necessary.

The governors may uphold, partially uphold or dismiss the complaint and recommend appropriate steps to resolve it. Their decision is the final internal outcome for a complaint specifically about the Executive Headteacher.

6. Fairness, confidentiality and records

All complaints will be handled objectively, sensitively and with due regard to confidentiality. Information will be shared only with those who need it to consider the complaint, in accordance with data protection requirements. The school will consider reasonable adjustments to enable access to the procedure. Where concerns involve the conduct or performance of an employee, any employment, disciplinary or capability processes will be dealt with separately and confidentially. The school may confirm that concerns have been considered and, where appropriate, that action has been taken, but will not disclose whether disciplinary action has been initiated, the nature of any sanction, or other confidential personnel information to a parent or complainant. Complainants cannot direct or determine action against an individual member of staff.

The school will maintain a secure written record of formal complaints, the stage reached, findings, actions taken and correspondence. Records will be retained in accordance with the school's records retention arrangements. Complainants and staff are expected to communicate respectfully and avoid publicising confidential details, including on social media.

7. Outcomes and resolution

At either stage, the school may provide an explanation, acknowledge that a matter could have been handled better, apologise, offer reassurance, explain appropriate school-level corrective action or review relevant procedures. A complaint may be upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. Remedies must be reasonable, proportionate and within the school's authority. Requests for a named employee to be disciplined, dismissed, moved or otherwise sanctioned are not appropriate remedies under this policy and will not determine the outcome of a complaint.

Where contact becomes persistent or unreasonable, the school may manage communications in line with a separate procedure for serial or unreasonable complaints, while ensuring legitimate concerns can still be considered fairly.

8. After the final stage

After Stage 2, or after the governors' decision on a complaint specifically about the Executive Headteacher, the school's internal complaints procedure is complete. A complainant who believes the school has not followed its published procedure or has acted unlawfully or unreasonably in exercising its education duties may refer the matter to the Department for Education. The Department for Education does not ordinarily reinvestigate the merits of the original complaint.

Department for Education: www.gov.uk/complain-about-school | Telephone: 0370 000 2288.

Appendix 1 – Formal Complaint Form

Please return this form to the school office in an envelope marked "Private and Confidential – Complaint".

Name of complainant:
Pupil name and relationship (if applicable):
Address:
Email address:
Telephone number:
Date(s) of incident:
Details of complaint (including any previous discussions):
What school-level resolution would you like to see?: *Requests for action against an individual employee are not appropriate outcomes.*
Supporting documents attached:
Signature and date:

FOR SCHOOL USE

Date received:	**Date acknowledged:**
Allocated to:	**Stage:**
Response due:	**Date closed:**