

PINNER

HIGH SCHOOL

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| Policy | Complaints Policy |
| Date of Review | September 2023 |
| Reviewed By | Headteacher |
| Date of Approval | 31 January 2024 |
| Approved By | LGB |
| Date of Next Review | January 2025 |
| Statutory/Non Statutory | Statutory |
| Website/Non Website | Website |

1. Statement of Intent

Pinner High School takes all concerns or complaints seriously. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage reduces the need for formal complaints and reflects the commitment to working effectively with all members of the community. Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- be impartial and non-adversarial
- facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence and make it available on the school website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

2. Legislation and Guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on [creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations](#), and refers to [good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE). This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

The emphasis is to understand, investigate, and resolve the concern or complaint as early as possible.

3. Definitions and Scope

3.1 Definitions

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A concern is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”
- A complaint is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”

Distinguishing between Concerns and Complaints

It is important to distinguish between a “concern” and a “complaint”. Most concerns can be made informally to the initial member of staff and be resolved without the need to go through the formal complaint procedures. Initial concerns should be made with the school as soon as possible to allow the matter to be considered carefully, potentially including (as appropriate to the issue that has been raised):

- Clarifying the nature of the concern and what remains unresolved from the perspective of the person raising the concern; and/or
- Establishing what has happened so far, and who has been involved, including seeking input from those who have been involved.

A concern may arise (for example):

- from uncertainty regarding the application of school rules or disciplinary procedures from misunderstanding or misrepresentation of an incident which has taken place inside or outside the classroom
- where a parent believes that their child has been misunderstood or treated unfairly and feels it necessary to raise the matter so that steps may be taken to restore goodwill
- where a parent believes that their child is being bullied or has suffered some form of discrimination and brings the matter to the school’s notice so that action can be taken to prevent a recurrence

Concerns should normally be raised with the member of staff most directly involved in the situation giving rise to the concern. Parents will appreciate that it is helpful if a concern is expressed as soon as possible after the relevant incident. The staff member will respond as soon as practicable, and in any case within three working days.

A complaint may arise (for example):

- when an individual has previously raised a concern and is not satisfied with the response offered; or
- where an individual has serious disquiet over an incident that has taken place or a decision made in the school and believes the school has fallen short of appropriate standards.

3.2 Scope

The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage. There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does **not** cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline
- Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

A complaint should be made on the form in Appendix A. All documentation relating to a complaint, including all complaint forms, will be held by the Headteachers' PA. If the complaint concerns the Headteacher it should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the Clerk to the Governors.

The formal complaint process has three stages:

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| Stage 1 | Complaint heard by a member of staff |
| Stage 2 | Complaint heard by a senior member of staff appointed by the Headteacher |
| Stage 3 | Appeal heard by a Complaints Panel |

4. Principles for Investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- what has happened
- who was involved
- what the complainant feels would put things right

4.1 Timescales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident. We will consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved. When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

5. Investigating Complaints

The person investigating the complaint will make sure that they:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary)
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of the interview

6. Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure the person attempting to resolve the complaint will keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is a valid complaint (in whole or in part) without admitting liability. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology
- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint

Complainants will be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better or differently is not the same as an admission of negligence or culpability.

At all stages, those hearing the complaint will attempt to identify areas of agreement between the parties, and to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred in order to create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

At any stage the Headteacher is able consider whether a complaint is vexatious, unreasonably persistent, or whether the complainant has engaged or is engaging in unreasonable behaviour in accordance with this policy. If the Headteacher considers that the relevant provisions of this policy apply they may act accordingly to ensure any legitimate complaint is appropriately investigated while ensuring that any unreasonable elements or behaviour is managed.

6.1 Stages of Formal Complaint

Stage 1: Complaint heard by a member of staff

It is in the interests of everyone 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 their complaint will escalate.

Staff need to be sensitive to any potential actual or perceived conflicts of interest or difficulties of a particular member of staff being involved in hearing and investigating the complaint.

To ensure clarity of understanding, a Complaint Form needs to be completed. This ensures that there is no conflict in determining what the complaint consists of and the action taken by members of staff. The member of staff hearing the complaint needs to ensure that they have investigated it appropriately. The member of staff hearing the complaint will respond to the complainant in writing, with a copy issued to the Headteacher and, where relevant, to the person complained about.

It is normally expected that complaints will be acknowledged within three working days, and the Stage 1 process completed within ten school days. If it is clear that the process is going to take longer than this, the reasons for this should be explained to the complainant.

The member of staff should update the Complaint Form and pass this to the Head's PA for retention, alongside their written response to the complainant.

The Headteacher should record on the Complaint Form any action taken as a result of the complaint, and include any lessons learned (including about broader policy or procedure) within reports to the LGB or Board of Trustees.

Stage 2: Complaint heard by the Headteacher

The complainant should write to the Headteacher giving details of either the areas of the complaint left outstanding following Stage 1 or concerning the Stage 1 process. This notification needs to be received within fifteen school days of the decision from Stage 1 being issued to the complainant otherwise it will be deemed that the decision is accepted and the complaint will be closed.

The Headteacher may formally reject further investigation of the complaint if, in their judgement, the complaint:

- was received too long after the alleged incident for realistic investigation to take place
- does not identify specific actions or incidents that are capable of being investigated
- refers only to issues that have already been determined
- raises only minor matters that should have been resolved in discussion with the staff member involved
- is vexatious (see below for further information)

The Headteacher will nominate a senior member of staff to consider these issues (the “investigating officer”). The investigating officer will consider both the original complaint and the process followed during Stage 1. They will report to the Headteacher.

Following the report of the investigating officer, the Headteacher can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part (including if there is insufficient evidence to uphold the complaint)
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- decide on appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes to the school’s systems or procedures

The Headteacher will put their judgement and rationale, including details of the process followed, in writing to the complainant.

It is normally expected that the Stage 2 process would be completed within fifteen school days of the Headteacher initiating Stage 2. If it is clear that the process is going to take longer than this, the reasons for this should be explained to the complainant.

If the investigating officer makes any recommendations regarding changes to school processes as a result of the investigation, or the Headteacher decides these are necessary following consideration of the findings of the investigating officer, the Headteacher will be responsible for reviewing these recommendations and implementing them where appropriate. Acceptance of recommendations will be at the Headteacher’s discretion unless the investigation reveals processes that do not comply with statutory, Funding Agreement, or DfE/ESFA requirements when the Headteacher will be required to ensure compliance as soon as possible.

The Headteacher should update the Complaint Form which should be completed and passed to the PA of the Headteacher or Head of School for retention, along with a copy of their written response to the complainant.

The Headteacher should record on the Complaint Form any action taken as a result of the complaint, and include any lessons learned (including about broader policy or procedure) within reports to the LGB or Board of Trustees.

Stage 3: Appeal heard by a Complaints Panel

The complainant should write to the Chair of Governors giving details about the aspects of the decision or the Stage 2 process that they are appealing against. This notification needs to be received within fifteen school days of the decision from stage 2 being issued to the complainant otherwise it will be deemed that the decision is accepted and the complaint will be closed.

The Chair of the Local Governing Body may reject the request for a Panel Hearing if, in their judgement, the request:

- is vexatious or abusive and/or
- refers only to issues that have already been reasonably determined and with no reasonable basis (such as new information) upon which an appeal hearing could reach a different decision

The Chair, or a nominated Governor, will convene a Complaints Panel. This Panel will comprise at least **three** individuals, none of whom will have been directly involved in previous consideration of the complaint. At least one member of the Panel will be independent of the management and running of the trust and at least one member of the Panel will be a Governor of the school concerned. The panel will have the powers to determine the complaint. In the unlikely event that more than one session is required to hear the appeal, the individuals on the Panel will remain the same. The Panel members will elect their Chair.

Any Governors who were part of the Panel Hearing would not be part of any panel that was subsequently required for a disciplinary hearing regarding a member of staff.

The Panel Hearing should normally be heard within fifteen school days of the Chair of the Local Governing Body receiving notice of the complaint progressing to Stage 3, ensuring that the complainant is given reasonable notice and that reasonable endeavours are made to arrange a time and date that the complainant can attend. Any documentation from either party should be circulated to all parties five school days before the hearing.

The complainant is able to attend the Panel Hearing, and may be accompanied by one other individual at the Panel Hearing (and if the complainant is a child, they may be accompanied by their parent(s) and another person).

The Panel Hearing will be heard in private, providing an opportunity for the complainant and for relevant Headteacher / Head of School (or other staff as appropriate, including the Executive Headteacher) to present and for all presenters to be questioned by the Panel and the other party (through the Chair).

The Panel will, once the presenters have left the hearing, give careful consideration to the substance of the complaint, consider all the views expressed, and decide the outcome. The decision will be made by a simple majority of the Panel; a unanimous decision is not required.

The panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- decide on appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures
- the decision of the panel is binding

If the Complaints Panel makes any recommendations regarding changes to school processes as a result of the investigation, the Headteacher will be responsible for reviewing these

recommendations and implementing them where appropriate. Acceptance of recommendations will be at the Headteacher's discretion unless the investigation reveals processes that do not comply with statutory, Funding Agreement, or DfE/ESFA requirements when the Headteacher will be required to ensure compliance as soon as possible.

A copy of the report and the findings will be provided within five working days of the hearing to the complainant, the Headteacher, the Chair of the Board of Trustees, and, where relevant, to the person complained about.

The Headteacher should record on the Complaint Form any action taken as a result of the complaint, and include any lessons learned (including about broader policy or procedure) within reports to the LGB or Board of Trustees.

Complaints against the Headteacher, a Governor or the Governing Board

7.1 Stage 1: Informal

- Complaints made against the headteacher or any member of the governing board should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the Clerk to the Governors
- If the complaint is about the headteacher or 1 member of the governing board (including the chair or vice-chair), a suitably skilled and impartial governor will carry out the steps at stage 1

7.2 Stage 2: Formal

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the chair and vice-chair or
- The entire governing board or
- The majority of the governing board

An independent investigator will carry out the steps in stage 2. They will be appointed by the governing board and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation.

7.3 Stage 3: Review Panel

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the chair and vice-chair or
- the entire governing board or
- the majority of the governing board
- a committee of independent governors will hear the complaint. They will be sourced from local schools, the local authority and will carry out the steps at stage 3.

8. Vexatious and Abusive Complaints

Pinner High School takes its responsibilities to investigate concerns and complaints seriously and will do so professionally.

Pinner High School does not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour by complainants, which would include behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Pinner High School defines unreasonably persistent and vexatious complainants as those complainants who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder the ability to investigate their original complaint. The description 'unreasonably persistent' and 'vexatious' may apply separately or jointly to a particular complainant.

An unreasonably persistent and/or vexatious complaint/complainant may:

- arise from a historic and irreversible decision or incident
- have insufficient or no grounds for their complaint, or refuse to specify the grounds for their complaint, and appear to be making the complaint only to annoy or for undeclared reasons
- refuse to cooperate with the complaints investigation process
- refuse to accept that issues are not within the power of the school to investigate, change or influence
- make what appear to be groundless complaints about the staff dealing with the complaint(s)
- make an unreasonable number of contacts with the school, by any means, about the complaint
- make persistent and unreasonable demands or expectations of staff and/or the complaints process
- harass, abuse, or otherwise seek to harass or intimidate staff dealing with their complaint
- raise subsidiary or new issues during the investigation
- introduce trivial or irrelevant new information and expect this to be taken into account
- change the substance or basis of the complaint without reasonable justification
- deny statements he or she made at an earlier stage
- electronically record meetings and conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of the other person involved
- refuse to accept the outcome of the complaint process after its conclusion and/or denying that an adequate response has been given
- make the same complaint repeatedly, perhaps with minor differences, and insist that the minor differences make these 'new' complaints which should be put through the full complaints procedure
- persistently approach the school (and potentially other parties such as the Local Authority) through different routes about the same issue
- combine some or all of these features

For the purpose of this policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions set out in the preceding paragraph in such a way that they:

- appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff
- cause ongoing distress to individual member(s) of school staff
- have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community
- are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms,

whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health

In the case of persistent or vexatious complaints and/or harassment, the school will verbally inform the complainant that his/her behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable/unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this policy. This will be confirmed in writing.

If the complainant's behaviour is not modified the school will take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:

- inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this section of the policy
- inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties
- inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the school should be by letter only
- in the case of physical, or verbal aggression warn the complainant about being banned from the school site; or proceed straight to a ban
- consider informing the police who may seek to take further action under anti-harassment / malicious communication legislation

8. Responsibilities Under the Policy

Local Governing Body

The Local Governing Body is responsible for:

- approving the school policy, procedures, and guidelines
- ensuring the Complaints Panel for Stage 3 complies with the appropriate processes
- monitoring the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes annually or earlier if so determined by the Chair

The Chair of the Local Governing Body is responsible for:

- receiving complaints at Stage 3 of the complaints procedure
- convening the Complaints Panel for Stage 3, or appointing another Governor to convene the Complaints Panel and ensuring that this is done within the required timeframes
- checking that the correct procedure is followed

The Chair of the Complaints Panel at Stage 3 is responsible for ensuring that:

- the parties understand the procedure
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are established

- complainants are put at ease
- the hearing is conducted as informally as possible
- the panel is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome, or has been involved in the issues previously
- all parties have the chance to be heard
- any written material is seen by all parties
- related Child Protection and Data Protection rules are observed and maintained

Headteacher

The Headteacher is responsible for:

- the effective implementation of this policy and procedures
- maintaining an accurate and up to date list of all written complaints received, which school(s) they relate to, the date of receipt of the complaint, the current stage of the complaint, and which stage of this procedure they were resolved in accordance with (and whether this was through the formal procedure or a panel hearing)
- where a complaint is escalated to them at Stage 2, identifying who will investigate the complaint
- advising Governors and Trustees about the composition of Panels for Stage 3
- ensuring that actions taken as a result of a complaint, including any lessons learned, are implemented
- reporting to the Governors and /or Trustees about the number and nature of complaints, as well as actions taken in response and lessons learned
- ensuring that the policy and procedure is monitored and reviewed, with recommendations for revision to Governors and / or Trustees as appropriate

Headteacher's PA

To retain, in a confidential manner except when requested by the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them, the material relating to complaints, including Complaint Forms, all written judgements from stages 1, 2 and 3, and the requests from the complainant to initiate stages 2 and 3, so that they can be made available as appropriate.

All staff

All staff are responsible for:

- listening to any concerns brought to them by parents and students

- reassuring them that they will be dealt with as soon as possible by the appropriate member of staff
- for informing the relevant staff of the concerns being raised
- passing any complaints received from other people who are not parents or students to the Headteacher's PA

The Governor responsible for Complaints will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the headteacher where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

9. Complaints about the school to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)

Individuals are able to complain to the ESFA, to make sure the school handles your complaint properly. The ESFA will only be able to consider your complaint if you can provide evidence that the school:

- does not have a complaints procedure
- did not provide a copy of its complaints procedure when requested
- does not have a procedure that complies with statutory regulations
- has not followed its published complaints procedure
- has not allowed its complaints procedure to be completed

The ESFA complaints procedure can be accessed here.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure>

10. Review of Policy

This policy shall be reviewed every three years, sooner as necessary or appropriate.

Headteacher
September 2023

Appendices
Appendix One: Complaint Form

Complaint form

Please complete and return to the Headteacher's PA who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

| | |
|--|--|
| Your Name: | |
| Student's Name: | |
| Your relationship to the student: | |
| Address: | |
| Email address: | |
| Daytime number: | |
| Evening number: | |
| Mobile number: | |
| Please give details of your complaint: | |
| | |
| What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve the complaint? Who did you speak to and what was the response? | |
| | |

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

| | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| <i>School use only</i> | |
| Date acknowledgement sent: | |
| Who sent acknowledgement: | |
| Signature | |
| Please complete the following, acknowledge the stages of the complaints procedure that have been followed and make any comments as necessary | |
| Stage 1 (complaint heard by staff) | Date: Signature: |
| Stage 2 (complaint heard by senior member of staff) | Date: Signature: |

| | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Stage 3 (Panel Hearing) | Date: Signature: |
| Action taken as a result of the complaint | |

All functions of the complaints procedure must adhere to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.