

Complaints Policy

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Procedures for dealing with complaints

In the AspirePlus Educational Trust, we undertake to provide a friendly and safe environment in which students will be supported to achieve their potential, both academically and socially. We always aim to maintain positive relationships with families and do our best to address any concerns as soon as they arise.

- ▲ We value good home/school relations and will, therefore, do everything we can to establish and maintain them. This includes seeking to resolve any concerns or complaints promptly, and to the satisfaction of all concerned.
- ▲ We welcome feedback on what parents feel we do well or not so well, as a school. We will consider carefully all feedback, whether positive or negative, and will review our policies and practices accordingly.
- ▲ We will treat all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously and will advise parents and others of the school's procedures for dealing with their concerns. In return, we expect parents and other complainants to behave respectfully towards all members of the school community. In particular, any disagreement with the school should not be expressed inappropriately or in front of pupils.
- ▲ All school staff and members of the Trust Board and local governing board will receive a copy of this policy statement and will be familiar with the school's procedures for dealing with parental concerns and complaints, to which they will have access as required. The policy will be available on request to parents.
- ▲ The school's procedures will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.
- ▲ Staff and governors will receive training in handling parental concerns and complaints as appropriate. This may be on an individual basis, or as a group activity for all staff, or for specific groups, such as the office staff or members of the governing body.
- ▲ A dissatisfied complainant will be given the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.
- ▲ The Trust and local governors advocate resolution of parental concerns and complaints at school level wherever possible, in the interests of maintaining good home/school relations.
- ▲ The schools in the AspirePlus Trust will not respond to anonymous complaints unless issues of child protection are raised. Should a complaint be raised that does not fall within our procedure, parents/carers will be informed who they should go to, to direct their complaint.

In summary, the nationally accepted procedure for resolution of complaints is divided into three stages:

Stage 1 aims to resolve concerns through informal contact at the appropriate level in school.

Stage 2 is the first formal stage where the complaint made in person, by telephone or in writing is considered by the Headteacher or a designated Trustee/Governor, who has responsibility for dealing with complaints.

Stage 3 is the next step once Stage 2 is complete. It involves a complaints review committee of Trustees/Governors. Such a panel may be offered at the discretion of the Chair of Governors.



Stage One - Informal contact

- ▲ Most complaints/issues can be resolved informally and quickly by discussion either directly with the member of staff concerned. Informal complaints should firstly be directed towards the relevant form tutor, subject teacher or appropriate member of staff.
- ▲ Once your concern is made known to us, we will see you, or contact you by telephone or in writing, as soon as possible. If it is necessary, all members of staff know how to refer to the appropriate person with responsibility for your particular issues. He or she will make a clear note of the details and will check later to make sure that the matter has been followed up.
- ▲ If the complaint is still unresolved, it should then be taken to the relevant Subject Leader, Learning Leader or appropriate member of staff. If this does not lead to a successful resolution the complaint should be taken to the relevant senior member of staff with responsibility for that area of work in school.
- ▲ Any actions or monitoring of the situation that has been agreed, will be communicated clearly with you and where appropriate we will confirm this in writing to you.
- ▲ If necessary we will contact appropriate people who may be able to assist us with our enquiries into your concern.
- ▲ We will normally update you on the progress of our enquiries within ten working days. Once we have responded to your concern, you will have the opportunity of asking for the matter to be considered further.
- ▲ If you are still dissatisfied following this informal approach, your concern will become a formal complaint and we will deal with it at the next stage.

Stage Two - formal consideration of your complaint

This stage in our procedures deals with formal complaints. It applies where you are not happy with the informal approach to dealing with your concern, as outlined above.

- ▲ If a parent/carer is still dissatisfied after the informal stages, they can refer the matter to the Headteacher. This should be done in writing and received within 15 school days after the informal stage. The attached complaint form can be used to do this. Where there are communication difficulties (under the Equality Action 2010) you can choose to make the complaint by telephone or in person. School may wish to use recording devices/minute taking to ensure the complainant is able to access and review any discussions at a later point.
- ▲ Where if, a complaint concerns the Headteacher personally, it should be sent to the school marked "For the attention of the Chair of Governors".
- ▲ We will acknowledge your complaint in writing as soon as possible after receiving it. We will do all we can do ensure this is within three working days.
- ▲ This written response should detail why the parent/carer is still dissatisfied after the earlier discussion with the appropriate member of school staff. We will enclose a copy of these procedures with the acknowledgement.
- ▲ The Headteacher will deal with the complaint and, if appropriate, will offer a meeting to the parent/carer at a mutually convenient time. The Headteacher may need to speak



to other staff and students to investigate the concerns before writing a response. This should happen within 15 school days. If this timescale cannot be met the Headteacher should inform the parent/carer that this will take longer. Reasons for this may be that the complaint is complex and needs more time or someone involved is absent through sickness or holidays. The Headteacher should, however, give written notice of a realistic timescale for the complaint to be responded to.

As part of our consideration of your complaint, we may invite you to a meeting to discuss the complaint and fill in any details required. If you wish, you can ask someone to accompany you to help you explain the reasons for your complaint.

- ▲ The Headteacher may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.
- ▲ If the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the school's Whistleblowing and /or disciplinary procedures as appropriate.
- ▲ Once we have established all the relevant facts, we will send you a written response to your complaint. This will give an 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 you to a meeting to discuss the outcome as part of our commitment to building and maintaining good relations with you, although this may not always be necessary.
- ▲ The person investigating your complaint may decide that we have done all we can to resolve the complaint, in which case we may use our discretion to close the complaint at this point.
- ▲ If you are unhappy with the outcome after the involvement of the Headteacher, the complaint can be referred to the Chair of Governors. This must be in writing to the Chair at the school address and received within 15 school days.
- ▲ This complaint must specify the unresolved issue and the complainant's preferred outcome. The Chair of Governors will ask for the complaint to be put in writing (if this has not already happened). If appropriate, the Chair of Governors will offer to meet with the parent/carer at a mutually convenient time. The Chair of Governors has 15 school days to investigate the complaint. If it cannot be resolved within this time, the Chair will inform the complainant and explain why it will take longer.
- ▲ Reasons for this may be that the complaint is complex and needs more time or someone involved is absent through sickness or holidays. The Chair of Governors should, however, give written notice of a realistic timescale for the complaint to be responded to.

Stage Three - formal consideration of a complaint by a Complaints Committee

If the complaint has already been through stage 2 and you are not happy with the outcome as a result of the way in which the complaint has been handled, you can take it further to an appeal panel. This is a formal process, and is the ultimate recourse at Trust level. The Chair of Governors will decide if this is appropriate. The purpose of this arrangement is to give you the chance to present your issues in front of a panel of Trustees/governors who have no prior knowledge of the details of the case and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice. However, the aim of a panel is not to re-hear the complaint. It is there to review how the complaint has been investigated and to determine whether this has been conducted fairly. It



is there to establish facts and make recommendations which will reassure you that we have taken the complaint seriously.

- ▲ The Complaints Committee will only be convened if the Chair of Governors is unable to provide a mutually acceptable resolution. Whilst a Complaints Committee can be called it will only be convened as a last resort when all other avenues have been explored.
- ▲ The Complaints Committee must comprise of three people not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom must be independent of the local governance, management and running of the school. The Complaints Committee should meet at a time convenient to all parties and to take place within 20 working days.
- ▲ You will be informed, at least five working days in advance, of the date, time and place of the meeting.
- ▲ The letter will explain what will happen at the panel meeting and that you are entitled to be accompanied to the meeting. The choice of person to accompany you is your own, but it is usually best to involve someone in whom you have confidence but who is not directly connected with the school. They are there to give you support but also to witness the proceedings and to speak on your behalf if you wish.
- ▲ With the letter, you will receive any relevant correspondence or reports regarding stage 1 and 2 and you will be asked whether you wish to submit further written evidence to the panel.
- ▲ The complainant, the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors and any member of staff the complaint is about will be invited to the meeting.
- ▲ The Chair of Governors can elect to appoint an investigating officer to gather evidence and organise the information relating to the complaint. The investigating officer will provide a detailed report of his/her investigation of the complaint. You will be asked whether you wish to provide any further written documentation in support of your appeal.
- ▲ The Complaints Committee will consider any written material, and also give the person making the complaint and the Headteacher, Chair of Governors and staff an opportunity to state their case and to question others present.
- ▲ The Headteacher or complaint investigator will be asked to prepare a written report for the panel. The panel can request additional information from other sources if necessary.
- ▲ If it is necessary in the interests of ratifying the investigative process, the complaint investigator may, with the agreement of the Chair of the panel, invite relevant witnesses directly involved in matters raised by you to attend the meeting.
- ▲ The chair of the panel will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating for you and will do his or her best to put you at your ease.



- ▲ 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.
- ▲ The committee will ensure that all present are treated fairly.
- ▲ The Chair of the Committee will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted. Please understand that any decision to share the minutes with you, the complainant, is a matter for the panel's discretion and you do not have an automatic right to see or receive a copy as the minutes are the property of the local governing board. Since such minutes usually name individuals, they are understandably of a sensitive and, therefore, confidential nature.
- ▲ In closing the meeting, the chair will explain that the panel will now consider its decision and that written notice of the decision will be sent to you and the Headteacher within three school days. All participants other than the panel and the clerk will then leave.
- ▲ 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 case; decide on the appropriate action to be taken, if necessary; recommend, where appropriate, to the governing body changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.
- ▲ The committee will give its decision, in writing, within 15 school days following the meeting, together with the reasons for their decision.



Closure of complaints

Very occasionally, the school and/or Trust will feel that it needs, regrettably, to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied.

- ▲ We, and the Trust where appropriate, 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, designated governor, Chair of governors or anyone else – or to the Trust, 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 and that the complaint has exhausted our official process. The Trust will support us in this position, and especially where the complainant's action is causing distress to staff and/or pupils.
- ▲ In exceptional circumstances, closure may occur before a complaint has reached stage 2 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 sure that it is likely to assist the process of investigating the complaint.
- ▲ The Chair 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
- ▲ If after this school-based process the complaint is still not resolved to the parent/carer's satisfaction, they should write to the Secretary of State, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT.

APET Complaints Procedure – July 2017

All formal written complaints will be recorded formally by the school in a central log which will indicate at which stage the complaint was resolved. All correspondence, statements and records of complaints are to be kept confidential. It should be noted that the school will not consider complaints made later than the end of the second term after an incident/issue has occurred.

The Trust and each school has a right and a duty to protect its employees from complaints that are malicious, personally offensive, including obscenities, racist or homophobic language. Problems arise where a complaint is unreasonable and are not seeking to have a situation remedied but instead are determined to exact retribution for some real or imagined wrong. We reserve the right not to deal with such complaints. The decision not to consider a complaint of this nature will be taken by the Chair of Governors along with a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

Schools reserves the right to limit the method of contact of such complaints and restrict who the complainant may communicate with in school. The school also reserves the right not to consider a complaint that has been re-submitted with only minor differences after we have previously addressed the complaint.





AspirePlus
E D U C A T I O N A L T R U S T

Complaints Form

School.....

Name

Address

.....

Postcode

Daytime telephone number

Evening telephone number

If applicable, name of child(ren) and year at school
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Your relationship to the school, e.g. parent, carer, neighbour, member of the public,
student:

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Please give details of your complaint:

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

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

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Signature

Date

Official Use:

Date of acknowledgment

By whom

Complaint referred to

Date

