HELSBY HIGH SCHOOL

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

PREFACE

The education of young people will always necessarily be a partnership between home, school and other elements of young people's lives and so as school it is very important to us to always work as effectively as possible in partnership with parents/carers and all other stakeholders involved in supporting and guiding young people thorough their crucial secondary years.

As a large and dynamic organisation with over 1300 students, over 2000 parents/carers and over 150 members of staff, despite all best efforts it is probably inevitable that there will be times when concerns or possible complaints will arise. Please be reassured that as a school we would always want to resolve issues as quickly and effectively as possible for the ultimate benefit of our students' academic progress and well-being.

Our Complaints Procedure is laid out in the following pages and the detail can inevitably appear slightly daunting - and the use of the word 'Complaint' in itself can also appear unintentionally adversarial. Hopefully the summary below helps to clarify the process that should be followed whenever parents/carers have any concerns, however minor. At its heart, the process just describes how to escalate them so that they can be dealt with as quickly, effectively and appropriately as possible:

General Concern/Complaint**
Step 1: Contact the relevant Subject Leader or Progress and Pastoral Leader.**
Step 2: Contact the Senior Leadership Team (seniorteam@helsbyhigh.org).**
Step 3: Contact the Headteacher.**
Step 4: Make a formal complaint to the Governing Body.

** Please note that the Complaints Procedure below outlines separate processes for complaints/concerns about the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors or other members of the school's Governing Body. Page 5 also outlines areas of a legal nature where national complaints processes should be followed rather than individual schools' own processes (for example, with regards to Admissions, SEND or Suspensions).*
*** Please see (website link) for how to contact staff at the school.*

If parents/carers or other stakeholders are uncertain at any stage about how to resolve a concern or progress a complaint then please use the seniorteam@helsbyhigh.org e-mail address to access support with the processes described above and on the following pages. Doing so will also, most importantly, hopefully provide the school's Senior Leadership Team with the opportunity to resolve issues for the benefit of our students and families as quickly as possible.

Martin Hill
Headteacher
July 2024

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Helsby High School Aims

We provide a safe and inclusive learning environment where everyone is valued and encouraged to reach their full potential.

Achieving Success	*by*	**Valuing Others**
Encouraging high aspiration and a love of learning		Contributing to a safe school environment
Maximising progress and potential		Showing tolerance, respect and fairness
Providing rewarding learning experiences		Listening to and respecting others' views
Offering diverse opportunities		Appreciating and embracing diversity
Recognising and celebrating all achievement		Being an active member of our school and local community
Preparing for independence and future challenges		Co-operating with others

RATIONALE

Under Section 29 of the Education Act 2002, Governing Bodies of all maintained schools in England have been required to have in place a procedure to deal with complaints relating to the school. The law also requires the procedure to be publicised.

There is a difference between a concern and a complaint; taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the number that develop into formal complaints. The formal procedures will need to be invoked only when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

AIMS

We will endeavour to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint and will always put the interests of our young people above all else. We will give careful consideration to all complaints and we aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding.

Any person, including members of the general public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that a school provides, unless separate statutory procedures apply (such as exclusions or admissions).

Our complaints procedure will:

- encourage resolution of problems by **informal** means wherever possible;
- be easily **accessible** and **publicised;**
- be **simple** to understand and use, providing clarity at all times over the Steps at which complaints are being dealt;
- be **impartial and non-adversarial;**
- allow **swift** handling with established **time-limits** for action and keeping people

informed of the progress;

- ensure a full and **fair** investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- respect **confidentiality;**
- address all the points at issue and provide an **effective** response and **appropriate** redress;
    - provide **information** to the school's senior leadership team and governors so that services can be improved.

GUIDELINES

For a general complaint:

- **Step 1** If a parent is concerned about anything to do with the education or support that we are providing at our school, they should, in the first instance, discuss the matter with their child's Head of Department (HoD) / Progress & Pastoral Leader (PPL); most matters of concern can be resolved positively in this way. All conversations and agreed outcomes should be recorded in writing and filed appropriately. All teachers work very hard to ensure that each child is happy at school, and is making good progress; they naturally want to know if there is a problem, so that they can take action before it seriously affects the child's progress.
- **Step 2** Where a parent feels that a situation has not been resolved through contact with the HoD/PPL, they should make an appointment to discuss it with the Assistant Headteacher (AHT) /Deputy Headteacher (DHT) linked to the department or year. The AHT/DHT will consider all matters of concern very seriously and investigate each case thoroughly. Most complaints would normally be resolved at this stage.
- **Step 3** Where a parent feels that a situation has not been resolved through contact with the AHT/DHT, they should make an appointment to discuss it with the Headteacher. The Headteacher will consider all matters of concern very seriously and investigate each case thoroughly.
- **Step 4** Only when an informal complaint fails to be resolved by the Headteacher should a formal complaint be made to the governing body. This complaint must be made in writing, stating the nature of the complaint, who has been spoken to already and the preferred outcome. The parent should send this written complaint to the chair of governors via the clerk to governors in school.

For a complaint about the Headteacher:

- **Step 1** If a parent is concerned about anything to do with the behaviour, leadership or management of the Headteacher, they should, in the first instance, discuss the matter with the Headteacher; most matters of concern can be resolved positively in this way.
- **Step 2** Where a parent feels that a situation has not been resolved through contact with the Headteacher, or that their concern is of a sufficiently serious nature, they should make an appointment to discuss it with the chair of the governing body. The chair will consider all matters of concern very seriously and investigate each case thoroughly. Most complaints would normally be resolved at this stage.
- **Step 3** Only when an informal complaint fails to be resolved by the chair should a formal complaint be made to the governing body. This complaint must be made within 21 days of receipt of the outcome of Step 2 and be made in writing, stating the nature of the complaint, who has been spoken to already and the preferred

outcome. The parent should send this written complaint to the governing body via the clerk to the governors.

Complaints against chairs of governors

- In the event of a formal complaint being made against the Chair of Governors, the complaint will be reviewed by a Grievance Panel/Hearings Committee of the Governing Body. The school should seek guidance on this process from an Education Officer. The Committee will decide if the complaint has merit by reviewing the written information and will make any recommendations it feels appropriate to enable resolution of the matter. The outcomes will be communicated in writing within ten working school days to both sides by the Chair of the Panel, with reasons for the outcomes given.
- The Review should normally take place within ten working school days of receipt of the request. If this is not possible, the complainant will be informed of the review date.
- Under this complaints procedure there is no further stage for a complaint against the Chair of Governors.

Complaints against governors

- A formal complaint against a governor other than the Chair should be referred to the Chair, who will investigate and then decide on any appropriate action. In extreme cases this might include making a recommendation to the Governing Body about possible suspension (See A Governor's Guide to the Law).

Governing body complaints committee

- The governing body must consider all written complaints **within 21 school working days** of receipt.
- The chair of governors will nominate a governor to co-ordinate the procedure and will appoint a **complaints panel** consisting of 3 governors who are not employees of the school. The nominated co-ordinator will chair the complaints panel.
- The co-ordinator will arrange a meeting of the complaints panel to discuss the complaint and will invite the person making it to attend the meeting so that they can explain the complaint in more detail. The school will give the complainant at least five days' notice of the meeting. If the complainant cannot attend the suggested date, a further date will be set. If the complainant does not attend the second date, a third and final date will be set, at which time the meeting will proceed without the complainant present.
- The Headteacher will write a report addressing the complaint and ensure that the complaints panel members and the complainant receive a copy 4 days before the meeting. (If it is a complaint about the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors will write the report).

The complainant is invited to write a report addressing the issue and must ensure that the complaints panel members and the Headteacher (or Chair of Governors) receives a copy 2 days before the meeting. Other written evidence will not be accepted at the meeting, except in exceptional circumstances.

Check list for a panel hearing

The panel must take the following points into account:

- the hearing is as informal as possible;
- after introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint (with the support of parent partnership or other advocate if required);
- the panel members and Headteacher (or Chair of Governors) may ask questions;
- the Headteacher (or Chair of Governors) is then invited to explain the school's actions (with support of other SLT or staff as appropriate or other supporter if required);
- the panel members or complainant may ask questions;
- the complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint;
- the Headteacher (or Chair of Governors) is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint;
- the chair of the panel explains that both parties will hear from the panel within 5 working days;
- both parties leave the meeting while the panel decides on the issues.
- a written record of the meeting will be made by the Clerk to the Governing Body

When the panel has fully investigated the complaint, the chair of the panel, on behalf of the governing body, will write to the complainant confirming the outcome of the complaint and any agreed action to be taken. The panel can:

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

Investigating Complaints

At each stage, the person investigating the complaint should 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;
- 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.

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Matters Outside the Scope of a Complaints Procedure

The **exceptions** listed below, for which there are separate (statutory) procedures, will not be dealt with via the school complaints procedure:

Exception	Who to Contact
• Admissions to schools	The admission authority (Cheshire West and Chester). Complaints about admission appeals for maintained schools are dealt with by the Local Government Ombudsman.
• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Concerns should be raised direct with the Local Authority SEND team.
• School re-organisation proposals	Concerns should be raised direct with the Local Authority (Cheshire West and Chester).
• Safeguarding matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	The Local Authority Safeguarding Children in Education (SCiE) team.
• Exclusion of children from school	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions
• Whistleblowing	Schools have an internal whistleblowing procedure for their employees and voluntary staff. Other concerns can be raised direct with Ofsted by telephone on: 0300 123 3155, via email at: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk or by writing to: WBHL, Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD. The Department for Education is also a prescribed body for whistleblowing in education.
• Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures	These matters will invoke the school's internal grievance procedures. Complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any investigation.
• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities.	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure we will look for a way in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. 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.

It should be noted that an admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

Unresolved complaints

From 1 August 2012 complaints about maintained schools not resolved by the school that would have been considered by the Local Government Ombudsman or the LA should be addressed to the Secretary of State for Education.

Further information can be obtained by calling the National Helpline on 0370 000 2288 or going online at: www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus or by writing to:

Department for Education

School Complaints Unit

2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

Reviewed: 15th July 2024

Date of Next Review: December 2024