

Policy Essential Information

Title: Complaints Policy

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Complaints Policy

Statement of intent

Pinner High School takes all concerns or complaints seriously. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage reduces the numbers of formal complaints and reflects the commitment to working effectively with all members of the community.

This policy aims to ensure that:

- as far as possible all concerns should be dealt with as informally as possible.
- all complaints are dealt with as quickly and sensitively as possible, and by the person best able to do so;
- where a formal process is required, the steps involved are clearly outlined
- people are aware of their responsibilities

The emphasis is to understand, look into the concern, and resolve the complaint as early as possible.

The formal process has three stages:

- a. Complaint heard by a member of staff
- b. Complaint heard by a senior member of staff appointed by the Headteacher
- c. Appeal heard by a Complaints Panel

Scope and applicability

1. This policy applies to all complaints received by the school.
2. This policy applies to all staff and governors.

The policy

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
- 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
- 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.

A complaint must be made in writing to the Headteacher (potentially using the Complaint Form at the end of this document). If the complaint concerns the Headteacher it should be addressed to the Chair of Governors.

All correspondence and material relating to a complaint will be held by the Headteachers' PA.

All correspondence and material relating to a complaint is confidential.

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;
and
- keep notes of the interview.

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; and
- 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 is not the same as an admission of negligence.

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.

Stages of 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 academy 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.

Stage 2: Complaint heard by appropriate senior member of staff appointed 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. The Headteacher will nominate a senior member of staff to consider these issues.

The Headteacher may formally reject further investigation of the complaint if, in their judgment, 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 designated senior member of staff will put their judgement and rationale, including details of the process followed, in writing to the complainant, with a copy issued to the Headteacher and, where relevant, to the person complained about.

It is normally expected that the Stage 2 process would be completed within ten 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 designated senior member of staff makes any recommendations regarding changes to Academy 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/EFA requirements when the Headteacher will be required to ensure compliance as soon as possible.

Stage 3: Appeal heard by a Complaints Panel

The complainant should write to the Chair of Governors giving details of either the areas of the complaint left outstanding following Stage 2 or concerning the Stage 2 process. The Chair, or a nominated Governor, will convene a Complaints Panel, which will consist of at least three people, none of whose members will have been directly involved in previous consideration of the complaint. The panel will have the powers to determine the complaint. At least one member of the Panel will not be a Governor or member of staff.

Individual complaints would not be heard by the whole Governing Body, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel that may be subsequently set up as part of a disciplinary hearing for a member of staff if that is warranted.

The appeal hearing should be heard within 10 school days of the Chair receiving notice of the complaint.

The appeal hearing will be heard in private, will give careful consideration to the substance of the complaint, consider all the views expressed, and decide the outcome. The complainant may be accompanied by a friend / colleague, and by their parents if the complainant is a student.

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; or Recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures.

The decision of the panel is binding. A copy of the report and the findings will be provided to the complainant within three working days of the hearing to the complainant, the Headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, and, where relevant, to the person complained about. This will be available for inspection.

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/EFA requirements when the Headteacher will be required to ensure compliance as soon as possible.

Vexatious complaints

A vexatious complaint is likely to involve some or all of the following:

- the complaint arises from a historic and irreversible decision or incident;
- contact with the school is frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful for staff;
- the complainant behaves in an aggressive manner to staff when he/she presents his/her complaint or is verbally abusive or threatening;
- the complainant changes aspects of the complaint partway through the complaint process;
- the complainant makes and breaks contact with the school on an ongoing basis; or
- the complainant persistently approaches the school (and potentially other parties such as the Local Authority) through different routes about the same issue in the hope of getting different responses.

If the situation is challenging but it is possible to proceed, staff should avoid giving unrealistic expectations on the outcome of the complaint. In instances where there is a complete breakdown of relations between the complainant and the school, a decision may be made to restrict contact. The options that may be considered include:

- requesting contact in a particular form (e.g. – letters only);
- requiring contact to take place with a named member of staff (e.g. – Headteacher);
- asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about his/her future contact with the school; and
- informing the complainant that if he/she still does not follow this advice (as stated above) any further correspondence that does not present significant new matters or new information will not necessarily be acknowledged, but should be kept on file.
- if the complainant tries to reopen an issue that has already been examined through the complaints procedure, the Chair of the Governing Body is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

Responsibilities under the policy

Governing Body

The 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 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; and
- 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; and
- related Child Protection and Data Protection rules are observed and maintained.

Headteacher

The Headteacher is responsible for:

- the overall internal management of the procedures;
- Identifying who will hear complaints at stage 2 of the procedure;
- ensuring that the procedures are monitored and reviewed and reports made to the Governing Body as appropriate, including reporting changes made to Academy processes as a result of recommendations from Stage 2 or Stage 3 processes.

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 Complaints 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.

To retain a written record of all complaints and their outcomes.

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 raise; and
- passing any complaints received from other people who are not parents or students to the Headteacher's PA.

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

Date	
School use only	
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 (appeal heard by Governors)	Date: Signature: