





To inspire, enrich and nurture so each individual reaches their full potential

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The HCFS is a company limited by Guarantee Registration number 07648654

Complaints Policy and Procedure

September 2025

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Next Review: September 2026

History of Document

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1. Introduction

Hatfield Community Free School (HCFS) aims to fulfil its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Maintain impartiality and adopt a non-adversarial approach;
- Ensure a complete and impartial investigation conducted by an independent individual or panel, where necessary;
- Address all the points raised and give a clear and prompt response;
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality;
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy;
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair, and proportionate, in accordance 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 allow the complainant to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy 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.

In addition, it addresses duties outlined in the [Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework](#) concerning complaints about the school's fulfilment of these requirements.

3. Scope

This policy and procedure only applies to complaints about the provision of facilities or services by HCFS.

Some examples of issues that may be complained about are as follows:

- Complaints from individuals, including members of the public, about the provision of facilities or services by the School;
- Issues from parents or carers of children who attend the School;
- Complaints regarding pupil welfare and wellbeing;
- Complaints regarding bullying;
- Complaints regarding staff behaviour;
- A trustee complaining about a member of staff;

- A member of staff complaining about a trustee;
- A trustee complaining about another trustee;
- Complaints about the school's handling of a Subject Access Request (SAR) or a Freedom of Information (FOI) Request.

The following matters cannot be dealt with as a formal complaint:

- Complaints about pupil behaviour outside of school hours, such as weekends and holiday periods – such issues are not the school's responsibility;
- Complaints about third parties using or hiring school premises – third-party providers should have their own complaints process, and you should contact them directly;
- Complaints about the school fulfilling a statutory duty, for example making a Child Protection referral, cannot be used to stop it from doing what it is legally required to do;
- Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation – complaints about Child Protection issues are managed in accordance with the School's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and relevant statutory guidance;
- A staff member raising a concern about another staff member – refer to the School's Internal Grievance Procedures;
- A staff member raising a concern about an action or decision of the School's Full Trust Board - the Trust Board will have already thoroughly considered the matter;
- Whistleblowing – refer to the School's Internal Whistleblowing Procedure for all employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the designated person for whistleblowing in education matters for those who do not wish to raise issues directly with their employer. Referrals can be made at www.education.gov.uk/contactus;
- Complaints regarding internal management decisions, e.g. Class and Teacher Allocations and School Session Time changes;
- National Curriculum content – contact the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk/contactus;
- Complaints about a decision or process that has undergone a full consultation and has been subsequently approved by the Full Trust Board – the Full Trust Board has already given the matter thorough consideration, and respondents have had the opportunity through the consultation process to express their views.
- Unsuccessful school admission applications – Hertfordshire County Council manages admissions at HCFS.
- Complaints regarding Fixed-Term or Permanent Exclusions – Permanent Exclusions can eventually be appealed to an Independent Review Panel (IRP). For Fixed Term Exclusions, representations may be made to the Chair of the Trust Board outside the complaints process.

Suppose other bodies are investigating aspects of a complaint, such as the Police, the Local Authority (LA) Safeguarding Teams, or a Tribunal. In that case, this may affect the school's ability to meet the timescales outlined in this policy and procedure or may lead to the process being suspended until the relevant body has finished its enquiries.

If a complainant initiates legal action against HCFS regarding their complaint, we will consider whether to pause the complaints process until the legal proceedings are concluded. The school will only decide to investigate the complaint after the legal proceedings have ended if those proceedings did not resolve the core issues of the complaint.

4. Who can make a complaint?

This complaints process is not limited only to parents or carers of children who are registered at the school. Other people, including members of the public, can also make a complaint to our school, provided that the complaint relates to the facilities or services we offer. Any issues that are subject to a separate statutory process (such as appeals concerning exclusions or admissions) are not covered by this process. The school will

confirm upon receipt whether your complaint falls under this policy and procedure, and inform you of the next steps if it does. For issues outside the scope of this policy and procedure, the school will clarify the correct process that applies instead.

5. The difference between a concern and a complaint

We define a **concern** as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

We define a **complaint** as *'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action that requires an investigation and formal response in writing'*.

It is in everyone's best interest that concerns and complaints are resolved promptly. Many issues can be dealt with informally, without needing to escalate to the formal stages of the complaints process. HCFS takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In such cases, you will be referred to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to handle your concerns, you will be referred to another staff member. The staff member may be more senior, but does not have to be. The most important factor is the ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially.

HCFS recognises, however, that there are times when individuals prefer to raise their concerns formally. In such cases, the School will endeavour to resolve the issue(s) internally, following the stages outlined in this complaints policy and procedure.

6. Timescales

All complaints must be raised within three months of an incident or event. If a series of related incidents occur, the complaint should be raised within three months of the last incident in the series. HCFS will only consider exercising discretion to accept complaints outside this timeframe if the school determines that exceptional circumstances apply. To facilitate this decision, the complainant will be asked to explain why they took longer than three months to lodge their complaint. If no explanation is provided, or if the school finds the explanation unconvincing or not sufficiently exceptional to justify investigating the late complaint, the school will confirm this in writing and take no further action.

6.1 Complaints received outside of term time

HCFS will treat any complaints made outside term time as received on the first school day after the holiday period. The school will send the complainant an acknowledgement of their complaint, confirming the receipt date, the next steps, and the timescale involved. This may vary depending on the current stage of the complaints process. In cases of serious injury, a complaint received outside term time might be considered before the new term begins.

7. How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing, or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, provided that the third party can demonstrate to the school that they have the appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the Class Teacher or the Phase Leader. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint (see section 7.2 for further information).

Complainants should not approach individual trustees to raise concerns or complaints. They lack the authority to act independently, and doing so may also hinder their ability to consider complaints at stage three (section 7.3) of the formal complaints process. If a trustee is approached by a complainant, they should direct the

complainant to the most appropriate person. This could be the Class Teacher, Phase Leader, Senior Leadership Team, or Chair of the Trust Board, depending on the stage the complaint has reached.

Complaints against school staff, excluding the Principal, should initially be directed to the Principal through the School Office. They should be marked as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Principal should be directed to the Chair of the Trust Board and submitted through the School Office. They must be marked as Private and Confidential. The School Office will ensure that the Chair of the Trust Board receives them promptly.

Complaints regarding the Chair of the Trust Board, any individual trustee, or the entire Trust Board should be directed to the Clerk to the Trust Board and submitted to the School Office. They should be marked "Private and Confidential." The School Office will ensure that the Clerk receives them promptly. The Clerk will then refer the matter to an Independent Investigator appointed by the Clerk to the Trust Board. This person could be a trustee or governor from another school or be appointed by the HFL Complaint Investigations and Resources Service.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included within this complaints policy and procedure (Appendix One). If you need assistance to complete the form, contact the School Office. You can also seek help from third-party organisations like the Citizens Advice Bureau or an Independent Advocate. HCFS will ensure that all formal complaints are documented in writing to make the issues being raised and the complainant's desired outcomes clear. Complainants will be asked to submit their complaint in writing, either by email, letter via the School Office, or by completing the School's formal complaint form.

In accordance with equality law, as outlined above, the School will consider making reasonable adjustments if necessary to help complainants access and complete this complaints process. This includes providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint, or holding meetings in accessible locations.

If a complainant is unable to submit their complaint in writing, the School will ensure that the issues and requested outcomes are documented in writing. The School may do this in either of the following ways:

- Invite the complainant to a meeting with the Principal or Chair of the Trust Board (depending on what stage the complaint has reached) and a Notetaker. The Notetaker will document the issues being complained about and the complainant's desired outcomes, as discussed and agreed upon during the course of the meeting. At the end of the meeting, the complainant will be given a copy of the meeting notes containing this information, and the School will retain the original copy for the purpose of investigating the complaint(s).
- Signpost the complainant to independent support, including Advocacy. Advocates offer qualified, impartial assistance for individuals who have difficulty understanding information and advice or who need support in expressing their views. Advocates can help complainants formulate their complaints, submit them on their behalf, and guide them through the complaints process. POhWER was established in Hertfordshire in 1996. They provide services in Hertfordshire as part of the HertsHelp scheme, in collaboration with various voluntary sector organisations, including Advocacy. It is a free and unbiased service. Their contact details are as follows:

POhWER

Telephone: 0300 456 2370

Text: send the word 'pohwer' with your name and number to 81025

Email: pohwer@pohwer.net

Skype: pohwer.advocacy

Post: PO Box 14043, Birmingham, B6 9BL

7.1 Stage One – Informal

The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. The provision or clarification of information may resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Senior Leadership Team, either in person or by letter/telephone/email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school office.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within two school days, and investigate and respond within five school days.

The informal stage will include a meeting between the complainant and the subject of the complaint and/or a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint (stage two).

7.2 Stage Two – Formal

Formal complaints must be initially made to the Principal (unless the complaint concerns the Principal) through the school office. If you are unable to submit your complaint in writing by email, letter, or using the formal complaint form (located in Appendix One), the school will follow the procedures outlined in section 7 of this policy by offering to meet with you and/or directing you to a free and impartial Advocacy and Support Service.

The Principal (or a member of the Senior Leadership Team) will record the date when the complaint was received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within three school days.

Within this response, the Principal will aim to clarify the nature of the complaint, inquire about what remains unresolved, and identify the outcome(s) the complainant wishes to see. The Principal will assess whether a face-to-face meeting is the most suitable way to proceed. The Principal can delegate the investigation of the complaint to another member of the School's Senior Leadership Team but cannot delegate the decision(s) to be made.

During the investigation, the Principal (or Investigator) will:

- Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish. The decision regarding who should be interviewed and how is at the discretion of the Principal (or Investigator).
- Maintain a written record of any meetings or interviews related to their investigation.

Once the investigation has been concluded, the Principal (or investigator) will provide a formal written response within 10 school days of receiving the complaint.

If this deadline cannot be met, for any reason, they will inform the complainant with an update and a revised response date.

The response will outline the actions taken to investigate the complaint and will provide a full explanation of the decision(s) made and the reasoning behind them.

Where appropriate and possible, the response will include:

- details of actions HCFS will take to hopefully resolve the complaint;
- advice on how the complainant may escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of stage two.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the investigation response at stage two, they have 10 school days to request escalation to stage three of the complaints process.

Escalation requests submitted outside this timeframe do not need to be accepted. If the request is late, the complainant will be asked to explain why they have taken longer than 10 school days to escalate their complaint to the next stage. If the complainant fails to provide any explanation or if the school considers the explanation given to be neither compelling nor exceptional enough to justify accepting the late escalation request, the school will confirm this in writing and take no further action.

7.2.1 Complaints about the Principal, Trustee or Trust Board

If the complaint is about the Principal or a member of the Trust Board (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled trustee will be appointed to complete all the required actions at stage two as set out above.

If the complaint is:

- jointly regarding the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Trust Board;
- the majority of the Trust Board;
- the entire Trust Board;

Stage two of the process will be reviewed by an Independent Investigator appointed by the Clerk to the Trust Board. This person could be a trustee or governor from another school or selected by the HFL Complaint Investigations and Resources Service.

7.3 Stage Three – Trustee Complaint Panel Hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at stage two and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to stage three, where it is heard by a Panel of Trustees. The Panel consists of three impartial trustees, usually from the school's Trust Board. In exceptional circumstances, however, a decision may be made to involve trustees or governors from other schools to form the Panel. Stage three is the final stage of the school's complaints process.

A request to escalate to stage three must be made by the complainant to the Chair of the Trust Board (or the Clerk to the Trust Board if the complaint concerns the Chair) via the school office, within 10 school days of the issue of the stage two response.

The Chair of the Trust Board (or the Clerk) will record the date the stage three escalation request is received and acknowledge receipt of the request in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.

Requests received outside this timeframe will only be considered if the school decides that exceptional circumstances exist. Stage three will only review complaints that have already been lodged and investigated at stage two. It is not an opportunity to raise new complaints. Any complainant wishing to do so must first complete stage two of the school's complaints process.

The Chair of the Trust Board (or the Clerk) will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the Stage Three Complaints Panel Hearing. They will aim to convene a Panel within 20 school days of receiving the Stage Three request. If this is not possible, they will provide an expected date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the three proposed dates without a valid reason, the Chair of the Trust Board (or the Clerk) will decide when the Panel Hearing will take place. It is allowed to proceed in the complainant's absence, provided that the Panel considers all written submissions from both parties.

The Stage Three Complaints Panel Hearing will include at least three trustees who have no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Before the meeting, they will decide among themselves who will serve as the Chair of the Panel. If fewer than three trustees from HCFS are available—due to reasons such as illness or other commitments—the Chair of the Trust Board (or the Clerk) will source additional impartial trustees through

another local school or the Local Authority's Governor Services Unit to complete the panel. Sometimes, a Panel composed entirely of external trustees may be convened to hear the complaint at stage three, depending on the circumstances, with the decision made by the Chair of the Trust Board (or the Clerk).

The Complaints Panel will decide whether to handle the complaint through a Hearing or written representations, taking into account the complainant's needs. The Hearing may involve both parties being present at the same time or attending separately. This will depend on the circumstances of each case.

Both parties (i.e., the complainant and the respondent on behalf of the school) may bring someone with them to provide support. This could be a friend, relative, or independent supporter. Generally, while not prohibited, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the Panel Hearing, as it is not a court of law and cross-questioning is not permitted. All questioning during the hearing is conducted by the Panel. Witnesses, including staff members, may be invited to give evidence during the Panel Hearing. They may also bring someone with them for support, such as a friend, relative, or independent supporter.

If a complaint is made about the behaviour or conduct of a staff member and it is upheld wholly or partly, this may lead to some form of disciplinary action. In such cases, complainants will be informed that the matter will be dealt with through Disciplinary Procedures, if appropriate, but the outcome cannot be shared with them as this information is confidential between the employer and the employee.

Media representatives are not allowed to attend a Stage Three Complaints Panel Hearing.

At least 14 school days before the meeting, the Chair of the Trust Board (or the Clerk) will:

- Confirm and notify the complainant and the respondent on behalf of the school of the date, time, and venue of the Panel Hearing. Every effort should be made to ensure that the Hearing date and time are convenient for both parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible. Please note, however, that if the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates without good reason, the Chair of the Trust Board (or the Clerk) will decide when the Panel Hearing will be, and it is permitted to proceed in the complainant's absence, on the basis that the Panel will consider all written submissions from both parties. Similarly, if either party elects to leave the Hearing before it has finished, it is permitted to continue in their absence.
- Request copies of any additional written material to be submitted to the Panel at least seven school days before the meeting. Late evidence will not be accepted.

Any written material submitted will be shared with all parties at least five school days before the Hearing date. The Complaints Panel will generally not accept audio or video recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly or without the informed consent of all involved parties as evidence.

The Complaints Panel will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint that may have been included. Any new complaints must first be dealt with at stage one or two of the complaints process.

The Stage Three Complaints Panel Hearing will be held privately. Electronic recording of the Hearing is generally not allowed unless a complainant's disability or special needs require a reasonable adjustment. Complainants cannot demand that the Hearing be recorded without valid reason. Prior notification and consent from all attendees must be obtained before recording can take place. Any request to audio or video record the meeting, and whether this was consented to by all parties, should be documented in the Clerk's detailed notes of the Hearing. The decision on which, if any, reasonable adjustments will be made rests with the school.

The Stage 2 Complaints Panel will review the complaint and all evidence provided by both parties. The Panel can:

- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- Reject the complaint in whole or in part;

- Make a finding of No Judgment if there is insufficient evidence to reach a definitive conclusion.

If the complaint is upheld either fully or partly, the Stage 2 Complaints Panel will:

- Decide on the appropriate action to take in order to resolve the complaint.
- Where appropriate, suggest modifications to the school's systems or procedures to prevent the same or similar issues from occurring in the future.

The Chair of the Panel will provide the complainant and the respondent on behalf of the school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within five school days of the Hearing.

The outcome letter to the complainant (and copied to the respondent on behalf of the school) will include details on how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by HCFS.

7.3.1 Complaints about the Principal, Trustee or Trust Board

If the complaint is:

- jointly regarding the Chair and the Vice Chair of the Trust Board;
- the majority of the Trust Board;
- the whole Trust Board;

Stage three will be heard by a Panel of Independent Governors, which may be informed by the HFL Complaint Investigations and Resources Service.

The response will outline any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a thorough explanation of the decision(s) made and the reasons behind them. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions HCFS will need to undertake to resolve the complaint and to prevent similar issues from recurring.

The response will also inform the complainant on how to escalate their complaint if they remain dissatisfied.

7.4 Complaints where a child no longer attends the school and is no longer on roll

The purpose of this complaints process is to ensure that if an error has been made or an injustice has occurred, action can be taken to attempt to provide a remedy. Where the complainant has removed their child from the school or the child has now left, it is impossible for the school to offer a remedy that will directly benefit them or their child.

However, as the Trust Board has a duty of care to pupils who remain on roll, when a child has left the school, it will ensure that the circumstances of any complaint made are reviewed so that the Trust Board is satisfied that the school acted appropriately and that the relevant policies and procedures were followed correctly.

Under this policy and procedure, when a child no longer attends the school and their name has been removed from the register, the Chair of the Trust Board has the discretion to commission a Stage Three Trustee Review instead of a Stage Three Complaints Panel. The Chair of the Trustees will select one of the two options to ensure the complaint is investigated properly and that the complaints process can be concluded; however, the final decision on which option to choose rests entirely with them.

If a decision is made to appoint a Stage Three Trustee Review instead of a Stage Three Complaints Panel Hearing, the Chair of the Trust Board will select a trustee with no prior involvement in the complaint to carry out this task. If a trustee cannot be chosen from the school's own Trust Board (for example, due to sickness or other existing commitments), the Chair will appoint an independent governor or trustee from another local school or via the Local Authority's Governor Services Unit.

Once a trustee has been appointed, they will review the original complaint, the stage two investigation and response, the complainant's reply to the stage two response (including their escalation request), and any

additional evidence the complainant has submitted (which must relate to the complaint and not involve new matters).

Once the review is finished, either the Chair of the Trust Board or the trustee who carried out the review will inform the complainant in writing whether the complaint has been upheld or rejected, fully or partly, and will detail any changes to practice and procedures agreed upon by the Trust Board.

8. Resolving complaints

At each stage of this process, HCFS will endeavour to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge whether the complaint is upheld, wholly or partly. Additionally, we may offer one or more of the following if it is deemed suitable and necessary:

- An explanation;
- An acknowledgement that the situation could have been managed differently or more effectively.
- An assurance that we will endeavour to prevent the event(s) complained of from recurring.
- An explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to prevent recurrence and an outline of the timescales for implementing any changes.
- An undertaking to review relevant school policies in light of the complaint.
- An apology.

9. Other complaints

9.1 Special Educational Needs provision complaints

If your complaint concerns how the School has been providing the provisions outlined in Section F of your child's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), you may escalate your complaint to the Local Authority responsible for maintaining your child's EHCP.

If the EHCP is maintained by Hertfordshire County Council, you may further complain by outlining the details of your concern and sending it to:

Customer Service Team – Complaints

Postal Point: CHO118

Resources Department

County Hall

Hertford

SG13 8DF

Email: cs.complaints@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Once your complaint is received, the Complaints Manager for Children's Services will ensure that the Local Authority completes a Section F Provision Checklist. This involves creating a Provision Checklist directly from Section F of the EHCP. A Senior SEND Officer will then visit the school to work through the checklist point by point and complete it. The Senior SEND Officer will seek the comments of the Principal, Senior Leadership Team, SENCo, and Trustees as appropriate, along with any other information or advice they consider necessary.

Once the Provision Checklist has been completed, the Local Authority will notify the complainant of the outcome in writing, enclosing a copy of the checklist. A copy of the outcome letter and checklist will also be sent to the school for its information and record-keeping. This process will take up to 25 working days for the Local Authority to conclude.

Complainants who remain dissatisfied after further investigation of their Special Educational Needs provision complaint by the Local Authority may appeal to the Secretary of State, who may then decide to carry out an additional investigation. The contact details for the Secretary of State are provided below.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Secretary of State at the Department for Education online at www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on 0370 000 2288, or in writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

9.2 Anonymous complaints

HCFS generally does not investigate anonymous complaints. In such cases, the Principal and/or the Chair of the Trust Board will decide whether an investigation is necessary and ensure it is carried out if required. The outcome of the investigation cannot be shared with the complainant because the school will not know their identity, and therefore cannot determine if they are entitled to confidential information regarding the investigation.

9.3 Complaints of any other nature

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint correctly according to this complaints policy and procedure or that it acted unlawfully or unreasonably in exercising its duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education (DFE) after completing the School's complaints process at Stage 2.

The DFE generally will not re-investigate the substance of a complaint or overturn decisions made by HCFS. They will assess whether the school has complied with education legislation and relevant statutory policies related to the complaint. The DFE will not replace its decision with that of the Stage Three Complaints Panel solely because the complainant disagrees with it.

10. Persistent and vexatious behaviour and complaints

HCFS is dedicated to handling all complaints fairly and impartially in line with the complaints policy and procedure.

The school does not expect staff to accept unreasonable behaviour and will take firm action to protect staff from such conduct, including anything the school considers to be abusive, offensive, or threatening.

HCFS defines unreasonable behaviour as that which disrupts the smooth and efficient daily running of the school, or that which hampers the school's ability to consider complaints due to the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school.

10.1 Unreasonably persistent complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore, we will handle them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Has previously made the same complaint, and it has already been resolved through the school's complaints procedure.
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory, or repetitive.
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded or outside the scope of the complaints procedure, beyond all reason.
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner, e.g., refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the timeframes it sets out.
- Makes a complaint aimed at causing disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time.
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes or a solution that has no real purpose or value.

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns and provide them with a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when meeting with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as usual (as outlined above) whenever possible.

If the complainant persists in contacting the school in a disruptive manner, we may implement communication strategies. These may include:

- Provide the complainant with a single point of contact through an email address.
- Restrict the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a set limit per term.
- Request the complainant to involve a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#).
- Implement any other strategy as needed.

We may cease responding to the complainant when all these factors are satisfied:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable measures to help address their concerns.
- We have clearly outlined our stance and their options.
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their aim is to cause disruption or inconvenience.

When we cease responding, we will inform the individual of our intention to do so. We will also clarify that we will continue to consider any new complaints they submit.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will promptly inform the police and notify our actions in writing. This may include banning an individual from our school premises.

10.2 Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member, or other individual, we will evaluate whether there are aspects we hadn't previously considered or any new information that needs to be taken into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Inform the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is finalised.
- Guide them to the DfE if they are unhappy with our original handling of the complaint.

If there are any new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

10.3 Complaint campaigns

When the school receives a high number of complaints about the same issue, particularly if these originate from complainants not affiliated with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website;
- Sending a template reply to all of the complainants.

If complainants are dissatisfied with the school's response or wish to take the complaint further, the normal procedures will be followed.

11. Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, they must inform the school. HCFS will ask them to confirm this in writing. If they are unable to do so, the school will write to them to confirm that their complaint has been withdrawn, in accordance with their wishes.

12. Record keeping

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including details about actions taken at each stage, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes related to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and stored centrally, and will only be seen by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the Secretary of State (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or a subject access request under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in accordance with data protection law, our privacy notices, and records retention schedule.

The details of the complaint, including the names of those involved, will not be shared with the Full Trust Board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later stage.

Where the Trust Board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the Trust Board, which will not unreasonably withhold consent.

13. Learning lessons

The Trust Board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Senior Leadership Team, where appropriate, and in accordance with confidentiality, to determine whether the school can implement improvements to its procedures or practice to prevent similar events in the future.

14. Monitoring arrangements

The Trust Board will oversee the effectiveness of the complaints procedure to ensure complaints are handled appropriately. The Trust Board will record the number and types of complaints and will review the underlying issues as outlined in section 13.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Principal and approved by the Full Trust Board at each review.

Appendix One – Formal Complaint Form

Name		
Address		
Email Address		
Telephone No	Day	
	Evening	
	Mobile	
What is the nature of your complaint? <i>Please use additional sheets if needed</i>		
Have you raised your issue(s) with your child’s Class Teacher and/or Phase Leader at the informal stage? If so, when did you do this?	<p style="text-align: center;">Yes</p> <p><i>Please state date:</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">No</p>
Have you complained to the Principal at this informal stage?	<p style="text-align: center;">Yes</p> <p><i>Please state date:</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">No</p>
What happened when you complained to the Principal? <i>Please use additional sheets if needed</i>		

What are your desired outcomes? *Please use additional sheets if needed*

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Signed

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Date

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Please return your completed complaint form to the School Office and it will be passed to the Principal or Chair of the Trust Board, depending on what stage the complaint is at and what it is regarding.

Appendix Two – Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant must:

- Explain their complaint fully and as quickly as possible.
- Co-operate fully with the school to try and resolve the complaint.
- Respond promptly to requests for information or meetings.
- Agree on the details of their complaint and their desired outcomes promptly if clarification is requested.
- Ask for assistance if or when required.
- Treat everyone involved in their complaint and the complaints process with dignity and respect.
- Avoid sharing the details of their complaint publicly on social media and keep confidentiality.
- Avoid making allegations and threats.

If the complainant fails or refuses to comply with the above, the School may have to suspend consideration of their complaint, either temporarily or permanently, depending on the nature of the complainant's behaviour and how this impacts the School's handling of the matter.

Investigator (if one is required or appointed)

This could be the Principal or another member of the Senior Leadership Team. The Investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- Providing a comprehensive, open, transparent, and fair examination of the complaint through:
 - Sensitive and thorough interview with the complainant to determine what has occurred and who has been involved;
 - Interviewing staff, children, young people, or other relevant individuals involved in the complaint;
 - Consideration of records and other relevant information;
 - Analysing information;
 - Referring to any applicable School policies and procedures.
- Liaising with the complainant and the Complaints Co-ordinator as appropriate to identify the best way to resolve the complaint.

The Investigator should:

- Conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in their questioning if they deem it necessary;
- Keep notes of interviews or organise for an independent note taker to record the meeting;
- Ensure that all papers generated during the investigation are kept securely until the complaint has been further examined;
- Be mindful of the response timescales;
- If the Investigator is someone other than the Principal, they should prepare a comprehensive report for the Principal or the Stage Three Complaints Panel that outlines the facts, attempts to identify solutions, and makes recommendations to resolve the issues.

The Principal or Stage Three Complaints Panel will then decide whether to uphold or reject the complaint entirely or partially and inform the complainant of their decision(s), including the relevant escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator

This could be the Principal, a Designated Complaints Trustee, or a member of school staff providing administrative support.

The Complaints Co-ordinator should:

- Ensure that the complainant is kept informed at every stage of the school's complaints process;
- Liaise with staff members, the Principal, the Chair of the Trust Board, the Clerk, and any other relevant

- sources of information or support to ensure a smooth and effective complaints process;
- Remain aware of issues concerning:
 - Sharing third-party information;
 - Additional support. This may be required, for example, by complainants when making a complaint, including an interpreter or where the complainant is a child or young person.
- Maintain precise records and keep them in a secure location.

Clerk to the Trust Board

The Clerk is the main contact for the complainant, the respondent representing the school, and the Stage Three Complaints Panel. They should:

- Ensure that everyone involved in the complaints process is aware of their legal rights and responsibilities, including those under legislation related to School complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018, and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).
- Set the date, time, and venue of the meeting, making sure that the dates are suitable for all invited parties (unless three proposed dates have been declined without valid reason, in which case the Clerk or the Chair of the Trustees will decide when the Hearing will take place). They should also ensure that the venue and procedures are accessible to all attendees.
- Gather any written material relevant to the complaint (for example, the stage two paperwork, the respondent's submission on behalf of the school, the complainant's submission, and signed, dated witness statements) and send it to all parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale (including the Panel).
- Take thorough notes during the Stage Three Complaints Panel Hearing.
- Provide a copy of their detailed notes to either or both parties if requested.
- Notify both parties of the Panel's conclusions.

Chair of the Stage Three Complaints Panel

The Chair of the Stage Three Complaints Panel will be appointed prior to the Hearing and should ensure that:

- Both parties are asked (through the Clerk) to submit any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date prior to the hearing;
- The hearing is conducted fairly and impartially, is not adversarial, and, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy;
- Complainants who may not be accustomed to attending such hearings are made as comfortable as possible. This is especially important if the complainant is a child or young person;
- The responsibilities of the Complaints Panel are explained to both parties;
- Written material is viewed by everyone present, as long as it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR;
- If a new issue arises, it would be helpful to give everyone the chance to consider and comment on it. This might require an adjournment of the hearing. New issues would need to be referred back for consideration at stage two first;
- Both the complainant and the respondent, on behalf of the school, are given the opportunity to present their case and seek clarification, either through written submissions prior to the Hearing or verbally during the Hearing itself;
- All questioning is carried out by the Panel; no cross-examination is allowed;
- The issues have been addressed;
- Key findings of fact are established;
- The Panel remains open-minded and acts independently;
- No member of the Panel has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or has had any involvement at an earlier stage of the complaints process;
- The Clerk records detailed notes of the Hearing;
- They communicate with the Clerk whenever necessary (and the Complaints Co-ordinator, if the School has one).

Stage Three Complaints Panel Member

Stage Three Complaints Panel Members should keep in mind that:

- The hearing must be independent and impartial and should appear to be so;
- No trustee may sit on the Panel if they have had previous involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it;
- The aim of the Hearing should be to try to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the School and the complainant wherever possible;
- The complainant might be dissatisfied with the outcome if the Panel does not rule in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations;
- Many complainants may feel nervous in a formal setting like this;
- Parents and carers often feel emotional when discussing issues that affect their children;
- Extra care must be taken if the complainant is a child or young person and they are present during all or part of the hearing;
- Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should be given to ensure that a child or young person does not feel intimidated;
- The Panel should respect the views of a child or young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults;
- If a child or young person is the complainant, the Panel should ask them beforehand if they need any support to help them present their complaint;
- When a child's or young person's parent or carer is the complainant, the Panel should allow them to specify which parts of the meeting, if any, the child or young person would like to attend;
- The complainant should be advised that it may not be permitted for a child or young person to attend a Hearing if the Panel believes it is not in the best interests of the child or young person;
- The welfare and best interests of the child or young person should always be prioritised.