



| <b>School Complaints Policy</b> |               |                            |                         |
|---------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Version</b>                  | <b>Date</b>   | <b>Review completed by</b> | <b>Next review Date</b> |
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| <b>Authorised by:</b>           |               | Dr A Smith - Headteacher   |                         |

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## 1 Aims

- 1.1 Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.
- 1.2 When responding to complaints, we aim to:
  - 1.2.1 Be impartial and non-adversarial
  - 1.2.2 Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
  - 1.2.3 Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
  - 1.2.4 Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
  - 1.2.5 Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
  - 1.2.6 Make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
  - 1.2.7 Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
  - 1.2.8 Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes
- 1.3 We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.
- 1.4 The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.
- 1.5 To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.
- 1.6 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

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 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).
- 2.3 This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

## 3 Definitions and scope

### 3.1 Definitions

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



3.1.1 A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”

3.1.2 A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”

### 3.2 Scope

The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

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

3.2.1 Admissions

3.2.2 Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)

3.2.3 Safeguarding matters

3.2.4 Exclusion

3.2.5 Whistle-blowing

3.2.6 Staff grievances

3.2.7 Staff discipline

3.2.8 Withdrawal from the curriculum (parents and carers can withdraw their child from any aspect of religious education, including the daily act of collective worship. They do not have to explain why)

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

## 4 Roles and responsibilities

### 4.1 The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

4.1.1 Follow these procedures

4.1.2 Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly

4.1.3 Ask for assistance as needed

4.1.4 Treat all those involved with respect

4.1.5 Not publish details about the complaint on social media

### 4.2 The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint, and establish the facts. They will:

4.2.1 Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes

4.2.2 Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely



- 4.2.3 Prepare a comprehensive report to the headteacher or complaints committee which includes the facts and potential solutions

### **4.3 The complaints co-ordinator**

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- 4.3.1 The headteacher or delegated senior leader
- 4.3.2 Any other staff member providing administrative support

The complaints co-ordinator will:

- 4.3.3 Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- 4.3.4 Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the headteacher, chair of governors, clerk to the governors
- 4.3.5 Be aware of issues relating to:
  - 4.3.5.1 Sharing third party information
  - 4.3.5.2 Additional support needed by complainants, for example interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- 4.3.6 Keep records

### **4.4 Clerk to the governing board**

The clerk will:

- 4.4.1 Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings
- 4.4.2 Arrange the complaints hearing
- 4.4.3 Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

### **4.5 Committee chair**

The committee chair will:

- 4.5.1 Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- 4.5.2 Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

## **5 Principles for investigation**

5.1 When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right



## 5.2 Time scales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

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

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

## 6 Resolving complaints

6.1 There are three stages to Poole Grammar School's Complaints Procedure:

- Stage 1: Informal complaint
- Stage 2: Formal complaint
- Stage 3: Panel hearing

6.2 At each stage in the procedure, Poole Grammar School will endeavor to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- 6.2.1 an explanation
- 6.2.2 an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- 6.2.3 an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- 6.2.4 an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- 6.2.5 an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- 6.2.6 an apology.

6.3 If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

## 7 Stages of complaint

### 7.1 Stage 1: informal complaints

- 7.1.1 It is to be hoped that most complaints can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis. We accept that it may be appropriate for some complaints to be dealt with at Stage 2 at the outset.
- 7.1.2 Complaints should be raised with the child's form tutor. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to



act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.

- 7.1.3 The recipient will acknowledge your complaint in writing within 3 school days of receipt.
- 7.1.4 On some occasions, the complaint raised may require investigation or discussion with others. At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide an informal written response within 7 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. It is anticipated that the vast majority of complaints will be satisfactorily dealt with in this way.
- 7.1.5 If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

## **7.2 Stage 2: formal complaints**

- 7.2.1 All formal complaints must be made in writing and addressed to the Headteacher, (unless they are about the Headteacher, see below), via the school office or by email: [headteacher@poolegrammar.com](mailto:headteacher@poolegrammar.com) Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- 7.2.2 The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days. Where necessary, the letter or email will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome is sought.
- 7.2.3 In most cases, the Headteacher will meet or speak with the complainant, normally within 10 school days of receiving the formal complaint, to discuss the matter.
- 7.2.4 The Headteacher will investigate the complaint.  
Note: The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the final decision.
- 7.2.5 During the investigation, the Headteacher (or investigator) will:
  - 7.2.5.1 if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
  - 7.2.5.2 keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.
- 7.2.6 At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response to the complaint which will be sent to the complainant within 14 school days of receipt of the complaint.
- 7.2.7 If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.
- 7.2.8 The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Poole Grammar School will take to resolve the complaint.
- 7.2.9 The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.
- 7.2.10 If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or a member of the governing body, the Chair of Governors or a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the



actions at Stage 2 otherwise undertaken by the Headteacher. Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Chair of Governors via the Clerk to the Governors, via the school office or email: [gristt@poolegrammar.com](mailto:gristt@poolegrammar.com) . Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

7.2.11 If the complaint is:

- 7.2.11.1 jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- 7.2.11.2 the entire governing body or
- 7.2.11.3 the majority of the governing body

Stage 2 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response to the complaint which will be sent to the complainant within 14 school days of receipt of the complaint.

### **7.3 Stage 3: review panel**

- 7.3.1 If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3. This will involve a hearing of the complaint by a three-person panel consisting of two governors who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and a third person who is independent of the management and running of the school. If the complaint is about the Governing Body, Stage 3 will be heard by a committee of three independent people.
- 7.3.2 This is the final stage of the Complaints Procedure.
- 7.3.3 A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk to the Governors, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.
- 7.3.4 The chair of the panel will be nominated from within the group of panel members appointed to deal with a complaint. All Panel members will be familiar with and have access to this Complaints Policy.
- 7.3.5 The Clerk to the Governors will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days. This letter will inform the complainant of the next steps, proposed date of the hearing and request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the panel.
- 7.3.6 The Clerk to the Governors will aim to convene the hearing within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request (but may fix a later date if necessary). The Clerk to the Governors will inform the complainant, any witnesses, the panel and Headteacher of the date, time and location of the hearing at least 10 school days in advance.
- 7.3.7 If the complainant rejects three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the hearing which will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.
- 7.3.8 The Clerk to the Governors will ensure that the venue and proceedings are accessible to all attendees.



- 7.3.9 The complainant and Headteacher may submit written material to the panel for consideration at the hearing. Any written material to be considered at the hearing will be collated and circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the hearing. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties.
- 7.3.10 A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Legal representation will not usually be appropriate. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate and this will be permitted where the panel consider it to be necessary. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.
- 7.3.11 The panel will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. If the panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing.
- 7.3.12 The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending to electronic recordings must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.
- 7.3.13 The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. All attendees will be invited to speak at the hearing. The panel is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from any witnesses, but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.
- 7.3.14 The panel can:
- 7.3.14.1 uphold the complaint in whole or in part
  - 7.3.14.2 dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- 7.3.15 If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:
- 7.3.15.1 confirm the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
  - 7.3.15.2 where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues arising in the future.
- 7.3.16 The Chair of the panel will provide the complainant and Poole Grammar School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days of the hearing. The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Poole Grammar School.
- 7.3.17 The panel will ensure that their findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Academy Trust and the Headteacher.



## 8 Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

- 8.1 If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the ESFA after they have completed Stage 3.
- 8.2 The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Poole Grammar School. They will consider whether Poole Grammar School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.
- 8.3 The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus), by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to: Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit, Education and Skills Funding Agency, Cheylesmore House, 5 Quinton Road, Coventry, CV1 2WT.

## 9 Persistent complaints

### 9.1 Unreasonably persistent complaints

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

- 9.1.1 Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure
- 9.1.2 Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- 9.1.3 Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure, beyond all reason
- 9.1.4 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 time frames it sets out
- 9.1.5 Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time
- 9.1.6 Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value

### 9.2 Steps we will take

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



If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place. We may:

- 9.2.1 Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- 9.2.2 Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- 9.2.3 Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as Citizens Advice
- 9.2.4 Put any other strategy in place as necessary

### **9.3 Stopping responding**

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- 9.3.1 We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- 9.3.2 We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- 9.3.3 The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from our school site.

### **9.4 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 assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

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

- 9.4.1 Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- 9.4.2 Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

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

### **9.5 Complaint campaigns**

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- 9.5.1 Publishing a single response on the school website
- 9.5.2 Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.



## 10 Record keeping

- 10.1 A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing. A record will be kept of any action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).
- 10.2 All correspondence, statements and records are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 109 of the Education and Skills 2008 Act requests access to them.
- 10.3 If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, 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.
- 10.4 Poole Grammar School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

## 11 Learning lessons

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

## 12 Monitoring arrangements

This policy is reviewed every three years by the Governing Body or before that date if there have been any specific queries or changes to national policy or guidance.

## 13 Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- 13.1 [Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures](#)
- 13.2 [Admissions policy](#)
- 13.3 [Exclusions policy](#)
- 13.4 [SEND policy and information report](#)
- 13.5 Staff grievance procedures
- 13.6 Staff disciplinary procedures
- 13.7 Privacy notices

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|---|-------------------------|
| <i>Changes to policy following this review</i>          | <i>0</i>                |
| <i>Previous version ratified by Full Governing Body</i> | <i>Autumn term 2022</i> |