



Complaints Policy September 2025 Review September 2026

(Adopted from WCC / Department of Education Guidelines)

The Governors of Northlands Primary School have adopted the following policy on dealing with formal complaints from members of the school community or the general public.

Information for Parents: Sharing your concerns about your child's education can be read in Appendix 2

1. **The difference between a concern and a complaint**

A 'concern' may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'. A complaint may be generally defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to invoke formal procedures. The School will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

There are occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. In those cases, the school's formal procedure should be invoked through the stages outlined within this procedure.

2. **Principles informing our Complaints Procedure** This procedure is designed to:

- be well publicised and easily accessible
- be simple to understand and use
- be impartial
- be non-adversarial
- allow prompt handling with established time limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress
- allow a mediation process if agreed by the complainant
- allow for a hearing by a Panel of Governors, where appropriate
- respect people's desire for confidentiality, wherever possible
- address all points of issue
- provide an effective response and appropriate redress where necessary
- provide information to the school's Senior Management Team so that services can be improved

3. **Dealing with concerns at the earliest opportunity** This is the informal stage in the complaint's procedure

3.1 When parents, pupils or members of the public have concerns they should: discuss their concerns with the member of staff most directly involved and, if not satisfied discuss their concerns with a senior member of staff.

We expect the majority of concerns will be resolved in this way (and not recorded as a formal complaint). However, if not, the following formal procedure will be followed.

4. **Stage 1 of the formal process** Discuss concerns with the Headteacher



•

4.1 At each stage in the procedure, Northlands Primary School & Nursery will be mindful of ways in which a concern or complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the concern or 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 steps will be taken to ensure the event 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

4.2 Complainants will be encouraged to state what actions they consider will 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. Equally, an effective procedure will identify areas of agreement between the school and the complainant. It is important to clarify any misunderstandings which might have arisen as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Only where all these avenues have been tried and found unsatisfactory should the complainant take a complaint to the Chair of Governors.

4.3 If the Headteacher considers she can do no more to resolve the complaint it should be stated explicitly that the complainant can write to the Chair of Governors if not satisfied. Complainants should be encouraged to take this step.

5. Making a Complaint to the Governing Board This is the Stage 2 of the formal process

5.1 Where informal attempts have been unsuccessful in resolving a complaint, the complainant should write to the Chair of Governors at the school address. The envelope should be marked 'FOR IMMEDIATE ATTENTION' 'PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL' and staff in the school office must ensure that the letter is forwarded without delay.

5.2 The complainant will be asked to complete a complaint form (appendix 1) if they have not already done so**. The Chair of Governors or Clerk will offer to help an individual to complete the form if appropriate.** If the complainant has provided a detailed written letter explaining the issues surrounding their complaint the Chair may make the decision to accept this instead of asking for a complaint form to be completed and the information duplicated.

5.3 On receipt of the complaint form, the Chair of Governors (or other nominated Governor) will:

- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- meet with the complainant or contact them
- clarify what the complainant considers would resolve the matter.

5.4 The Chair of Governors will decide whether the complaint should be referred to the Governors' Complaints Panel or whether a mediation stage should be offered. Mediation can only proceed if the Complainant and the Head teacher are willing to undertake this course of action. Should mediation be unsuccessful, the complaint will be considered by the Governors' Complaints Panel.

5.5 Mediation

Mediation can be an effective means by which to resolve a complaint:

- It gives both the complainant and the Headteacher a further opportunity to hear each other's points of view (with a third party facilitating).
- It gives the third party an opportunity to help the Headteacher and Complainant identify and build on areas of agreement.



-
- It gives the Headteacher and the Complainant a structure within which to resolve remaining differences.
- As and when the complainant and the Headteacher emerge from the mediation satisfied, this is the best foundation for a continuing positive relationship.
- Should the complaint continue and be referred to a Governors' Panel, the issues to be considered are likely to be clearer following mediation.

5.6 Mediation may elicit one or more of the responses listed below from either party:

- an acknowledgement that the complaint is valid in whole or in part
- an apology
- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been managed differently or better
- an assurance that the event will not recur
- an explanation of the steps which have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

Appendix 3 outlines Mediation Facilitator Options.

6. **Governors' Complaints Panel This is Stage 3 of the formal process**

Where the complainant remains not satisfied that their complaint has been dealt with fully and properly, they may choose to take it to a Panel of Governors.

6.1 **Establishing a Complaints Panel**

It is best practice for a Governing Board to agree the composition of the Complaint Appeals Panel at the first meeting of the Governing Board each year.

As Governors may not be available at all times during school times Governing Boards are advised to agree the names of 4 or 5 possible Governors from whom a Panel of three may be drawn.

The decision about the membership of a particular Panel will depend on factors such as availability, whether any Governors have prior knowledge, and any vested interest. The decision as to the composition of the Panel will be made by the Chair of Governors.

6.2 When the Clerk of Governors receives a copy of the complaint form she will inform the Chair of the Governing Board that a complaint has been received and that it has been passed to the Panel to deal with. No further information about the complaint should be shared with other Governors.

Both parties should be invited to submit relevant documentation in time to be circulated seven days before any hearing or formal consideration by the Complaints Panel.

6.3 There are several points which any Governor sitting on a Complaints Panel needs to remember:
It is important that the appeal hearing is independent, transparent and impartial. The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. The Panel Chair will ensure that the proceedings are welcoming and as informal as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is not intimidating and not adversarial.

6.4 **Remit of the panel – the Complaints Panel can:**

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part



-
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- Recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure problems of a similar nature do not recur.

6.5 It may:

- Consider and criticise the way in which an operational decision was communicated – but cannot overturn the decision itself.
- Consider the thoroughness with which the Headteacher investigated a complaint about a member of staff – but cannot expect the Headteacher to provide details about confidential discussions with the staff member.
- Consider the manner in which a complaint about any decision was addressed.

Consider and identify limitations in a policy or procedures – but cannot make or improve policy. It can, however, recommend that the policy be reviewed by the Governing Board. • Consider whether it should recommend that the Governing Board offer appropriate redress.

6.6 **Format of a Panel Hearing**

- The Complainant (and friend) and Headteacher (and representative) will enter the room where the hearing is taking place together.
- The chair will introduce the panel members and the Clerk and outline the process.
- The complainant is invited to explain the complaint.
- The Headteacher may question the complainant.
- The panel will question the complainant.
- The Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions.
- The complainant may question the Headteacher.
- The panel will question the Headteacher.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Headteacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- The Chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within three working days.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The Clerk will remain with the panel to clarify any issues.

6.7 The hearing should be made as unthreatening as possible to all parties.

The panel may ask questions at any point. Panel members must find ways to ask probing questions while maintaining impartiality.

The Headteacher must have no contact with members of the governors' complaints panel except when the complainant is present to preserve the principle of neutrality. This means that Headteacher and complainant enter and leave the room where the hearing is held together.



-

The Chair of the panel should discourage the introduction of fresh documentary evidence at the hearing — there should be every encouragement to produce the evidence in advance so that both sides have time to study it.

However, if new and relevant evidence is accepted by the Chair, the Chair will adjourn the hearing for a few minutes to allow everyone to read the document. Both parties must leave the hearing room during the adjournment.

6.8 **Exceptional circumstances**

For the sake of clarity, the description above does not cover exceptional circumstances which might include:

- The chair of governors may not be able to find three governors who have no prior knowledge of the case. If a case has become a major talking point around the community, the chair can nominate three governors with minimal prior knowledge.

If there are still insufficient governors able to sit on a panel, the Governing Board in consultation with the Local Authority or Diocese will put in place an alternative fair process.

- A complaint to the governors' complaints panel will never be against a junior member of staff (it may be against the way the Head teacher handled a complaint against a junior member of staff) but it is conceivable that a senior manager will appropriately stand in for the Head teacher. That would need to be considered very carefully but if agreed the senior manager would be 'the Head teacher' for the purpose of the panel.
- There may be exceptional circumstances in which the complaint is against the chair of governors — e.g. for refusing to deal with a complaint. In those circumstances the procedure above would be adapted and every reference to 'Head teacher' would be read as 'chair of governors'.
- If both the head teacher / governing board and the parent / guardian agree then any stage in this complaints procedure may be bypassed when it is deemed appropriate.

6.9 **Outcome of the hearing**

Following the end of the hearing the Clerk will ensure that the Panel's decision regarding each of the issues is clearly communicated to all parties in a letter. This will be sent within 5 working days of the end of the hearing. The letter will set out the reasons for the decision(s) made by the Panel.

The Clerk will ensure that the letter adheres to the facts and demonstrates impartiality.

7. **Monitoring Complaints**

As well as addressing an individual's complaint, the process of listening to and resolving complaints would contribute to school improvement. When individual complaints are heard, schools may identify issues that need to be addressed.

The monitoring and review of complaints by the School and Governing Board can be useful in evaluating the school's performance. Any discussion of complaints by the Governing Board or others in the school community should not name or be able to identify individuals.

The flowchart on the next page summarises the complaints process.



Complaints Policy

Northlands Primary School

One Community – Many Cultures – Achieving Together

Complaints Process from Start to Finish



