Complaints Policy

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(adopted from BCC Model Policy)
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History of most recent policy reviews

Date (every 3 years)	Review	Who is Responsible?
November 2022	• Changes to 1.1, 1.2 to reflect changes in school systems. Removal of online complaints form. Now added as a link.	**Education Committee**
September 2024	• Addition of 1.7 to clarify timescale of any escalation. • Addition within 3.4 in line with other school policies on managing timings of panel meetings.	**Finance Committee**
September 2025	• General re-formatting and structure of policy for improved readability. • Inclusion of introductory overview • Greater clarity on possible outcomes of complaints • Rewritten summary of policy for parents with updated flowchart • Additional definitions for persistent complainants • Added details about complaints to Ofsted.	**Finance Committee**

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Introduction

Concerns and complaints

At Air Balloon, we take all concerns and complaints seriously and make every effort to resolve such matters as quickly as possible. Concerns or complaints should be raised as soon as possible, ideally within three months of the event or issue arising. The school is unlikely to investigate complaints over twelve months old unless there are compelling reasons to do so.

We define **concerns** as *a worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances/resolutions are sought*. We define **complaints** as *a dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action regarding a specific issue.*

Complaint Procedure Overview

It is in everyone's interest for concerns or complaints to be resolved at the earliest possible stage of this policy. The member of staff who responds to a concern or complaint may vary depending on its nature - the school will always seek to assign the most appropriate member of staff to respond to a concern of complaint. This may be the class teacher, a middle leader, a senior leader, the headteacher or a governor.

There are four stages to the complaint procedure:

Stage 1: Contact the member of staff you feel is in the best position to understand your concern/complaint and provide you with the appropriate reassurances/resolutions.
Stage 2: If your concern/complaint remains unresolved, write to the Headteacher.
Stage 3: If your concern/complaint remains unresolved by the headteacher, request a governor complaints panel hearing.
Stage 4: If dissatisfied with the panel, you may refer your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education.

We aim to resolve complaints promptly and fairly and many issues can be resolved informally (stage 1), without the need to invoke formal procedures. It should be acknowledged that in order for some concerns/complaints to be resolved, a reasonable timeframe for action/change is expected. A concern/complaint may not be escalated upon request if it is judged that a reasonable timeframe has not yet elapsed.

There are occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally in the first instance. In these cases, Air Balloon's formal procedure will be invoked through the stages outlined within our procedure.

Who can make a complaint?

Any person, including members of the general public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that a school provides, except where there are separate (statutory) procedures (please see appendix G).

The school recognises that complainants may include parents of children with SEND or other vulnerabilities. Reasonable adjustments will be made to support these complainants in accessing the complaints procedure, including providing additional communication support or advocates if required.

Should parents and pupils be dissatisfied with the support provided regarding a medical condition they should discuss these concerns with a member of staff in reference to the school's Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions and Administering Medication Policy.

If you are a member of staff at Air Balloon and you wish to make a complaint about another member of staff, please use the Allegations Against Staff Policy.

Any complainant should be assured that no matter what the concern/complaint, our support and respect for you and your child in school will not be affected in any way.

The Complaints Procedure

Stage 1: **Contact the member of staff you feel is in the best position to understand your concern/complaint and provide you with the appropriate reassurances/resolutions.**
A concern/complaint can be made in person, by telephone, email or in writing and can be received by any member of staff. Upon receiving a concern or complaint, the member of staff will consider if they are best placed to help. If not, they will direct the concern/complaint to the most appropriate member of staff who will be happy to hear the concern/complaint in full. This may be a teacher or one of the school leaders.

What happens when I share my concern/complaint with a member of staff?
If concerns/complaints are raised in person, the relevant member of staff will determine the most appropriate first steps to provide suitable reassurances/resolutions. The member of staff will make a record of the concern/complaint.

If concerns/complaints are received indirectly (e.g. via email sent to the office) then a relevant member of staff will acknowledge receipt of the concern/complaint as soon as possible with the complainant - typically within 48 hours - and outline any appropriate steps they will be taking to help resolve the issue.

Steps a member of staff may take to help resolve the issue:

- Considering and putting in place steps that seek to resolve the issue swiftly without delay or need for a further meeting;
- Forwarding the concern/complaint to another member of staff;
- Arranging a time to meet the complainant at a later date in order to fully understand the issue;
- Directing the complainant towards another member of staff who may be best places to help;
- Escalating the matter to a school leader.

What happens if I wish to meet a member of staff to talk about my concern/complaint?
Staff will listen to concerns/complaints in detail and try to provide reassurances or explore some resolution options. The member of staff leading the meeting will make clear notes that outline the nature of the concern/complaint and any agreed next steps/actions that are going to be put in place. All notes and records relating to complaints will be stored securely and treated confidentially in accordance with data protection legislation and the school's privacy policies. Access to these records will be limited to those directly involved in the complaint's investigation and resolution

When listening to the concern/complaint, staff will seek to understand what reassurances/resolutions the complainant is seeking and give them due consideration when planning any next steps.

It may also be useful for other individuals to attend this meeting. For example, it might be suggested that the school SENCO join the meeting to support with concerns about SEND support. The complainant may also want an advocate (such as a family member or a social worker) to attend to help make sure their voice is heard. Any other attendee should be agreed prior to the meeting.

When discussing a concern/complaint, staff will always behave professionally and actively listen to best support resolving the concern/complaint swiftly. Complainants are expected to share their concerns/complaints in a respectful manner. Abuse, threats and swearing will not be tolerated. Such behaviour is unacceptable and may result in formal action being taken.

Can I record the meeting?
Typically, the recording of any meeting/conversation on electronic devices is not encouraged. Staff must be made aware if their conversations are being recorded and may then select to make their own audio record of the meeting. Recording devices may be used to support individuals who have communication difficulties to ensure that the complainant is able to access and review the discussions at a later point.

What happens after the meeting?
If specific actions are identified to support a resolution, these will have been agreed with a reasonable timeframe for carrying them out and for when the desired impact of such actions should be reviewed. Any actions that require the involvement of other members of staff will be communicated accordingly as soon as possible.
A summary of the meeting along with any agreed actions that are going to be put in place and, if relevant, the date of a review meeting, will typically be shared with the complainant within five days of the meeting. Any such emails/letters will also be stored centrally by the school for future reference.

What if I'm not satisfied after this stage?
In light of the complainant not being satisfied with any proposed resolution, or feeling that any agreed actions have not been effectively put in place then they should move to stage 2 of the complaints procedure and write to the headteacher. This should be within ten school days of their initial meeting.

If, after ten days, the concern/complaint has not been escalated to the headteacher, it will be presumed that the matter has been resolved and/or the complainant is happy to wait for an agreed review period.

If the concern/complaint is against the Headteacher the complainant is advised to contact the chair of the governing body via the clerk to governors. (Email: clerk@abhps.com).

Stage 2: Referral to the Headteacher
Anyone can write to the Headteacher, within ten school days of the conclusion of Stage 1, if they feel that their initial concern/complaint has not been listened to and/or acted upon in an appropriate, reasonable or timely manner. The Headteacher can also be contacted in the first instance if it is felt by the complainant that the matter is serious enough to forego Stage 1 of this procedure.

If the Headteacher is written to, they will be the person who responds unless it is appropriate for another designated person to act in their place. (e.g. The Deputy Headteacher in light of the Headteacher's absence; the chair of governors if the complaint is about the Headteacher; the Headteacher chooses to use their discretion and delegate to another member of staff.)

How should I set out my complaint to the Headteacher?
When writing to the Headteacher, complainants should provide the following information:

- Name, contact information and details of the child – if the concern/complaint is child-related.
- Details of the concern/complaint.
- Details of any steps they have already taken to try and have their concerns/complaints resolved.
- If appropriate, details of their dissatisfaction of the school's response so far.
- Suggestions or ideas that they would like considered that they feel would resolve the issue.
- If appropriate, share any documentation or evidence. (e.g. copy of any prior communication from the school linked to the concern/complaint.)

Complaints to the Headteacher should be made in writing or by email (airballoonhillp@bristol-schools.uk) marked: FOA The Headteacher. Alternatively, complainants can complete this online form when writing to the Headteacher.

What happens when the Headteacher receives my complaint?
Firstly, the Headteacher (or designated person) will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within three school days and provide reassurances that they have the complaint under review.

The Headteacher will then seek to investigate and fully respond to the complaint within fifteen school days (i.e. excluding weekends and school holidays). If this proves impossible, a letter will be sent explaining the reason for the delay and giving a revised target date.

How will my complaint be investigated?
To fully investigate a complaint, the Headteacher (or designated person) may carry out the following:

- Meet with the complainant to supplement any information provided previously.
- Review, if relevant, how any initial concern/complaint was managed by the school – and any initial steps that have been put in place – to help consider whether the escalation to Stage 2 of the complaint procedure is appropriate.
- Interview any relevant members of staff and/or witnesses.
- View additional sources of evidence such as school behaviour logs / safeguarding records /medical logs / CCTV footage. If the complaint centres on a pupil, the pupil should also be interviewed.
- Ensure that written notes are made of any conversations, meetings, statements that form part of the investigation into the complaint.

The Headteacher (or designated person) will then consider the evidence they have gathered and use this to inform their final response to the complainant.

What might the outcome of the Headteacher's investigation be?
By investigating a complaint, the Headteacher (or designated person) will seek to determine whether:

The complaint is upheld (fully or partially)
The Headteacher (or designated person) *concludes that one or more aspects of the complaint are valid and supported by evidence. In such cases, the Headteacher will determine the most appropriate course of action to resolve the matter.*

The complaint is not upheld
The Headteacher (or designated person) *concludes that the complaint is not supported by sufficient evidence or that the processes and conduct of the school, in seeking to resolve the original complaint, were appropriate and proportional.*

The Headteacher (or designated person) will provide the complainant with a full explanation of their investigation and their decision about the complaint. They will also include their review of any actions previously put in place to resolve the issue and any actions that they are seeking to put, or have put, in place to resolve the issue.

Where fault is identified, the Headteacher will seek to provide reassurances that appropriate and proportional action has been taken to put matters right so that any potential injustice does not continue or risk happening to somebody else.

The Headteacher (or designated person) will ensure that the complainant has a written copy of the complaint's outcome.

What if I'm not satisfied after this stage?
If the complainant is not satisfied with the Headteacher's (or designated person's) response to their complaint they will should write to the chair of governors within four weeks of receiving the Stage 2 outcome. If, after four weeks, the complaint has not been escalated to the chair of governors, it will be presumed that the matter has been resolved and/or the complainant is happy to wait for an agreed review period.

What if the complaint is about the headteacher?
If the complaint is against the Headteacher, or if the Headteacher has been closely involved at Stage 1, the chair of the governing body will carry out all the Stage 2 procedures.

What if the complaint is about a governor?
Complaints against any individual governor should be made in writing to the Clerk to the Governing Body. (email: clerk@abhps.com)

Stage 3: Request a governor complaints panel hearing.
If a complainant is not satisfied with how their complaint has been managed by the school then they can write to the school's governing body to review it through a complaints panel hearing. Unless the complaint is about the Headteacher directly, the governing body will not review any complaint that has not yet been managed by Stage 1 or Stage 2 of this procedure.

The purpose of governor complaints panel is to:

- Ascertain whether the complainant has been adequately listened to by the school.
- Consider whether the school has taken appropriate and proportional steps to resolve the issue.
- Ensure that the complaint policy and procedure has been followed and upheld.
- Seek any further reasonable steps or recommendations that will provide reassurances and resolution for the complainant.

How do I request a governor complaints panel hearing?
Requests should be made in writing to the Clerk to the governing body. (email: clerk@abhps.com) The request should include the following information:

- Name, contact information and details of the child – if the concern/complaint is child-related.
- Details of the initial concern/complaint.
- Simple timeline of how the complaint was managed by the school – include which members of staff were involved in Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the procedure and any actions they suggested or put in place.
- Detail of dissatisfaction with the school's response.
- Suggestions or ideas that they would like considered that they feel would resolve the issue.
- If appropriate, share any documentation or evidence. (e.g. copy of any prior communication from the school linked to the concern/complaint.)

What happens after I've written my request to the governing body?
The clerk will acknowledge receipt of the request (typically within five school days) by writing to the complainant and informing them that their request will be reviewed by a panel of three governors.

The clerk will then contact the school governors to arrange the panel. Details of the request and/or original concern/complaint will not be shared at this point to ensure impartially. A date for the hearing will be agreed which should be within twenty school days of the request being acknowledged.

The Clerk will write to the complainant again informing them that the review panel has been agreed and inviting them to attend the hearing. The complainant has the right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend/advocate/interpreter.

The Clerk will also ask if the complainant wishes to send the panel any additional documentation or evidence for the panel to review. These must be received at least five school days prior to the hearing in order for the documents to be sent to the three panel members. The complainant can also request that specific witnesses be called as part of the hearing although it is up to the Chair of the panel to approve all witness requests.

The complainant should reply to the Clerk to confirm their attendance and the details of any person they are planning on bringing with them to the meeting. They should also confirm if they are planning on providing any additional documentation or evidence for the panel and indicate when and how they will provide this. (e.g. paper copies in a sealed envelope to the school office marked: FAO Clerk to Governors; email attachment sent directly to the Clerk for distribution.)

What happens if I can't make the date and time of the review meeting?
If you are unable to attend the hearing then you can request that an alternative date be found. This should be done as soon as possible and should typically be no later than 5 days after the original date. Complainants should be aware that rearranging the date may cause the hearing to extend beyond the twenty-day timeframe.

Once an alternative date has been agreed by the governor panel, the Clerk will inform the complainant of the new date and they should confirm their attendance with the Clerk as soon as possible. If the complainant cannot make the new date for the hearing then they will be invited to make their representation in writing.

Who makes up the panel?
The Complaints Panel will be composed of at least three governors drawn from the whole governing body. Governors with prior involvement or any conflict of interest will not be included on the panel. If they have not previously been involved the chair of governors can chair the panel. However, this does not need to be the case. It is up to the Complaints Panel to decide who should be its chair.

When deciding on the makeup of the panel, the school will bear in mind the advantages of including a parent governor and if possible, having a balance of race and gender. It is not appropriate for the Headteacher to sit on the panel. Careful consideration will need to be given whether it is appropriate for staff governors to be appointed as panel members; in many instances this may lead to a conflict of interest.

Complainants have a right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The school will consider this request, but the final decision will be made by the governors.

How do governors review my complaint?
All relevant correspondence and documentation relating to the complaint will be given to each panel member as soon as the composition of the panel is confirmed. If the correspondence is extensive, the Clerk may prepare a thorough summary for sending to panel members.

The Headteacher (or designated person) will be asked to prepare a written report for the panel in response to the complaint. The Headteacher (or designated person) may also invite members of staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant to respond in writing or person.

The panel will also review any additional documentation provided by the complainant and the Chair will consider any witness request that has been made.

The panel may request additional evidence/documentation from the Headteacher, such as behaviour records or letters/emails which may be relevant etc. The panel may also request copied of specific school policies if they are deemed to be relevant to the complaint.

All documentation/evidence both offered and requested must be submitted to the panel five school days prior to the hearing. The panel will not consider any documentation/evidence received less than five days before the hearing and will not consider any new documentation/evidence presented to them at the hearing. This ensures that all parties have adequate time to review materials.

Throughout the review process, the panel may seek advice from the school's HR provider when reviewing the complaint.

What happens at the panel hearing?
The panel will meet the complainant to introduce themselves and explain the hearing process. The Clerk to governors will also be at the hearing as it is their responsibility to ensure that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken or actions agreed. An HR representative may be in attendance to help support the panel with their decision making.

The hearing should allow for:

- The complainant to explain their complaint and the Headteacher (or designated person) to explain the school's response
- The opportunity for both parties to ask questions of each other about the complaint.
- Panel members to have an opportunity to question both the complainant and the Headteacher (or designated person)
- Any party to have the right to call witnesses (subject to approval of the Chair) and all parties having the right to question all the witnesses
- Final statements by both the complainant and the Headteacher (or designated person).

The panel will be sensitive to the feelings of all parties and may seek to meet with individual attendees separately. In this instance, the panel will seek to put any questions each party has for the other on their behalf.

At the end of the hearing, the Chair of the Panel will explain to the complainant and Headteacher (or designated person) that the panel will now retire to consider its decision and that a written decision will be sent to both parties within five school days.

The decision that the panel will seek to unanimously conclude, is whether:

The complaint is upheld (fully or partially)
The panel concludes that one or more aspects of the complaint are valid and supported by evidence that indicates the school did not respond to the complaint in line with its policies.

The complaint is not upheld
The panel concludes that the complaint is not supported by sufficient evidence or that the processes and conduct of the school, in seeking to resolve the original complaint, were appropriate and proportional.

If the panel cannot agree unanimously, a decision supported by the majority of governors on the panel will stand as the outcome. If the panel is evenly split, the chair of the panel will have the casting vote to break the deadlock. Any dissenting opinions or minority views should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting to ensure transparency and fairness.

What happens if my complaint is upheld?
Actions may include issuing an apology, recommending or mandating further training for staff, or other remedial actions. The panel may also suggest recommended changes to school policy, systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

If the panel feel that any staff member has seriously breached school policy or code of conduct they may make referral to the appropriate school disciplinary procedures. This would be a confidential matter and not shared with the complainant. The complaints panel does not have the authority or remit to carry out disciplinary investigations or impose sanctions.

What happens if my complaint is not upheld?
No further action may be taken, though the complainant will be informed of the decision and reasons. Even if not fully upheld, the panel may still recommend improvements in policies, procedures, or training to prevent future issues.

What if I'm not satisfied after this stage?
If the complainant is not satisfied with the decision of the panel, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State for Education via the Schools Complaints Unit.

Stage 4: Refer your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education
Once the governor panel has reviewed the complaint, this is considered the final stage of the school's local complaints process. If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they can refer their complaint to the Secretary of State for Education.

Complainants should be made aware that the Secretary of State will only intervene where the governing body has acted unlawfully, unreasonably, or failed to follow proper procedures. The referral should be made within a reasonable timeframe following the conclusion of Stage 3

How do I refer my complaint to the Secretary of State?
Further information can be obtained from the School's Complaints Unit by calling the National Helpline on 0370 000 2288 or going online at: www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus. Alternatively, you can write to:

Department for Education School Complaints Unit 2nd Floor,
Piccadilly Gate Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Complaints to Ofsted

Can parents complain to Ofsted?
Yes, but Ofsted expects parents to first raise concerns with the school, ideally informally at first (Stage 1), then through the school's formal complaints procedure (Stages 2-3). If an issue remains unresolved after going through the headteacher and governing body then a complaint to Ofsted may be appropriate.

Will Ofsted investigate my complaint?
Ofsted may investigate a complaint if the issue affects the whole school, such as:

- Poor quality of education
- Inadequate leadership or financial mismanagement
- Neglect of pupils' well-being or personal development

Ofsted does not investigate individual pupil issues (e.g. exclusions, SEN provision, bullying incidents).

What if I have serious safeguarding concerns about the school?
If a child is at risk, parents should contact the local authority or police immediately. Ofsted may refer any safeguarding complaints they receive to other agencies to investigate on their behalf.

How do I Complain to Ofsted?
Complaints to Ofsted can be made using their online complaints form. Complaints can be made anonymously, but this may limit Ofsted's ability to act.

What response should I expect from Ofsted?
Complainants should not expect any direct feedback from Ofsted and Ofsted typically does not contact parents to inform them of any outcome. Possible actions by Ofsted include:

- No action if the complaint does not meet criteria.
- Retain the complaint for consideration during the school's next scheduled inspection.
- Immediate inspection in rare cases where serious concerns are identified
- Referral to other agencies: e.g. safeguarding concerns may be passed to local authorities or police.

Serial and persistent complainants and unacceptable behaviour

We are fully committed to dealing with all concerns and complaints fairly, impartially and professionally. We acknowledge that raising a concern or making a complaint can be difficult and/or stressful and it is our aim to ensure that this policy supports everyone to engage in the complaints procedure in a productive manner.

We are sure that all parties understand the need to behave in a safe, kind and respectful way when raising and addressing concerns/complaints so that they can be resolved as quickly and informally as possible.

The school does not expect its staff or governors to tolerate behaviour by complainants which is unacceptable (for example, behaviour/language which is abusive, offensive or threatening) and will act accordingly to protect staff and governors from any such behaviour if it occurs.

Also, there may be complainants who, because of the frequency of their contact with the school and/or them repeatedly raising of historic concerns/complaints and/or complaints that have already been resolved, hinder our consideration of their, or other people's, complaints and potentially the running of the school.

We anticipate that such behaviour will be a very rare occurrence, but if we consider a complainant's behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, we will tell them why and ask them to change it. If the behaviour continues, we may act to restrict the complainant's contact with the school.

The decision to restrict access to the school will be taken by the headteacher. Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate with the Chair of Governors notified. They may include:

- requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only);
- requiring contact to take place with a named member of staff or governor;
- restricting telephone calls to specified days and times; and/or
- asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their conduct.

In all cases we will write to tell the complainant why we believe his or her behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, what action we are taking and the duration of that action. We will also tell them how they can challenge the decision if they disagree with it. Restrictions will be reviewed every 6 months.

Where a complainant continues to behave in a way which is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, we may decide to terminate contact with that complainant and discontinue any investigation into their complaint. If we decide to carry on treating someone as an unreasonably persistent complainant but are still investigating their complaint six months later, we will carry out a review and decide if such restrictions need to be lifted in order to resolve the complaint.

Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of the school's staff or governors, we will consider other options, for example reporting the matter to the Local Authority, the police or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

Where a complainant whose case is closed persists in communicating with us about it, we may decide to terminate contact with that complainant. In such cases, we will read all correspondence from that complainant, but unless there is fresh evidence which affects our decision on the complaint, we will simply acknowledge it or place it on the file with no acknowledgement.

New complaints from people who have previously been judged to be unreasonably persistent complainants will be treated on their own merits.

Barring from the School Premises

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Schools will therefore act to ensure they remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community.

If a parent or complainant's behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask them to leave school premises. In serious cases, the headteacher or the local authority can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make.

The decision to bar will be reviewed, considering any representations made by the parent, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent will be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the Headteacher or Chair of Governors.

However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the Department for Education. Once the school's own complaints procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.

Appendix A: Complaints policy summary for parents

If you have a concern or complaint
We would like you to tell us about it so we can help. Be assured that no matter what you are wanting to tell us, our support and respect for you and your child in school will not be affected in any way. Please tell us of your concern as soon as possible, in best cases within 3 months and definitely within 12 months of the matter occurring. We may not be able to properly investigate an issue that happened a long time ago.

What to do first – stage one
Most concerns and complaints can be sorted out quickly by speaking with your child's class teacher. You can also speak to one of our middle leaders, SEND or pastoral support workers. They will work with you, and the class teacher, to address any concern that you may have.

If you have a complaint that you feel should be looked at by a senior leader, you can contact them straight away if you prefer. It is usually best to discuss the problem face to face or on the phone. You may need an appointment to do this and can make one by ringing or calling into the school office. You may also share your concern/complaint in writing or by email and a leader will get back to you, typically within 48 hours.

All staff will make every effort to resolve your problem informally. This may mean that they refer your concern or complaint to another member of staff. Staff will make sure that they understand what you feel went wrong, and seek to provide you with the appropriate reassurances/resolutions to help put things right. It can take time for agreed actions to be put in place or to start seeing a change. The member of staff will talk to you about this and may suggest having a review meeting at a later date.

What to do next – stage two
If you are not satisfied with the initial response to your questions or concerns, you can make a formal complaint, in writing, to the Headteacher. Guidance on what to include in your complaint can be found here.

The Headteacher will conduct a full investigation of the complaint which may inviting you to a meeting to discuss your complaint in more detail. The Headteacher may also interview any members of staff or pupils involved and review other evidence to help determine whether the complaint is upheld and, if so, what steps can be put in place to help make things right. Afterwards, you will receive a written response to your complaint.

If your complaint is about an action of the Headteacher personally, then you should refer it to the Chair of Governors immediately. You can contact them via the school office, or by emailing the clerk to the governors at clerk@abhps.com

If you are still unhappy – stage three
If you are not satisfied with the Headteacher's response to your complaint, you can write to the Chair of the Governing Body, via the Clerk, to ask for a referral of your complaint to a Governor Complaints Panel. It will then be reviewed by a group of three governors to determine whether the school's response to your complaint was appropriate or if your complaint is upheld. As part of the hearing, you will be invited to attend and speak to the panel along with the Headteacher and any other witnesses.

Further Action – stage four
If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the governor complaints review, you have the right to refer the complaint to the Secretary of State via the DfE's School's Complaints Unit.

Parents may consider referring a complaint to Ofsted. Ofsted expect parents to have followed the school's complaints procedure prior to them making a complaint to Ofsted. Complainants should be aware that Osted will not investigate individual pupil issues.

Complaints Procedure Flowchart

Stage One

Share your concern/complaint with the member of staff you feel best placed to help - typically this will be the class teacher. You may want to talk to a SEND leader or a pastoral member of staff such as the Family Support Worker.

Any member of staff will aim to provide you with reassurance / resolution as quickly as possble. This may mean putting in place some actions which could take time to put in place or take effect.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, contact the Chair of Governors.

Concerns/complaints should be raised as soon as possible and typically within 3 months.

School acknowledgement of the concern/complaint should be within 2 school days.

Subsequent meetings and actions should be concluded within 10 school days.

Issue not resolved

Stage Two

Make a fomal complaint to the Headteahcer (or Chair of Governors, via the Clerk, if the complaint is about the Headteacher).

The Headteacher may delegate the management of your complaint to anbother member of staff, especially is Stage One has not been followed.

The Headteacher will investigate your complaint and share with you the outcome and any idenitified actions or next steps to help put things right.

Complaints to the Headteacher should be made within 10 days of Stage One being completed.

Headteacher's acknowledgement of the concern/complaint should be within 3 school days.

Stage two should be concluded within 15 days.

Issue not resolved

Stage Three

Contact the Chair of Governors, via the Clerk, if you are not satisfied with how the Headteacher managed your complaint.

A governor complaints panel will be convened to hear your complaint and review the evidence about how it was managed by the school.

You will be invited to the hearing to talk to the panel who wiil then write to you with their decision about the complaint.

Referral to the governors should be made within 4 school weeks of Stage Two being completed.

Governors' acknowledgement of the referral should be within 5 school days.

Stage two should be concluded within 20 days.

Issue not resolved

Stage Four

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome fo the governor complaints panel, you can refer the matter to the Secretary of State for Education.

There is no official time-limit for when referrals to the Secretary of State for Education can be made although the DfE state referrals should be made within a reasonable timeframe.

Appendix B: How to Listen to Complaints

When you realise that you are listening to a complaint, try to remember these points:

Don't pass the person on unless you have to	*Try not to keep transferring an angry person from one place/person to another. Make sure you know the contact person for anything you cannot deal with yourself.*
Don't be flippant	*First impressions count. You and the school may be judged on your immediate reaction.*
Treat all complaints seriously	*However small or trivial it may seem to you, the complaint will be an important problem for anyone who takes the trouble to complain.*
Treat every complaint individually	*Even if you have already received several similar complaints the same day, it is probably the person's first chance to have their say.*
Be courteous and patient	*Be sympathetic and helpful, but do not blame other colleagues.*
Say who you are	*If you are unknown to the other person, introduce yourself.*
Ask for their name and use it	*Anonymous complaints are acceptable only where there are special circumstances.*
Take time to find out exactly what the problem is	*It is easy for someone to forget to tell you an important detail, particularly if they are upset or annoyed.*
Don't take the complaint personally	*To an angry or upset person, YOU are the school, and the only one they can put their feelings to right now.*
Stay cool and calm	*Do not argue with the person - be polite and try to find out exactly what the person thinks is going wrong or has gone wrong.*
Check you are being understood	*Make sure that the person understands what you are saying. Don't use jargon - it can cause confusion and annoyance to someone 'not in the know'.*
Don't rush	*Take your time. Let people have their say and let off steam if they need to. Listen carefully and sympathetically to their problems before replying and attempting to find a solution or offer a next step.*

Appendix C: Complaints record form

This record form can be used to collate details of a complaint or as a prompt during any meeting with the complainant.	
Complainants Name	
Pupil's Name	
Relationship to the Pupil	
Address	
Daytime/ Evening Tel Number	
Outline details of the complaint:	
What actions, if any, have already been taken to try and resolve the complaint (e.g. Who did the complainant speak to and what was the response)?	
What actions does the complainant wish to see that might resolve the problem?	
Has the complainant provided any paperwork? List documents here and keep copies with this note.	
Date acknowledgement sent By Whom Complaint referred to: Date:	

Appendix D: Governing body complaints panel; roles and responsibilities

The clerk to the governors is the contact point for the complainant and is required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting;
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the meeting;
- record the proceedings;
- advise the panel on procedural issues only;
- notify all parties of the panel's decision.

The ***chair of the governing body*** or the nominated governor needs to check that the procedure has been correctly applied and, if a meeting is appropriate, liaise with the clerk to arrange the panel.

The ***Chair of the panel*** needs to ensure that:

- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- those attending the meeting to give evidence are put at ease;
- the meeting is conducted in a professional, but not overly formal, manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;
- the panel is open minded and acting independently;
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

Checklist for a panel meeting
The panel needs to take the following points into account:

- The meeting should be professional, but not overly formal.
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the meeting in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint and be followed by their witnesses.
- The head teacher may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The head teacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses.
- The complainant may question both the head teacher and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The head teacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within a set time scale.

Notification of the panel's decision

The chair of the panel will ensure that all parties to the complaint are notified of the panel's decision, in writing, with the panel's response, within five schooldays of the panel meeting. The letter needs to explain that if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint, they can refer the matter to the Secretary of State if they believe that the governing body has acted unreasonably or has failed to carry out its duties properly.

All discussions and decisions remain confidential and MUST NOT be discussed outside of the panel hearing or with anyone not involved in the process.

Appendix E: The Role of the School Complaints Unit

If a complaint has completed the local procedures and the complainant remains dissatisfied, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has a duty to consider all complaints raised but will only intervene where the governing body has acted unlawfully or unreasonably and where it is expedient or practical to do so.

The School Complaints Unit (SCU) considers complaints relating to LA maintained schools in England on behalf of the Secretary of State. The SCU will look at whether the complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies were adhered to. The SCU also looks at whether statutory policies adhere to education legislation. However, the SCU will not normally re-investigate the substance of the complaint. This remains the responsibility of schools.

The SCU will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint except in exceptional circumstances where it is clear the school has acted unlawfully or unreasonably. If the SCU finds that the school has not handled a complaint in accordance with its procedure, we may request that the complaint is looked at again.
If legislative or policy breaches are found, the SCU will report them to the school and the complainant, and where necessary, ask for corrective action to be taken. The SCU normally also seeks written assurances as to future conduct. Failure to carry out remedial actions or provide written assurances could ultimately result in a formal Direction being issued by the Secretary of State in accordance with her powers under sections 496 and 497 of the Education Act 1996.

Schools may wish to contact the SCU for advice on whether they have acted reasonably; for example: in closing down a complaint from a serial complainant before the local procedure has been completed. However, the SCU will not be able to advise on how to resolve the complaint.

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

Department for Education School Complaints Unit 2nd Floor,
Piccadilly Gate Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD 15

Appendix F: Complaint form

An online complaint form can be found here.

Please complete and return to the Headteacher who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to the pupil:

Address:

Postcode:

Daytime telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint.

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint.

(Who did you speak to and what was the response)?

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Do you have any paperwork to support your complaint? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date: D D / **M** M / Y Y Y Y

Appendix G: Complaints not in the scope of the procedure

The following is defined by the Department for Education in their document "Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2020"

Admissions
These are handled under a separate statutory process governed by the School Admissions Code.

Exclusions
Complaints about pupil exclusions must follow the statutory guidance in the *Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England* document.

Staff Grievances
These are internal employment matters and are dealt with under the school's HR policies.

Disciplinary Procedures Against Staff
These are confidential and governed by employment law and school HR procedures.

Child Protection/Safeguarding Concerns
These must be referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) or the police, not handled as complaints.

Whistleblowing
Schools must have a separate whistleblowing policy for staff and others to report serious concerns.

Freedom of Information (FOI) or Data Protection Requests
These are handled under the relevant legislation (FOIA 2000 and UK GDPR/Data Protection Act 2018).

Complaints about services provided by other providers using school premises
These should be directed to the third-party provider although it is advised that the school be made aware of such complaints.