



Complaints Procedure

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| Author: | SS |
| Position of Author: | Clerk to Governors |
| Approved by: | NW |
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Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

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 defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Northern Schools Trust takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

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

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Northern Schools Trust will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

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 on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complaints against school staff (except the Principal) should be made in the first instance, to the Principal via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Principal should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a trustee of the Trust, should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees, via the trust office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Complaints relating to SEN

This complaints procedure will cover complaints related to SEN support in our schools.

This procedure does not cover complaints about EHC plans. Complaints related to EHC plans should be directed towards the local authority.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Principal or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Northern Schools Trust, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

| Exceptions | Who to contact |
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| Admissions to schools | Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority. |
| Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation | Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). |
| Exclusion of children from school* | Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions . <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i> |
| Whistleblowing | We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus . Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint. |
| Staff grievances | Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures. |
| Staff conduct | Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. |

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| | Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed. |
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If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against Northern Schools Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Northern Schools Trust wants 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:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- 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
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a complaint

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

Stages of the Complaint Procedure

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

Concerns that are to be raised on an informal basis are to be made, in the first instance, with the student's Form Tutor and Head of House at North Liverpool Academy, or Coach, Academic Mentor and Year Group Progress Leader at Liverpool Life Sciences and The Studio, before a request is made to deal with it under this policy. If a matter is not resolved at the informal stage then a complainant may take it to the formal stage.

It is a precondition to the operation of this policy that the complainant shall have made reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution and shall have acted in relation to the matter in a reasonable and measured way. The Chair of Trustees shall have a discretion, which will be exercised reasonably, not to allow a complaint to be pursued where this precondition has not been met.

Where the matter is not resolved at the informal stage, the parent may elevate it to the formal stage.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution at Local Level: Investigation by a member of the Senior Leadership Team

1. The complainant must put the complaint in writing, addressed to the Principal of the school, setting out briefly the facts and stating what it is that the complainant considers should have been done or where the school has not met reasonable expectations.
2. An investigation will be carried out by a member of the Senior Leadership Team of the school; which may include the offer of a meeting with the complainant. The investigator will speak to

others involved. Whenever reasonably possible, any meeting with the complainant will take place within 15 school days of the written complaint being received.

3. The investigator will put her/his findings in writing and will indicate what, if any, steps should be taken to resolve the matter. Whenever reasonably possible, this will be done within 15 school days of any meeting with the complainant; if no meeting is arranged it will be within 15 school days of the written complaint being received.

Any complaint relating to the Principal of the school must be raised in the first instance with the Chair of Governors who will, if an informal resolution cannot be reached, investigate in the same way as in the first stage of the formal process outlined above.

Where the complainant remains dissatisfied he/she may request the complaint is dealt with at Stage 3. Any such request **must** be set out in writing, stating where the complainant remains dissatisfied and lodged within **10** school days of the complainant receiving the findings in writing.

Stage 3 – Formal Resolution: Chair of Governing Body

1. The complainant must put the complaint in writing, addressed to the Chair of the Governing Body, setting out briefly the facts and stating what it is that the complainant considers should have been done or where the school has not met reasonable expectations.
2. The Chair of the Governing Body may appoint any other member of the Local Governing Body of the school to investigate the complaint. The investigation may include the offer of a meeting with the complainant. Whenever reasonably possible, any meeting with the complainant will take place within 15 school days of the written complaint being received.
3. The investigator will put her/his findings in writing and will indicate what, if any, steps should be taken to resolve the matter. Whenever reasonably possible, this will be done within 15 school days of any meeting with the complainant; if no meeting is arranged it will be within 15 school days of the written complaint being received.

Where the complainant remains dissatisfied he may request the complaint is dealt with at Stage 4. Any such request **must** be set out in writing, stating where the complainant remains dissatisfied, what remedies are being sought and be lodged within **10** school days of the complainant receiving the findings in writing. The request must be addressed to the Clerk to the Governors.

Stage 4 – Formal Resolution: Panel Hearing

1. A Complaints Panel of the Trust will consider all complaints at Stage 4.
2. The Complaints Panel must comprise at least three people, which will include one person who is independent of the management and running of the Trust and any of its academies.
3. The Complaints Panel may also include one or more persons from the following categories:
 - (i) A member of the local governing body of the school where the complaint emanated from;
 - (ii) A member of a local governing body from another school within the Trust;
 - (iii) A member of the Board of Trustees from the Trust.

4. None of the members of the Complaints Panel will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.
5. The Clerk will invite the school to put in writing its response to the complainant's reasons. The school will provide this within 15 school days. At the end of that period (whether or not the school has responded) the Clerk will convene a meeting of a Complaints Panel. That meeting will be held as quickly as practicable given the need to find a date that is reasonably convenient for the complainant, the school and the members of the Complaints Panel. Whenever possible, the meeting will be held within 15 school days of the end of the school's response time. At any meeting, the complainant will be entitled to be accompanied by a friend but legal representation will not be allowed.
6. The meeting is not a court case, it will be held in private, and will be as informal as circumstances allow. The complainant will have the opportunity to put her/his reasons for dissatisfaction and to enlarge on them but may not introduce reasons that were not previously put in writing. The school will have the opportunity to put its side of things and each side, as well as the Panel members, will be able to ask questions. The complainant will have the opportunity to make final comments to the Panel.
7. The Panel may make findings and recommendations and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be
 - (i) sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and
 - (ii) available for inspection on the school premises by the Trust and the Principal.
8. The Panel will formulate its response as quickly as reasonably possible, aiming to do so within 10 school days, and the Clerk will notify all concerned.

Attendance at a Complaints Panel Hearing

The Complaints Panel will only proceed if the complainant and/or their representative attend. If the complainant does not confirm attendance or fails to attend on the day without compelling reasons, the Complaints Panel will not proceed and the complainant will lose their right to the complaint being heard. Any further attempt to re-open the matter will be considered as falling under the serial/persistent complaint section as below.

Serial or persistent complainants

If at any level a complainant attempts to reopen an issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this complaints procedure, the Chair of the Trust may write to the complainant to inform him/her that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter closed, that continued correspondence on the same matter is vexatious and that the Trust will not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

Record Keeping

A written record will be kept of all complaints that were resolved at the formal stage of the complaints procedure. Records will contain details of whether the complaint was resolved at stage 2, stage 3 or whether it proceeded to a stage 4 panel hearing. The action taken by the school or the Trust as a result of a complaint (regardless of whether they are upheld) will also be recorded.

Confidentiality

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.