



Complaints Policy

Reviewed Date:	Reviewed By:	List of changes	Next Review
August 2021	Luke Collins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed staff structure for complaints process 	August 2022
July 2022	Luke Collins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed with no changes needed 	July 2023
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October 2023	Luke Collins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed to add more detail as to the review panel hearing, Independent panel and details of the records kept following a complaint. 	July 2024
August 2024	Adrian Anderson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed with no changes needed 	August 2025
February 2026	Luke Collins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corrected formatting issues Improved wording in complaints procedure Added more information to appeals Corrected titles 	February 2027

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This procedure is intended to be clear, fair and accessible. We aim to resolve concerns at the earliest possible stage while ensuring that formal complaints are handled properly, impartially and within published timescales.

1. Aims

The school aims to maintain a complaints procedure that is lawful, fair, proportionate and easy to use.

Through this policy, the school will:

- meet its obligations under Part 7 of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014;
- deal with concerns and complaints as quickly and efficiently as possible;
- ensure complaints are investigated fairly, fully and objectively;
- respect confidentiality, subject to safeguarding and legal obligations;
- keep complainants informed about progress and outcomes; and
- use complaints to support reflection and school improvement.

2. Legal framework

This policy is written with reference to Part 7 of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and relevant Department for Education complaints guidance for schools operating under those standards.

Guidance formerly published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) continues to be followed where relevant, but responsibility now sits with the Department for Education.

This policy is published on the school website and is available in hard copy on request.

3. Scope

This statutory complaints procedure applies to complaints from parents/carers of current pupils about the school and/or the provision made for their child.

The school may, at its discretion, consider complaints from other individuals respectfully and expediently, but those complaints are not covered by the statutory requirements of Part 7.

Complaints that fall under another statutory route or a separate school procedure will be dealt with under that route instead.

- admissions decisions;
- child protection or safeguarding matters, which must be raised immediately with the Designated Safeguarding Lead or, where appropriate, the local authority or police;
- staff disciplinary issues or grievances;
- whistleblowing;
- pupil suspension or permanent exclusion matters;
- local authority special educational needs statutory assessment processes;
- data protection matters, which may also be raised through the school's data protection processes; and
- services delivered by third-party organisations using the school's premises.

4. Roles and contact points

For the purposes of this policy, the school operates the following roles and contact points.

Role	Name	Contact
Proprietor	Yvonne Evans	yvonne@new-direction.org.uk
Directors	Luke Collins and Hannah Oliver	Main school contact via 01246 810456
Head of Education	Luke Collins	luke@new-direction.org.uk
Main office	School office	01246 810456

5. Definitions

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt for which reassurance is sought.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.

6. Principles for handling complaints

When considering a complaint, the school will seek to establish:

- what has happened;
- who was involved;
- when the relevant events took place;
- what steps have already been taken to resolve the matter;
- what outcome the complainant is seeking; and
- whether any support, communication adjustment or accessibility arrangement is needed.

To be considered under this complaints procedure, the complainant must provide their name and sufficient contact details. Anonymous complaints will not normally be accepted or investigated, unless the school considers that there is an overriding safeguarding, welfare or public interest reason to do so.

7. Timescales

A complaint should normally be raised within 3 months of the incident, or within 3 months of the last incident in a series of related incidents. The school will consider exceptions where there is a good reason for delay and it remains possible to investigate fairly.

Complaints received during school closure periods will be treated as received on the next school day.

If the school cannot meet a published timescale, it will explain the reason, provide a revised target date and keep the complainant updated.

8. Stage 1 - Informal resolution

Most concerns can be resolved informally. Parents/carers should raise the concern as soon as possible with the most appropriate member of staff, usually the Head of Education or another senior leader.

Concerns may be raised in person, by telephone, by email or in writing.

The school will normally acknowledge an informal concern within 3 school days and aim to provide a response within 20 school days.

If the matter is not resolved informally, the complainant may move to Stage 2.

9. Stage 2 - Formal complaint

A formal complaint must be made in writing to the Proprietor. Assistance will be provided where a complainant needs help to set out the complaint in writing.

The complaint should include, where possible, the nature of the complaint, relevant dates and times, people involved, copies of relevant documents and the outcome sought.

The Proprietor, or a person appointed by the Proprietor who has not been directly involved in the matter, will investigate the complaint.

The school will normally acknowledge a formal complaint within 5 school days and provide a written outcome within 20 school days of acknowledgement.

The Stage 2 response will include:

- whether the complaint is upheld in full, upheld in part or not upheld;
- the reasons for the decision;
- any action the school has taken or proposes to take; and
- how to request a panel hearing under Stage 3 and the deadline for doing so.

10. Stage 3 - Complaints panel hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the Stage 2 outcome, they may request a panel hearing by writing to the Proprietor within 15 school days of the date of the Stage 2 response.

The panel will consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school. One member will be appointed as Chair.

The complainant will be given reasonable notice of the hearing date and reasonable access to the documents to be considered. The school will take reasonable steps to agree a suitable date, but the panel may proceed in the complainant's absence if repeated attempts to arrange attendance are unsuccessful.

The complainant may attend and may be accompanied by a friend, relative, interpreter or advocate. Legal representation will not normally be necessary, but the Chair may allow it in exceptional circumstances where fairness requires this.

Both parties may submit additional evidence in advance of the hearing by the deadline set by the Chair. The Chair may refuse late evidence or accept it where fair and proportionate to do so.

The panel will consider the complaint, the Stage 2 investigation, any written submissions and any oral representations made at the hearing.

The panel may dismiss the complaint in whole or in part, uphold the complaint in whole or in part, and/or make recommendations.

The panel will issue its findings and recommendations in writing, normally within 10 school days of the hearing.

A copy of the findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant, the Proprietor, the Head of Education and, where relevant, the person complained about.

A copy of the findings and recommendations will be made available for inspection on the school premises by the Proprietor and the Head of Education.

11. Record keeping and confidentiality

A written record will be kept of all formal complaints, whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or proceed to a panel hearing, and of any action taken by the school as a result of the complaint, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld.

Records will include dates, correspondence, notes of meetings and calls, evidence considered, decisions reached and actions taken.

Complaint records will be held centrally, securely and confidentially in line with the school's data protection arrangements and retention schedule.

Confidentiality will be respected so far as possible, but information may need to be shared with those who are investigating, with inspectors, with the Secretary of State or Department for Education, or where disclosure is otherwise required by law or necessary for safeguarding purposes.

12. Serial, persistent or unreasonable complaints

Most complaints are raised in good faith and should be treated seriously. However, a complaint or contact may become unreasonable where the complainant's behaviour hinders the proper consideration of the complaint or places disproportionate demands on staff.

In those circumstances, the school may adopt reasonable and proportionate measures to manage communication while still considering any new complaint on its merits.

- requiring contact through a single named point of contact;
- limiting the frequency or method of communication;
- declining to respond to repeated correspondence that raises no new issues after the procedure has been completed; and
- warning that abusive, threatening or defamatory behaviour will not be accepted.

13. Duplicate complaints and complaint campaigns

If the school receives a duplicate complaint from a different person about the same matter that has already been fully considered, the school will decide whether there is any material new information or any aspect that has not previously been addressed.

Where a large volume of substantially similar complaints is received, the school may publish a single response or send a standard response, while still allowing an individual complainant to pursue the formal stages of the procedure where appropriate.

14. After the school procedure is completed

Once the school procedure has been completed, the complainant may contact the Department for Education if they believe the school did not handle the complaint properly or that the school has failed to comply with a legal requirement or the independent school standards.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of the complaint simply because the complainant disagrees with the outcome. Its role is generally to consider whether the school followed the required procedure and complied with relevant obligations.

Information about how to raise concerns with the Department for Education is available on GOV.UK under the Department for Education complaints procedure.

15. Monitoring, review and learning lessons

The Proprietor and Head of Education will review trends, themes and lessons arising from complaints, while preserving confidentiality, to identify whether improvements are required to policy, communication, practice or provision.

This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if there are changes to law, guidance or the school's structure.

Appendix A - Suggested complaints form

The school may accept complaints by letter or email, but the following information should normally be provided to support a fair investigation.

Name of complainant	
Relationship to pupil	
Name of pupil	
Contact details	
Summary of complaint	
Key dates / people involved	
What action has already been taken	
Outcome sought	

Appendix B - Complaint record requirements

For each formal complaint, the school record should include the stage reached, dates of key actions, a summary of the issues raised, the evidence considered, the outcome, and any action taken by the school.

Formal complaint received	Date / reference
Acknowledgement sent	Yes / date
Investigator appointed	Name
Outcome issued	Date
Escalated to panel	Yes / no

Panel findings issued	Date
Action taken	Summary