



The Acorn School

Complaints Policy

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Introduction

At The Acorn School, we aim to provide a high standard of education and care. However, we recognize that there may be times when parents or others wish to raise concerns or make a formal complaint.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement and evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed as detailed below.

This policy explains how to raise a complaint and outlines the steps we follow to ensure a fair resolution.

Definitions and scope

Definitions

The Department of Education (DfE) guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A concern is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”. The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible
- A complaint is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”

Scope

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

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints. This policy only relates to complaints from parents of current pupils. Complaints by anyone else will be handled at the discretion of the school.

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

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

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

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

Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

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

Time scales

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

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

When complaints are made outside of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the next school day.

Complaints Procedure Summary

Stage	What Happens?	Timeframe
Stage 1: Informal Resolution	Raise your concern with the relevant staff member or the Headteacher. Most concerns are resolved at this stage.	As soon as possible
Stage 2: Formal Complaint	Submit a written complaint to the Headteacher (or Chair of Governors if about the Headteacher). A full investigation is conducted.	Acknowledgment within 5 school days, response within 20 school days
Stage 3: Independent Panel Review	If not satisfied, request a hearing with an independent panel.	Panel held within 10 school days of request, outcome within 5 school days

Stages of complaint

Stage 1: Informal

Most concerns can be resolved quickly through open communication.

- Speak directly to the staff member involved.
- If unresolved, contact the Headteacher.
- If the complaint is about the Headteacher, contact the Chair of Governors.

We encourage informal discussions first, as they often lead to faster resolutions.

Stage 2: Formal

If your concern or complaint is not resolved at the informal stage and you wish to take it further, you should put it in writing and pass it to the Headteacher, who will be responsible for ensuring that it is investigated appropriately. If the complaint is about the Headteacher, your complaint should be addressed to the Chair of Governors.

Any complaint should include:

- The issue and relevant dates.
- Any previous attempts to resolve it.
- What outcome you are seeking

Please pass letters of complaint by email or in a sealed envelope to the school office. The envelope should be addressed to the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, as appropriate.

Alternatively there is a form at <https://forms.office.com/e/cCVDX10kF5> that you can complete online.

Where a complaint concerns the Chair of Governors and you don't feel able to address it to them or the Headteacher, you should in the first instance contact one of the other Governors. If your complaint relates to the Board as a whole, the Chair of Governors will arrange an appropriate independent individual to handle the complaint in line with this policy.

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

The Headteacher / Chair of Governors may invite you to a meeting to clarify your concerns and to explore the possibility of an informal resolution. If you accept that invitation, you may be accompanied by a friend or representative, if you wish, to assist you in explaining the nature of your concerns.

It is possible that your complaint will be resolved by the meeting. If not, arrangements will be made for the matter to be fully investigated, using the appropriate procedure. In any case you should learn in writing, usually within 5 days of the school receiving your formal complaint, of how the school intends to proceed. This notification should include an indication of the anticipated timescale.

Any investigation will begin as soon as possible and when it has been concluded, you will be informed in writing of its conclusion.

If you are not satisfied with the manner in which the process has been followed by the Headteacher, you may request that the Governing Board reviews the process followed by the school, in handling the complaint. Any such request must be made in writing to the Chair of Governors, within 10 school days of receiving notice of the outcome and include a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow the procedure. The procedure described below will be followed.

Stage 3: Review Process

Any review of the process followed by the school will be conducted as a panel hearing, normally chaired by the Chair of Governors. The panel will consist of at least three members including one panel member who has no connection to the school. This will usually take place within 10 school days of receipt of your request.

The review will normally be conducted through a consideration of written submissions. Parents will be allowed to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by a friend or representative if they wish.

The result of the hearing will be communicated to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about within 5 school days of the hearing. The panel will make findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and where relevant, the person complained about, and will be available for inspection on the school premises by the headteacher and appropriate Governors.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the Governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

If You Are Still Not Satisfied

The Department for Education (DfE) cannot investigate individual complaints about private schools. However, it has certain powers as a regulator if the school is not meeting standards set by DfE for:

- education
- pupil welfare and health and safety
- school premises
- staff suitability
- making information available to parents
- spiritual, moral, social or cultural development of students

The DfE will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint. The DfE will consider reports of a major failure to meet the standards. Where appropriate, it can arrange an emergency inspection to look at pupil welfare and health and safety, and make sure that the school deals with serious failings.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

What will happen afterwards

Record keeping

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel. The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not normally be shared with the whole Governing board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Records may also be accessed by Inspectors from Ofsted or the Department for Education. Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and records management policies.

Learning lessons

The Governing Board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Senior Leadership team to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

Monitoring and Review

The Headteacher and Board of Governors will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure. The Headteacher will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues identified.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the Headteacher.

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years by the Leadership Team and approved by the Board of Governors.

Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures

- Admissions policy
- Exclusions policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- SEN policy
- Privacy notices
- Allegations against staff policy
- Vexatious, Malicious Complaints and Harassment
- Parent Code of Conduct