

Amble Links Primary School
Complaints and Serial & Persistent Complainants Policy



Date Written: March 2026 (Based on NCC Model Policies)
By: Paul Heeley/NCC
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This procedure is for use for complaints against the school, a member of staff or the governing board. The complainant 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). The school will consider complaints out of this time frame, only if exceptional circumstances apply. The school will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and having prior knowledge of a complaint will prevent the governor from being able to sit on a panel at a later stage of the complaints process. Complainants should always be advised to follow the process laid out in this policy.

There are separate arrangements, laid down by law to cover the following:

- Appeals against admissions to schools.
- Appeals about statutory assessments and against Education Health Care Plans.
- School re-organisation proposals.
- Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation
- Appeals against the Exclusion of Children from School
- Whistleblowing
- Staff Grievance & Disciplinary procedures
- Staff conduct complaints.
- Services provided by other providers who may use the school premises or facilities.
- Complaints about the content of the national curriculum. Complaints about the 'content' of the national curriculum should be sent to the DfE using their [contact form](#).
- Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

In addition:

- Anonymous complaints will not be investigated unless deemed serious enough by the Headteacher or Chair of Governors.
- Complaints that are being investigated by other bodies such as the Police will be suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.
- If a complainant commences legal action against the school in relation to their complaint, the school will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to the complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

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

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher 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 Governance Professional via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Stage One: Informal Stage - Complaint Heard by Staff Member/Headteacher/ Chair of Governors.

In the first instance the complaint should be discussed between the person making the complaint and the member of staff involved. If a complainant indicates that they would have difficulty discussing a complaint with that particular member of staff they should be referred to another staff member.

Similarly, if a member of staff/Headteacher/Chair of Governors feels too compromised to deal with a complaint it should be referred to another member of staff or another governor. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial and it is also important to give an indication of timescale if it is found that the complaint requires further investigation.

If a complainant first approaches a governor, they should be referred, via the Headteacher, to the appropriate person, i.e., the member of staff concerned or the Chair of Governors.

Whoever has heard the complaint at stage one will advise the complainant on how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome.

At this stage the complainant will be asked to complete the complaints form if they have not done so already. This may be done by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, if they have appropriate consent to do so. Reasonable adjustments will also be made if required.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

Mediation (Optional stage after stage one or two)

*The school **may** offer the option of mediation following stage one or two of the complaint consideration. This is not instead of stage two or three rather as an additional way of reaching agreement and securing a way forward. Complainants do not have to accept mediation nor do the school have to offer this step if it is felt to be inappropriate.*

Stage Two: Formal Consideration of Complaint.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of stage one or the way the complaint has been handled at stage one and wishes to pursue their initial complaint further, the Headteacher, Chair of Governors or nominated officer may delegate the task of formally investigating the complaint to another staff member or another governor once the complaints form has been received.

The Headteacher/Chair of Governors/nominated officer may also, in exceptional circumstances, commission an investigating officer report to be undertaken by an external professional. Within this stage, the appointed person will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see.

The person making the complaint will be informed that an investigation is underway and that they will receive a response within **25 school days**, or a letter explaining the reason for any subsequent delay.

Once the relevant facts have been established and conclusions drawn, the Headteacher/Chair of Governors/nominated officer should relay the decision, and the reason for the decision, in writing to the complainant.

In addition, they 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 reoccur
- 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.

Stage Three: Complaint Heard by Governing Board Complaints Committee

If the complainant is still dissatisfied with the outcome, they should contact the Headteacher/Chair of Governors/nominated officer giving details of the complaint within **10 school days** of receipt of the stage two decision letter.

At least **7 school days** before the meeting, the Governance Professional will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least **3 school days** before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Governance Professional will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

When convened, the committee will consist of a minimum of three governors with delegated powers. The chair of the committee will be appointed when they meet. The complaints committee will take a decision as to any action to be taken in response to the complaint. For example, they may choose to:

- Convene a hearing at which the complainant will be invited to put forward their case. This should be held within **20 school days** of the decision to hold the hearing;
- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- Recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

In reaching a decision the committee may take the advice of such bodies as they see fit, in particular the Local Authority and, where appropriate, the Diocesan Authority. Guidance on preparing for and holding the hearing will be provided by the school's dedicated Governance Professional.

It should be noted that these complaints committees are not a form of legal proceeding and therefore it is inappropriate for either the school or the complainant to bring legal representation. The exception to this would be if a member of staff, as a witness, wished to bring individual union or legal representation.

Further Considerations

Making a complaint to the Department for Education should only happen once all other routes have been followed. The exception to this may be where there is a child protection concern, or where a child is missing education. If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed stage three.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288, or by writing to:

Department for Education,
Piccadilly Gate,
Store Street,
Manchester,
M1 2WD.

If a complaint has been made by a number of parents and it is about a whole school issue they may, at any stage of the procedure, ask the Chief Inspector of Schools to investigate their complaint. The Chief Inspector may or may not require the school's complaints procedure to be exhausted before he decides whether or not to investigate.

However, should the school become the focus of a complaint campaign; receiving a large volume of connected complaints all based on the same subject or from complainants unconnected with the school then the school reserves the right to deal with these complaints by means of either a template response or a general response posted on the school website.

A separate policy is in place in respect of serial and persistent complainants.

Exemplar Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Headteacher/Chair of Governors or Governance Professional who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. If you have difficulties completing the form, please contact the school so specific arrangements to consider your complaint can be made.

Your name:

Pupil's name (if applicable):

Your relationship to the pupil (if applicable):

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

E mail:

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?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details:

Signature:

Date:

Official Use Only

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

ROLES WITHIN COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Complainant

The complainant is the person who raises their issue with the school in line with the school's complaints procedure. Individuals are expected to engage with the process in an open and honest manner in order to try to reach an equitable outcome. Complainants need to consider what they would feel to be appropriate outcomes from the process. Complainants must not try to pursue their complaint outside the process as this can cause difficulties in accessing sufficient individuals without connections to the complaint if too many people are contacted at the initial stages.

Initial Contact

Anyone who is contacted by the complainant would be the initial contact - the only role this person would have within the process would be to ensure that the complainant had a copy of the complaints procedure and how to move this forward. No discussion of the actual complaint should take place other than to identify who the complaint should properly be addressed to.

Stage One Contact

The complaints procedure expects that all complaints should be resolved at the earliest opportunity with the person most associated with the allegation being made - this could be a class teacher or other member of staff. A face-to-face discussion would usually be the first step and many complaints can be brought to a conclusion at this stage. Otherwise, the Headteacher might take this role if the member of staff or the complainant is not comfortable with the usual arrangements. Exceptionally, if the complaint is about the Headteacher and they are not able to participate in the stage one discussion, the Chair of Governors might take this role or delegate to another appropriate Governor.

Nominated Officer

Depending on the level at which the stage one discussion is held, this role may be taken by a senior leader; the Headteacher; a Governor designated by the Chair or the Chair of Governors themselves. The role of Nominated Officer would be to commission an investigation report from an Investigating Officer. The Nominated Officer would prepare a brief for the Investigating Officer to follow based on the substance of the complaint. On receipt of the Investigating Officer's report, the Nominated Officer would draw up and send a stage two outcome letter to the Complainant. The Nominated Officer would also consider the appropriate response to complainants not satisfied at stage two. The Nominated Officer would also present the school case to the Panel at stage three should this be required.

Investigating Officer

Depending on the level at which the stage one discussion is held, this role may be taken by a senior leader; the Headteacher; a Governor designated by the Chair or the Chair of Governors themselves. Exceptionally, if there is no-one with sufficient independence, an Investigating Officer may be commissioned from outside of the school, but it is likely that there would be a cost to this. The Investigating Officer would interview witnesses; scrutinise documentation, formulate conclusions and draw up recommendations within a report prepared for the Nominated Officer.

Panel Chair or Member

Should the complaint move to stage three a Panel might be drawn up to consider the school case - both complainant and Nominated Officer would attend to present their case; each would be able to call witnesses as appropriate. The Chair of the Panel would be voted from within the Panel and would be responsible for communicating the judgement to the Panel in a stage three outcome letter.

Witnesses

Individuals identified as having specific knowledge in respect of the complaint would be identified as potential witnesses - these witnesses would be interviewed by the Investigating Officer and statements drawn up for signature. These statements would form part of the evidence in support of the Investigating Officer's conclusions and recommendations within their report to the Nominated Officer.

Support for Procedure

Schools that buy into the School Governance SLA may access support from the School Governance and Data Protection Team - Schools outside these SLA's would need to purchase such support on a "pay as you go" basis.

Serial & Persistent Complainants Guidance for Schools

The school will do their best to be helpful to people who contact them with a complaint or concern or a request for information. However, in cases where we are contacted repeatedly by an individual making the same points, or who asks us to reconsider our position after a decision is made, the school would need to take the appropriate actions.

Once the school has done everything, the complainant will be informed by the Chair of Governors or person hearing the complaint, that the procedure has been completed and the matter now closed. Should a complainant contact the school again on the same issue then the correspondence may be viewed as serial or persistent and the school may choose not to respond. The school will always ensure that the complainant has completed the school's complaints procedure before such a decision is taken.

Policy

Staff are not expected to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and the school will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening. Unreasonable behaviour is defined as that which hinders the school's consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaint's investigation process
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaint's procedure
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the Complaints Policy or with good practice
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on
- Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into a complaint where the school's Complaints Policy has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- Seeks an unrealistic or unachievable outcome

- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- Uses threats to intimidate
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- Knowingly provides falsified information
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

The school will take the decision to stop responding only when **all** the following apply:

- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs.
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any); and
- They are contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time.

Additional weight is added if any of the following also apply:

- The school has reason to believe the individual is contacting them with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience.
- The communications are often or always abusive or aggressive; or
- The individual makes insulting, personal comments about or threats towards staff.
- There is heavy reliance on AI-generated content, particularly where it replaces first-hand knowledge, evidence, or personal analysis.

If the behaviour continues the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after **six months**.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the Police informed. This may include banning an individual from the school premises.

Further advice and guidance will be sought from the School Governance and Data Protection Team.

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'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. Schools should always give the parent the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing.

The decision to bar should then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent should 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.

Communication Strategies

If an individual's behaviour is causing a significant level of disruption, regardless of whether or not they have raised a complaint, schools can implement a tailored communication strategy. For example, they can restrict the individual to a single point of contact via an e-mail address, and/or limit the number of times they can make contact, such as a fixed number of contacts per term. It can be suggested that complainants who are difficult to deal with ask a third party to act on their behalf.

A COPY OF THIS POLICY IS AVAILABLE IN LARGE PRINT ON REQUEST