Outcomes First Group.

Acorn Education Options Autism

# Papworth Hall School
# COMPLAINTS POLICY

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**Terminology:** Please note that the terms “our teams” and ”team member/s” include everyone working with the people in Outcomes First Group’s services in a paid or unpaid capacity, including employees, volunteers, consultants, agency staff and contractors.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This complaints procedure is written in line with the:

- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (England)
- Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 and
- Registration of Independent Schools in Scotland Guidance

The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year will be made available on the school’s website.

Please also see the Parent/Carer-School Communication Policy

**If there is reason to believe that a pupil has been harmed or is at risk of harm the School Safeguarding Policy must be followed.**

## 2.0 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 generally defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.’

It is in everyone’s interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally (Stage 1), without the need to invoke formal procedures (Stages 2 & 3). We take all concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve any matter raised, as quickly as possible.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Ensure that decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

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

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

## 3.0 WHO CAN MAKE A COMPLAINT

Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services provided, unless separate procedures apply (including Suspensions or Exclusions, Admissions, Safeguarding, Whistleblowing and Grievances).

**The complainant** will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication Promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not approach individual governors about the complaint
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

**The Investigator:** An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts.
They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the headteacher or complaints committee, which includes the facts and potential solutions

**The complaints co-ordinator** can be:

- The headteacher
- The designated complaints governor / Regional Director

**The complaints co-ordinator** will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with team members, the headteacher, chair of governors, and clerk
- Keep records
- Be aware of issues relating to:
- Sharing third-party information
- Additional support needed by complainants; for example, interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person

## 4.0 COMPLAINTS FROM PARENTS/CARERS

The procedures set out below only relate to complaints from parents of pupils, i.e., persons for whom education is being provided at the school. The process set out below does not cover complaints from parents of pupils who have left (except in cases where the complaints process was started when the pupil was still being educated at the school).

It is expected that complaints are made as soon as possible after an incident arises (although three months is generally considered to be an acceptable time frame in which to lodge a complaint). The procedures below will be followed in the event of a complaint being made by parents or carers against the school (complaints are not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school).

## 5.0 INFORMAL COMPLAINT (STAGE 1)

If parents or carers have a complaint against the school, they may initially wish to contact the school informally either by telephone, in writing or personally after making an appointment (please see page 7 for contact details).

Our school will take informal complaints seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue. The school will ask the complainant what they think might resolve the issue.

The school will consider and resolve as quickly, and efficiently as possible the complaint and will respond with the outcome **within 10 working days** of receiving the complaint. Where further investigations are necessary that may exceed this period, amended time limits will be communicated with an explanation for the delay.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

## 6.0 FORMAL COMPLAINT (STAGE 2)

If parents or carers are not satisfied with the response at Stage 1, they should write formally to the Headteacher of the school (see end of document for contact details). If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office (please see page 7 for contact details).

The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email).

The Headteacher will act as the complaints coordinator and will appoint an Investigator – a Senior Individual to investigate the complaint further and respond in writing **within 10 working days** of receiving the formal complaint in writing. Where further investigations are necessary that may exceed this period, amended times will be communicated with an explanation for the delay.

If the complaint is against the Headteacher, the complaint should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, also known as the 'Regional Director.' ( Their contact details are at the end of the document.) The Regional Director will investigate and respond within **20 working days** of receiving the formal written complaint.

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

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

## 7.0 FORMAL COMPLAINT (STAGE 3)

1. If the parents or carers are not satisfied with the response from Stage 2, they should inform the School's / Regional Director who will arrange a panel to hear the complaint.
2. The panel will comprise three people not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one member of the panel will be independent of the running and management of the school. The member should not only be outside the school's workforce, and not a member of governing body/proprietorial body, but also should not be otherwise involved with the management of the school.
3. The date of the panel meeting will consider the availability of the parents or carers as well as the school and will take place **within 30 working days** of receiving formal notification that the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the stage 2 complaint, and their desire to proceed to stage 3.
4. Parents or carers will be invited to bring with them another person or persons to support

   them at the panel hearing if they wish. The panel hearing does not confer a right on a parent to have a legal representative to make representations on their behalf at the hearing.
5. The panel will hear the complaint and will hear the outcome of the school's investigations and its response to these. The panel will then make findings and recommendations which will be communicated in writing **within 10 working days** of the conclusion of the hearing to the Proprietor, Director of Education, the Headteacher, the parent or carer and, where appropriate, the person complained about. The panel can:
   - Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
   - Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part
   - If the complaint is upheld, the committee will:
   - Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
   - Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future
6. If a parent does not exercise the right to attend a panel hearing, the panel will meet in line with this policy. The school's arrangements for the panel hearing will be reasonable to facilitate the parent(s) exercising the right of attendance.
7. A written record of all complaints and their resolution, whether they proceeded to a panel hearing or not, will be kept on the school premises by the Headteacher (Equality Act 2010) and made available to the Proprietor and Ofsted inspectors on request. The school will record the progress of the complaint and the outcome. These records and any correspondence relating to a complaint will remain confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Education Act requests access to the records.
8. The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year will be published on the school website. Only level 2 and level 3 complaints will be published.

## 8.0 COMPLAINTS FROM PUPILS

The procedures below will be followed in the event of a pupil making a complaint against a team member, a fellow pupil, or any other person or situation either in school or outside.

- Pupils may wish to talk to an adult they trust about a situation relating to school or to a situation outside school. Within school, pupils may talk to any team member and are encouraged to share any concerns.
- Pupils are reminded that there may be occasions where information will have to be referred to other agencies for safeguarding reasons.
- A pupil may merely need a trusted adult to talk a situation through with and may not be making a formal complaint. However, all actual complaints made by pupils will be recorded by the team member in the Complaints Log. The school response to the complaint will also be recorded. If the complaint is serious the pupil's parents/carers/those with parental responsibility will be informed of both the complaint and the outcome. Some complaints may need to be referred to other agencies such as the Local Authority. If necessary, a meeting will be called to discuss the issues further.
- A pupil may ask to speak to an adult from an outside agency. The school will, wherever possible, put the pupil in contact with a representative of the appropriate agency. The referral will be noted in the pupil's file.
- If the complaint is an allegation against a team member the school's Safeguarding Policy and Group's Managing Allegations against Staff Policy & Procedure must be followed, in addition to recording the complaint. Failure to follow this process may result in disciplinary action.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- despite offers of assistance, refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint.
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure.
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be considered and commented on, or 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 team members 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 that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education.
- seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated, and stressful contact with team members regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:

- maliciously
- aggressively
- using threats, intimidation, or violence
- using abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language
- knowing it to be false
- using falsified information
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

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 Regional Director will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' evaluation.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable, 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 6 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.

We welcome your feedback and our contact details can be found below.

**9.0 CONTACT DETAILS**

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| **Contact details for School Office** | 01223 641760<br>infopapworth@papworthhallschool.co.uk |
| **Contact information for the Headteacher** | Karen Page<br>Papworth Hall School<br>Ermine Street South<br>Papworth Everard, Cambridge<br>CB23 3RD<br>Karen.Page@papworthhallschool.co.uk |
| **Contact information for the Chair of Governors / Regional Director** | John Shanahan<br>Assistant Regional Director<br>Papworth Hall School<br>Ermine Street South<br>Papworth Everard, Cambridge<br>CB23 3RD<br>John.Shanahan@ofgl.co.uk |

**We are part of the Outcomes First Group Family, by working together we will build incredible futures by empowering vulnerable children, young people and adults in the UK to be happy and make their way in the world.**

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