

Complaints Procedure

(Includes Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints)

Aspire Federation



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Next review: October 2024

Signed: ... 

Name: Laura Martin
(Executive Headteacher)

Date: ...17.10.23.....

Signed: ... 

Name: Peter Hilton
(Chair of Governors)

Date: ...17.10.23.....

1 Introduction

- 1.1 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. The Aspire Federation takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.
- 1.2 This procedure sought advice from the Department for Education through its document, [Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/544221/Best-practice-guidance-for-school-complaints-procedures-2020.pdf), updated 15 January 2021. In accordance with section 29 of the [Education Act 2002 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/26/section/29), all maintained schools must have and publish procedures to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides, for which there are no separate (statutory) procedures.
- 1.3 There is a difference between 'legal requirement' and 'good practice'. In this document, we use:
- must - where the school has a legal duty to do (or not do) something
 - can - where the school has a legal power (not a duty) to do something
 - should - for guidance on best practice

2. Who can make a complaint?

- 2.1 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 the school provides. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), this complaints procedure will be used.

3. The difference between a concern and a complaint

- 3.1 The Aspire Federation is clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint.

A concern may be treated 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'.

4. How to raise a concern or make a complaint

- 4.1 A concern or complaint may be made in person, by telephone or in writing. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.
- 4.2 Concerns should firstly be raised with the class teacher. Most matters of concern can be dealt with in this way. A class teacher should make him/herself available to a parent/carer within two school days. Notes should be kept by the class teacher of the concern as perceived by the parent/carer, the agreed actions – with time scale - to be taken to resolve the issue, an outline of the outcomes of the actions and how the issue

is going to be monitored. The class teacher must share the notes with the Head of School.

If the person raising the concern has difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, their views will be respected. In these cases, the school's Administrators will refer them to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, they will refer to a member of the leadership team and then the Head of School. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

- 4.3 It is understood, however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, The Aspire Federation will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.
- 4.4 Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.
- 4.5 Complaints against school staff (except for the Executive Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Executive Headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- 4.6 Complaints that involve or are about the Head of School should be addressed to the Executive Headteacher, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- 4.7 Complaints that involve or are about the Executive Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, Mr P Hilton, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- 4.8 Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to Mr N Manders-Jones (the Clerk to the Governing Body) via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- 4.9 For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure (See Appendix A). If help is required in completing the form, please contact the school office. A third party or organisations like the Citizens Advice may help.
- 4.10 In accordance with equality law, the school 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.

5. Anonymous complaints

- 5.1 Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated; however, the Executive Headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

6. Time scales

- 6.1 A complaint must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. Complaints made outside of this time frame will be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

7. Complaints received outside of term time

- 7.1 Complaints made outside of term time will be considered to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

8. Scope of Complaints Procedure

- 8.1 This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by The Aspire Federation, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to schools Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Lincolnshire County Council Education Team
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under the 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: Tel: 01522 554674 Email address LSCP_LADO@lincolnshire.gov.uk
Exclusion of children from school *	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions *complaints about the application of the Behaviour and Rewards Policy can be made through the school's Complaints Policy
Whistleblowing	There is an internal whistleblowing procedure for all employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers 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. They may also be able to complain direct to

	the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of their 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. 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.
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
National Curriculum Content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

8.2 If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on the school's ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

8.3 If a complainant commences legal action against The Aspire Federation in relation to their complaint, the school will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

9. Resolving complaints

9.1 At each stage in the procedure, The Aspire Federation wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, the school will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, the school 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 the school 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.

10. Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

11. The Complaints Procedure

11.1 At The Aspire Federation, there are two stages to the complaints procedure.

Stage 1: formal complaints must be made to the Executive Headteacher (unless they are about the Executive Headteacher) via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing using the Complaint Form in Appendix A, or by telephone.

Stage 2: the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1 and wishes to take the complaint further.

12. Stage 1.

12.1

- i. The Executive Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within three school days.
- ii. Within this response, the Executive Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Executive Headteacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.
- iii. Note: The Executive Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team, such as the Head of School, but not the decision to be taken.
- iv. During the investigation, the Executive Headteacher (or investigator) will:
 - if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
 - keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.
- v. At the conclusion of their investigation, the Executive Headteacher will provide a formal written response within ten school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the Executive Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.
- vi. The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions The Aspire Federation will take to resolve the complaint.
- vii. The Executive Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

12.2 Complaints about the Executive Headteacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk, via the school office using the Complaints Form in Appendix A. A suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

12.3 If the complaint is:

- about the Chair or Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

13. Stage 2

13.1 If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the governing body's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

- 13.2 A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within five school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within three school days. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.
- 13.3 The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.
- 13.4 If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk 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.
- 13.5 The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from The Aspire Federation available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.
- 13.6 The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.
- 13.7 If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, it is not encouraged for either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.
- 13.8 Note: 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.
- 13.9 Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.
- 13.10 At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk 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 five school days before the meeting.
- 13.11 Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least five school days 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.

- 13.12 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.
- 13.13 The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.
- 13.14 The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
 - dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
 - where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.
- 13.15 The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and The Aspire Federation with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within five school days. The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by The Aspire Federation.
- 13.16 If the complaint is:
- about the Chair or
 - the entire governing body or
 - the majority of the governing body
- Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent governors.
- 13.17 The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions The Aspire Federation will take to resolve the complaint.
- 13.18 The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied by writing to the Department for Education (see 5.2)

14. Next Steps

- 14.1 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 2.

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

- 14.2 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.

15. Roles and Responsibilities

15.1 Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

15.2 Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - o sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - o interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - o consideration of records and other relevant information
 - o analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Executive Headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The Executive Headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

15.3 Complaints Co-ordinator (this could be the Executive Headteacher / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, Executive Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:

- o sharing third party information
- o additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

15.4 Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

15.5 Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

15.6 Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so no governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

It is recognised that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting

Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.

- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

Appendix A: The Aspire Federation Complaint Form

Please complete and return to this form to the Executive Headteacher (Mrs Martin) via the school office.

If the complaint is about the Executive Headteacher, return the completed form to the Chair of Governors (Mr Hilton) via the school office.

If the complaint is about the Chair of Governors or an individual governor, please return the completed form to The Clerk of Governors via the school office.

In all cases mark the envelope as 'Private and Confidential'.

Receipt of your complaint will be acknowledged and an explanation will be given as to what action will be taken.

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to the pupil:

Your Address:

Your postcode:

Your daytime telephone number:

Your evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it:

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? (who did you speak to and what was their response?)

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

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

Your signature:

Today's date:

Official Use:

Date acknowledgement sent:

By Who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

16. Introduction

16.1 The Aspire Federation is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. It will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, it will not expect its staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

16.2 Unreasonable behaviour

The Aspire Federation defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders its 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 complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect 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 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 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.

16.3 Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the 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 Executive Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Executive Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact The Aspire Federation causing a significant

level of disruption, the school may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the school will immediately inform the police and communicate its actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from The Aspire Federation schools.

17. Monitoring and review of the Complaints Procedure

- 17.1 Following the closure of Stage 1 complaints, they will be reviewed with the Governing Board in order to ensure that all complaints are handled according to procedure. When individual complaints are heard, the school identifies underlying issues (if any) that need to be addressed. The monitoring and review of complaints by the school and the governing body is a useful tool in evaluating a school's performance.
- 17.2 This policy is made available to all parents/carers on the school's website and as a paper copy on request, so that they can be properly informed about the complaints procedure. At least once an academic year, the school's newsletter reminds parents/carers of the value of sharing their concerns with a class teacher or the Head of School and/or Executive Headteacher from the outset.
- 17.3 This policy will be reviewed in October 2024 or sooner and with regard to any guidance given from time to time by the Department for Education. The People, Finance and Premises Committee will be responsible for reviewing the policy which, in turn, must be ratified by the full governing body