



Challenge, Equality & Opportunity

Complaints Policy and Procedure 2024

Approved by:	Governing body	Date: October 2024
Last reviewed on:		
Next review due by:	October 2026	

In this policy, 'parents' refers to parents and carers of children on roll at the school

Principles

The school's priority is to serve the needs of pupils, parents and the local community. We try to serve as efficiently and as courteously as possible but we recognise that things can go wrong. We welcome complaints and comments as an opportunity to improve the quality of the services we offer and we assure parents that they and their child will not be compromised if they raise a concern or a complaint.

In following the complaints policy, the following general principles will apply:

- We hope to be able to settle differences informally;
- We recognise the need for more formal mechanisms for dealing fairly and effectively with complaints which have proved impossible to settle informally;
- We are committed to open communication of the complaints procedure to parents, staff and governors
- We will not tolerate abusive or vexatious behaviour from complainants, whether written (including social media), verbal or physical

Should any parent have difficulty in speaking English or writing please contact the school office in the first instance or you can request support from Newcastle City Council Governor Services, Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8PU who can signpost you to appropriate support.

Introduction

This document sets out the procedures that should be followed when raising a concern or a complaint in Havannah First School.

There are 4 possible stages to the complaints process.

If you have a concern or a complaint about an issue with our school, then you should follow the appropriate procedures as set out below.

Individual complaints will not be heard by the whole Governing Body at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any potential panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff should this follow the outcome of a serious complaint.

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

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent 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.

The 4 stages of our complaint procedure

Stage 1 (informal):

Initial raising of a concern or a complaint

Concerns should initially be raised with the class teacher, the School Office or another member of staff. The School recognises that first contact with the school can be very important in the successful resolution of issues and every effort will be made to try and resolve things informally at this stage. You are welcome to talk to the Headteacher also if you think that the matter can be resolved by seeking information or asking for clarification from the Headteacher.

Complaints can be raised verbally, by email or in writing. The School will respect the views of any complainant who indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. In such cases, you should ask to speak to the School Office, the Headteacher or another senior member of staff and your concern will be referred to another appropriate staff member.

If your complaint concerns the Headteacher, complainants should direct their concerns to the Chair of Governors.

The School will also respect the interests of its staff and if the member of staff initially involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the School will make arrangements to refer the complainant to another appropriate staff member.

Generally, complaints should not be made through school governors, as they may need to become involved in the resolution of issue(s) at a later point.

Our Governors will not act on an individual basis and if Governors are approached at this stage, they will be expected to direct any concerns back through the appropriate school procedures.

What the Class Teacher / Staff Member of staff will do

The Teacher or member of staff initially approached, will try and resolve the matter or provide an explanation as to what has happened. The School will make every effort to resolve all concerns informally at this early stage.

Timescale for a response (Stage 1)

At this stage, you should expect to receive a response to your concern or complaint at an early stage and within 15 school days of raising the matter. We will usually act immediately.

Stage 2 (formal) - Complaint Investigated by the Headteacher

If a complainant still remains dissatisfied after Stage 1, then the complaint should be raised with the Headteacher. The Headteacher may delegate the task of collating of information relating to the matter to another staff member but will retain the responsibility for any decision(s) or any action(s) to be taken.

At Havannah First School, you should seek to raise your concerns with the Headteacher by making contact with the Headteacher in person or via the office by telephone, email or letter.

What the Headteacher will do:

The Headteacher will investigate your concerns and will notify you of the outcome and any decisions taken in relation to your complaint.

Following an appropriate investigation, the Headteacher may choose to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology
- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that the event complained of will not happen again
- Feedback on any outcomes such as an improvement in service, an agreement to review or amend a policy or an explanation as to why the actions of the school did / did not comply with LA or school policy
- Information on any further recourse through the chair of governors and / or the details of how the complaint can be progressed further.

Timescale for a response (Stage 2):

At this stage, you should expect to receive a response from the Headteacher within 15 school days of receipt of your complaint.

Stage 3 (formal) - Complaint Heard by Chair of Governors

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response from the Headteacher or the complaint is about the Headteacher, the complainant should write to the Chair of Governors to request that their complaint is considered further.

At Havannah First School, you should seek to raise your concerns with the Chair of Governors by one of the following methods

- Submitting a complaint in writing via the school office – the complaint should be addressed for the attention of the Chair of Governors
- Contact and send your written complaint via Newcastle City Council Governor Services, Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8PU, who will forward your complaint on to the Chair of Governors.

What the Chair of Governors will do:

The Chair of Governors will review the matter and will either provide the complainant with an appropriate response, or will arrange for an Appeal Panel of governors to meet and consider the matter further.

Timescale for a response (Stage 3):

At this stage, you should expect to receive a response from the Chair of Governors within 15 school days of receipt of your complaint.

Stage 4 (formal): Complaint Heard by the Governing Body's Complaints Appeal Panel

If it has not been possible to resolve the complaint at any of the earlier stages, then the Chair of Governors will arrange for a Governors' Appeal Panel to formally review the matter.

Complainants need to be aware that Governor Complaint appeal hearings are formal processes. All parties directly involved have the right to provide evidence statements and to call appropriate witnesses. Complainants will have the right to bring someone along for support, but that person will not be allowed to participate in the appeal hearing itself.

The Chair (or a nominated Governor) will arrange:

- For an Appeal Panel to be set up, usually consisting of three governors or independent members, who have had no prior involvement in the matter.
- For the appointment of an appropriate Clerk for the Meeting

The normal process for an Appeal Hearing will be as follows:

- The Clerk will write to all concerned to provide details of when and where the meeting will be held and to request copies of any written submissions of evidence to be provided (usually by at least a week prior to the meeting). This evidence will then be provided to all parties concerned.
- The Appeal Panel will hear the submissions of evidence from all parties and will allow for each side to raise questions and provide any witnesses at an appropriate point in the proceedings.
- After the appropriate submissions have been received, the Appeal Panel will then withdraw and consider its decision(s).

What the Appeal Panel will do:

The Panel may choose to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

Timescale for a response (stage 4):

In most cases, the Panel will communicate its decision(s) and reason(s) in writing – usually within one week of the Appeal Hearing meeting.

Dealing with specific issues

Complaint about the Headteacher

If your complaint is about the Headteacher, or the actions/decisions taken by the Headteacher, then you should put your complaint in writing directly to the Chair of Governors, giving the reasons for your concerns. This can be done by submitting your written complaint (addressed to the Chair of Governors) either via the school office, or by contacting Newcastle Governor Services, Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8PU who will forward your complaint on to the Chair.

What the Chair of Governors will do: The Chair of Governors will review the matter and will either provide the complainant with an appropriate response, or will arrange for an Appeal Panel of governors to meet and consider the matter further. The Chair of Governors may also seek further advice and guidance from the Local Authority or an external consultant.

Timescale for a response (Stage 3): At this stage, you should expect to receive a response from the Chair of Governors within 15 school days of receipt of your complaint.

Complaint about a Governor

If your complaint is about a Governor, then you should put your complaint in writing directly to the Chair of Governors, giving the reasons for your concerns. This can be done by submitting your written complaint (addressed to the Chair of Governors) either via the school office, or by contacting Newcastle Governor Services, Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8PU, who will forward your complaint on to the Chair.

What the Chair of Governors will do: The Chair of Governors will review the matter and will either provide the complainant with an appropriate response, or will arrange for a Panel of governors to meet and consider the matter further. The Chair of Governors may also seek further advice and guidance from the Local Authority or an external consultant.

Timescale for a response (Stage 3): At this stage, you should expect to receive a response from the Chair of Governors within 15 school days of receipt of your complaint.

Complaint about the Chair of Governors

If your complaint is about the Chair of Governors, then the Governing Body will need to assign a specified governor to deal with the matter. This will usually be the Vice-Chair of Governors.

You should put your complaint in writing to the Vice-Chair of Governors. This can be done by submitting your written complaint via the school office, or by contacting Newcastle Governor Services, Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8PU who will forward your complaint on to the Vice-Chair.

What the Vice-Chair of Governors will do: The Vice-Chair of Governors will review the matter and will either provide the complainant with an appropriate response, or will arrange for an Appeal Panel of governors to meet and consider the matter further. The Vice-Chair of Governors may also seek further advice and guidance from the Local Authority or an external consultant.

Timescale for a response (Stage 3): At this stage, you should expect to receive a response from the Vice-Chair of Governors within 15 school days of receipt of your complaint.

Anonymous complaints

The School recognises that for a variety of reasons, some complainants wish to remain anonymous. However, in such cases, the school reserves the right to ignore the concerns being raised and in most circumstances, no further action will be taken. However, the school also reserves the right to retain some of the information raised in any anonymous complaint to support the future analysis of trends and behaviour etc.

Closure of the Complaint

The Governor's Appeal Panel represents the final stage in the School's complaints policy and the decision of the appeal panel is final. Should a complainant still remain dissatisfied with the outcome, then complainants should be advised that the only remaining option will be for the complainant to raise the matter further with The Secretary of State for Education. Write to: Ministerial and Public Communications Division, Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD Email: ministers@education.gsi.gov.uk. Telephone: 0370 000 2288. Website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>

Using Complaints to Improve Practice

Annually, a brief summary of any formal complaints will be collected in school and taken to the Full Governing Body Meeting. It will detail:

- the number of complaints;
- the subjects concerned;
- the time taken to resolve complaints;
- the assessment of complainant satisfaction;
- changes/improvements brought about as a result of reviewing the complaints.