The Henslow and Evolution School

Complaints Policy and Procedures

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1. Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of students at the school and any other stakeholder or linked professional.

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
- Make sure that any 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 concerns or 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, if they feel they wish to.

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

In line with the Equality Act 2010, the school will make reasonable adjustments for complainants where required. The school embraces difference and equality in everything it teaches young people and this ethos will also be applied when dealing with complaints. This may include providing translated documents, interpreters, accessible formats, advocacy support or adjustments to meeting arrangements.

2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of students at the school.

It is also based on guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE) on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations, and refers to good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures from the DfE.

3. Definitions and scope

3.1 Definitions

The 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”
- A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”

3.2 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.

Anonymous complaints will generally not be investigated. However, the school reserves the right to investigate anonymous complaints where the matter relates to safeguarding, student welfare, health and safety, unlawful discrimination or any issue considered sufficiently serious by the Headteacher or Proprietorial Board.

The school recognises that students may also wish to raise complaints and will ensure that complaints can be made in a manner appropriate to the student's age, understanding and communication needs.

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

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters *
- Permanent exclusion (complaints about a suspension, or from a parent of a pupil still on roll, can be made under this policy)
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

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

*Safeguarding concerns should be raised immediately with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or Headteacher and will be managed in accordance with the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

3.3 Data protection complaints

A complaint about how the school has used someone’s personal data will be handled under this policy, and in line with section 164A of the Data Protection Act 2018. For these complaints we will help the person make the

complaint, acknowledge it within 30 days, investigate it without undue delay and tell them the outcome promptly. The person can also complain to the Information Commission.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The complainant

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

Complainants are asked to avoid publishing confidential information relating to complaints on social media whilst the complaints process is ongoing.

4.2 The investigator and complaint co-ordinator

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 which includes the facts and potential solutions
- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the headteacher, chair of proprietors and CEO
- 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
- Keep records

4.3 The Head teacher

The head teacher will;

- Ensure complaints are managed in accordance with this policy.
- Monitor complaint trends
- Report complaint themes to proprietors.
- Promote resolution at the earliest appropriate stage

4.4 The Administrator

The administrator will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings

- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

4.5 Committee chair

The committee chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

5. 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

5.1 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 out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the time scales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

6. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the headteacher or proprietors)

6.1 Stage 1: informal

The school will take informal concerns 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 complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Headteacher, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the administrator in the school office by phone for The Henslow School on 01938 739077 or for Evolution School on 01743 850517.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 3 school days and investigate and provide a response within 10 school days. (For the purposes of this policy, "school days" means days when the school is open to students during term time).

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the Headteacher or a member of staff they nominate. Complaints about the Headteacher follow section 7. In this meeting all parties will be invited to explore and discuss the issues honestly and openly with the aim of resolving the complaint.

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

6.2 Stage 2: formal

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint to the Headteacher and/or the subject of the complaint stating that they wish to escalate it to a formal complaint:

- In a letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on their behalf

If a formal complaint is made over the phone or in person, the Headteacher will write it down and send it to the complainant to check. The confirmed written record is the formal complaint.

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office by phone for The Henslow School on 01938 739077 or for Evolution School on 01743 850517.

The Head teacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.

The Headteacher (or other person appointed by the Headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 10 school days. If the matter is complex and more time is needed for a full investigation, then this extension will be clearly stated in writing between the complainant and the Headteacher but should not exceed 20 school days.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the proprietor, Mandy Clarke, Chief Operating Officer, New Reflexions, on 01939 210040 or email mandy.clarke@newreflexions.co.uk

6.3 Stage 3: review panel

Convening the panel

Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal, stage.

The panel will consist of at least three people who have had no prior involvement in the complaint. At least one member will be completely independent of the management and running of the school and of the proprietor.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 10).

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The panel will meet within 15 school days of the request, unless the complainant agrees to a later date.

If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the administrator will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the meeting.

At the meeting

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 will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish. We don't encourage either party to bring legal representation but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and headteacher.

The outcome

The committee 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

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 10 school days.

7. Complaints against the headteacher, a proprietor or the proprietorial board

7.1 Stage 1: informal

Complaints made against the Headteacher, or any member of the proprietorial board should be directed to the proprietor: Mandy Clarke, Chief Operating Officer, or Rob Arrowsmith, Director of Education, New Reflexions, on 01939 210040 or by email to mandy.clarke@newreflexions.co.uk or rob.arrowsmith@newreflexions.co.uk.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher or one member of the proprietorial board (including the chair), a suitably skilled and impartial person will carry out the steps at stage 1 (set out in section 6 above).

7.2 Stage 2: formal

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, the Director of Education, or another senior member of New Reflexions staff with no prior involvement appointed by the Chief Operating Officer, will carry out the steps at stage 2 (set out in section 6 above) and write a formal response at the end of the investigation.

If the complaint is:

- about the chair
- The entire proprietorial board or
- The majority of the proprietorial board

An independent person will carry out the steps in stage 2 (set out in section 6 above). They will be appointed by the proprietorial board and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation.

7.3 Stage 3: review panel

If the complaint is:

- about the chair
- The entire proprietorial board or
- The majority of the proprietorial board

A group of individuals not already connected to the complaint or location of the complaint will hear the complaint. They will be agreed in discussion with the complainant. At least one member will be fully independent: not employed by New Reflexions or any of its schools, and not otherwise involved in the management of the school. The panel will carry out the steps at stage 3 (set out in section 6 above).

8. Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure and the complaint is regarding the school not meeting standards set by the DfE in any of the following areas, the complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE:

- Education
- Student welfare and health and safety
- School premises
- Staff suitability
- Making information available to parents
- The spiritual, moral, social or cultural development of students

The Department for Education does not normally reinvestigate complaints. It will consider whether the school has complied with the Independent School Standards and has followed its published complaints procedure.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

9. Unreasonable and Persistent complaints

9.1 Unreasonable complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- 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 DfE
- 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

Please note: the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It is at the discretion of the school what is deemed to be unreasonable.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school 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.

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

Whenever possible, the head teacher or chair of the proprietal board will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues, the head teacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as Citizens Advice
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

Stopping responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from our school site.

9.2 Serial/Persistent complaints

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. We may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:

- We have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts the school repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

The case to stop responding is stronger if:

- The complainant's communications are often or always abusive or aggressive
- The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff
- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

Where we decide to stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will consider any new complaints they make provided the concerns raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern.

9.3 Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

9.4 Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

10. 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.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a subject access request under the terms of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

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 policy/record retention schedule.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole proprietorial board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the proprietorial board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

The school will maintain a written record of all formal complaints and whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage, formal stage or panel stage, and the action taken as a result, regardless of whether the complaint was upheld. This record will be made available to inspectors on request.

The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year is published on each school's website with this policy.

11. Learning lessons

The school will annually analyse complaints data to identify recurring themes, systemic issues, equality considerations, communication concerns and safeguarding trends to inform quality assurance and school improvement planning.

12. Monitoring arrangements

The Headteacher and proprietorial board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The Headteacher will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 11.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the Headteacher

This policy will be reviewed by the Headteacher and proprietorial board annually or sooner if there are significant changes in legislation, statutory guidance or inspection requirements.

At each review, the policy will be approved by the proprietorial board.

13. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Permanent Exclusion and Suspension policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- SEND policy and information report
- Privacy notices

Date reviewed	August 2026
Next review	August 2027
Reviewed by	Head Teacher and Proprietors

14. Log of Complaints made

Academic year	Complaints Made
2016 – 2017	No complaints
2017 – 2018	No complaints
2018 – 2019	No complaints
2019 – 2020	No complaints
2020 – 2021	No complaints
2021 - 2022	No complaints
2022 – 2023	One complaint (informal)
2023 - 2024	One complaint (relating to care staff)
2024 – 2025	One complaint (informal)
2025 – 2026	No complaints