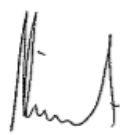




The Bridge Short Stay School

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Lead responsibility for policy	A Stewart Date: February 2023
Approved (Head Teacher)	 Date: February 2023
Approved (Chair of Management Committee)	N/A
Date policy due for renewal	February 2025

Complaints Policy

1. Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

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
- 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.

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

2. Who Can make a Complaint?

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 to The Bridge Short Stay School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

3. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements of section 29 of the Education Act 2002, which states that schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides.

It is also based on guidance for schools on complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE).

4. Definitions and scope

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”.

The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.

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

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 Bridge Short Stay School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Headteacher, will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, The Bridge Short Stay School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- School re-organisation proposals
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline
- Content of the National Curriculum
- Services from other providers who use school premises or facilities

Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with SEN about the school’s support are within the scope of this policy. Such

complaints should first be made to the SENDCO: Ms Kate Roberts, they will then if necessary be referred to this complaints policy. Our SEN policy and information report includes information about the rights of parents of pupils with disabilities who believe that our school has discriminated against their child.

5. How to Raise a Concern or Make a Complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the relevant member of staff or headteacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

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 3 of the procedure.

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

Complaints that are about the headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of the Management Committee, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of the Management Committee, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to Sue Knight (the Clerk to the Governing Body) via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

In accordance with equality law, we 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.

6. Anonymous Complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the headteacher or Chair of the Management Committee, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

7. 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

We also intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits will be set for each action within each stage.

Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set, and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline with an explanation for the delay.

The school expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and no later than 3 months afterwards. 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.

Where complaints are received outside of term time these will be considered to have been received on the first day of term

If a complainant commences legal action against The Bridge Short Stay School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

8. Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure, The Bridge Short Stay School wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we 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 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.

9. Withdrawal of Complaints

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

10. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the Headteacher or a governor)

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 concern as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Headteacher as appropriate, 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 school office.

The school will acknowledge informal concerns within 5 school days, and investigate and provide a response within 15 school days.

The informal stage will involve investigation by the member of staff receiving the concern and may include a meeting between the complainant and the investigator and requests for further details of the concern, as appropriate.

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

Stage 2: Formal

Inform the Headteacher in writing

This should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents and will ideally be provided on the template available from the school office. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher (or designated member of the senior leadership team) will call a meeting to clarify concerns, and seek a resolution. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting, and should inform the school of the identity of their companion in advance.

In certain circumstances, the school may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case, the school will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment.

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 20 school days.

Stage 3: Submit the complaint to the review panel

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the chair of the Management Committee in writing within 20 days.

This letter should set out the details of the complaint including evidence as set out above. The complainant should also specify what they feel would resolve the complaint, and how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently.

The review panel will consist of at least 3 members of the Management Committee. These individuals will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel; however, the review panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. 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 by a suitable companion if they wish.

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 will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representatives have completed presenting their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel must then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide a copy of the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the subject of the complaint, and make a copy of the findings and recommendations available for inspection by the Headteacher.

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 20 school days.

11. Complaints against the Headteacher or a governor

Where a complaint regards the Headteacher, the complainant should first directly approach the Headteacher in an attempt to resolve the issue informally. If the complainant is not satisfied with this outcome they should

notify the clerk to the governors. The Stage 2 process will then commence, but with the chair of the Management Committee as the individual responsible for the investigation rather than the Headteacher.

Where a complaint regards a governor, the same process applies as for the Headteacher. Where a complaint concerns the Chair of the Management Committee, the individual should contact the clerk to the governors. Informal resolution will be sought, but where this fails, the complaints procedure at Stage 3 will take immediate effect. The Vice Chair will mediate any proceedings.

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

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the School Complaints Unit (SCU), which investigates complaints relating to maintained schools on behalf of the secretary of state.

The SCU will not re-investigate the matter of the complaint. It will look at whether the school's complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies that the school holds were adhered to. The SCU also looks at whether the school's statutory policies adhere to education legislation. It may direct the school to re-investigate the complaint where it is clear the school has acted unlawfully or unreasonably.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

13. Persistent complaints

Where a complainant tries to re-open the issue with the school after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the chair of governors (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

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

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The school will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, and/or
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, and/or
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint.

Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The school will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the school acts reasonably.

14. Duplicate Complaints

After closing a complaint it is possible the school will receive a duplicate complaint from, for example, a spouse, child or grandparent. If the complaint is about the same subject, The Bridge Short Stay School will write to the complainant to inform them that the school has already considered the complaint and it is considered closed. In doing so the school will ensure that there are no new aspects of the complaint that haven't previously been considered.

15. Complaint Campaigns

If the school receives a large number of complaints related to a single subject or from a number of people unconnected to the school a template response will be sent to all complainants and published on the school website

16. 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 freedom of information (FOI) request or under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept for 6 years.

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

Where the management committee 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.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the Management Committee, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

17. Learning lessons

The management committee will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

18. Monitoring arrangements

The Headteacher will report of the operation of this complaints policy to the management committee on a termly basis, as part of the Headteacher report.

The management committee will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The management committee will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 17.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the Office Manager.

This policy will be reviewed by the Headteacher every 2 years. At each review, the policy will be approved by the Headteacher.