

Policy Name	Complaints Policy
Policy No.	NA08
Date Written	12.01.24
Date to Review	12.01.27
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Cross Reference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions and Assessment Policy • Capability of Staff Policy • Child Protection Policy • Pupil Assessment Policy • SEND Policy

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1. 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 New Avenue 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.

We recognise, however, that parents and carers have a statutory right to raise concerns and complaints about various aspects of our school's operations, stemming from their direct contractual relationship with us. Our complaints procedure is designed to address and resolve these issues in a fair and transparent manner. While we also welcome feedback from external parties, our primary obligation is to the students and their families. Therefore, complaints from members of the public will be considered at the school's discretion and addressed as appropriate, in line with our commitment to maintaining high standards of education and welfare.

2. The Difference Between a Concern and a Complaint

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be 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. New Avenue School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly, fairly and transparently as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, one of the two **designated staff (Clare Priday and/or Anthony Merriman)** can act as your point of contact.

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the **designated staff** will be the point of contact. 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, New Avenue School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

3. How to raise a concern or 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 class teacher 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 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the headteacher) should be made in the first instance, **Anthony Merriman** (the headteacher) via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to **Teresa Coxford** (the Chair of Governors), via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

If you require help in completing a complaint form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

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.

4. Anonymous Complaints

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

5. Timescales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

6. Concerns Raised outside of Term Time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

7. Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by New Avenue School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Admissions to schools• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with <insert local authority details>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School re-organisation proposals 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). (See App. A for details)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i></p> <p><i><link to school behaviour policy></i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Curriculum - content 	<p>Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus</p>

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

If a complainant commences legal action against New Avenue 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, New Avenue 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

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

Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the headteacher (unless they are about the headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing, or by telephone.

The headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 2 school days.

Within this response, the headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the 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.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within 14 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

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 New Avenue School will take to resolve the complaint.

The headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the headteacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Chair of Governors.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair
- 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.

Stage 2

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 two impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to Teresa Coxford, via email, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

Teresa Coxford will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 2 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

Teresa Coxford will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, Teresa Coxford will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, Teresa Coxford 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.

The complaints committee will consist of at least two 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 two governors from New Avenue School available, Teresa Coxford 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.

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.

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, we do not encourage 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.

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.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, Teresa Coxford 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 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 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.

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.

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.

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.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and New Avenue School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 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.

If the complaint is:

- jointly 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.

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 New Avenue School will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

10. Next Steps

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 New Avenue School. They will consider whether New Avenue School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

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.

Updates	
Dates	Comments

Appendix A – Key Details

Authority	Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Contact	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Contact
Southampton	- Phone: 023 8091 5535 / 07500 952 037 - Email: lado@southampton.gov.uk	- Phone: 023 8083 3336 - Email: mash@southampton.gov.uk - Out of Hours Phone: 023 8023 3344
Hampshire	- Phone: 01962 876364 - Email: child.protection@hants.gov.uk	- Phone: 0300 555 1384 (Mon-Thurs: 8:30 am – 5:00 pm; Fri: 8:30 am – 4:30 pm) - Out of Hours Phone: 0300 555 1373
Portsmouth	- Phone: 023 9288 2500 - Email: LADO@portsmouthcc.gov.uk	- Phone: 023 9268 8793 - Email: mash@portsmouthcc.gov.uk - Out of Hours Phone: 0300 555 1373
Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole (BCP)	- Phone: 01202 817600 - Email: LADO@bcpcouncil.gov.uk	- Phone: 01202 123334 - Email: childrensfirstresponse@bcpcouncil.gov.uk - Out of Hours Phone: 01202 738256 - Out of Hours Email: childrensoohs@bcpcouncil.gov.uk