



HEATHFIELD SCHOOLS' PARTNERSHIP

Complaints Policy & Procedure

Definition of terms used:

Concern: an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought.

Complaint: an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.

A complaint will typically follow a concern being raised, if it is felt that the concern has not been resolved informally, however this is not always the case. A concern is typically understood to be at a lower level or initial stage.

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 complaint's procedure. Heathfield Schools Partnership takes all concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Who can raise a concern or make a complaint?

Any person, including members of the public, parents and carers, can raise a concern or make a complaint to Heathfield Schools' Partnership about any services provided. Some concerns and complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions, or whistleblowing by staff members or volunteers); in other cases, we will use this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern (informal process)

A concern can be raised informally to express worry about an issue relating to the schools. Typically, the process for raising a concern will start informally, likely through an email, phone call or face to face discussion.

In most cases, concerns would initially be raised with a class teacher, especially if they relate directly to a child or class matter. Concerns can be escalated informally to the YGL or relevant Co-Head Teacher, either by the complainant or by the member of staff receiving the concern. Once the Co-Head Teacher has met with the complainant, if there continue to be concerns, the complainant will be invited to contact the other Co-Head Teacher to discuss further. This is to give a further opportunity for the concern to be addressed at this informal stage.

It is not appropriate to raise concerns, even at the informal stage, with support staff, catering staff, premises staff (unless directly relevant to the site or school building), administrative staff or volunteers.

We endeavour to respond to concerns raised in a timely manner, usually within a working week.

How to make a complaint (formal process)

Typically, a complaint will be made after a concern has been raised, if the complainant does not feel the matter has been resolved.

A formal complaint must be made in writing, either via letter or email and must be marked 'formal complaint'. Complaints can be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Formal complaints must be addressed to the Co-Head Teachers and can be handed to the school office marked 'confidential', or emailed to office@heathfield-jun.richmond.sch.uk. Complaints in relation to one of the Co-Head Teachers, can be handed to the school office for the attention of the Chair of Governors and marked 'confidential', or emailed to clerk@heathfield-jun.richmond.sch.uk. Complaints must not be sent via children attending the school.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure.

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).

Please also see the ParentKind: Parent Guide to School Complaints for guidance.

[V8- Parent Complaint Guide](#)

Complaints made using Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Complaints written using AI will be considered if they are an accurate reflection of the complainant's concerns. Complainants are encouraged to make use of AI cautiously and ensure they fully understand what they have written so that they are able to discuss it as part of the complaints process. Complainants making use of AI are reminded that they are responsible for ensuring personal data and information identifying a staff member, child or school are handled according to data protection laws.

The complaints procedure is designed to provide a forum for discussing and resolving issues in a transparent and constructive manner and the use of AI should support this process, not hinder it.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. The Co-Head Teachers and Chair of Governors will determine whether an anonymous complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last incident. We will only consider complaints made outside of this time-frame if exceptional circumstances apply, or if the complaint relates to a historical safeguarding matter.

Once a complaint has been raised, there is an expectation that every effort is made to respond and resolve the situation within set timescales (please see appendix 1 for details).

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 may result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Heathfield Schools' Partnership in relation to their complaint, the school will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to the complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Complaints received outside of term time

The school will consider complaints made outside of term time as if they were received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of facilities or services by Heathfield Schools' Partnership, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures (see appendix 4).

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Heathfield Schools Partnership actively seeks to resolve the complaint. Following an investigation, we may offer:

- an acknowledgement that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part
- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will work hard to ensure there will be no further recurrence
- 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, either from the school, the Co-Head Teachers or from the member of

staff most closely involved.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing. We will not typically reopen complaints once they have been withdrawn.

Behaviour of complainant and staff members involved within the process

We expect all concerns and complaints to be made in a manner which is constructive and respectful. We also expect the response of any staff members and governors dealing with the concern or complaint to respond in a similar manner, seeking to listen, respond and reassure the complainant wherever possible.

Whilst recognising the emotive and sometimes personal nature of a concern or complaint, we expect complainants and staff members to use language which is supportive, calm and conciliatory, avoiding discriminatory or offensive language at all times.

We reserve the right to pause communication and adjourn meetings or phone calls, if the way in which they are conducted falls short of these expectations.

Please also see the school's Policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints.

Policy agreed by governors: May 2026

Appendix 1: Stages followed in making a formal complaint

Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made in writing, either via letter or email and must be marked 'formal complaint'.

If the complaint is about one of the Co-Head Teachers or the Chair of Governors, the complaint must be made to the Clerk of the Governors, via the school office marked confidential or emailed to clerk@heathfield-jun.richmond.sch.uk. In these instances, suitable governors (including the Vice-Chair of Governors) will be selected to carry out the process outlined in stage one.

If the complaint is about the Chair and Vice-Chair jointly, or about the entire governing body or about the majority of the governing body, Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. This is likely to be a senior leader or governor from another local school.

A member of the office team will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Following the complaint being received, the Co-Head Teacher (or Chair of Governors if the complaint is about the Co-Head Teacher) will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, discuss the process that has led to a complaint being raised, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Co-Head Teacher will typically invite the complainant to attend a face-to-face meeting to establish the details of the complaint.

Following this meeting, the complaint will either be resolved to the satisfaction of both parties or an investigation will be carried out.

The investigation:

In most cases, the Co-Head Teacher will delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team (other Co-Head Teacher, Assistant Head Teacher or SENCo).

During the investigation, the investigator will:

- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained about, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation
- present the findings to the Co-Head Teacher.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the Co-Head Teacher will provide a formal written response to the complainant within 20 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. This response will include any actions taken to investigate the complaint and will provide an

explanation of the decision made and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Heathfield Schools' Partnership will take to resolve the complaint.

If the Co-Head Teacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update on actions taken thus far and give a revised response date.

Stage 2

Stage 2 is the final stage of the complaint's procedure.

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. This will involve a meeting with members of the governing body's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial governors available who have no prior involvement with the complaint.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk of the Governors, via the school office, or to clerk@heathfield-jun.richmond.sch.uk, within 4 weeks of receipt of the Stage 1 response. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 5 school days.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the Stage 2 meeting with governors. Wherever possible, this meeting will be within 20 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 of the process.

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.

The complainant is invited to bring someone along to the meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. We do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting, although there may be occasions when this is appropriate and both parties will be informed in advance. If a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union representative.

Prior to the meeting, the 3 governors will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Heathfield Schools' Partnership 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.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend meetings held under the complaint's procedure.

The Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the Clerk at least 10 school days before the meeting
- circulate written material to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting.

The committee will not accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will 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 a private area of the school.

Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Consent to record a meeting 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 Heathfield Schools' Partnership with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days following the meeting.

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 Heathfield Schools' Partnership.

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 once stage 2 has been completed.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Heathfield Schools' Partnership. They will consider

whether Heathfield Schools' Partnership 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.

Appendix 2: Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Helen Child and David Colenso (Co-Head Teachers) via the school office.

Your name:
Child's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the child (if relevant):
Address: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it (raising an informal concern, or through any other means).

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

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

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date complaint received:

Date acknowledgement sent to complainant:

Complaint referred to (Co-Head Teacher or Chair of Governors):

Date complaint passed on:

Appendix 3: Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

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

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings
- ask for assistance as needed
- respect confidentiality
- do not publicise the details of their complaint on social media (including WhatsApp) as this may prejudice the outcome of the complaint or the impartial manner in which it can be considered

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:
 - a sensitive and supportive conversation with the complainant to establish the nature of the complaint and who has been involved
 - interviews with staff, children and other people relevant to the complaint
 - consideration of other relevant information
- keeping notes of interviews or arranging for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- liaising with the complainant as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- preparing a comprehensive report for the Co-Head Teacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

Co-Head Teacher

The Co-Head Teacher will review information gathered by the investigator at Stage 1 and will determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint. The Co-Head Teacher will communicate the decision to the complainant, giving reasons for the decision and providing the appropriate escalation details.

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point in school 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, by taking accurate minutes
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair will be one of the governors hearing a complaint as part of the Stage 2 process. The committee chair will be nominated in advance of the Stage 2 Complaint meeting and should ensure that:

- the meeting is conducted in a manner which is not adversarial, and that all parties are 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, who would typically be supported by a parent/carer)
- 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.
- 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 and key findings are made clear to all
- 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 welfare of the child is paramount.

Committee Members

NB Governors may not sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation

between the school and the complainant.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Extra care needs to be taken when a child is present during part of the meeting. The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
- the committee should discuss in advance whether it is appropriate for the child to attend for part of the meeting. Parents/carers should be advised that it is not always in the best interests of the child to attend, even if this is the wish of the parent//carer.
- the welfare of the child is paramount.

Appendix 4: Complaints dealt with under other statutory procedures

Exceptions	Who to contact
<p>Admissions to schools</p> <p>Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs</p> <p>School re-organisation proposals</p>	<p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Richmond upon Thames Local Authority.</p> <p>Richmond.admissions@achievingforchildren.org.uk</p>
<p>Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation</p>	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Safeguarding Policy https://www.heathfieldschoolspartnership.org/federation/policy/safeguarding/docs/hsp-safeguarding-and-cp-policy-september-2025.pdf and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. Concerns of this nature can be made to the school following the procedure set out above, or can be made directly to the Single Point of Access https://www.richmond.gov.uk/single_point_of_access or the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) who has local responsibility for safeguarding lado@achievingforchildren.org.uk</p>
<p>Expulsion or suspension of children from school</p>	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p>The named school governors for expulsions or suspensions are: Martin Dean and Jacqueline Kelly</p> <p><i>Complaints about the application of the behaviour policy, other than those relating to an expulsion or suspension, can be made through this complaints procedure.</i></p>
<p>Whistleblowing</p>	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors https://www.heathfieldschoolspartnership.org/federation/policy/safeguarding/docs/hsp-whistleblowing-policy-2025.pdf .</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.</p> <p>Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus</p>
<p>Staff grievances</p>	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures, available in the Policies folder on the Teacher's Drive.</p>

Staff conduct	<p>Complaints about staff can be raised through this Complaints Policy and will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p><u>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint.</u> However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
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>
National Curriculum delivery or content	<p>Concerns about the manner in which the curriculum is being taught can be raised via this Complaints Procedure, initially as an informal concern. For concerns about the content or scope of the National Curriculum, please contact the Department for Education at:</p> <p>www.education.gov.uk/contactus</p>