Huntington School
Learn and succeed

POLICY ON COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES

Policy Number:	**17**
Member of Staff Responsible for the Policy:	**Matt Smith**
Date on which this Policy was last reviewed:	**February 2026**
Date by which this Policy is to be reviewed:	**February 2027**
Dissemination of the Policy:	**All Staff, Parents (via website), Governors**

CONTENTS

What to do if you have a concern or complaint	Page 2 -3
Scope of the complaints procedure	Page 3 -5
Resolving complaints	Page 5
Withdrawal of complaint	Page 5
Stage 1: Referral or investigation	Page 5-6
Stage 2: Review by the governing body	Page 7-9
Serial and unreasonable complaints	Page 9-10
Complaint form	Page 11
Addendum: Where staff conduct is involved	Page 12

1. What to do if you have a concern or complaint

1.1 Who can make a complaint?

1.1.1. 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 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.

1.2. The difference between a concern and a complaint?

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

1.2.2. A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

1.2.3. 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 school takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

1.2.4. If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases the Head Teacher will be able to refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Head Teacher will be able to 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.

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

1.3. How to raise a concern or make a complaint

1.3.1. 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.

1.3.2. Concerns should be raised with either the Class Teacher, Subject Leader, Head of Year, Senior Leader or Head Teacher, who will seek to resolve the issue. If, however, the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. Governors have no power to act on an individual basis and an approach may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

1.3.3. Complaints against school staff (except the Head Teacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Head Teacher via the school office.

.

1.3.4. Complaints should be made by using the template at the back of this policy. It may be helpful to copy and paste the template into an email to the Head Teacher.

1.3.5. Complaints that involve or are about the Head Teacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the clerk to the governing board. Please mark correspondence as Private and Confidential. Where a complaint is about the Head Teacher, this complaint should be about the **conduct** of the Head Teacher, rather than more general concerns with the school.

1.3.6. Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the clerk to the governing body via the school office. Please mark correspondence as Private and Confidential.

1.3.7. 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.

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

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

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

2. Scope of this Complaints Procedure

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

Exceptions	Who to contact
- **Admissions to schools** - **Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs** - **School re-organisation proposals**	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with City of York Council – www.york.gov.uk

- **Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation**	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding – lado@york.gov.uk or 01904 551783.
- **Suspension of children from school***	Further information about raising concerns about suspension can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions *complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.
- **Whistleblowing**	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. 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. 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.
- **Staff grievances**	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
- **Staff conduct**	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. 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.

- **Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities**	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.
- **National Curriculum – content**	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

2.1. If other external 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.

2.2. If a complainant commences legal action against the 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. We reserve our right to consult our legal advisors in such circumstances which may include disclosing the content of your complaint.

3. Resolving Complaints

3.1. At each stage in the procedure, the school will work to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is not upheld, upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- 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
- a formal agreement to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology

4. Withdrawal of a complaint

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

5. Stage 1: Referral to the Head Teacher / Chair of Governors for investigation

5.1. Formal complaints must be made to the Head Teacher (or via the clerk to the governing board if about the Head Teacher). This should be done by completing the template at the back of this policy and copy and pasting into an email to the Headteacher (or clerk if about the Headteacher)

5.2. The Head Teacher/Chair of Governors will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days.

5.3. Within this response, if it is required, the Head Teacher/Chair of Governors will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would

like to see. The Head Teacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this. Much of this detail may already be documented on the initial template used for recording the complaint.

5.4. The Head Teacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's Senior Leadership Team but not the decision to be taken. The Chair of Governors may also delegate the investigation to another suitably trained governor, where appropriate to do so.

5.5. During the investigation, the Head Teacher/Chair of Governors (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.

5.6. At the conclusion of their investigation, the Head Teacher / Chair of Governors (or investigator) will provide a formal written response within twenty school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

5.7. If the Head Teacher / Chair of Governors (or investigator) is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

5.8. 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 the school will take to resolve the complaint.

5.9. The Head Teacher /Chair of Governors (or investigator) will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

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

5.11. Complaints about the Head Teacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk, via the clerk to the governing board.

5.12. If the complaint is:
- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- 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.

6. Stage 2: Review by the governing body

6.1. 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 panel, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

6.2. A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

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

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

6.5. The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting 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.

6.6. 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.

6.7. The complaints panel will consist of at least three 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 Panel. If there are fewer than three governors from the school available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through the LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the panel. Alternatively, if it is not possible to arrange a suitable panel, an entirely independent panel may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2. Advice should be sought from the Governor Services team in this situation.

6.8. The panel 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.

6.9. 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 panel 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.

6.10. Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure., save in relation to the Head Teacher which shall be dealt with in accordance with paragraph 1.3.5 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. (See addendum)

6.11. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

6.12. At least ten school days before the meeting, the Clerk 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 panel at least seven school days before the meeting.

6.13. Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least five school days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

6.14. The panel 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.

6.15. 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.

6.16. The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

6.17. If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the panel 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 issues in the future.

6.18. The Chair of the Panel will provide the complainant and school (via the Head Teacher) with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 15 school days.

6.19. 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 the school.

6.20. If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 2 will be heard by a panel of independent, co-opted governors.

6.21. 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 the school will take to resolve the complaint.

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

7. Next Steps – If the complainant remains unsatisfied

7.1.Referral to the Department for Education for review of process

7.1.1. 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.

7.1.2. The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

7.1.3. 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.

8. Serial and unreasonable complaints

8.1. The school is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

8.2. The school defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- 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 11 including referral to the Department for Education
- 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

8.3. Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, 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.

8.4. Whenever possible, the Head Teacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

8.5. If the behaviour continues, the Head Teacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

8.6. 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 the school.

9. COMPLAINT FORM TEMPLATE

Please complete and return to the Head Teacher (m.smith@huntington-ed.org.uk) or Clerk to Governors as appropriate who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Student's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the student (if relevant):
Address: Postcode:
Daytime telephone number:
Evening telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so please give details.
Signed:
Date:

Huntington School
Learn and succeed

Addendum to Complaints policy – where staff conduct is involved

1. Complaint is sent to Headteacher or clerk, date noted and acknowledgement of receipt of complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days. (5.2 & 5.3 in policy)

2. The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's Senior Leadership Team, but not the decision taken. (5.4 of policy)

3. Where the complaint relates to the Head Teacher in accordance with paragraphs 1.3.5, the Chair of Governors may delegate the investigation to another suitably trained governor, but not the decision taken.

4. Initial investigation starts with statements from those involved and witnesses. (5.5 in policy)

5. If then judged to fall under Staff Disciplinary policy, then that policy will be followed for this part of the process.

6. The complainant will be informed that, as the complaint has given rise to an internal staff disciplinary process, the usual Stage 1 process shall be suspended whilst this process takes place. An outcome will not be available at the usual 10 working days mark. (5.7 in policy)

7. The Headteacher or Chair of Governors will inform the complainant when updates will be given during this disciplinary process. The Headteacher or Chair of Governors can only give very brief details at this stage which will include when the next update will be and, if known, when the official Stage 1 letter will be sent. (5.7 in policy)

8. At the end of the internal disciplinary process then the official Stage 1 letter can be sent to the complainant with enough detail to give the complainant an understanding that a thorough process has taken place and the outcome of the complaint – ie upheld in whole or in part or as detailed in item 3 – Resolving complaints. This letter will not be able to be as detailed as in other complaints because it involves a staff disciplinary process. (5.8 in policy)

9. If, after the Stage 1 process is complete, the complainant wants to escalate the matter to Stage 2, then the independent governor review panel will also be limited in their knowledge of the internal disciplinary process and will only be able to consider the evidence presented and can either uphold the complaint in whole or in part or dismiss the complaint in whole or in part. (6.21 in policy)