

Abbeyfield  
School



## Complaints Policy & Procedure

**Status:** Approved

**Governing Committee:** Full Governing Board

**Author:** Local Authority/Headteacher

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## **Introduction**

Abbeyfield School endeavours to provide the best possible education for all of its pupils in an open and transparent environment. We welcome any feedback that we receive from parents, pupils and third parties, and we accept that not all of this will be positive. Where concerns are raised the school intends for these to be dealt with:

- Fairly
- Openly
- Promptly
- Without Prejudice

In order to do so, the governing board of Abbeyfield School has approved the following procedure which explains what you should do if you wish to make a complaint about the school. All members of staff will be familiar with the procedure and will be able to assist you.

### **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. Abbeyfield 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 Complaints Administrator, will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the complaints administrator 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, Abbeyfield School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

### **Complaints that fall outside of this procedure**

Complaints relating to the following issues are covered by a separate/specific policy.

- Pupil admissions; please see the school’s Admissions policy
- Pupil exclusions; please see the school’s Behaviour policy or Exclusion policy.
- 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.

- Where the complaint concerns a third party used by the school; please complain directly to the third party themselves.
- Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information Requests – please see the school’s Data Protection and Freedom of Information policy

These policies are available on the school website or on request from the school.

### **Resolving concerns informally**

For the purpose of this procedure concerns are defined as having a worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought. The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the formal stages of the formal complaint procedure (see below). The governing board of Abbeyfield School encourages those that have concerns to raise them with the appropriate person at the school (e.g. the class teacher or Head of Department) and to work constructively with that person towards resolving them. The extent to which this was both attempted and followed may be taken into consideration when assessing the reasonableness of a complaint during the formal stages of the procedure. The formal stages of the procedure should be followed when attempts to resolve concerns informally have proved unsuccessful, and in cases where individuals wish to raise their concern formally.

### **Complaints about the headteacher or the governors**

Where a complaint is about the headteacher, the complainant should notify the clerk to the governors (see contact details at the end of the document). The stage one process (see the formal stages below) will then commence, but with the chair of governors as the individual responsible for the investigation, rather than the headteacher.

Where a complaint concerns a governor the complainant should contact the clerk to the governing board. The clerk will then determine the most appropriate course of action, seeking advice as appropriate. This will depend upon the nature of the complaint.

### **The timescale for making a complaint**

Notification of a complaint should be given as soon as possible after the issue that led to the complaint has occurred and after informal attempts to seek resolution have proved unsuccessful. Complaints that are submitted three months after the issue that led to the complaint occurred will not be considered under this procedure unless there are exceptional circumstances. These may include (but are not limited to) subsequent information about the complaint coming to light and a valid explanation of why it was not possible to give notification of the complaint sooner. In such cases the headteacher/chair of the governing board/clerk to the governing board (as appropriate) will review the circumstances, seek advice and determine whether the complaint should be considered under the formal procedure.

### **Maintaining records**

A confidential written record of all complaints that are made in accordance with this procedure will be kept by the school. The written record will include whether the complaint has been resolved following a formal procedure and whether it proceeded to a panel review meeting. It will also refer

to any action taken by the school as a result of the complaint regardless of whether it has been upheld.

### **Maintaining confidentiality**

Informal concerns and complaints will be dealt with confidentially at all stages and at the conclusion of the procedure. Confidentiality should be maintained at all times by everyone involved. The governing board of Abbeyfield School requests that complaints are not discussed publicly, including via social media.

Actions taken in relation to school staff that arise as a result of the complaint will remain confidential to the school and the member of staff concerned.

Written records taken and used throughout the complaints process, including correspondence, notes of meetings, telephone calls etc., will be kept securely and in accordance with the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018.

### **Safeguarding**

Wherever a concern indicates that a child's wellbeing or safety is at risk, the school is duty bound to report this immediately to the local authority. Any action taken will be in accordance with the school's safeguarding policy which can be found on the school's website.

### **The formal stages of the complaints procedure**

The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the formal stages of the procedure. If you need to raise a concern then please do so with the relevant member of staff who will be happy to talk to you and seek to resolve it.

There are **two** formal stages of the complaints procedure.

#### **Stage 1 – formal investigation by headteacher or nominated investigation officer**

1. A request for a formal investigation of a complaint by the headteacher or nominated investigation officer (or chair of the governing board as appropriate) should be made in writing C/O the school, or by completing the formal complaints form that is included as Appendix 1 of this procedure.

2. The headteacher or nominated investigation officer (or chair of the governing board as appropriate) will acknowledge the request in writing no later than 10 working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of receiving it. The written acknowledgment will, as far as possible, explain how the complaint will be investigated and the timescale for completing the investigation.

3. A log of all correspondence in relation to the complaint will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Principles.

4. The headteacher or nominated investigation officer will consider all relevant evidence. This may include, but is not limited to:

- obtaining statements from the complainant and those involved with the complaint
- meeting with the complainant and those involved in the complaint
- reviewing correspondence and other document relating to the complaint

5. After considering the available evidence, the headteacher or nominated investigation officer can decide to:

- uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it
- uphold the complaint in part (in other words find an aspect or aspects of the complaint to be valid, but not the whole complaint) direct for certain action to be taken, or
- dismiss the complaint entirely

6. The headteacher or nominated investigation officer will inform the complainant of their decision in writing, the grounds on which it was made and any actions taken as a result of the complaint. This will be within 20 working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of having issued written acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint (see 2 above). The written notification shall also advise the complainant of their right to escalate the complaint to stage 2 of the formal complaints procedure if they are not satisfied with the outcome at stage 1, including the contact details of the clerk to the governing board.

### **Stage 2 – Review by a panel of the Governing Body**

The complainant is entitled to request a review of the decision taken at stage 1 and the actions taken. The review is carried out by a panel of the governing board at a meeting convened by the clerk to the governing board.

Requests for a review of the decision taken at stage 1 should be made in writing to the clerk (see contact details below) no later than 4 weeks after written notification of the decision taken has been received. The request should include a brief summary of the complaint, why the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of stage 1 and the outcome they are seeking. The clerk will fulfil the role of organising the time and date of the review meeting, inviting all the attendees, collating all the relevant documentation and distributing this 5 days in advance of the meeting. Minutes of the review meeting will be taken by the clerk and provided with the written notification of the decision taken at stage 2 (see 9 below).

The following steps are taken at stage 2:

1. The clerk will acknowledge the written request for the complaint to be reviewed no later than ten working days (not including the school holidays) after receiving it.
2. The clerk will convene a panel of two school governors and one independent member to review the complaint. All three panel members will have no prior knowledge of the content of the complaint.
3. The review meeting will take place within 20 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) of receipt of the written acknowledgement from the clerk (see 1 above).
4. The panel may decide to invite the following to attend the review meeting:
  - the complainant
  - the headteacher (or chair of the governing board as appropriate) who investigated the complaint and made the decision at stage 1
  - relevant persons involved with the complaint
  - persons whom, in the view of the panel, can provide relevant advice and information relating to the subject of the complaint and the review process at stage 2

5. Where the complainant, headteacher and/or relevant person involved in the complaint have been invited to attend the review meeting, they are entitled to be accompanied by a family member/friend/representative as appropriate. However, legal representatives are not permitted to attend the review meeting.

6. Where the relevant persons involved in the complaint include pupils at the school, and their attendance at the review meeting has been requested by the panel, parental permission must be sought if they are under the age of 18. Extra care will be taken to consider the vulnerability of children where they are present at a complaints hearing.

7. Where the complaint is about a governor/trustee/governing board the complainant may request that the review meeting is held by an independent panel. This is at the discretion of the governing board who will notify the clerk of their decision. Where an entirely independent panel is required, timescales may be affected while the school source appropriate individuals for the review.

8. After considering the complaint afresh and reviewing the available evidence, the panel reviewing the complaint can decide to:

- uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it;
- uphold the complaint in part (in other words find an aspect or aspects of the complaint to be valid, but not the whole complaint) and direct for certain action to be taken, or
- dismiss the complaint entirely.

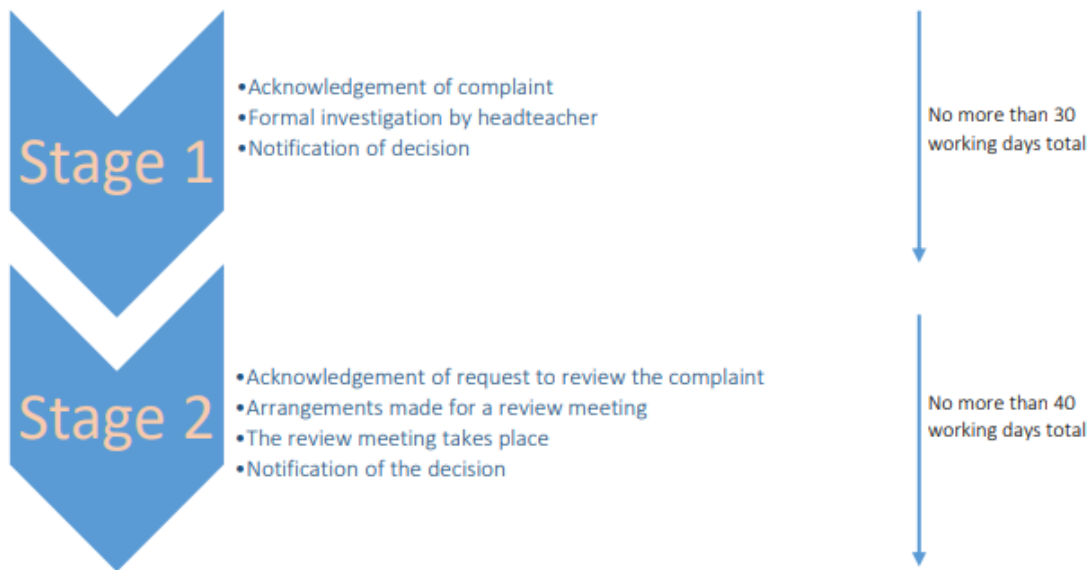
Irrespective of the decision taken, the panel may also recommend steps that the complainant and the school should take to move forward from the presenting issues in the best interests of all concerned. The panel may also recommend steps to be taken that reduce the likelihood of a similar complaint being made in the future.

9. The complainant, the headteacher (or chair of the governing board as appropriate) who investigated the complaint and made the decision at stage 1, and, where relevant, the person complained about will be informed in writing of the outcome of the review meeting no later than 10 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) after the review meeting has taken place.

This is the **final stage** at which the school will consider the complaint. If the complainant remains dissatisfied and wishes to escalate the complaint further they should refer to the following:

- If the complainant feels that the governing board acted 'unreasonably' in the handling of the complaint, they can complain to the Department for Education after the complaint procedure has been exhausted. Please note that 'unreasonable' is used in a legal sense and means acting in a way in which no reasonable school or authority would act in the same circumstances. <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

## Timescale for completing the formal stages of the procedure



Abbeyfield School will endeavour to complete the formal stages of its complaint procedure in a timely manner and within the timescale for each stage that is referred to above. However, if it becomes clear that for any reason Abbeyfield School is unable to meet the timescale for completing a stage of the procedure, the complainant will be advised of this immediately, along with the reason for the delay and the revised timescale.

### Serial, persistent and unreasonable complaints

Abbeyfield 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.

Abbeyfield 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 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.

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.

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

If the behaviour continues, the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Abbeyfield 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.

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 Abbeyfield School.

We will also follow DfE Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures 2020 - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

### **Vexatious Complaints**

A complaint may become vexatious when it has been properly considered and dealt with, but the complainant is not prepared to accept the conclusion or persists in making the same or substantially the same complaint. Continuing with such complaints can unreasonably take up time and resources and detract from the responsibility to others in the school community. If the Headteacher and Chair of Governors concur that a complaint has become vexatious they will inform the complainant in writing of this, stating that the matter is now closed.



Queries regarding any aspect of the complaints procedure should be directed to the clerk to the governing board at the following address [clerk@abbeyfield.wilts.sch.uk](mailto:clerk@abbeyfield.wilts.sch.uk)

## Appendix 1

### Abbeyfield School Formal Complaints Form

A copy of the formal complaints form can be found on the school website to be downloaded or can be accessed using the following link or QR code

<https://forms.office.com/e/0RnqmQvv5Z>



## Appendix 2

Scope of this Complaints Procedure This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Abbeyfield 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"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Admissions to schools</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs School</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> re-organisation proposals</li></ul>	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Wiltshire Council

<input type="checkbox"/> 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). LADO Tel: 01225 713945 MASH Tel: 03004560108</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Exclusion of children from school*	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/schooldiscipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/schooldiscipline-exclusions/exclusions</a>.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i></p>
<input type="checkbox"/> 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: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>.</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>
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff grievances	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> 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>
<input type="checkbox"/> 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>
<input type="checkbox"/> Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme	<p>Any complaints about the Duke of Edinburgh Programme which are not successfully resolved by the school in the first instance, should be forwarded to the Duke of Edinburgh South West Regional Office.</p>

National Curriculum - content

Please contact the Department for Education at:

[www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus)