Ravenswood School

Complaints Procedure

Based on Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2020:
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-complaints-procedures

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Rationale

In accordance with Section 29 of the Education Act 2002, all local authority-maintained schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the schools provide, unless separate statutory procedures apply. These are listed at the end of this document in the section *'Complaints not in Scope of this Procedure'.*

Any person, including members of the general public may make a complaint; schools must not limit complaints to parents or carers of children who are registered at the school.

An anonymous concern or complaint will not be investigated under this procedure unless there are exceptional circumstances.

In the event that a complaint concerns the well-being or safety of a child, schools have a duty to report this to the Local Authority, and any action taken will be in accordance with the school's Safeguarding Policy.

Complaints involving safeguarding concerns will be managed in accordance with the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. Information relating to complaints will be shared only with those individuals who require access to fulfil their professional responsibilities.

The school will maintain confidentiality throughout the complaints process wherever possible, whilst recognising that there may be circumstances where information must be shared in order to safeguard a child or comply with statutory duties.

If it is determined that staff disciplinary or capability proceedings are required to resolve an issue, the complainant will only be informed that action is being taken and the outcome of any such action. The complainant will not be entitled to participate, and the details of the proceedings will remain confidential to the Headteacher and/or the individual's line manager.

To allow for a proper investigation, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the school as soon as possible. In general, any matter raised more than three months after the event being complained of will not be considered. However, this may be extended in exceptional circumstances, such as the level of complexity of information needed to review the complaint, or difficulties regarding individuals' availability. A mutually acceptable timeframe will then be agreed with all involved.

A written record of all complaints, the investigation and the outcomes will be kept in the school and a copy will be available for inspection.

Raising a Concern or Complaint

There is a 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 generally defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action’.

The following is an outline of the three stages that can be used to resolve complaints:

- Stage 1 – Informal
- Stage 2 – Complaint is heard by the Headteacher
- Stage 3 – Complaint is heard by the Governing Body’s Appeal Panel

Stage 1: Informal

We aspire to forming good relationships within our school community which we hope will enable you to feel comfortable with communicating your concerns or complaints directly with the member of staff concerned. This may be by letter, telephone or in person by appointment.

We recognise that there is a difference between a concern and a complaint and many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information. It is anticipated that most concerns will be resolved at this informal stage.

If you are uncertain about who to contact, please seek advice from the school office or the Clerk to the Governing Body.

Stage 2: Complaint to the Headteacher (Formal Stage)

If your concern is not resolved at the informal stage and you wish to make a formal complaint, you must put the complaint in writing to the Headteacher, who will be responsible for ensuring that it is investigated appropriately.

If your complaint directly concerns the Headteacher (or a Governor), you should write to the Clerk to the Governing Body for the attention of the Chair.

If your complaint concerns the Chair of Governors, you should contact the Clerk to the Governors where an informal resolution will be sought. If this fails, the complaint will go straight to Stage 3 of the procedure and the Vice Chair or an independent investigator will conduct the proceedings.

A Complaint Form is attached to this policy at Appendix 1.

If for any reason you are unable to submit the complaint in writing we will, on request, offer appropriate help and assistance.

Your letter of complaint should include all details which might assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events, and copies of relevant documents. It is very important that you include a clear statement of the actions that you would like the school to take to resolve your concern.

Please pass the completed form, in a sealed envelope, to the Headteacher or the Clerk to the Governing Body, as appropriate.

The Headteacher (or Chair of Governors) may invite you to a meeting to clarify your concerns and to seek an informal resolution. If you accept that invitation, you may be accompanied by a friend or family member (not acting in a legal capacity), if you wish, to assist you in explaining the nature of your concerns. Brief notes of the meeting will be kept and a copy of any written response will be added to the record.

If it is not possible to resolve your complaint through a meeting with the Headteacher (or Chair of Governors), arrangements will be made for the matter to be fully investigated using the appropriate procedure. In any case, you should learn in writing, within five school working days of the school receiving your formal complaint, of how the school intends to proceed. This notification will include an indication of the anticipated timescales.

Any investigation will begin in accordance with the above-mentioned timeline and when it has been concluded you will be informed in writing of its conclusion.

If you are not satisfied with the decision or the manner in which the process has been followed, you can request that the Governing Body reviews the process followed by the school in handling the complaint. Any such request must be made in writing to the Clerk to the Governing Body within ten school working days of receiving the notice of the outcome, and must include a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow the procedure.

Members of the Reviewing Panel will have no prior knowledge of the content of the complaint, however if you feel that there is likely to be a bias, you have the right to request an Independent Panel. Timescales may be affected whilst members of an Independent Panel are sourced.

The school aims to investigate complaints promptly and thoroughly. Where investigations require additional time due to staff availability, school holidays, complexity of the issues raised, or the involvement of external agencies, the complainant will be informed of the revised timescales and provided with regular updates regarding progress.

Stage 3: Governing Body Appeals Panel Review Process

Any review of the decision and/or process followed by the school will be conducted by a panel of three non-staff members of the Governing Body. This will usually take place within ten school days of receipt of your request.

The review will normally be conducted through a consideration of written submissions, but reasonable requests to make direct representations will be considered sympathetically. The Panel will first receive written evidence from the person making the complaint.

The Panel will then invite representatives of the school as appropriate to make a response to the complaint (usually the Headteacher or the Chair of the Governing Body Panel that has considered the matter).

The Panel will also have access to the records kept of the process followed.

You and the school representative(s) will be informed in writing of the outcome, usually within five school days of the Panel meeting.

The matter will then be closed as far as the school is concerned.

If you are not satisfied with the decisions of the Governing Body, then you may make representations to the Secretary of State for Education:

National Helpline:	0370 000 2288
Online:	www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus
In writing:	Department for Education, School Complaints Unit, 2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

Managing Unreasonable, Persistent or Vexatious Complaints

Ravenswood School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly, impartially and in a timely manner. Whilst we recognise the right of individuals to raise concerns, there may be occasions when a complainant's behaviour becomes unreasonable.

Examples of unreasonable behaviour may include:

- Refusing to clearly identify the grounds of a complaint;
- Persistently pursuing a complaint after the school's procedures have been fully exhausted;
- Making excessive demands on staff time and resources;
- Repeatedly contacting the school regarding the same matter without presenting new information;
- Using offensive, abusive, threatening or discriminatory language towards staff, governors or other members of the school community.

Where a complainant's behaviour is deemed unreasonable, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors may implement proportionate measures to manage future communication. These measures may include restricting communication to a single point of contact, limiting the frequency of correspondence or declining to investigate matters that have already been fully considered. Any such decision will be communicated in writing and reviewed periodically.

Complaints Raised Through Social Media

The school encourages concerns and complaints to be raised through the procedures outlined within this policy.

Complaints submitted solely through social media platforms will not normally be investigated until they have been submitted through the school's formal complaints process.

The school reserves the right to take appropriate action where social media content contains abusive, threatening, discriminatory or defamatory comments about pupils, families, staff, governors or the wider school community. Such matters may be referred to appropriate agencies where necessary.

Complaints not in Scope of this Procedure

Separate statutory procedures are in place for the following exceptions:

- Admission to schools- which should be directed to the relevant Local Authority
- Exclusion of children from school
- Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs
- School re-organisation proposals
- Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation
- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures
- Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use the school premises or facilities

Monitoring and Reporting

- The Headteacher will maintain a record of all formal complaints received by the school together with their outcomes.
- An anonymised summary of complaints will be presented annually to the Governing Body. This information will be used to identify trends, inform school improvement activities and ensure the effectiveness of the complaints procedure.
- Personal information relating to individual complainants will remain confidential and will not be reported to governors except where necessary for the management of a complaint.

Ravenswood School welcomes concerns and complaints as an opportunity to improve services, strengthen relationships with families and continuously develop the quality of education, care and safeguarding provided to pupils.

The school is committed to resolving concerns at the earliest possible stage and ensuring that all complainants are treated with courtesy, fairness and respect throughout the process.

APPENDIX 1

RAVENSWOOD SCHOOL COMPLAINTS FORM

Please complete and return to the Headteacher/Chair of Governors as appropriate who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:	
Pupil's name (if applicable):	
Your relationship to the pupil (if applicable):	
Address:	
Daytime telephone number*:	
Evening telephone number*:	
Email address*:	
**please indicate preferred contact option*	
Please give details of your complaint:	

What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? Who did you speak to and what was the response?
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any supporting paperwork? If so, please give details:
If it has been more than three months since the incident, please explain the delay in making your complaint

Signature:	
Date:	

For Official Use Only:	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By whom:	
Complaint referred to:	
Date:	