Hamp Nursery & Infants School

Complaints Procedure and Guidance

Date: Autumn 2026

Review: **Autumn 2027**

(Unless there is a significant material change at an earlier date)

Complaints Procedure and Guidance

At Hamp Nursery and Infants school, we aim to make all decisions which affect pupils, parents and the local community in a fair and transparent way. Where any stakeholder feels that this is not the case, we have a robust procedure through which any complaint can be considered and resolved. Complaints are a key part of a constructive process that allows schools to improve and, as such, it is crucial that there is a process to handle them fairly and respectfully.

General Principles

Initial concerns

The first stage of any complaint would be to attempt a find a satisfactory resolution informally. Often, as soon as the school is aware of any issues or concerns, we are able to address them and find satisfactory resolutions. Parents and carers should speak initially with their child's class teacher to make the school aware of the concern. We will respond to this within 24 hours.

We should be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. Informal concerns, when shared constructively with the school can often be resolved at the earliest stage, and will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

The underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, wherever possible, without the need for formal procedures. In most cases, classroom teachers will receive the first approach and are often able to resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary, so that concerns do not develop into formal complaints. Where this is not immediately resolved, class teachers will refer to a member of the SLT, who will then support a resolution if possible.

Formal procedures should only be invoked, when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further. A formal complaint will not be acknowledged until attempts have been made to discuss and address the concerns informally.

Framework of Principles

Our complaints procedure will:

- use a "Trauma Informed" approach
- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
- be easily accessible and publicised
- be simple to understand and use
- be impartial
- be non-adversarial
- allow swift handling with established time limited to action and keeping people informed of the progress
- ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary
- respect people's desire for confidentiality
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary
- provide information to the school's senior management team so that services can be improve

Investigating Complaints

At each stage the person investigating the complaint will ensure that they:

- establish what has happened so far and who has been involved
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary)
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- consider interviewing those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- conduct any interviews with an open mind
- keep notes of any interviews
- act with confidentiality

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure we will want to keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology
- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint

Complainants will be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

We will try to identify areas of agreement between the parties. We will also try to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Vexatious Complaints

If properly followed, our complaints procedure is expected to limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of the Governing Body is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

Time Limits

Complaints need to be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. The complainant will be informed about the expected timescales associated with dealing with the complaint. Where further investigations are necessary, the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

Formal Complaints Procedure (following informal attempts to resolve)

There are three stages to our formal complaints procedure:

Stage	Complaint – see more detail in appendix A	Response
Stage One	Complaint given verbally or in writing (complaints form attached – appendix B) considered by the Headteacher, Deputy Head*.	Respond in writing within two working days. *If necessary, this may be an indication of further time to investigate and should explain when they can expect a response by.*
Stage Two	complaint heard/read by the Chair of Governors (this should be sent in writing care of the school)	Response in writing care of the school within 10 working days.
Stage Three	complaint heard by the Governing Body's complaints panel	Final response within 5 working days of the panel.

There may on occasion, be the need for some flexibility; for example, the possibility of further meetings between the complainant and a member of staff directly involved, as this may involve finding a convenient time for parents or part-time staff to attend a meeting. Or, further investigations may be required by the Head teacher, prior to being well-informed enough to make a response.

Complaints about the Headteacher will be dealt with by the Chair of Governors.* The Deputy Head may support either the Chair or the Head teacher with an investigation.

We recognise that we may not always be able to resolve an issue, and unsatisfied complainants can always take a complaint to the next stage. However, there are some decisions that are outside of the schools control and decision making authority, and in these circumstances, the school will direct the complainant to the correct authority.

Managing and Recording Complaints

<u>Recording Complaints</u>

We recognise that it is useful for us to record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing. Our complaint form can be found in appendix A. At the end of a meeting, or telephone call, the member of staff involved will try to ensure that the complainant and the school have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls will be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

<u>Governing Body Review</u>

As well as addressing an individual's complaint, the process of listening to and resolving complaints will contribute to our school improvement. The monitoring and review of complaints by the school and the Governing Body is a useful tool in evaluating our school's performance. We monitor the level and nature of complaints, and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of our procedure making changes where necessary. Complaint information shared with the whole Governing Body happens at each meeting. It does not name individuals.

<u>Publicising the Procedure</u>

There is a legal requirement for the complaints procedure to be publicised. As a Governing Body we include details of our procedure:

- in information given to new parents when their children join the school
- on our website

Appendix A - Complaints Procedure

A formal complaint will not be acknowledged until attempts have been made to discuss and address the concerns informally.

The Three Stages

Stage One: Complaint heard by the Headteacher (possibly following a Staff Member)

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the school can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To that end, if staff are made aware of the procedures, they know what to do when they receive a complaint.

The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial. The school will respect the view of the complainant who indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. In these cases, the Headteacher can refer the complainant to another staff member, or will hear the complaint themselves. Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher, the complainant will be referred to the Chair of Governors.

Where the first approach is made to a Governor, the next step would be to refer the complainant to the appropriate person and to advise the complainant about the procedure for making a complaint. Governors will not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or be involved in the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the procedure.

The complainant may be dissatisfied with the way the complaint is handled at stage one and may wish to pursue their initial complaint.

Stage Two: Complaint heard by the Chair of Governors

The Headteacher's influence will already have shaped the way complaints are handled in the school. If the complainant was dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at stage one by the Head teacher, the Chair of Governors will hear the complaint. The complainant will write to the Chair of Governors giving details of the complaint. This will be investigated and the Chair will; write to the complainant.

Should the complainant still not be satisfied he/she may ask for the matter to be referred to stage three.

Stage Three: Complaint heart by the Complaints Panel

Complaints would not be heard by the whole Governing Body at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

A panel of three governors, with delegated powers to do so, will hear the complaint. The terms of reference for the panel are to:

- draw up its procedures
- hear individual complaints
- make one or more recommendations below as a result of complaints

Remit of the Complaints Panel

The complaints panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or part
- uphold the complaint in whole or part
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes to the school's systems, procedures or policies to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur

Panel Members - points to remember

There are several points which any governor sitting on a complaints panel needs to remember:

- it is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No Governor will sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the panel, Governors will ensure that it is a cross section of the categories of Governors and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation

- The aim of the hearing, which will be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may well be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously

- An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial

- Extra care will need to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.

- The Governors sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaints procedure.

Roles and Responsibilities

The role of the clerk – the clerk will be the contact point for the complainant and is required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing
- record the proceedings and notify all parties of the panel's decision

The role of the chair of the complaints panel is to ensure that:

- there is a check that the correct procedure has been followed
- if a hearing is appropriate, that the clerk is notified to arrange the panel
- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of facts are made
- parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy
- the panel is open minded and acting independently
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions, written material is seen by all parties
- if a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it
- the chair of the panel will ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, with the panel's response, this will usually take place within five working days

<u>Checklist for the panel hearing</u>

- the hearing is as informal as possible
- witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence
- after introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses
- the Headteacher may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken
- the Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses
- the complainant may question both the Headteacher and the witnesses after each has spoken
- the panel may ask questions at any point
- the complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint
- the Headteacher is then invited to sum up the school's action and response to the complaint
- the chair of the panel explains that both parties will hear from the panel within five school days
- all parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues

Appendix B School Complaints Procedure
Complaint Form

Your Name:

Pupil's Name:

Your relationship to the pupil:

Address:

Postcode:

Daytime telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and 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 paperwork? If so, please give details
Signature: Date:
School use: Date acknowledgement sent: By Whom: Complaint referred to: Date: