Excellence, Aspiration and Care in Partnership

Complaints Policy

2026.27

Ashmole Trust

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Approved by	Mr Sullivan (CEO)
Signed	
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Complaints Policy

Ashmole Trust recognises its accountability to parents/carers and community users, as a Trust we are committed to working in partnership and encourage parents/carers to discuss issues that arise at an early stage to avoid escalation to complaint level. We take all concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve them as quickly as possible.

Anyone can make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that a school provides, unless separate statutory procedures apply. 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. The policy will be applied to any complaint registered against the Trust other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, for example:

1. Child protection matters
2. Admissions
3. Exclusions where a separate procedure applies
4. Financial misconduct
5. Appeals relating to internal assessment decisions for external qualifications where a separate procedure applies.

Time limits

A complaint must be made within 3 months of the incident to which it refers to. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

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

Although every effort will be made by the School to comply with the time limits

specified under each stage of the procedure, it may not always be possible to do so, for example due to the complexity or number of matters raised, or due to the unavailability of the Complainant to attend a meeting, if offered. In all cases, **where a time limit cannot be complied with, the School will write to the Complainant within the specified time limit, setting out the reasons why the time limit cannot be complied with, and confirming the new time limit which will apply**.

If the School has made reasonable attempts to accommodate complainants with dates for complaint meetings and they refuse or are unable to attend the School may:

- Convene meetings in their absence; and
- Reach a conclusion in the interests of drawing the complaint to a close.

Resolving complaints

As a Trust we expect that most concerns can be resolved informally by working in partnership and will use its best endeavors to resolve any complaints in this way. If the informal procedure fails to resolve the issue, a formal complaint about any matter, other than the exceptions detailed above, should be submitted in writing to the CEO/Head Teacher. Every complaint will receive fair and proper consideration and a timely response. Our aim is always to resolve complaints either to the complainants' satisfaction, or with an appropriate outcome which balances the rights and duties of pupils, parents/carers, staff and the Governors/Trustees of the Trust.

All complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially, they will be recorded, monitored and a written record kept.

Procedure

Withdrawal of a Complaint
If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

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. The aim is that complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally by working together to address concerns raised.

Complaints are first handled by the class teacher or form tutor concerned. In most cases the matter will be resolved straight away by this means to the parent/carers' satisfaction. If the teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult with the head of department or a member of the Leadership Team.

Should the complainant feel the teacher of form tutor is unable to resolve the matter they may wish to discuss the concern with the relevant head of department or head of year.
If the complainant considered that the concern raised has not been resolved with the classroom teacher or head of department, an informal complaint should be raised with a member of the Leadership Team or Deputy Head Teacher. The concern/complaint may be put in writing to clarify the nature of the complaint. If it is made clear that the correspondence does not yet constitute a formal complaint, the Leadership Team member will try to resolve the issue on an informal basis. All informal complaints will receive a written reply within 15 school days following the Leadership Team investigation. In most cases the matter will be resolved at this stage, however, if the complainant fails to reach a satisfactory resolution then they may proceed to stage 2, formal resolution.
If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

Formal complaints should be put in writing to the CEO/Head Teacher who will decide, after considering the complaint the appropriate course of action to take. The formal complaint will be acknowledged in writing within **five school days** of receipt.

Complaints against school staff (except the Head Teacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Head's PA via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Head Teacher should be addressed to (the Chair of Governors), via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual Governor or the whole Local Governing Committee should be addressed to the Clerk to the Local Governing Committee via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a Trustee of the Trust, should be addressed to Chair of Trustees, via the Trust Office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

All complaints must use the template complaint letter 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, completing the complaints form or holding meetings in accessible locations

The Complainant should clearly set out the matters in dispute, the relevant dates, the full names of the persons involved and what the Complainant believes the School should do to resolve the complaint. Any documentation relied upon by the Complainant should be attached to the formal complaint.

In most cases, the CEO/Head Teacher will speak with the complainant to discuss the matter, if this is not possible they will correspond by writing.

The Head Teacher 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.

Note: The Head Teacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Head Teacher (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.

Written records will be kept of all meetings, conversation and interviews held in relation to the complaint. Once the CEO/Head Teacher is satisfied that all relevant facts have been established a decision will be made and the complainant will be

informed of the decision, in writing, no later than 15 school days after the initial contact and which will also include reasons for the decision.

If complainant is still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to stage 3 of the procedure. The Head Teacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

If the complaint is about the Head Teacher, or a member of the Local Governing Committee (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

If the complaint is about the Head Teacher, or a member of the Local Governing Committee (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.
Complaints about the Head Teacher or member of the Local Governing Committee must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.
If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Local Governing Committee or
- the majority of the Local Governing Committee

Stage 2 will be escalated to the CEO of the Trust

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to stage 3, a panel hearing. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure. The complainant should detail the nature of the complaint, the reason that they consider the matter has not been resolved and the desired outcome.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk to Governors, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The panel will consist of at least three people not directly involved in the matters. The panel will consist of the Chair of Governors, a Trustee and one other not involved in the management of the Trust. The panel will meet within 30 school days of receipt of the written complaint and all parties will be given 7 days' notice of the hearing. 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.

Documentation relating to the complaint will be supplied in advance to all parties and not later than 5 school days prior to the hearing. The panel may request additional information from either or both parties. The complainant may be accompanied to the hearing by a friend or relation. For the avoidance of doubt, the Complainant's supporter will be present for moral support only and will not play any part in the proceedings, unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Complaint Panel, entirely at his or her discretion and for a good reason. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. The Complaint Panel Hearing is **not** a legal hearing and it is not appropriate for either the Complainant or the School to be legally represented. The aim of the panel hearing should be reconciliation; to put things right that may have gone wrong. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Local Governing Committee or
- the majority of the Local Governing Committee

Stage 3 will be heard by the Trustees and an independent panel member.

The committee 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.
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.

After due consideration of all the facts it considers relevant, the panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations.

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 complainant will be informed of the outcome of the complaint, in writing, within 5 school days.

The decision of the panel will be final.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the Trust.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, the school wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- 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 reoccur
- 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.

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 3.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Ashmole Trust. They will consider

whether Ashmole Trust 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.

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to either Head's PA/ Head Teacher/ Clerk of Governors /Chair of Governors/Chair of Trust as outlined in the policy who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: **Postcode:** **Day time telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:** **Email address:**

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.
Signature: Date:
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Action taken:
Date: