



HORSFORTH NEWLAITHES PRIMARY SCHOOL

Complaints Policy

Policy owner	Headteacher
To be approved by	Full Governing Body
Date approved	Autumn 2026
Review date	Autumn 2027
Applicable to	Horsforth Newlaithes Primary School
Model policy	Based on the Department for Education model complaints procedure and best-practice guidance for maintained schools, with local arrangements personalised for Horsforth Newlaithes Primary School.

School contact details

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Formal complaints should be sent via the school office and marked Private and Confidential.

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Complaints process at a glance

Stage	What happens	Key timescale
Informal concern	Raise the concern with the class teacher, relevant member of staff or Headteacher. We will try to resolve concerns as early as possible.	No formal timescale
Stage 1	A formal complaint is investigated and a written decision is provided.	Acknowledge within 3 school days; response within 15 school days
Stage 2	A panel of at least three impartial governors considers the complaint afresh. This is the final school stage.	Request within 10 school days; meeting aimed within 20 school days; decision within 5 school days
After Stage 2	If the complainant believes the school has not followed its procedure or has acted unlawfully or unreasonably, they may contact the Department for Education.	After the school procedure is complete

Timescales may need to be extended for complex complaints or where other agencies are involved. If this happens, the school will explain the reason and provide a revised date.

1. Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children registered at the school. Any person, including a member of the public, may make a complaint to Horsforth Newlaithes Primary School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless a matter is dealt with under a separate statutory procedure, such as an admission appeal or a suspension/permanent exclusion process, we will use this complaints procedure.

2. The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt about an issue considered important, for which reassurance or clarification is sought.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.

It is in everyone's interests that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally without using the formal stages of this procedure. Horsforth Newlaithes Primary School takes concerns seriously and will make every reasonable effort to resolve them quickly and constructively.

If someone has difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, the Headteacher will arrange for another appropriate member of staff to respond. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with the concern objectively, the Headteacher may refer it to another member of staff. Seniority is less important than the ability to consider the matter impartially.

A complainant is not required to attempt informal resolution before making a formal complaint. If they wish to raise a formal complaint, the school will allow them to do so.

3. How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, by telephone or in writing, including by email. It may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant. Before the school discloses information to a third party, we will normally require written consent from the complainant.

Concerns should usually be raised with the class teacher or another relevant member of staff. A concern may also be raised with the Headteacher. If the matter remains unresolved, or if the complainant wishes to make a formal complaint, the routes below apply.

Complaint about	Send to	Stage 1 arrangement
School provision, policy, practice or a school decision where the complaint is not about a named individual	Headteacher, via the school office	The Headteacher will consider the complaint. The investigation may be delegated to an appropriate senior leader or suitably skilled independent person.
A member of school staff (other than the Headteacher)	Headteacher, via the school office	The Headteacher will make the Stage 1 decision. The investigation may be delegated to an appropriate senior leader or suitably skilled independent person.
The Headteacher	Chair of Governors, via the school office	A suitably skilled and impartial governor, or an independent investigator where appropriate, will consider the complaint.
An individual governor, including the Chair or Vice-Chair	Clerk to the Governing Body, via the school office	The Clerk will arrange for a suitably skilled and impartial governor, or an independent investigator where appropriate, to consider the complaint.
The Chair and Vice-Chair jointly; the majority of the governing body; or the entire governing body	Clerk to the Governing Body, via the school office	The Clerk will arrange an independent Stage 1 investigation.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints outside the routes above. Governors have no power to act individually, and prior involvement may prevent a governor from serving impartially at Stage 2.

Formal complaints should be marked Private and Confidential and sent via the school office. A complaint form is included at Appendix 1, but use of the form is not compulsory.

In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, the school will consider reasonable adjustments needed to enable a complainant to access this procedure. This may include providing information in an alternative format, support to set out a complaint, interpretation or translation support, or holding meetings in accessible locations.

4. Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, as appropriate, will determine whether the nature and seriousness of the matters raised warrant investigation.

5. Timescales

A complaint should normally be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents has occurred, within three months of the most recent incident. We will consider complaints made outside this period where exceptional circumstances apply.

For the purposes of this procedure, a school day is a day on which the school is open to pupils. Where a published timescale cannot reasonably be met, the school will explain the reason for the delay and provide a revised date.

6. Complaints received outside term time

Complaints received when the school is closed for a school holiday will be treated as having been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

7. Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers complaints about the provision of facilities or services by Horsforth Newlaithes Primary School, except where a separate statutory or specialist procedure applies. The main exceptions are set out below.

Matter	Route
School admissions and admission appeals	Admissions and admission appeals follow separate statutory procedures. For maintained-school admission appeal process complaints, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is the relevant external route.
Statutory assessment of special educational needs	Concerns about statutory assessment and Education, Health and Care Plan processes should be raised directly with the local authority. Complaints about the school's own SEND provision or the delivery of support may be considered under this procedure where no separate process applies.
School reorganisation proposals	Raise these with the local authority or other relevant body responsible for the proposal.
Matters likely to require a child protection investigation	These will be handled under the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and relevant statutory/local safeguarding procedures. Immediate concerns about a child's safety should be reported through the appropriate safeguarding route.
Suspensions and permanent exclusions	These are governed by separate statutory procedures. Complaints about the application of the school's Behaviour Policy may be made through this complaints procedure.
Whistleblowing	Employees, including temporary staff and contractors, should use the school's Whistleblowing Policy. Volunteers may use this complaints procedure where appropriate.
Staff grievances	Complaints by staff about their own employment will be dealt with under the school's grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Where a complaint raises a staff-conduct matter, the school may deal with that aspect under disciplinary or other employment procedures. The complainant will not be informed of confidential disciplinary action, but will be told that the matter has been addressed as appropriate.
Services provided by other organisations using school premises	The provider's own complaints procedure should normally be used.

Matter	Route
National Curriculum content	Complaints about the content of the National Curriculum should be directed to the Department for Education. Complaints about the school's delivery of the curriculum may be considered under this procedure.

If another public body is investigating an aspect of the complaint - for example the police, a local authority safeguarding team or a tribunal - this may affect the school's ability to meet the published timescales. The school may pause all or part of the procedure until that investigation has concluded where this is necessary and reasonable.

If a complainant commences legal action against the school in relation to the complaint, the school will consider whether it is appropriate to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

8. Resolving complaints

At each stage, the school will seek to resolve the complaint. Where appropriate, we may acknowledge that a complaint is upheld in whole or in part. Possible remedies include:

- an explanation;
- an acknowledgement that a situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance about steps to reduce the likelihood of the issue recurring;
- an explanation of actions already taken or planned, with timescales where appropriate;
- a review of relevant school systems, procedures or policies;
- an apology.

Mediation may sometimes be helpful, but it will not replace a proper investigation at a formal stage and will not be used to prevent a complainant progressing through the procedure.

9. Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing where possible. The school may nevertheless decide to consider any safeguarding, legal, regulatory or organisational issues arising from the matters raised.

10. Stage 1 - formal complaint

Formal complaints should be made using the routes set out in section 3. They may be made in person, by telephone or in writing, although a written complaint or completed complaint form is helpful because it provides a clear record of the issues raised.

The school will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt in writing, by letter or email, within three school days.

At the outset, the person responsible for Stage 1 will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant is seeking. A meeting may be offered where this would assist.

Where the Headteacher is the Stage 1 decision-maker, they may delegate the investigation to an appropriate senior leader or to a suitably skilled independent person, including a senior leader from another school. The Headteacher retains responsibility for the Stage 1 decision unless the complaint is about the Headteacher.

During the investigation, the investigator will, as appropriate:

- interview those involved and any relevant witnesses, allowing an individual to be accompanied where appropriate;

- consider relevant records, correspondence and other evidence;
- keep a written record of meetings, interviews and key decisions;
- approach the matter with an open mind and give relevant parties a fair opportunity to explain their position.

At the conclusion of the investigation, a formal written response will normally be provided within fifteen school days of receipt of the complaint. If this deadline cannot be met, the complainant will be given an update, the reason for the delay and a revised response date.

The response will explain the investigation undertaken, the decision reached and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, it will identify action the school intends to take to resolve the complaint or improve practice. The response will also explain how the complainant may escalate the complaint to Stage 2.

Complaints about the Headteacher or an individual governor will be considered by a suitably skilled and impartial governor or, where appropriate, an independent investigator. Complaints involving the Chair and Vice-Chair jointly, the majority of the governing body or the entire governing body will be considered at Stage 1 by an independent investigator arranged through the Clerk to the Governing Body.

11. Stage 2 - governing body complaints panel

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1, they may ask for the complaint to progress to Stage 2. Stage 2 is the final stage of the school's complaints procedure.

A request to escalate should be made via the school office, for the attention of the Clerk to the Governing Body, within ten school days of the Stage 1 response. Requests outside this period will be considered where exceptional circumstances apply.

The school will record the date the Stage 2 request is received and acknowledge it in writing within three school days.

The school will aim to convene the panel within twenty school days of receiving the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the complainant will be given an anticipated date and kept informed.

The panel will consist of at least three governors who have had no prior involvement in, or detailed knowledge of, the complaint. The panel members will select a Chair. Where the school cannot form a suitably impartial panel, governors or associate members from another school may be invited to serve. An entirely independent panel may be convened where appropriate.

Stage 2 will consider the complaint afresh. The panel may consider both the substantive issues raised and the school's handling of the complaint at Stage 1. It is not limited to reviewing whether Stage 1 procedure was followed.

A complainant who believes there is likely to be bias in the proposed panel may request an independent panel and should provide reasons or evidence in support. The school will consider the request fairly, taking account of both actual and apparent bias.

The panel may decide to consider the complaint at a meeting or, where appropriate, through written representations. In making this decision it will be sensitive to the complainant's needs and ensure both parties have a fair opportunity to present their case.

If a meeting is arranged, the complainant may bring a relative, friend or other supporter. Legal representation is not normally encouraged because the panel is not a legal proceeding, although there may be circumstances where legal or trade-union representation is appropriate. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

If the school has made reasonable attempts to offer suitable dates and the complainant rejects three proposed dates without good reason, the school may set a date and proceed in the complainant's absence using the written material available.

Before the meeting

At least ten school days before the meeting, the school will:

- confirm the date, time and venue or online arrangements, ensuring the proceedings are accessible;
- ask both parties to submit any further written material at least five school days before the meeting.

Written material will normally be circulated to all parties at least three school days before the meeting. The panel will not normally accept covert recordings of conversations obtained without the informed consent of all people recorded.

New complaints or matters unrelated to the original complaint will not normally be added at Stage 2. A genuinely new complaint should begin at Stage 1, although the panel may consider new evidence that is directly relevant to the existing complaint.

The meeting

The meeting will be held in private. Audio or video recording is not normally permitted unless it is agreed in advance or is required as a reasonable adjustment. Where recording is permitted, the purpose and arrangements will be agreed beforehand and consent recorded.

The panel will consider the complaint and all relevant evidence presented. It may:

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

Where a complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the panel will decide what action, if any, should be taken to resolve the matter and may recommend changes to school systems, procedures or practice to reduce the risk of recurrence.

Outcome

The Chair of the panel will provide the complainant and the school with a written decision, including the reasons for it, within five school days of the meeting. If this timescale cannot be met, the complainant will be told why and given a revised date.

The decision letter will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if the complainant believes the school has failed to follow its published procedure or has acted unlawfully or unreasonably.

Minutes will be taken. Once approved, a copy will normally be provided to the complainant, subject to any necessary redactions to protect personal data, confidentiality or the rights of third parties.

Where the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice-Chair, the majority of the governing body or the entire governing body, Stage 2 will be heard by an independent panel.

12. Next steps

If, after completing Stage 2, the complainant believes the school did not handle the complaint in accordance with its published procedure, or believes the governing body acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of its duties under education law, they may contact the Department for Education.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of the complaint or overturn the school's decision. Its role is to consider whether the school has complied with education law and its published procedures, and whether it has acted reasonably.

Online: www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe

Telephone: 0370 000 2288

Post: Ministerial and Public Communication Division, Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

13. Records, confidentiality and data protection

The school will keep a secure record of the progress of a formal complaint, relevant investigation material and the final outcome. Records will be managed in accordance with the UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the school's records-retention arrangements.

Information about an ongoing complaint will be shared only with those who need it for the fair and effective handling of the matter, subject to safeguarding, legal and regulatory requirements. Details of complaints should not normally be shared with the whole governing body while a complaint is still being considered, so that sufficient governors remain impartial and available for Stage 2.

Complaint records will normally be held separately from a pupil's educational record unless information properly forms part of that record for another reason.

14. Managing unreasonable, persistent and serial complaints

Horsforth Newlaithes Primary School is committed to dealing with 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 the school. However, staff and governors are not expected to tolerate behaviour that is abusive, offensive, threatening or so frequent or unreasonable that it materially hinders the school's ability to consider the complaint or carry out its other duties.

Examples of unreasonable behaviour may include a complainant who:

- refuses to set out the complaint, the grounds for it or the outcome sought despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to cooperate with the complaints process or to accept that certain issues fall outside its scope;
- insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with the published procedure or good practice;
- introduces large amounts of trivial, irrelevant or repetitive information and requires detailed responses to it;
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insists on immediate answers to self-imposed timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff dealing with the complaint and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint repeatedly as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly raises substantially the same complaint after the procedure has been properly completed;
- seeks an outcome that is plainly unrealistic or outside the school's power to provide;
- makes excessive demands on school time through frequent, lengthy or complicated contact while the complaint is being considered;
- uses threats, harassment, abusive, offensive or discriminatory language, or violence;
- knowingly provides falsified information;
- publishes personal, confidential or otherwise unacceptable information on social media or other public forums in a way that interferes with fair complaint handling or the rights of others.

Complainants should try to keep communication about an active complaint proportionate and focused. Repeated correspondence can delay an outcome and place unnecessary demands on staff time.

A complaint will not be treated as serial simply because the complainant remains dissatisfied or continues to pursue it through the published stages. A complainant will normally be allowed to complete the procedure in full. Exercising the right to contact an MP will not, of itself, be treated as serial or unreasonable behaviour.

Once the complaints procedure has been completed, if a complainant repeatedly seeks to reopen substantially the same issue, the school may confirm that the matter is closed and decide not to respond further on that subject. Any genuinely new complaint will be considered on its own merits.

Where contact itself is causing significant disruption, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, as appropriate, may agree a proportionate communication plan. This may specify a single point of contact, method of communication or reasonable limits on frequency. The plan will be explained in writing and reviewed, normally after no more than six months.

Wherever practicable, concerns about unreasonable contact will be discussed with the complainant before restrictions are imposed. Any decision to stop responding will be taken only after reasonable steps have been taken to address the complaint and the school's position and the complainant's remaining options have been made clear.

Serious aggression, threats or violence may be reported to the police. The school may also take steps to control access to school premises where necessary for safety. Any barring decision will be handled fairly, including an opportunity for the individual to make representations and appropriate governor review.

15. Managing complaint campaigns

Occasionally, the school may receive a large volume of complaints about the same subject, including from people who are not connected with the school. Where it is reasonable and appropriate to do so, the school may:

- send a standard response to complainants where the issues raised are materially the same; or
- publish a single response on the school website.

This approach does not remove the school's responsibility to consider relevant safeguarding concerns, individual circumstances or genuinely different complaints.

Appendix 1: Complaint form

Please complete this form and return it to the Headteacher via the school office. If the complaint is about the Headteacher or a governor, send the form via the school office for onward transmission to the appropriate person under section 3. You may instead make a complaint by another accessible method.

Your name	
Pupil's name (if relevant)	
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant)	
Address and postcode	
Daytime telephone number	
Email address	

Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have already spoken to anybody at the school about it.

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What outcome or action do you feel might resolve the matter?

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Are you attaching any documents? If so, please give details.

Signature	Date

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent	
Acknowledged by	
Complaint referred to	
Stage / investigator	
Date	

Appendix 2: Roles and responsibilities

Complainant

A complaint is more likely to be resolved effectively where the complainant:

- explains the complaint fully as early as possible;
- cooperates with the school in seeking a resolution;
- responds promptly to reasonable requests for information, meetings or clarification;
- asks for assistance where needed;
- treats those involved with respect;
- respects confidentiality and avoids publicising personal or sensitive details in a way that could compromise privacy or fair handling.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint through a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair process. This may include:

- sensitive and thorough discussion with the complainant;
- interviewing staff, pupils/young people and other relevant people;
- considering records, correspondence and other relevant information;
- analysing the evidence and identifying areas of agreement, disagreement and uncertainty;
- liaising with the person administering the complaint to clarify what the complainant feels would put matters right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and ask appropriate follow-up questions;
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note-taker;
- keep complaint papers securely;
- be mindful of the published timescales;
- prepare a clear report or evidence summary for the decision-maker, setting out the relevant facts and any appropriate recommendations.

The Stage 1 decision-maker or Stage 2 panel will determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part, and will communicate the decision with the appropriate escalation information.

Complaints coordinator / administrator

The person administering the complaint may be a member of school staff or the Clerk to the Governing Body, depending on the nature of the complaint. Their responsibilities may include:

- keeping the complainant updated at each stage;
- liaising with staff, the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk, investigators and external advisers as appropriate;
- ensuring appropriate support is considered, including interpretation, accessibility support or support for a child or young person;
- maintaining secure records;
- arranging dates, times, venues and accessibility for meetings;
- collating and circulating written material within the published timescales;
- communicating the panel's decision and providing approved minutes where appropriate.

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk provides governance and procedural advice and may administer complaints about governors or support Stage 2. The Clerk may:

- advise those involved about relevant legal and procedural duties, including education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR;
- arrange an impartial investigator or panel where required;
- record or arrange the recording of panel proceedings;
- support the panel Chair in ensuring the procedure is followed fairly.

Panel Chair

The panel Chair should ensure that:

- both parties are asked to provide any additional relevant information by the specified deadline;
- the meeting is conducted in a calm, respectful and non-adversarial way;
- the remit of the panel is clear;
- the complainant and the school have a fair opportunity to make their case and seek clarification;
- written material is available to those entitled to see it, subject to confidentiality and data-protection requirements;
- the issues are addressed and key findings of fact are made;
- the panel remains open-minded and independent;
- no panel member has a conflict of interest or prior involvement that could undermine impartiality;
- the meeting is minuted and the outcome letter clearly explains the decision and reasons.

Panel members

Panel members should be aware that:

- the panel must be independent and impartial and must be seen to be so;
- the purpose is to consider the complaint fairly, seek resolution where possible and identify any learning or action required;
- a complainant may remain dissatisfied even where the panel does not find in their favour;
- complainants may be nervous or emotional when discussing a matter that affects their child;
- additional care is needed where the complainant is a child or young person.

Where a child or young person is involved, the panel should consider what support they need to participate, whether attendance at all or part of the meeting is in their best interests, and how their views can be heard safely and appropriately. The welfare of the child or young person is paramount.

Reference framework

This procedure has been prepared with regard to section 29 of the Education Act 2002 and the Department for Education guidance for complaints procedures in maintained schools. It should be read alongside the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Behaviour Policy, Whistleblowing Policy, Data Protection Policy and relevant staff employment procedures.

DfE school complaints guidance: www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-complaints-procedures