

Complaints Procedure

(Statutory)

Approved by Trustees' Full Board:

Review Cycle: Annually

Review Date: July 2026

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1. Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of students at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of students at the school.

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on [creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations](#).

This policy complies with our Funding Agreement and Articles of Association.

3. Definitions and scope

3.1 Definitions

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”.
- A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”.

3.2 Scope

The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does **not** cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs and disability (SEND)
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances

- Staff discipline
- Withdrawal from the curriculum (parents and carers can withdraw their child from any aspect of religious education, including the daily act of collective worship. They do not have to explain why).

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

4.2 The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the executive headteacher or complaints committee which includes the facts and potential solutions

4.3 The complaints co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- The executive headteacher
- Any other staff member providing administrative support

The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the executive headteacher, chair of trustees, and clerk
- Be aware of issues relating to:
 - o Sharing third party information
 - o Additional support needed by complainants, for example interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person

- Keep records.

4.4 Clerk to the board of trustees

The clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

4.5 Committee chair

The committee chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

5. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

5.1 Time scales

The complainant must raise the complaint within three months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within three months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the time scales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

6. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the executive headteacher or trustees)

6.1 Stage 1: Informal

The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff (class teacher, head of year, head of department) or the executive headteacher, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school office on 01425 652039 or email: burgate@burgate.hants.sch.uk.

The executive headteacher or a delegated member of the leadership team will determine the date a complaint was received, for the purposes of the established subsequent deadlines.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within three school days and investigate and provide a response within ten school days.

The informal stage may involve a meeting between the complainant and a member of the Leadership Team and/or the subject of the complaint, if appropriate.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

6.2. Stage 2: Formal

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint to the executive headteacher:

- In a letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on their behalf

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office on 01425 652039 or email: burgate@burgate.hants.sch.uk

The executive headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within three school days.

The executive headteacher (or other person appointed by the executive headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within ten school days.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the clerk to the board of trustees in writing within ten school days.

6.3 Stage 3: Review panel

Convening the panel

Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal, stage.

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the executive headteacher and must consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school. The panel cannot be made up solely of board of trustees' members, as they are not independent of the management and running of the school.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 10).

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The clerk will aim to find a date within twenty school days of the request, where possible.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least five school days before the date of the meeting.

At the meeting

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 will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

At the review panel meeting, the complainant, and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish. Either party is not encouraged to bring legal representation, but this will be considered on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the proprietor and executive headteacher.

The outcome

The committee can:

- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld, the committee will:

- Decide 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 school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within ten school days.

7. Complaints against the executive headteacher, a trustee or the board of trustees

7.1 Stage 1: Informal

Complaints made against the executive headteacher or any member of the board of trustees should be directed to the clerk to the board of trustees in the first instance.

If the complaint is about the executive headteacher or one member of the board of trustees (including the chair or vice-chair), a suitably-skilled and impartial trustee will carry out the steps at stage 1 (set out in section 6 above).

7.2 Stage 2: Formal

If the complaint is

- Jointly about the chair and vice-chair or
- The entire board of trustees or
- The majority of the board of trustees

An independent investigator will carry out the steps in stage 2 (set out in section 6 above). They will be appointed by the board of trustees and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation.

7.3 Stage 3: Review panel

If the complaint is

- Jointly about the chair and vice-chair or
- The entire board of trustees or
- The majority of the board of trustees

A committee of independent trustees will hear the complaint. They will be sourced from local schools and will carry out the steps at stage 3 (set out in section 6 above).

8. Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). The ESFA will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school. The ESFA will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint, but will intervene if a school or trust has:

- Breached a clause in its funding agreement
- Failed to act in line with its duties under education law
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions

If the school's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

We will include this information in the outcome letter to complainants.

Part 2: Concerns or complaints from other persons

Part 1 of this complaints policy applies only to complaints made by parents of current registered students of the school. However, the school wishes to work closely with other members of the local community and will deal with their concerns and complaints as follows:

- 1 Stage 1 - a concern regarding the school or its operations may be made to any member of staff. That member of staff will attempt to resolve the matter immediately or may, if appropriate, refer the matter to their line manager or member of the leadership team (LT) who is best placed to deal with the concern. It is expected that most concerns will be responded to orally or in writing within five school days. If a longer period is required, you will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation.
- 2 Stage 2 - where a concern is not resolved at Stage 1, or you wish your concerns to be dealt with immediately as a formal complaint, you should put your complaint in writing and send this to the Executive Headteacher to investigate. The Executive Headteacher may delegate the task of investigation and/or responding to the complaint to a member of LT or may

escalate the complaint straight to Stage 3. A formal response to the complaint will usually be provided within 15 school days of receipt of the letter of complaint although if a longer period is required to respond, you will be kept updated.

- 3 Stage 3 - if you are not satisfied with the response at Stage 2, you may request a review by writing to the school's Chair of Trustees. You should write to the Chair of Trustees within 15 school days of receipt of the letter at Stage 2. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. The Chair of Trustees will usually arrange for a trustee to consider the complaint alone or may refer the matter to a review panel on the same terms as set out in Part 1 of this complaints policy. The decision at this stage will usually be sent to you within 15 school days of receipt of the request for a review or within five school days of the Review Panel hearing (as applicable).
- 4 Stage 4 - if you are dissatisfied with the decision at Stage 3, you are entitled to refer your complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) as outlined in Part 1 of this complaints policy.

Concerns or complaints regarding the Associate Headteacher should be referred direct to the Executive Headteacher who will arrange for the stages above to be considered by an appropriate person.

Concerns or complaints regarding the Executive Headteacher should be referred direct to the school's Chair of Trustees who will arrange for the stages above to be considered by an appropriate person.

Part 3: Repetitious and vexatious complaints and complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

There are rare circumstances where we will deviate from the Complaints Procedure set out in Parts 1 and 2. These include, but are not necessarily limited to:

1. Repetitious, including serial and/or persistent, complaints

Where the complainant's complaint is the same, similar to or based on the same facts of a complaint which has already been considered in full and we have:

- taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns; and
- given the complainant a clear statement of our position and their options,

we will write to the complainant to advise that the complaints procedure has been exhausted and that we will not be responding to any further correspondence in relation to these matters. If complainants remain dissatisfied with the school's response, they will be directed to the ESFA.

2. Vexatious complaints

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator defines the characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint as:

- complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitious;
- insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
- insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance; and
- demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- refusal to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refusal to co-operate with the complaints investigation process;
- refusal to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure;
- insistence on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introducing trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on;
- raising large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insisting they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeking to have them replaced;
- changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- seeking an unrealistic outcome, such as the inappropriate dismissal of staff;
- making 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;
- knowingly providing falsified information;
- publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

3. Complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner

Where the complainant's behaviour or language towards staff, trustees or members is aggressive, abusive, offensive, discriminatory, or threatening or insulting personal comments are made about, or threats are made towards, staff.

4. Steps we will take:

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place. We may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#)
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

5. Stopping responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

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 our school site (see policy on Managing the Conduct of Parents and Visitors to The Burgate School and Sixth Form).

6. Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we had not previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

7. Complaint campaigns

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint campaign is defined as a complaint from three or more separate individuals (whether or not connected with the school) which are all based on the same subject.

Depending on the subject in question, we may deviate from the procedure set out in this policy and instead:

- Publishing a single response on the school website (as applicable)
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

Part 5: Recording Keeping/Learning Lessons

1. Record keeping

The school will record the progress of all formal complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records may also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or through a subject access request under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and our data retention policy.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole board of trustees in case a panel hearing needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the board of trustees is aware of the substance of the complaint before the panel hearing stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the board of trustees, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

2. Learning lessons

The board of trustees will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the executive headteacher/ leadership team where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

3. Monitoring arrangements

The board of trustees will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The board of trustees will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 11.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the clerk to the board of trustees.

This policy will be reviewed by the executive headteacher every year.

At each review, the policy will be approved by the full board of trustees.

4. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Low Level Concerns policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Admissions policy
- Suspension and permanent exclusion policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- SEN policy and information report
- Privacy notices

Date reviewed/approved by the Board of Trustees: 10 July 2025

Complaint Form

Appendix One: Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Executive Headteacher who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Student's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the student (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 complaint first received:

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Action taken:

Date: