

Hartismere Family of Schools



Complaints Policy and Procedure

Most complaints are dealt with under this policy, with the exception of safeguarding matters, staff grievances, suspensions and exclusions, admission appeals, matters related to handling of personal data, whistleblowing and statutory assessment of special needs, which are dealt with under separate procedures. Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the incident, or last of the incidents occurring. This procedure may be suspended to avoid prejudicing a concurrent investigation by another body.

General Principles

- Complaints are handled fairly and as quickly as possible.
- Most concerns can be resolved informally through discussion.

The Complaints Process

1. **Informal resolution:** Most complaints are resolved at this stage. Concerns should first be raised with the relevant member of staff, for example, with the class teacher or form tutor, year team (for secondary schools), or Headteacher. The complaint will be acknowledged within 3 school days. Meetings or phone calls are encouraged to ensure concerns are fully understood. The Headteacher may, if they deem it appropriate and reasonable, delegate an investigation to a senior staff member who will investigate and respond to the complaint under their delegated authority. The school aims to provide an outcome within 15 school days (or longer if the matter is complex, with the complainant kept informed). If the matter remains unresolved, you may proceed to the formal resolution stage.
2. **Formal resolution:** A formal complaint must be set out in writing to the Headteacher (or to the Chair of Governors if the complaint is about the Headteacher). The complaint will be acknowledged within 3 school days. An investigation will take place and a written response provided within 15 school days (or longer if the matter is complex, with the complainant kept informed). The Headteacher may, if they deem it appropriate and reasonable, delegate an investigation to a senior staff member who will investigate the complaint under their delegated authority. However, the final decision on the matter remains with the Headteacher. After this point, the Headteacher will cease to be directly involved in the complaint resolution process.
3. **Trust CEO and Chair of Trustees:** If the complaint is not resolved at the formal resolution stage, the complainant may exercise the option to have their complaint heard by the CEO and Chair of Trustees. This will happen within 15 school days of receiving your wish to escalate the complaint. The complaint must be set out in writing to the CEO and Chair of Trustees and will be acknowledged within 3 school days.
4. **Hearings committee:** Either a meeting will be held which parties will be invited to, or written submissions will be considered. This will happen within 15 school days of receiving your wish to escalate the complaint. The panel will include a member independent of the management and running of the school. The panel will consider whether the complaint was handled properly and whether the outcome was reasonable. The panel's decision, along with findings and recommendations where relevant, will be confirmed in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, within 5 school days of the hearing. They will also be made available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and Headteacher(s). The panel may uphold or dismiss the complaint (in whole or in part).

This is the final stage of the school's complaints procedure.

Complaints against a governor, the chair, or the governing board should be made in writing to the clerk to the governing board via the school office, marked as private and confidential.

Referring a Complaint to the Department for Education (DfE)

If you believe the school has not followed the correct complaints procedure or relevant education law, you may refer the matter to the DfE. The DfE will not usually reinvestigate the substance of complaints, but may consider whether statutory guidance has been followed.

Website: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

Telephone: 0370 000 2288

Early Years (Primary Schools Only)

Written complaints about Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements will be investigated and responded to within 28 days. Records of such complaints are made available to Ofsted upon request.

Unreasonable or persistent complaints

The school may take proportionate action where complaints are deemed unreasonable or persistent, in line with DfE guidance, while ensuring access to the complaints process for new or substantive issues. Complaints which are generated by artificial intelligence (AI) will not automatically be viewed as official complaints, especially where their content is not firmly rooted in the specific cause of concern. Such complaints may be returned to complainants as unreasonable by virtue of their origination method. In such circumstances, complainants will be given the opportunity to resubmit their complaint.

Malicious complainants

Individuals can be identified as malicious complainants based on threats, personalised criticism of staff in public forums and on social media, over-use of AI, and indications in their complaint that they want to create as much noise as possible, rather than follow this procedure. If they are identified as such, the Headteacher(s) can nominate this to the Chair of the Local Governing Body, if they agree. The Complainant will be notified of this and will be able to appeal this nomination with the Chair of Trustees and CEO.

Record keeping

A written record will be kept of complaints that reach the formal stage, including whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and action taken by the school as a result of those complaints. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or Ofsted requests access to them.

Trust and school offices

Benjamin Britten School	office@benjaminbritten.school	01502 582312
Carlton Colville Primary School	office@carltoncolvilleprimary.co.uk	01502 572682
Hartismere School	office@hartismere.com	01379 870315
Ludham Primary School	office@ludham.norfolk.sch.uk	01692 678293
Somerleyton Primary School	admin@somerleytonprimary.co.uk	01502 730503
Woods Loke Primary School	office@woodsloke.org	01502 561234
Hartismere Family of Schools	office@hartismere.com	01379 870315