Concerns and Complaints Policy

Approved by:	Governing Body	**Date:** 14/7/26
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Concerns and Complaints Policy

1. Introduction

The School is committed to maintaining positive and constructive relationships with pupils, parents, carers and members of the wider community.

We recognise that from time to time concerns may arise. The School encourages concerns to be raised promptly so that they can be resolved informally wherever possible.

The purpose of this policy is to provide a fair, transparent and proportionate process for addressing concerns that cannot be resolved through discussion.

The School expects all participants in the complaints process to communicate respectfully and courteously. Equally, the School is entitled to expect that concerns and complaints are raised honestly, reasonably and in good faith.

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2. Guiding Principles

The School aims to:

- resolve concerns at the earliest opportunity;
- maintain constructive relationships wherever possible;
- ensure complaints are considered fairly and impartially;
- make decisions based on evidence rather than assumption;
- protect staff from unreasonable conduct or excessive demands;
- use school resources proportionately and effectively.

The complaints process is not intended to determine “winners” and “losers”. Its purpose is to establish facts, understand differing perspectives and identify appropriate resolutions where necessary.

The School recognises that individuals may draw different conclusions from the same event. Complaints will therefore be considered by examining evidence, records, professional judgement, witness accounts and the perspectives of all those directly involved.

The existence of differing accounts does not necessarily mean that either party is acting in bad faith.

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3. Concern or Complaint?

Concern

A concern is an expression of worry, uncertainty or dissatisfaction which may be resolved through discussion, clarification or explanation.

Complaint

A complaint is a formal expression of dissatisfaction regarding an action, decision or omission by the School that remains unresolved following Stage 1 of this procedure.

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4. Three-Stage Complaints Process

Stage 1 – Resolution Meeting with a Senior Leader

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Stage 2 – Formal Complaint Investigation

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Stage 3 – Governor Review Panel

No complaint will normally progress to the next stage until the previous stage has been completed.

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5. Stage 1 – Resolution Meeting

Before a formal complaint can be accepted, the complainant will normally be expected to participate in a Resolution Meeting with an appropriate member of the Senior Leadership Team.

This may include:

- Deputy Headteacher;
- SENCO;
- School Business Manager;
- Key Stage Leader.

The Headteacher will not normally be involved at this stage unless deemed necessary.

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- understand the concern;
- establish relevant facts;
- clarify assumptions or misunderstandings;
- identify evidence;

- consider alternative perspectives;
- explore possible resolutions.

The School believes that many concerns can be resolved through open discussion and clarification.

Where a face-to-face meeting is not possible, alternative arrangements may be offered.

Following the meeting, the School will provide a brief written summary of the discussion and any agreed actions.

If the concern remains unresolved, the complainant may proceed to Stage 2.

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6. Two-Way Exchange of Information

The complaints process is a two-way exchange of information.

Whilst the School will be expected to explain and evidence its actions, decisions and professional judgements, complainants may also be asked to clarify, evidence and substantiate any concerns, assumptions, interpretations or conclusions that form part of their complaint.

The School may ask questions designed to establish whether a concern is based upon:

- direct evidence;
- reasonable inference;
- information provided by others;
- hearsay;
- personal opinion;
- assumption.

The School will evaluate complaints on the basis of available evidence rather than assertion, speculation or opinion alone.

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7. Complaint Clarification Questions

In order to ensure concerns can be investigated fairly and proportionately, the School may ask:

- What are the three main concerns you would like the School to understand?
- What happened from your perspective?
- Which aspects of the matter are based on direct knowledge?
- What information or evidence would you like the School to consider?
- What specific aspect of the School's actions or decisions concerns you most?
- What outcome are you seeking?
- If the School were able to provide an explanation today, would that help resolve the matter?
- Is there anything essential that the School should know before deciding next steps?

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8. Submitting a Formal Complaint

If the matter remains unresolved after Stage 1, a formal complaint may be submitted.

Formal complaints must:

- be submitted within 20 school days of the Stage 1 outcome;
- be in writing;
- identify the issue being complained about;
- explain why the complainant remains dissatisfied;
- identify the outcome sought.

The School normally expects complaints to be no longer than 1,000 words or two sides of A4. The School may waive this limit where reasonable adjustments or exceptional circumstances apply and a complaint will not be rejected solely because it exceeds the recommended length. Where a complaint is excessively lengthy, repetitive or unclear, the School may request a concise summary before accepting the complaint. The complaint must be submitted to enquiries@johnharrox.lincs.sch.uk

Complaints about members of the Senior Leadership Team will normally be investigated by the Headteacher or another suitably independent investigator.

Where a complaint concerns the Headteacher, the complaint should be submitted to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors will determine the appropriate handling of the complaint and may undertake the investigation personally or appoint an impartial investigator. Any subsequent review will be conducted by governors who have had no prior involvement in the matter. The chair of Governors can be contacted at: claire.sammons1@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Any person may make a complaint about facilities or services provided by the school.

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9. Use of Artificial Intelligence

The School recognises that complainants may use digital tools to assist with drafting correspondence.

However, complaints must accurately reflect the complainant's own concerns, experiences and desired outcomes.

Where correspondence appears generic, inaccurate, excessively lengthy, contains speculative allegations, or fails to identify clear issues capable of investigation, the School may request clarification before accepting the complaint.

The School will investigate evidence and facts rather than volume of correspondence.

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10. Complaint Information

Complainants should identify all matters they wish the School to consider when submitting a complaint.

Once a complaint has been accepted for investigation, additional matters will not normally be added.

Any new issues raised after acceptance may be treated as a separate complaint and considered under a new process.

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11. Matters Not Normally Investigated

The School will not normally investigate complaints that:

- have already been considered under this policy;
- concern matters raised more than three months after the event;
- are anonymous;
- are hypothetical or speculative;
- are abusive, offensive or threatening;
- contain discriminatory language;
- seek to revisit matters already concluded without new evidence;
- are submitted in excessive volume;
- fall under separate statutory procedures. Examples include admissions, exclusions, statutory SEN decisions, safeguarding matters, staff grievances, staff disciplinary processes and whistleblowing concerns, which are dealt with under separate procedures.

The Headteacher reserves the right to determine whether exceptional circumstances justify investigation.

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12. Stage 2 – Formal Investigation

The Headteacher, or an appropriately appointed senior leader, will investigate the complaint.

The investigator may:

- review records;
- consider written submissions;
- interview relevant individuals;
- seek written statements;
- request further clarification.

The investigator will determine which matters are relevant to the complaint and proportionate to investigate.

The School is not required to investigate every assertion, assumption, question or allegation contained within a complaint where these are not material to the issues being considered.

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13. Stage 2 Outcome

A written response will normally be provided within 15 school days. The school will have 5 school days to provide receipt of the complaint and then a further 10 school days from the receipt of the complaint to providing a written response.

The response will:

- summarise the issues investigated;
- explain findings;
- provide reasons for conclusions;
- identify any actions arising.

The decision represents the School's formal position.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may request a Governor Review Panel.

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14. Stage 3 – Governor Review Panel

Requests for a Governor Review Panel must be submitted within 10 school days of the Stage 2 response.

The request must explain:

- why the complainant believes the investigation was flawed;
- which conclusions remain disputed;
- what outcome is sought.

The Governor Review Panel is not a re-investigation. The Governor Review Panel will normally consist of three impartial governors who have had no prior involvement in the complaint. The School will take reasonable steps to ensure that complaints are considered impartially. Investigators and panel members must be free from any actual or perceived conflict of interest and have had no prior involvement that could compromise their independence. Where appropriate, an independent governor may be appointed to support the fair consideration of a complaint.

Its purpose is to consider whether:

- the procedure was followed;
- relevant evidence was considered;
- conclusions were reasonable based upon the evidence available.

Where a complaint progresses to a Governor Review Panel, the complainant will be given the opportunity to attend the meeting and explain why they remain dissatisfied with the Stage 2 outcome. The complainant may be

accompanied by a friend, relative or representative for support. The panel will consider the complainant's views, the outcome of the investigation, and any relevant evidence before reaching its decision.

The panel may:

- dismiss the complaint;
- uphold in whole or part;
- recommend actions to remedy matters;
- recommend policy or procedural improvements.

The panel's findings and recommendations will be provided in writing with reasons.

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15. Standards of Conduct

The School expects all participants to communicate respectfully throughout the complaints process.

The School will not tolerate:

- abusive behaviour;
- aggressive language;
- personal attacks;
- harassment;
- intimidation;
- discriminatory remarks;
- unreasonable demands on staff time.

The School reserves the right to manage communication where behaviour becomes unreasonable.

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16. Managing Serial, Persistent and Unreasonable Complaints

A complaint may be considered unreasonable where a complainant:

- repeatedly raises issues already considered;
- refuses to accept findings without new evidence;
- contacts multiple staff members regarding the same issue;
- submits excessive correspondence;
- seeks outcomes beyond the School's authority to provide.

In such circumstances, the School may:

- require communication through a single point of contact;
- limit the frequency of correspondence;
- decline to respond to matters already addressed;

- conclude that the matter is closed.

The complainant will be informed of any such decision in writing.

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17. Confidentiality

All complaints will be handled confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation.

Information will only be shared with those who require access for the purposes of investigating or determining the complaint.

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18. Record Keeping

The School will keep a written record of all formal complaints, together with supporting correspondence, evidence, investigation notes, actions taken and final outcomes. These records will be held securely by the School and retained in accordance with the School's Records Retention Schedule and data protection legislation. Records will be accessible only to those with a legitimate need to review them and will be securely destroyed when the retention period expires.

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19. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Governing Body to ensure it remains effective, proportionate and consistent with current statutory guidance.

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20. Reasonable Adjustments and Accessibility

The School is committed to ensuring that the complaints process is accessible to all. Where a complainant has a disability, additional communication needs, or requires support to access this procedure, the School will consider and make reasonable adjustments where appropriate. This may include alternative formats, additional time to provide information, support at meetings, or other measures to enable full participation in the complaints process.