

# **Alder Community High School**



## **Complaints Procedure**

**Reviewed by Governors: November 2016**

**Next Review: Autumn 2018**

## ALDER COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

This policy statement sets out our approach to dealing with parental concerns and complaints.

We always aim to maintain positive relationships with families and do our best to address any concerns as soon as they arise. However we are aware that in some instances a parent/carer may wish to make a complaint.

1. We value good home/school relations and will, therefore, do everything we can to establish and maintain them. This includes seeking to resolve any concerns or complaints promptly, and to the satisfaction of all concerned.
2. We welcome feedback on what parents feel we do well or not so well, as a school. We will consider carefully all feedback, whether positive or negative, and will review our policies and practices accordingly.
3. We will treat all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously and will advise parents and others of the school's procedures for dealing with their concerns. In return, we expect parents and other complainants to behave respectfully towards all members of the school community. In particular, any disagreement with the school should not be expressed inappropriately or in front of pupils.
4. All school staff and members of the governing body will receive a copy of this policy statement and will be familiar with the school's procedures for dealing with parental concerns and complaints, to which they will have access as required. The policy is available on request to parents.
5. The school's procedures will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.
6. Staff and governors will receive training in handling parental concerns and complaints as appropriate. This may be on an individual basis, or as a group activity for all staff, or for specific groups, such as the office staff or members of the governing body.
7. A dissatisfied complainant will be given the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.
8. The governors advocate resolution of parental concerns and complaints at school level wherever possible, in the interests of maintaining good home/school relations.

In summary, the nationally accepted procedure is divided into three stages:

**Stage 1** aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school.

**Stage 2** is the first formal stage where the complaint made in person, by telephone or in writing are considered by the Headteacher or a designated governor, who has responsibility for dealing with complaints.

**Stage 3** is the next step once Stage 2 is complete. It involves a complaints review panel of governors. Such a panel may be offered at the discretion of the Chair of Governors.

## **Informal stage – your initial contact with the school**

1. Many concerns will be dealt with informally when you make them known to us. The first point of contact should be your child's form teacher, subject teacher or progress leader depending on the nature of your concern. If it is necessary, all members of staff know how to refer to the appropriate person with responsibility for your particular issues. He or she will make a clear note of the details and will check later to make sure that the matter has been followed up.
2. Once your concern is made known to us, we will see you, or contact you by telephone or in writing (whichever is most appropriate), as soon as possible.
3. Any actions or monitoring of the situation that has been agreed will be communicated clearly to you in an appropriate format.
4. If necessary we will contact appropriate people who may be able to assist us with our enquiries into your concern.
5. We will normally update you on the progress of our enquiries with a practical timeframe. Once we have responded to your concern, you will have the opportunity of asking for the matter to be considered further, still within the informal stage.
6. If you are still dissatisfied following this informal approach, your concern will become a formal complaint and we will deal with it at the next stage.

## **Stage 2 - formal consideration of your complaint**

This stage in our procedures deals with formal complaints. It applies where you are not happy with the informal approach to dealing with your concern, as outlined above.

1. Normally, your written complaint should be on a completed complaint form (appendix 1) addressed to the Headteacher. Where there are communication difficulties (under the Equality Act 2010) you can choose to make the complaint by telephone or in person. School may wish to use recording devices/minute taking to ensure the complainant is able to access and review any discussions at a later point. Where if, however, your complaint concerns the Headteacher personally, it should be sent to the school marked "For the attention of the Chair of Governors".
2. We will acknowledge your complaint in writing as soon as possible after receiving it. We will do all we can do ensure this is within three working days.
3. We will enclose a copy of these procedures with the acknowledgement.
4. Normally we would expect to respond in full within 15 working days but if this is not possible we will contact you to explain the reason for the delay and let you know when we hope to be able to provide a full response.
5. As part of our consideration of your complaint, we may invite you to a meeting to discuss the complaint and fill in any details required. If you wish, you can ask someone to accompany you to help you explain the reasons for your complaint.
6. The Headteacher or Chair of Governors may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.
7. If the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the school's Whistleblowing and /or disciplinary procedures as appropriate.
8. Once we have established all the relevant facts, we will send you a written response to your complaint. This will give an explanation of the Headteacher's or Chair of Governors' decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, we will indicate what we are proposing

to do. We may invite you to a meeting to discuss the outcome as part of our commitment to building and maintaining good relations with you, although this may not always be necessary.

9. The person investigating your complaint may decide that we have done all we can to resolve the complaint, in which case we may use our discretion to close the complaint at this point. Please see the next page for further information about this process.
10. If you are unhappy with the outcome you may wish to proceed to stage 3, as described below.

### **Stage 3 - consideration by a complaint panel of the Governing Body**

- If the complaint has already been through stage 2 and you are not happy with the outcome as a result of the way in which the complaint has been handled, you can take it further to a governors appeal panel. This is a formal process, and the ultimate recourse at school level.
- The purpose of this arrangement is to give you the chance to present your issues in front of a panel of governors who have no prior knowledge of the details of the case and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice.
- However, the aim of a panel is not to rehear the complaint. It is there to review how the complaint has been investigated and to determine whether this has been conducted fairly. It is there to establish facts and make recommendations which will reassure you that we have taken the complaint seriously.

The governor appeal panel operates according to the following formal procedures:

1. The governing body will convene a panel of three governors and will aim to arrange for the panel meeting to take place within 20 working days.
2. You will be asked whether you wish to provide any further written documentation in support of your appeal.
3. The Headteacher or complaint investigator will be asked to prepare a written report for the panel. The panel can request additional information from other sources if necessary.
4. You will be informed, at least five working days in advance, of the date, time and place of the meeting.
5. With the letter, you will receive any relevant correspondence or reports regarding stage 1 and you will be asked whether you wish to submit further written evidence to the panel.
6. The letter will explain what will happen at the panel meeting and that you are entitled to be accompanied to the meeting. The choice of person to accompany you is your own, but it is usually best to involve someone in whom you have confidence but who is not directly connected with the school. They are there to give you support but also to witness the proceedings and to speak on your behalf if you wish.
7. If it is necessary in the interests of ratifying the investigative process, the complaint investigator may, with the agreement of the Chair of the panel, invite relevant witnesses directly involved in matters raised by you to attend the meeting.
8. The chair of the panel will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating for you and will do his or her best to put you at your ease.
9. As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses previously undisclosed should be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the meeting will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to the new evidence.

10. The Chair of the panel will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted. Please understand that any decision to share the minutes with you, the complainant, is a matter for the panel's discretion and you do not have an automatic right to see or receive a copy as the minutes are the property of the governing body. Since such minutes usually name individuals, they are understandably of a sensitive and, therefore, confidential nature.
11. Normally, the written outcome of the panel meeting, which will be sent to you, should give you all the information you require. If, however, you feel that you would like to have a copy of the minutes it would be helpful if you could indicate this in advance. If the panel is happy for the minutes to be copied to you, the clerk can then be asked maintain confidentiality in the minutes.
12. In closing the meeting, the chair will explain that the panel will now consider its decision and that written notice of the decision will be sent to you and the Headteacher within three school days. All participants other than the panel and the clerk will then leave.
13. The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in order to:
  - reach a unanimous, or at least a majority, decision on the case;
  - decide on the appropriate action to be taken, if necessary;
  - recommend, where appropriate, to the governing body changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.
14. The clerk will send you and the Headteacher a letter outlining the decision of the panel. The letter will also explain that you are entitled to have the handling of the complaint reviewed by the LA. That process is not strictly an appeal, as the local authority cannot direct the governing body in most general complaints cases. It is, however, an opportunity to seek the view of an official third party and the outcome, including any recommendations, may be helpful to you in seeking resolution of the complaint, through the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if necessary.
15. We will keep a copy of all correspondence and notes on file in the school's records but separate from pupils' personal records.

### **Closure of complaints**

- Very occasionally, the school and/or local authority will feel that it needs, regretfully, to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied.
- We, and the local authority where appropriate, will do all we can to help to resolve a complaint against the school but sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes. Sometimes it is simply a case of "agreeing to disagree".
- If a complainant persists in making representations to the school – to the Headteacher, designated governor, Chair of governors or anyone else – or to the local authority, this can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from our responsibility to look after the interests of all the children in our care.
- For this reason, we are entitled to close correspondence (including personal approaches, as well as letters and telephone calls) on a complaint where we feel that we have taken all reasonable action to resolve the complaint and that the complaint has exhausted our official process. The local authority will support us in this position, and especially where the complainant's action is causing distress to staff and/or pupils.
- In exceptional circumstances, closure may occur before a complaint has reached stage 2 of the procedures described in this document. This is because a complaints panel takes considerable

time and effort to set up and we must be sure that it is likely to assist the process of investigating the complaint.

- The chair of governors [the designated governor] may decide, therefore, that every reasonable action has been undertaken to resolve the complaint and that a complaints review panel would not help to move things forward.

**Appendix 1**

**Alder Community High School Governing Body Formal Complaint Form**

Please complete and return to the clerk to the Governing Body, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

**Your name:**

**Student's name (if relevant):**

**Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):**

**Address:**

**Postcode:**

**Contact telephone number:**

**E mail Address:**

Please give details of your complaint.

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint.

Who did you speak to and what was the response?

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

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

**Signature:**

**Date:**