



Complaints Policy

Date of Ratification: May 2020

Date of Review: May 2021

Approved by: Management Committee

Date: May 2020

Rationale

Northgate School is a unique organisation where the education provided is for vulnerable young people with complex mental health issues. We strive constantly to fulfil our strategic commitment, purpose and intent, our school motto of 'Together we can build a future' and do our best for all the young people in our care and for the adults on our staff.

In the course of every day there are many interactions between staff and students, staff and parents and carers and between students. We always try to communicate effectively and implement all processes and procedures fairly – but, as with any human organisation, sometimes things go wrong, communication fails, or we make a mistake.

In these circumstances we are very willing to listen to criticism and challenge and we hope to respond in a positive spirit in order to bring about improvement or redress.

Aims

The aims of our complaints procedures are:

- to enable complainants to express their dissatisfaction
- to ensure that anyone making a complaint about the school, or between persons within or connected with the school, is dealt with sympathetically and courteously. (Students will be dealt with in accordance with the Behaviour Policy)
- to take complaints seriously and investigate them fairly and thoroughly
- to ensure that where errors or faults on our part are demonstrated, they are remedied as far as is possible, to the satisfaction of the complainant
- to learn from complaints in order to make improvements to our practice and procedure

At each stage in the procedure the school will want to keep in mind ways in which the complaint might be positively resolved through:

- an apology
- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that every effort will be made to prevent a similar situation arising
- an undertaking to review school policies in the light of the complaint

The Complaints Policy is available at the school and published on the school website.

Practice

1. How do you make a complaint against the school?

What can you do?

Think clearly about the complaint you wish to make and what you want to achieve. If your complaint concerns an incident, please be ready to tell the school where, when and how you think it happened and who was involved. Your complaint might be about a difference of opinion, a matter of school policy or practice or a matter that needs clarifying. The outcome you wish may be an apology, an explanation or a review of practice or policy in the school (as outlined above)

How do I complain?

The school staff with designated responsibilities, the Headteacher and the Management Committee are variously responsible for handling complaints about the school. In the first instance you must take your complaint straight to the school. Complaints can pass through several stages, described as follows. If you are unsure who is the most appropriate person to take your complaint to, contact the school and ask – giving an indication of the nature of your complaint.

Informal Stage

1. In the first instance, contact the school and find out who would be the most appropriate person to talk to
2. Arrange to speak to that person, either on the phone or by making an appointment to speak to them in person or fax, e-mail or write to them at the school.
3. Their response will be by phone, e-mail or in writing within 15 working days

Most complaints are resolved satisfactorily at this stage and are brought to a close. This will be confirmed in writing. If you are not satisfied your complaint moves on to Formal Stage 1.

Formal Stage 1

- Contact the Headteacher in writing (letter or email), describing your complaint and/or the reason you remain dissatisfied with the school's response.

It would be most helpful if you could state what you wish to achieve – an apology, an explanation, a change to school practice etc. Please do not forget to give your full name and contact details and, where applicable, the student's name.

The Headteacher or designated member of staff will investigate the matter and will let you know in writing the outcome and any action to be taken. Please note that it can take some time for a school to complete an investigation. Teachers spend most of their time teaching and the Headteacher has many planned commitments. Therefore, it can take time to discuss matters with all those who may be involved. The school will respond to you within 15 working days.

If the complaint is about areas of the Headteacher's or Governing Body's responsibility then the complaint will be investigated by the Chair of Governors or a designated Governor.

If you still remain dissatisfied with the way in which your complaint has been treated, you can ask for it to be considered by the Complaints Panel of the School's Governing Body, consisting of a panel of 3 Governors who have no prior knowledge of the complaint. This must be done in writing to the school within 15 working days of the completion of Stage 1. This moves the complaint to Formal Stage 2.

Formal Stage 2

At this stage, the Complaints Panel will meet, usually within 15 school days of your request, to consider the process to date and the outstanding concerns and dissatisfactions.

- The Management Committee will ask you and the Headteacher to submit a written statement
- A date and time will be set for the panel to meet. You will be invited to attend so that you may present your views in person. If you wish, you may be accompanied by a friend or representative who can also speak for you
- The Panel will consider the views of both sides. They will come to a conclusion or a decision. This will be communicated in writing to both parties within 5 working days

The decision of the panel is final. If you still feel that the school has acted unreasonably or not followed the correct procedures, you may wish to put your complaint in writing to the Secretary of State for Education.

The Complaints File

This is kept by the Headteacher. The file records complaints made by parents and complaints made by members of staff about parents.

Each entry should record:

- (a) the name of the person making the complaint
- (b) the date of the complaint
- (c) the category of the complaint
- (d) if the complaint was resolved and how
- (e) if it was not resolved, to whom it was referred and why
- (f) the report of the incident will have attached any supporting witness statements or other evidence

The Headteacher will review the complaints file on a regular basis. The record of complaints made against staff and against parents will be reported on a half termly basis to the Management Committee.

2. Complaints against parents

Northgate School will operate the complaints procedure against the school and its staff alongside a procedure that allows staff to register complaints against parental behaviour. As with the parents' complaints procedure it is assumed that procedures to protect staff against inappropriate parental behaviour should be systematic and transparent. The school will, as with parental complaints, aim to deal with most complaints before they reach the formal stages of the procedure outlined below.

Formal staff complaints procedure

When a member of staff feels that they have been subjected to inappropriate behaviour or language from a parent they should report this in writing to a senior member of staff, with a copy to their immediate line manager. Such incident reports will be recorded in the complaints file kept by the Headteacher.

Stage 1

Following discussion between the member of staff, their line manager and the senior member of staff, an appropriate course of action will be decided upon. The parent will be contacted by the member of staff concerned, the line manager or the senior member of staff. In most cases the matter will be satisfactorily resolved at this stage and no further action need to be taken.

Stage 2

If the matter is considered to be too serious to be dealt with under Stage One then the Headteacher (or in her absence the Assistant Headteacher), will decide on a further appropriate response. If more formal action is required, the Headteacher will consult with the Chair of the Management Committee.

3. Complaints between persons within the school

Northgate School will operate the complaints procedure for complaints between adults within the school. As with complaints outlined previously, it is assumed that procedures should be systematic and transparent. The school will aim to deal with most complaints before they reach the formal stages of the procedure outlined below.

Formal staff complaints procedure

When a member of staff feels that they have been subjected to inappropriate behaviour or language from an adult within the school they should report this in writing to the Headteacher. Such incident reports will be recorded in the complaints file kept by the Headteacher.

Stage 1

Following discussion between the member of staff and a senior member of staff, an appropriate course of action will be decided on. The other party will be contacted by the member of staff concerned and the senior member of staff. In most cases the matter will be satisfactorily resolved at this stage and no further action need to be taken.

Stage 2

If the matter is considered to be too serious to be dealt with under Stage One then the Headteacher (or in her absence the Assistant Headteacher), will decide on a further response, following all relevant school policies as appropriate.

If more formal action is required, the Headteacher will consult with Chair of the Management Committee.

Appendix 1: Establishing a Complaints Panel

The Management Committee will convene a complaints panel when necessary with a minimum of three governors.

There are several points which any member of the Management Committee sitting on a complaints panel needs to remember:

- It is important that the hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No management committee member may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the panel, the committee need to try and ensure that there is a cross-section of members and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.

- The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.
- An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.
- Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
- The committee members sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaints procedure.

Remit of the Complaints Panel

The panel needs to consider whether the complaint:

- relates to a decision taken by the Headteacher, member of staff or the Management Committee
- is about the way a complaint or concern was handled

If the complaint was in relation to a decision taken by the Headteacher or member of staff, the panel will need to consider whether:

A it was a decision within the Headteacher's responsibility or

B an area where the Management Committee have responsibility, or share responsibility but have delegated this to the Headteacher

If the complaint relates to A, the panel can:

- consider the manner in which the complaint was addressed but not consider an alternative outcome
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur

If the complaint relates to B, the panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

Appendix 2: Roles and Responsibilities

The Role of the Clerk

Any panel or group of committee members considering complaints should be clerked. The clerk would be the contact point for the complainant and be required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing
- record the proceedings
- notify all parties of the panel's decision

The Role of the Chair of the Management Committee or the Nominated Member

The Chair of the Management Committee or nominated member should:

- check that the correct procedure has been followed
- if a hearing is appropriate, notify the clerk to arrange the panel

The Role of the Chair of the Panel

The Chair of the Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy
- the panel is open minded and acts independently
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions
- written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it

Notification of the Panel's Decision

The chair of the panel needs to ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, within 5 working days with the panel's response.

Complaint log 2019/20

Date	Name of complainant	Choose an item.	Resolved? Actions/Investigations	Referred to/why	Further Action Req?

