

## COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURES

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School governing bodies are required, under Section 29 of the Education Act 2002, to have in place a procedure for dealing with complaints. This policy and the procedures are based on guidance issued by the Department for Education in [School complaints procedures: guidance for maintained schools](#)

### Purpose

This policy aims to reassure parents/carers and others with an interest in the school that:

- Any complaint against the school will be dealt with in a fair, open and responsive way, with the aim of achieving a speedy and satisfactory resolution.
- The school recognises that a willingness to listen to questions and to respond positively to complaints, can lead to improvements in school practices and provision.

This policy is designed to:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible.
- Be easy to understand and to follow.
- Ensure a full, fair and impartial investigation where needed.
- Respect people's right to privacy and confidentiality and only share personal information on a 'need to know' basis.
- Provide management information to the school leadership team and governors to inform school improvement.

Anyone involved in investigating a complaint will make sure that they:

- Make contact with the complainant and keep them updated and informed.
- Establish what has happened and identify who is involved.
- Identify what the complainant believes would resolve the matter.
- Conduct the investigation with an open mind and a neutral approach.
- Keep records of complaints, responses and what actions have been agreed.
- Are sensitive to the needs of all parties involved and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals in accordance with the Equality Act.

### Who can make a complaint?

Complainants may be anyone including parents, carers, neighbours of the school or any person with an interest in the work of the school. However, it is expected that it will be mainly parents/carers who will use this policy therefore the term 'parent' is used throughout as a generic term but the policy also applies in relation to any other type of complainant.

A complaint may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, if they have appropriate consent to do so.

### Scope

A concern is defined as *an expression of worry or doubt over an issue for which reassurances are sought*. A complaint is defined as *a clear expression of dissatisfaction about any specified aspect of the school's work*. This policy deals with specified complaints about the management and/or operation of the school.

Certain types of complaints have separate statutory procedures and are not covered by this policy. This includes complaints about school admissions, suspensions and exclusions, statutory SEN assessments, claims against the school such as disability discrimination,

allegations relating to child protection and safeguarding matters, whistleblowing and staff grievance and disciplinary matters.

Complaints that must be dealt with by specific employment procedures for example allegations of professional misconduct, or criminal offences or those that are potentially staff disciplinary issues will be dealt with under separate internal school procedures.

If a complainant commences legal action against the school in relation to their complaint, the school will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until legal proceedings have concluded.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of a complaint (eg. Police, Local Authority Safeguarding Teams or Tribunals) this may impact the school's ability to adhere to the timescales within our procedures or may result in the procedure being suspended until those bodies have completed their investigation.

### **How to make a complaint**

The procedures for making a complaint are detailed in *Part 2: Procedures for making a complaint*. An informal complaint (Stages 1-2) can be made in person, by telephone or in writing. A formal complaint (Stages 3-4) should be made in writing and a complaints form completed. A complaints procedure flowchart is included at Appendix 2.

If you need assistance in raising a formal complaint you can contact the School Office. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise complaints. Governors have no power to act on an individual basis and it may prevent them from considering complaints at a later stage.

Complaints against **school staff** (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance to the relevant line manager. If you are not sure who to send your complaint to please check with the School Office who can let you know the name of the line manager.

Complaints that involve or are about **the Headteacher** should be addressed to the Clerk to Governors. Please mark the complaint as Private and Confidential and send to [governors@fortismere.org.uk](mailto:governors@fortismere.org.uk). Governors will investigate the complaint as set out at Stage Four.

Complaints about the **Chair of Governors, an individual governor or the whole governing body** should be addressed to the Clerk to Governors and sent to [smurray@fortismere.org.uk](mailto:smurray@fortismere.org.uk). Please mark the complaint as Private and Confidential. Complaints about individual governors will be investigated by the Chair of Governors. For complaints about the Chair of Governors, the Vice-Chair and Clerk will determine the most appropriate course of action for the investigation. This could include an independent investigator or Governors from another school. For complaints involving the whole governing body, the Clerk will determine the most appropriate course of action for the investigation.

### **General**

Records of formal complaints will be kept and copies of correspondence will be kept on file, separately from individual student records.

Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated, however, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, will determine whether such complaints warrant an investigation on a case-by-case basis.

## **Time scales**

Complaints must be raised within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of incidents, it must be raised within 3 months of the last incident. The school will consider exceptions to this time scale where there are valid reasons for not making the complaint on time and where the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all. When complaints are made during school holidays, the school will consider them to have been received on the next school day after the holiday period.

The time scales set within this policy will be adhered to wherever possible, however for complex complaints where further investigations or meetings are necessary or where time scales cannot be met, new timings will be set. Details of new deadlines and an explanation for the delay will be sent to complainants.

## **Resolving complaints**

At each stage of the procedure, the school will seek to fully resolve the complaint. The school will acknowledge if the complaint is upheld in whole or in part or dismissed.

In every case the school will offer one or more of the following:

- An explanation;
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- An explanation of any specific remedies which the school will undertake because of the complaint, with an indication of time scales;
- An assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- An explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure so far as possible that it will not happen again and an indication of time scales within which any changes will be made;
- An undertaking to review school policies and procedures in light of the complaint;
- An apology.

## **Persistent, Duplicate and Unreasonable complaints**

If the school has investigated a complaint and receives a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other connected individual, the school will consider if there are any new aspects or new information to consider. If there are new aspects, the complaints procedures will be followed again. If there are no new aspects, the school will tell the complainant that the process is complete, and the matter is closed. The complainant will be directed to the Department for Education.

The school is committed to dealing with complaints fairly and impartially and will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, staff are not expected to tolerate unacceptable behaviour including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening. The school considers unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders the consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school. See separate *Managing serial and unreasonable complaints policy at Appendix 1*.

## **Complaint campaigns**

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from people unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complainants by publishing a single response on the school website or by 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.

## Monitoring arrangements

Whilst always respecting confidentiality, Governors will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints policy and procedures, receive management information on the number of formal complaints raised and consider any underlying issues that need review, or where lessons can be learned. The policy and procedures will be reviewed every two years by the Headteacher and approved by the governing body.

**Policy date:** July 2025

**Agreed by the governing body:** 4 July 2025

**Review cycle:** Every 2 years

## Part 2: PROCEDURES FOR MAKING A COMPLAINT

Complainants must follow the stages set out below in order, unless the complaint is about the Headteacher or a governor (*See How to make a complaint page 2*).

### STAGE ONE - INFORMAL COMPLAINT

#### Contact the teacher or relevant member of school staff

Most concerns can be resolved quickly and effectively by the teacher or the relevant member of staff. Contact the member of staff to make an appointment or to find out when the member of staff is available to talk to you. You can make contact by letter, phone or email. The aim at this stage is to establish the nature of the complaint and to find a realistic and speedy resolution to the problem. The member of staff will look into the matters you raise and investigate.

#### Time scales and Response

There are no specific time scales for dealing with complaints at this stage. However, as at all stages, issues will be considered and dealt with as quickly and effectively as possible by the person investigating. You will be contacted by the member of staff and informed of any actions to be taken to resolve your complaint. Contact could be by phone, in writing or in person.

#### Taking matters further

If you are not satisfied with the response or the matter remains unresolved you can progress your complaint to Stage Two. This must be done within 15 school days of receiving your Stage One response.

### STAGE TWO - INFORMAL COMPLAINT

#### Contact the relevant Head of Department/Head of Year or Assistant Headteacher

If you could not resolve your complaint at Stage One you should then contact the relevant Head of Department, Head of Year or Assistant Headteacher to take the matter further. A request to escalate a complaint to Stage Two must be made within 15 school days of receipt of your Stage One response. Ideally, your complaint should be submitted in writing with details of what has already been discussed with the school. The aim at this stage is to establish the nature of the ongoing complaint, what has been discussed with the school so far and what actions, if any, have already been taken.

The Head of Department/Head of Year/Assistant Headteacher will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 5 school days of receiving it.

The member of staff will investigate your complaint and may contact you for further information or to discuss the matter with you in more detail.

#### **Time scales and Response**

You will receive a written response to your complaint within 15 school days.

#### **Taking matters further**

If you are not satisfied with the response or the matter remains unresolved you can progress your complaint to Stage Three. This must be done within 15 school days of receiving your Stage Two response.

It is hoped that most problems will be resolved through the informal stages of this procedure.

### **STAGE THREE - FORMAL COMPLAINT**

#### **Contact the Headteacher**

If your complaint is still unresolved you may wish to pursue it further by raising it formally with the Headteacher. Complete a Complaints Form and submit your complaint in writing to the Headteacher. You should explain clearly what has already been discussed at Stage One and Stage Two, who you have already spoken to and why you feel that your complaint is still not resolved. You should also explain what you think might resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 5 school days of receiving it.

#### **Investigation**

The Headteacher will investigate your complaint or nominate another senior member of staff to deal with the matter on their behalf but will not delegate the decision to be taken.

The Headteacher may contact you for further information or invite you to a meeting to discuss your complaint with you. Any meeting will be part of the investigation and an opportunity for you to explain your complaint and will not replace a formal written response.

#### **Time scales and Response**

You will receive a written response to your complaint within 15 school days.

#### **Taking matters further**

If you are not satisfied with the response or the complaint remains unresolved you can progress your complaint to the Governing Body at Stage Four. This must be done within 15 school days of receiving your Stage Three response.

### **STAGE FOUR - FORMAL COMPLAINT**

#### **Complaint to the Governing Body**

If you are not satisfied with the Stage Three response, or if the complaint directly concerns the Headteacher, you can make a formal complaint to the Governing Body. Complete a Complaints Form and submit your complaint in writing to the Clerk to Governors at [smurray@fortismere.org.uk](mailto:smurray@fortismere.org.uk) within 15 school days of receiving your Stage Three response. Complaints received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

You should explain clearly the complaint that has already been raised at Stages One, Two and Three with the school, what has already been discussed, what action has been taken, why you feel that the complaint is not fully resolved and what you think might resolve it. You should include any documents from the earlier stages of your complaint.

The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 5 school days of receiving it.

Individual governors who receive complaints will refer them to the Chair of Governors and will not become further involved themselves unless requested to do so.

### **The Governing Body Complaints Committee**

The Complaints Committee will consist of three impartial governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Governors from other local schools or the local authority may be invited to make up the committee if not enough Fortismere governors are available.

The Clerk will invite you and the School to a meeting with the Complaints Committee. They will aim to hold a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of your Stage 4 complaint. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep you informed.

If you wish you can be accompanied or represented at the Complaints Committee meeting. Governors do not encourage either party to bring legal representation but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. Any reasonable adjustments required to support your attendance and participation will be considered.

The Clerk will ask you to submit any further written material to the committee at least 7 school days before the meeting. Written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the meeting.

At this final stage, the committee will not consider any new aspects of the complaint or consider any evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private, and the Clerk will attend to keep a written record of the proceedings.

At the meeting, you and the School representative will have the opportunity to give statements and present your evidence. Witnesses may be called as appropriate to present their evidence. You, the School and the committee will have the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once everyone has completed presenting their cases, you and the School will be asked to leave.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented to them. The committee can decide to:

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

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to school systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide all those involved in the complaint with a full explanation of their decision and the reasons for it, in writing, within 5 school days. The committee's decision is final and represents the end of the school's complaints procedure.

### **Taking matters further**

If following a formal complaint at Stage Four a complainant feels that the Governing Body has not handled their complaint in accordance with the school's agreed procedures or that they have acted unlawfully or unreasonably in exercising their duties, they can complain to the Department for Education.

The Department for Education will not normally investigate the substance of complaints or overturn decisions made by the school. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

Information for parents about making a complaint to the Department for Education can be found on the Gov.uk website at [www.gov.uk/complain-about-school](https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school)

Contact details for the Department for Education can be found at [www.education.gov/contactus](https://www.education.gov/contactus)

## APPENDIX 1

### Managing serial and unreasonable complaints policy

Most complaints raised will be valid and the school will treat them seriously. However, sometimes a complaint may become unreasonable. The school considers the following to be unreasonable. If a complainant:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff or governors who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into the complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff or governors regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- Uses threats to intimidate
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- Knowingly provides falsified information
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, the school may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months

As a last resort, the school will cease all communications in respect of an unreasonable complaint, or one that is deemed closed, having first communicated why such a decision has been made.



## APPENDIX 2 – Add Complaints Flowchart

### APPENDIX 3

## FORMAL COMPLAINT FORM

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*If you are making a formal complaint to the school please complete this form. If you need help to complete the form please contact [office@fortismere.org.uk](mailto:office@fortismere.org.uk) for assistance.*

### Complainant's name

Title:      Surname:

First name:

### Student details

Student's name and tutor group:

Complainant's relationship to the student:

### Contact details

Email:

Mobile:

Address:

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### Details of the complaint

1. Please provide a summary of your complaint below and include the names of anybody in the school that you have spoken to about it.

2. Please provide details of any previous action taken by you or the school in relation to this complaint:

3. Please explain if your complaint relates to:

**3.1 A failure to follow school policy** – please give details of the relevant policy and how you think the school has failed to follow it:

**3.2 Staff conduct** – please give details of the member of staff and the specific actions or behaviour that you are complaining about:

**3.2 Management/operation of the school** – please give details of which specific aspects of the management or operation of the school that you are complaining about:

4. What is your desired outcome from this complaint:

5. If it is more than 3 months since you first became aware of the issues related to your complaint please explain why you have not complained before:

6. Please list any supporting documents that you are sending with your completed complaints form:

*Please email your completed form to the relevant member of staff. If you are not sure who to send it to please email it to [office@fortismere.org.uk](mailto:office@fortismere.org.uk) with the subject: Formal Complaint*

**This section to be completed by the school:**

<b>Form received (date &amp; name)</b>	<b>Receipt acknowledged (date &amp; name)</b>	<b>Referred to/by who (date &amp; names)</b>

*July 2025*