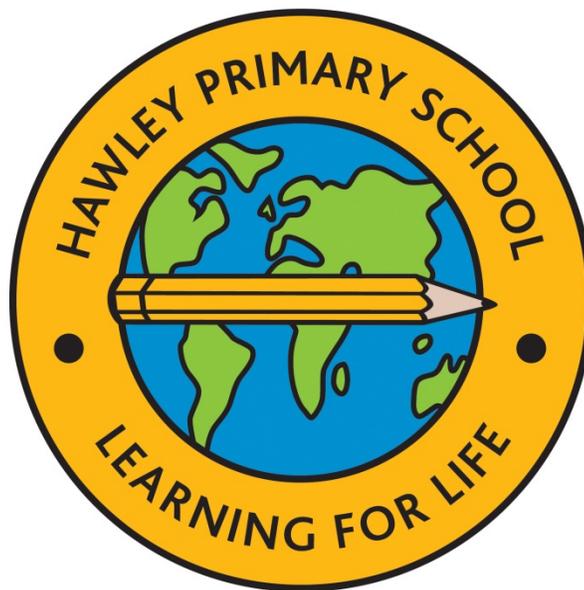


# HAWLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL



## COMPLAINTS POLICY

**AGREED BY GOVERNORS:** Spring 2025

**LATEST REVIEW:** Spring 2025

**NEXT REVIEW:** Spring 2028

## 1. Introduction

Hawley Primary School provides the best possible education and support for its pupils. This means having a clear, fair, and efficient procedure for dealing with any complaints to or against the school, so that any issues that arise can be dealt with as swiftly and effectively as possible.

This policy explains the steps that will be followed whenever an issue arises that causes concern. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint about provision of facilities or services that our school provides, unless separate statutory procedures apply.

This procedure applies to complaints in respect of:

- A child's academic progress including curriculum provision
- School based special needs provision
- A child's welfare including bullying
- Charging for activities and trips
- School budget
- Policy and procedures
- Behaviour of staff or pupils outside of school
- Statutory provision

This procedure does not apply to complaints about:

- Admissions to school
- Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)
- School re-organisation proposals
- Matters likely to require a Child Protection investigation
- Exclusion of children from school
- Protected Disclosures/Whistleblowing
- Staff grievance and disciplinary procedures
- Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use the school's premises or facilities

In these cases, there are other separate and statutory procedures.

The school will not respond to anonymous complaints under this policy, however, the Headteacher and/or Chair of Governors will consider whether the issue and fear of identification are genuine, or the issue is one of child protection.

For more information on our school's provision for protecting our pupils, please refer to our **Child Protection** and **Safeguarding policies**, both of which are available on the school website <https://www.hawleyprimary.co.uk/page/?title=Policies&pid=29>

## 2. Aims

Hawley Primary School follows the best practice guidance provided by Hampshire County Council (HCC) in resolving complaints. A staged process is implemented when dealing with complaints about general school

matters or about the National Curriculum, Religious Education, or related matters. The process recognises that things can go wrong and that the school is committed to resolving any concerns as quickly and as effectively as possible.

We will aim to resolve matters through:

- Informal discussion at the earliest opportunity
- Prompt and well-defined timescales with named contacts
- A focus on resolution and thoughtful service without blame
- Appropriate access for those with disabilities, special or language needs
- Confidential and discreet approaches
- A fair and transparent investigative process
- A definitive approach to vexatious, abusive, malicious, or anonymous complaints.

### **3. When an issue or concern first arises**

If you have a concern that you would like to take up with the school you should initially inform a member of staff either in person, over the telephone or in writing. You may wish to approach your child's Class Teacher first as they will be best placed to help you directly or by letting you know which other member of staff you should be speaking to.

We encourage parents to approach staff with any concerns they may have and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding. We will take your concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

The Chair of Governors reserves the right to refer complaints that are taken straight to them back to the appropriate member of staff if it does not warrant the governing body's involvement at that point.

#### **3.1 Initial Informal Meeting**

When a concern has been received, you may receive a telephone call from the member of staff or headteacher to discuss your concerns, or you may be invited to attend a meeting with a member of staff or the Headteacher to discuss your concerns.

If invited to a meeting, you are welcome to bring a friend, partner or, in the case of a pupil who has raised a concern, a parent along for support. It may be appropriate for a pupil to attend the meeting if their parent has raised a concern, depending on the nature of the issue.

Staff have a responsibility to ensure that you understand any future points of action that have been agreed and will make a record of what has been discussed, as well as any outcomes and a plan of action, if one has been agreed.

All staff will do their best to ensure your concerns are dealt with appropriately and efficiently, but if an agreement cannot be reached, or if you are dissatisfied with the outcome, you can make a formal complaint to the headteacher. If your complaint is about the Headteacher you should make your complaint in writing to the Chair of Governors. It is preferable for you to make your formal complaint in writing, but complaints can be made in person or by telephone.

There is no prescribed timescale for resolution at this stage given the importance of dialogue and informal discussion, although we expect to resolve most issues within **10 school days**. If we cannot meet the timescales set out in our policy, we will provide a clear explanation of the reason for this along with details of the indicative timescales.

#### **4. Formal Complaints** (See Appendix 1 – Complaints Form)

To ensure complaints are dealt with efficiently and effectively, Hawley Primary School deals with formal complaints in three stages.

##### **4.1 Stage 1 – Complaint heard by the Headteacher**

If you feel that your concern has not been dealt with as you would like, are unhappy with the outcome of your informal meeting or feel that the issue is serious enough that it warrants it, you can make a formal complaint to the Headteacher. It is preferable for you to make your formal complaint in writing, and we provide a proforma for you to complete which can be accessed on the school website. However, complaints can be made in person or by telephone.

The Headteacher will acknowledge your complaint in writing or offer a full response within **5 school days**. If further investigation is required, the Headteacher will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 5 school days and will advise you that a full response will be provided within **20 school days**.

The Headteacher may invite you to attend a meeting to discuss your complaint and workable solutions, or to explain what has happened or will happen as a result of your complaint.

The Headteacher will keep a record of all interactions with you and other staff, meetings and decisions made in reference to your complaint.

If your complaint is about a member of staff, the Headteacher will talk to that employee and invoke the relevant procedure if required. It will not be appropriate to inform you of the outcome of any investigation in relation to an individual member of staff.

The Headteacher will respond to you in writing within **20 school days** of receiving your complaint outlining their full response to your concern, and any action that has or will be taken. If the Headteacher has decided not to take any further action, they will explain what they have decided and how they reached the decision. You will also be advised of your right to take the matter further if you are not satisfied with the Headteacher's response.

##### **4.2 Stage 2 – Complaint heard by the Chair of Governors**

If, having spoken to the Headteacher, you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you should write to the Chair of Governors within **10 school days<sup>1</sup>**, explaining your concern and the steps that have resulted in you taking this course of action.

The Chair of Governors will acknowledge your complaint in writing or offer a full response within **5 school days**. If further investigation is required, the Chair of Governors will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 5 school days and will advise you that a full response will be provided within **20 school days**.

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<sup>1</sup> Exceptions to this time frame may be considered

The Chair of Governors may invite you to attend a meeting to discuss your complaint and workable solutions, or to explain what has happened or will happen as a result of your complaint.

The Chair of Governors will explain that the Governing Body has a strategic role and is responsible for the school's strategic framework and the Headteacher is responsible for the internal organisation, management, and control of the school and for advising on and implementing the governors' policies. The Headteacher is solely responsible for making day to day decisions.

This stage offers an opportunity for achieving conciliation between all parties and discussions between the Chair of Governors and the Headteacher will be key to resolving the complaint and agreeing a way forward. The Chair of Governors will decide what powers are available to governors in respect of the complaint. In reaching this decision, the Chair of Governors will determine to what extent the issues relate to responsibilities that:

- (a) are delegated to the Headteacher by the governing body; or
- (b) fall within the governing body's remit only; or
- (c) are within the Headteacher's Terms and Conditions of Employment and relate to the internal organisation, management, and control of the school.

For delegated responsibilities and matters within the remit of the governing body, the Chair of Governors may look at the whole issue afresh. If the matter relates to the Headteacher's conduct, the Chair of Governors will decide whether the matter should be dealt with through the Complaints Procedure or Staff Disciplinary Procedure. Advice may be sought from the Local Authority and/or Education Personnel Services. For matters that are the Headteacher's responsibility, the Chair of Governors is empowered only to look at whether the Headteacher's decision or action was reasonable in the light of the information available at the time.

The Chair of Governors will keep a record of all interactions with you and any decisions made in reference to your complaint.

If the Chair of Governors has decided not to take any further action, they will explain what they have decided and how they reached the decision. You will also be advised of your right to take the matter further if you are not satisfied with the Chair of Governor's response.

#### **4.3 Stage 3 – Complaint heard by Governing Body's complaints panel** (See Appendix 2 – Complaints Panel Agenda and Remit)

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you should write to the Clerk to Governors within **10 school days**<sup>2</sup> of the outcome of stage 2, explaining your concern and the steps that have resulted in you taking this course of action.

The Clerk to Governors will acknowledge receipt of your request within **5 school days**. The complaints panel will usually be convened within **20 school days** of receiving the request for your complaint to be heard by the governing body's complaints panel. Where it is not possible to find a mutually convenient

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<sup>2</sup> Exceptions to this time frame may be considered

date within that timescale, all reasonable steps will be taken to agree a time and date mutually convenient to all parties.

The main function of the complaints panel will be to:

- a) ensure the complaint has been properly handled by the Headteacher (and Chair of Governors)
- b) ensure that a sufficient comprehensive investigation was carried out
- c) ensure that the correct procedure/policies were followed.

The panel will also review whether the Headteacher (and Chair of Governors) acted reasonably.

The Clerk to Governors will arrange and facilitate the meeting of the complaints panel. You are entitled to an independent panel to hear your complaint, and the complaints panel will consist of three governors who have no former knowledge or involvement in the matter being considered. The chair of the panel will be nominated from within the group of panel members. All panel members will have access to, and will be familiar with, this complaints policy. The Clerk to Governors will confirm to all parties in writing, the date, time, and venue for the meeting at least **10 school days** in advance.

The Clerk to Governors will request that you supply any paperwork you feel the panel will require to consider your complaint fully. The Headteacher (and Chair of Governors) will also be requested to supply copies of their responses to the previous stages of the procedure, and any further paperwork they consider the panel will require to consider the complaint fully. Copies of all paperwork will be distributed to all parties by the Clerk to Governors at least **3 school days** in advance of the meeting.

You are welcome to bring a friend or partner for support to the meeting and the chair of the panel will ensure the meeting is conducted within a relaxed atmosphere whilst keeping to the formal agenda. The Headteacher (and Chair of Governors if attending) is also invited to bring a representative or member of staff for support.

No previously undisclosed evidence relating to the complaint should be introduced during the meeting.

The Clerk will inform you (and the Headteacher and/or Chair of Governors), in writing, of the panel's decision within **5 school days** of the meeting. The letter will include a summary of the issues, an outline of the main points of discussion, the reasons for the decision and the proposed actions or outcome. The panel may suggest you meet with the Headteacher and/or Chair of Governors again to agree a way forward.

The letter may set out recommendations which will be made to the governing body.

#### **4.4 Secretary of State**

The panel's decision is the final stage in the complaints procedure. If you feel the school has acted unreasonably or has not followed the correct procedures in relation to your complaint, you may write to the Secretary of State using the following contact details:

School Complaints Unit, Department for Education,  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

## 5. Unreasonable Complaints

Hawley Primary School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. Operating from a position of mutual respect, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour including that which is abusive, offensive, or threatening.

Hawley Primary School defines unreasonable complaints as “those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people’s complaints.”

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- 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 while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the school’s complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be considered and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified comments about staff 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 a 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, complicated, and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:

- maliciously
- aggressively
- using threats, intimidation, or violence
- using abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language
- knowing it to be false
- using falsified information
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a 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 asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Hawley Primary School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from Hawley Primary School.

## **6. Governing Body review and monitoring of complaints**

The Headteacher will report annually to the Governing Body on the number of formal complaints received and the levels at which they have been resolved. No details identifying the complaint, or any member of staff will be published.

The Governing Body will review and evaluate all complaints no matter how far they are taken or what the outcome to ensure that similar problems are avoided in the future or to see if they could have been managed any more efficiently.

## **7. Staff Complaints**

Staff who have a concern about a colleague or volunteer in school should refer to the **Protected Disclosures (Whistleblowing) Policy** which is available on the school's internal network 'Policies.'

The procedure for dealing with any other staff complaint or employment grievance is set out in the school's **Staff Code of Conduct Policy** which are available on the school's internal network 'Policies' and on the school's website.

## **8. Complaints Policy Review**

The Governing Body of Hawley Primary School will review this policy every 3 years, or sooner if there are any legislative changes. The Governing Body of Hawley Primary School will also review this policy following a complaint panel meeting to ensure that it met the requirement to provide a clear, fair, and efficient complaints procedure.

## Appendix 1

### Complaints Form

<b>Name of complainant:</b>	
<b>Contact details:</b>	<b>Address:</b>
	<b>Telephone:</b>
	<b>Email:</b>
<b>Outline of your complaint and how it has affected you (the complainant) / pupil:</b>	
<b>Have you discussed the matter already with a member of staff, if so, who? What was the outcome?</b>	
<b>What would you like to happen as a result of your complaint?</b>	
<b>Signature:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	

**For school use:**

<b>Date received:</b>	
<b>Date acknowledged and by whom:</b>	
<b>Summary of action taken:</b>	

## Appendix 2

### COMPLAINTS PANEL AGENDA and REMIT

#### Agenda

- ♦ Introductions
- ♦ Oral submission by the complainant (parent)
- ♦ Questions from the school
- ♦ Oral response by the Headteacher
- ♦ Oral response by the Chair of Governors
- ♦ Questions by the complainant
- ♦ Oral or written statements by external agencies (optional)
- ♦ Summary by the complainant, with no added information
- ♦ Summary by the school, with no added information

#### Remit

The appointed governors will decide who is responsible for dealing with the issues involved. The powers available to governors with respect to the complaint i.e., those issues related to responsibilities that:

- Are delegated to the Headteacher by the Governing Body
- Fall within the Governing Body's remit only, or
- Are within the Headteacher's terms and conditions of employment and relate to the internal organisation, management, and control of the school

When the case relates to delegated responsibilities, the panel will look at the matter on an individual basis, with any current information that the Headteacher may not have been aware of at the time of the original response or action. Considering additional information, the panel may decide to write and ask for the Headteacher to give the matter further consideration. Complaints about a governor will also be subject to a reconsideration of the issues.

If the matter falls within the Headteacher's decision making remit by virtue of their terms and conditions of employment, then the panel will only have the power to review the decision, not to consider it afresh. It may look at whether the decision or action was unreasonable. An unreasonable decision might be one that is irrational; a decision that no reasonable Headteacher, properly aware of their duties and carefully considering the facts of the case before them, would make.

The panel will consider the facts as they were known to the Headteacher at the time and then consider whether the Headteacher:

- Failed to take account of a relevant consideration
- Took into account an irrelevant consideration
- Made a perverse decision in the light of the evidence available at the time

If new evidence emerges, the panel will refer it back to the Headteacher, who may consider amending the decision considering that new evidence.

The panel's decision will be communicated in writing and include a summary of the issues, an

outline of the main points of discussion, a reason for the decision and any proposed outcomes and actions, together with follow-up meetings.

## Appendix 3

### Roles and Responsibilities

#### Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

#### Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent, and fair consideration of the complaint through:
  - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
  - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
  - consideration of records and other relevant information
  - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

**Complaints Co-ordinator** (this could be the headteacher/designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure

- the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
  - sharing third party information
  - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

## Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time, and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school, and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

## Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.  
If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted

- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

## Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so  
No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting  
Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.