

Complaints Policy



**Providing the rich soil that enables
our children to develop deep roots and flourish.**

Approved on: Spring Term 2022 by the FGB

Date of Review: Spring Term One 2023 by the FGB

Chair of Governors: Dr J Holmes

Other Relevant Policies: Safeguarding, Safer working practices

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

This Complaints Policy and Procedure is available on the school's website www.amberleyschool.co.uk

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Amberley Parochial School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (see pages 3&4 below) such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions, we will use this complaints procedure.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Amberley Parochial School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

There may be occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Amberley Parochial School will do its best to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

Raising a concern or making a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. School governors have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice Bureau to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Amberley Parochial School wants to resolve the complaint as soon as possible. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Timescales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply. We will consider **complaints made outside of term time** to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Amberley Parochial School other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, as listed below:

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals 	<p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with the local authority, Gloucestershire County Council.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure. See behaviour policy www.amberleyschool.co.uk</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a</p>

	complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Curriculum - content 	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

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

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Informal Stage

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or headteacher who will try to resolve the matter promptly. In some cases, the headteacher may refer you to another member of staff – for example, if you have difficulty discussing your concern with a particular member of staff, or if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with the concern. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information and it is hoped that most complaints will be resolved at this informal stage. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Formal Procedure - Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the headteacher (unless they are about the headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form - **Appendix 4**) or by telephone.

The headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Within this response, the headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Amberley Parochial School will take to resolve the complaint.

The headteacher will advise the complainant of how to take forward their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor (or governors) will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1. Such complaints must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is about:

- the Chair and Vice Chair jointly or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

then **Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator** appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Formal Procedure - Stage 2 – Final Stage

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can take the complaint to Stage 2 – **to the Chair of Governors or in the case of a complaint about the headteacher, to a meeting with members of the governing body's complaints panel**, which will be formed of the three, impartial, governors

available. (See Appendix 2 for Roles and Responsibilities and Appendix 3 Complaints Process Flow chart). This is the final stage of the school complaints procedure.

A request to move to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will:

- record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.
- write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed. If the proposed date is inconvenient for the complainant the Clerk will try to offer alternative dates.
- **If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates**, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The Governors' Complaints Panel will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Panel. If there are fewer than three governors from Amberley Parochial School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their Local Authority's Governor Services' team, in order to make up the panel. Alternatively, an entirely independent panel may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The panel will decide their approach but will normally deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting and by considering written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

- If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Similarly, the person(s) complained about, as relevant, will also be invited to a meeting.

Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the Panel meeting because the complaints procedure is not a form of legal proceedings. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. *Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.*

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 5 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will normally:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material, which will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting.
- The Panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The Panel will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence undisclosed by either party at Stage 1 of the formal complaints procedure unless by the agreement of all parties concerned. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The Panel will first establish that the correct procedure was followed at Stage 1 of the Complaints Procedure and consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The Panel can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

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

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the panel will provide the complainant and the school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 15 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Local Education Authority if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Amberley Parochial School.

If the complaint is:

- **jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or**
- **the entire governing body or**
- **the majority of the governing body**

then Stage 2 will be heard by a panel of independent, co-opted governors.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Amberley Parochial School will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to take forward their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Local Education Authority after they have completed Stage 2 at Shire Hall: Education and Learning Directorate, Gloucestershire County Council, Shire Hall, Gloucester, GL1 2TP.

The Local Education Authority will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Amberley Parochial School. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

Amberley Parochial School will do its best to be helpful to people who contact the school with a:

- Complaint or concern
- Request for information

However, there will be occasions when despite all stages of the complaint procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant persists in trying to reopen the same issue, a policy for managing serial and unreasonable behaviour is defined and addressed in **Appendix 1**.

Monitoring and Review of Complaints

Note: *The full governing body should only become involved when it receives a confidential report providing any recommended action following the complaint review. This report should be in summary form and avoid naming individuals.*

The Governing Body monitors the Complaints Procedure in order to ensure that any complaint is handled properly. The Headteacher logs all formal complaints received by the school (if any) and records how they were resolved. The log is reviewed by the Governing Body on an annual basis.

The governing body also monitors the volume and nature of complaints, allowing any trend to be identified and for governors to be assured that the procedure is effective.

This Policy complies with Section 29(1) of the Education Act 2002

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/section/29>

Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

(This policy can also be adapted to manage unreasonable or persistent contact not directly associated with, or resulting from, formal complaints.)

Amberley Parochial 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 our school. However, 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.

Amberley Parochial School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the 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 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 that 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 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, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from Amberley Parochial School.

ALL PARTIES SHOULD BE AWARE OF THE COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR AMBERLEY PAROCHIALSCHOOL

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 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 panel that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The headteacher or complaints panel 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 (As relevant, this may include: headteacher/governor/staff member/clerk to governors)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- as relevant, liaise with staff members, headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and the Local Authority (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 Panel 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 Panel's decision.

Panel Chair

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

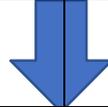
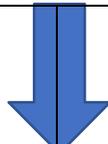
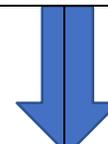
- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- 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 Panel is explained to the complainant (See page 7)
- 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 Panel is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the Panel 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.

Panel Member

Panel 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 Panel 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 Panel 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 Panel 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 Panel 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 Panel considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

CONCERN RAISED WITH TEACHER		CONCERN RAISED ABOUT TEACHER/STAFF MEMBER		CONCERN RAISED ABOUT HEADTEACHER OR GOVERNOR	
					
Informal	TEACHER deals with matter RESOLVED – IF NOT	Informal	SENIOR MEMBER OF STAFF deals with matter RESOLVED – IF NOT	Informal	CHAIR OF GOVERNORS deals with matter RESOLVED – IF NOT
					
Formal Stage 1	HEAD deals with matter RESOLVED – IF NOT	Formal Stage 1	HEAD deals with matter RESOLVED – IF NOT	Formal Stage 1	SUITABLE GOVERNOR(S) Deal(s) with matter RESOLVED – IF NOT
					
Formal Stage 2	CHAIR deals with matter RESOLVED - IF NOT, END OF SCHOOL PROCESS	Formal Stage 2	CHAIR deals with matter RESOLVED – IF NOT, END OF SCHOOL PROCESS	Formal Stage 2	GOVERNORS' PANEL Review complaint (not just process). RESOLVED – IF NOT, END OF SCHOOL PROCESS
					
Process review	GOVERNORS' PANEL TO REVIEW PROCESS ONLY.	GOVERNORS' PANEL TO REVIEW PROCESS ONLY		LOCAL AUTHORITY TO REVIEW PROCESS ONLY	

AMBERLEY PAROCHIALSCHOOL COMPLAINT FORM**APPENDIX 4**

Please complete and return to the Headteacher or Clerk to the Governing Body, marked 'Private and Confidential' who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number: Email:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

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

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details below. Remember to submit all relevant information to support your complaint. No further information can be considered at a future date unless by agreement of all parties involved in the complaint.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date: