

Meadowhead School and Sixth Form



Complaints Policy & Procedures 2026

This is a policy of Meadowhead School and Sixth Form.

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Policy for Hearing and Dealing with Complaints

Meadowhead School is committed to working in close partnership with all members of the school community. We place great value on the role which parents and carers can play in supporting children's learning. Staff and Trustees actively encourage a positive relationship between the school and the families of children who attend the school.

If, at any time, a member of the school community has a concern about an aspect of life at the school, the concern will be dealt with by the school as quickly, sympathetically and effectively as possible. It is hoped that most concerns will be settled amicably at this stage.

However, if there is a continuing concern, this can be directed through the formal stages as outlined in the school's complaints procedure detailed on the following pages.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- › Be impartial and non-adversarial
- › Facilitate a full and fair investigation (by an independent person or panel, where necessary)
- › Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- › Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- › Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- › Make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- › Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- › Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the [Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents/carers of pupils at the school. It is also based on [best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures](#) published by the Department for Education (DfE).

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

This complaints procedure is available on the school website and in hard copy on request.

Definition of a Complaint at Meadowhead School

The definition of a complaint within the terms of this policy and the procedures described here is:

'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

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 Meadowhead School Academy Trust about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

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.

Anonymous complaints will not normally be considered under this policy. However, the Headteacher or Chair of Trustees, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Meadowhead School Academy Trust other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions to schools 	<p>Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN) 	<p>Complaints about a Local Authority decision regarding an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) should be made via an appeal to the SEND Tribunal. https://www.gov.uk/appeal-ehc-plan-decision</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) - sheffieldsafeguardinghub@sheffield.gov.uk</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exclusion of children from school*(Suspension and Permanent Exclusion) 	<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.</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 whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters directly with their employer. Referrals can be made at: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/blowing-the-whistle-to-the-department-for-education</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 complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Protection 	<p>Complaints regarding data protection will be handled in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Data Use and Access Act 2025.</p> <p>To make a data protection complaint about how the school uses your personal information, please email: Sarah Gillott (PA to the Headteacher & Governance Professional) gillotts@meadowhead.sheffield.sch.uk</p> <p>We will acknowledge your complaint within 30 days.</p>
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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 this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale. If this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

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

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

Procedure for Dealing with Complaints

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between complainant and the school can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To this end all staff and Trustees are aware of the procedure to be followed if a complaint is raised. Also, whilst not wishing to encourage complaints, complainants should note that they have a duty to raise a matter as soon as conveniently possible.

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

At all stages, the aim is resolution to the satisfaction of both parties and a mutual understanding of the problems believed to exist in order that improvements can be made where necessary. Where agreement and resolution cannot be reached, the aim of the procedure is to ensure that all parties are treated fairly and equitably. Conciliation or mediation between school and complainant can be considered at any time within the informal or formal stages as set out in this policy.

The school operates a three-stage complaints procedure. If the complaint concerns the conduct of the Headteacher, it will be dealt with in accordance with Stage 2 and directed to the Chair of Trustees.

The procedure set out in the following pages outlines both formal and informal stages through which a complaint made against the school will proceed.

The school reserves the right not to consider complaints that:

- are malicious (that is, they are instituted without sufficient grounds and serving only to cause annoyance).
- use obscenities, racist or homophobic language.
- contain personally offensive remarks about members of our staff.
- are repeatedly submitted with only minor differences after we have fully addressed the complaint.

The procedure for dealing with serial and/or unreasonably persistent complainants and unreasonable complainant behaviour is detailed in Appendix A of this policy.

Stage 1: Initial Concern or Complaint – Informal resolution

In the first instance, it is hoped that the complainant will be able to discuss the issue with the member of staff concerned. The school will respect the views of a complainant who indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing the complaint with a particular member of staff. In these cases, the complainant should refer the complaint to the Headteacher, who may refer it to another member of staff to investigate.

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with the complaint, the complaint will be referred to another member of staff via the Headteacher. The member of staff will consider the complaint objectively and impartially.

If the first approach is made to a Trustee, they will refer the issue and the complainant to the appropriate person and advise the complainant of the procedure.

Trustees will not act unilaterally outside the formal procedure or be involved at the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the process.

The complainant will receive a verbal or written response to the concern or complaint raised, from or on behalf of the member of staff involved, within five school days.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it may be escalated to a formal complaint.

Stage 2: Formal Complaint heard by the Headteacher

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at Stage 1 and wishes to escalate, they may take their complaint further by submitting the complaint (ideally in writing) to the Headteacher within ten school days of Stage 1 being concluded.

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint. If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office.

If the complaint was dealt with by the Headteacher at Stage 1, then the complainant should submit a formal complaint to the Chair of Trustees within ten school days of receiving the outcome from Stage 1.

The Headteacher may delegate the task of collating information or investigating the complaint to another staff member, but not the decision nor the action taken. The Headteacher may meet with the complainant, hear the complaint, investigate and make every effort to resolve the issue.

Wherever possible, the complainant will be informed of the outcome of the investigation within ten school days. The Headteacher will write to the complainant summarising the outcome reached and the process for appeal. If the investigation is anticipated to take longer than ten school days, the complainant will be informed as early as possible.

Stage 3: Complaint heard by the Complaints Appeal Panel

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the Governance Professional in writing within 10 school days. Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Complaints can be escalated by contacting the Governance Professional:

- By letter or email (preferred)
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on behalf of the complainant – only where express consent has been provided by the complainant

The Governance Professional will need the details of the complaint as set out above, as well as details from the complainant of why they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

Convening the panel

Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal stage.

The panel will be appointed by, or on behalf of, the board and must consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school (meaning they are not an employee of the school and are not involved in governance decision making for the matter complained about). The panel cannot be made up solely of trustees/governing board members.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The Governance Professional will aim to find a date within 20 school days of the request, where possible. If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the Governance Professional will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting.

The board will ensure that the hearing is properly minuted.

At the meeting

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless required as part of reasonable adjustments. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish. We don't encourage either party to bring legal representation, but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. Upon request, the panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant. Where relevant, a copy will also be provided to the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and copies will be made available for inspection by the board and headteacher.

The outcome

The panel can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Not uphold the complaint, in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld, the panel will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The complainant will be notified in writing of the panel's decision, usually within five school days of the panel's decision being made. The letter will confirm the end of the school's and Governing Board's involvement with the complaint and explain any further rights of appeal.

The complainant should be advised that the Local Authority has no role unless the complaint relates to a service provided by the Local Authority.

Record Keeping and Confidentiality

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls. This material will be treated as confidential and stored securely, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or

through a subject access request (SAR) under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and record retention schedule.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

General and Monitoring

The governing board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The governing board will track the number and nature of complaints, and review any underlying issues.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the Governance Professional

This policy will be reviewed by the Headteacher every two years.

At each review, the policy will be approved by board of Trustees.

Please note:

Timescales refer to 'school days'. These are days when the school is open and staff and pupils are required to attend.

If a written complaint is received during a school holiday period, or when the school is otherwise closed, the complaint will be acknowledged in writing at the first practicable opportunity and the complaint will be progressed in accordance with this policy within five school days from the school re-opening.

Further Recourse

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the Department for Education. The DfE will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school. The DfE will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint, but will intervene if a school has:

- Breached a clause in its funding agreement
- Failed to act in line with its duties under education law
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions

If the school's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

We will include this information in the outcome letter to complainants.

Links with Other Policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Suspension and permanent exclusion policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- Special educational needs policy and information report
- Privacy notices

Appendix A - Procedure for dealing with Serial and/or Unreasonably Persistent Complainants and Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

Introduction

The school is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and to providing a high-quality response to complainants. The school will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the 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. Having a procedure on unreasonably persistent complainants and unreasonable complainant behaviour helps the school to deal with complainants in ways which are consistent and fair.

Definitions

The school has adopted the definition of 'unreasonable' and 'unreasonably persistent' complainants as those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder the school's day to day operations and prevent proper consideration of their, or other people's, complaints. The school reserves the right not to consider complaints it judges "unreasonable complainant behaviour" or are "unreasonably persistent" under the terms of this policy.

Unreasonable Complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- 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 DfE
- 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

Please note: the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It is at the discretion of the school what is deemed to be unreasonable.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school 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.

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's comments, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Trustees 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, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#)
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

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 school premises and ensuring appropriate measures of support are provided to staff where they are the subject of aggression and/or violence.

Serial/persistent complaints

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. We may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:

- We have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts the school repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

The case to stop responding is stronger if:

- The complainant's communications are often or always abusive or aggressive
- The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff
- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

Where we decide to stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will consider any new complaints they make provided the concerns raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern

Appendix B - Procedure for dealing with Duplicate Complaints and Complaints Campaigns

Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

If a duplicate complaint is raised which in the view of the school warrants further consideration, the usual procedure outlined in the policy (as appropriate) will be repeated.

Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- 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.

Appendix C - Barring from School Premises (adapted from DfE best practice advice 2016)

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Schools will therefore act to ensure they remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community.

If a parent's behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask him/her to leave school premises. In serious cases, the Headteacher or the Local Authority can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make. Schools should always give the parent the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing. The decision to bar should then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent should be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the Headteacher or Chair of Trustees. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the Department for Education. Once the school's own complaints procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.