



Pulford VA Lower School

January 2023

A Policy for Complaints

The school has a modified "open door" policy and parents are encouraged to see their child's teacher at the earliest opportunity in order to resolve a difficulty or raise a concern.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

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

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

As required by Section 29 of the Education Act 2002, the school has produced this policy for dealing with complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides as outlined below. It is not limited to parents/carers at the school. The 1998 Education Act gave parents/carers the legal right to **withdraw their children from Collective Worship and they are advised of this in the school prospectus**. There are separate statutory procedures which apply to certain areas such as exclusions or admissions – see section 3.5. If parents find that they must embark on the complaints procedure, the head teacher, on request, will provide them with the relevant details. Throughout the policy, the term 'parent' is used to designate any caregiver who has parental authority for the child concerned.

1. Introduction

1.1 We believe that our school provides a good education for all our children, and that the head teacher and other staff work very hard to build positive relationships with all parents. However, the school is obliged to have procedures in place in case there are complaints by parents this could be e.g. about bullying. The school may not consider complaints about behaviour that happens outside the school's hours or premises depending on the circumstances. However, the school recognises that complaints may be made by members of the public. Some complaints fall outside this policy for example, staff grievances or disciplinary procedures – there are separate policies for these.

The following policy sets out the procedure that the school follows.

2. Aims and objectives

2.1 Our school aims to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint. We give careful consideration to all complaints and deal with them as swiftly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding and, in all cases, we put the interests of the child above all other

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issues. We provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed, and then resolved.

3. The complaints process

How to share a concern

3.1 If a parent is concerned about anything to do with the education that we are providing at our school, they should, in the first instance, discuss the matter informally with their child's class teacher. Most matters of concern can be dealt with in this way. All teachers work very hard to ensure that each child is happy at school and is making good progress; they always want to know if there is a problem, so that they can take action before the problem seriously affects the child's progress. A further appointment can be made, if deemed necessary, with the class teacher and the Key stage lead. Following that it can be discussed further with the deputy - head teacher (Mrs. Rees) if necessary.

What to do if the matter is not resolved through informal discussion

3.2 Where a complainant feels that a situation has not been resolved through section 3.1, or that their concern is of a sufficiently serious nature, they should make an appointment to discuss it with the head teacher (Mr. Heather). The head teacher considers any such complaint very seriously and investigates each case thoroughly. Most complaints are normally resolved at this stage. A further follow up letter to the head teacher may be appropriate in certain circumstances.

How to take the matter further

3.3 If a complainant is still dissatisfied following the meeting with the head teacher, they can write a formal letter to him (please mark as private and confidential). However, the school recognises its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and if formal letter writing is not an option then notes from telephone calls or other means of communication are acceptable. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant (as long as appropriate consent have been obtained).

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

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.

Time scales

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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.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

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 Pulford 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.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Pulford School wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld or not 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.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

Stage 1

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 3 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



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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/or 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 7 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 Pulford will take to resolve the complaint.

The headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate 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 will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the headteacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

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

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body or (St Alban's Diocese if appropriate). At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with

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members of the governing body's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 3 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will 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 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 complaints committee 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 Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Pulford School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through 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. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. 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.



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Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 4 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. 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 committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee 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 committee 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 Committee will provide the complainant and Pulford School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 4 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Pulford School.

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

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent 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 Pulford School will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate 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 Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

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

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester

M1 2WD.

Other types of complaint

For some types of complaint, you need to contact a different agency.

Complaint

Child protection
Criminal behaviour
Data protection

Who to contact

[Local council](#)
[Police](#)
[Information Commissioner's Office](#)



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Complaint

Discrimination

Employment

Exam malpractice or
maladministration

Quality of education or leadership

Who to contact

[Equality Advisory and Support Service](#)

[An employment tribunal](#)

[Ofqual](#) and the awarding body

[Ofsted](#)

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. They should be contacted direct.

Exclusion of children from school

Further information about raising concerns
about exclusion can be found at:

[www.gov.uk/school-discipline-
exclusions/exclusions](http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions).

The Diocese of St Albans will only investigate complaints about Denominational Religious Education, Collective Worship in a Voluntary Aided School or the conduct of a Foundation Governor. Canon David Morton is Director of Education, <https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/schools/who-s-who-in-the-schools-team/>

Where complaints are made regarding Bullying or the National Curriculum, you may contact the Secretary of State. The contact details for the Secretary of State are as follows: The Secretary of State, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT; tel: 0870 000 2288; website: www.education.gov.uk

4. Serial and Persistent Complainants

The School will do their best to be helpful to people who contact them with a complaint or concern or a request for information. However, in cases where the school is contacted repeatedly by an individual making the same points, or who asks them to reconsider their position, the school will need to act appropriately.

There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the complaint procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. It is a poor use of schools' time and resources to reply to repeated letters, emails or telephone calls making substantially the same points. If a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors can inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed.



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If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, then the correspondence may be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the school may choose not to respond.

The following policy will then be put into place:

Pulford 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. 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.

Pulford School defines unreasonable complainants 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 adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account 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 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;

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- 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 (by either letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

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

If the behaviour continues, the head teacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Pulford 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 Pulford School.

Barring from the School Premises

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.

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If a parent's behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask him/her to leave school premises. In serious cases, the head teacher 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. Pulford School will always give the parent the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing. The decision to bar will then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent will be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place. As with all communication if reading a communication or writing a letter or e-mail is not possible then other forms of communication will be used and notes retained.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the head teacher or Chair of Governors. 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.

5. Monitoring and review

5.1 The governors monitor the complaints procedure, in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. The head teacher will hold a copy of the records and will hold them centrally. The School is aware that complainants have a right to copies of these records under the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts.

5.2 Governors take into account any local or national decisions that affect the complaints process, and make any modifications necessary to this policy. This policy is made available to all on the website, so that they can be properly informed about the complaints process. The policy will be reviewed every two years - next due Spring 2026.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Safeguarding and Child protection Policy; AUP; the anti-bullying and harassment policy ; the discipline and behaviour policy; the Learning support policy; the disability equality policy; the staff grievance procedure document.

Policy endorsed by the Governing Board, Spring 2025
Signed On behalf of the Chair of the Governing Board

Equal opportunities

All young people will be treated equally, regardless of disability, race, creed or gender.

The policy will be applied regardless of culture, faith or belief.

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