



Gatehouse Green Learning Trust Complaints Policy

Approved by:	Trust Board	Date: 28 March 2019
Last reviewed on:	28 March 2019	
Next review due by:	2022	

The Trust encourages feedback or opinions and we see this process as continuous, directly or indirectly, through PTA, school events and conversations with staff. It is considered natural that sometimes parents may occasionally be concerned about an aspect of their child's time in school. The vast majority of such concerns will be handled by the teacher or another member of staff, however, we recognise in rare circumstances concerns may need to be escalated.

In order to investigate your complaint as fully as possible, the Trust Board of Gatehouse Green Learning Trust has implemented a staged approach. We are fully committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, in a friendly, respectful and professional way as it is in everyone's best interest to help ensure the matter can be resolved as quickly and informally as possible. We anticipate that almost all complaints that arise will be resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2 below, and that Stage 3 and 4 and Part 2 will only need to be followed on very rare occasions.

PART 1: Complaints Procedure

Stage 1: The First Contact: Aim to resolve concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school

- 1.1 Parents are always welcome to discuss any concerns with the appropriate member of staff, who will clarify with the parent the nature of the concern and reassure them that the school wants to hear about it. The member of staff may explain to the parent how the situation happened. It can be helpful at this point to identify what sort of outcome the parent is looking for.
- 1.2 If the member of staff first contacted cannot deal with the matter immediately, they will make a clear note of the date, name and contact address or phone number.
- 1.3 All members of staff will know how to refer, if necessary, to the person with responsibility for the particular issue raised by the parent. They will check later to make sure the referral has been dealt with.

- 1.4 If the matter is brought to the attention of the Headteacher, they may decide to deal with concerns directly at this stage; if the complaint is against the Headteacher the parent will be advised to contact the Chair of the Governing Body.
- 1.5 The member of staff dealing with the concern will make sure the parent is clear what action (if any) or monitoring of the situation has been agreed, putting it in writing if appropriate.
- 1.6 Where no satisfactory solution has been found within ten days, parents will be advised that, if they wish their concern to be considered further, they should write to the Headteacher.

Stage 2: Referral to the Headteacher for investigation

- 2.1 The Headteacher will acknowledge the complaint in writing within three school days of receiving the written complaint. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the school's complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This should normally be within fifteen school days (i.e. excluding weekends and school holidays). If this proves impossible, a letter will be sent explaining the reason for the delay and giving a revised target date.
- 2.2 The Headteacher will provide an opportunity for the complainant to meet them to supplement any information provided previously. It will be made clear to the complainant that, if they wish, they might be accompanied to any meeting by a friend, relative, representative or advocate who can speak on their behalf.
- 2.3 If necessary, the Headteacher will interview witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres on a student, the student should also be interviewed. Students should normally be interviewed with parents/guardians present but, if this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious/urgent complaint, or if the student has specifically said that they would prefer that parents/guardians were not involved, another member of staff with whom the student feels comfortable should be present. If a member of staff is complained against, they must have the opportunity to present their case (see General Principles).
- 2.4 The Headteacher will keep written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.
- 2.5 Once all the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, the Headteacher will produce a written response to the complainant, including a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, this will include what action the school will take to resolve the complaint. The complainant will be advised that, should they wish to take the complaint further, they should notify the chair of governors within four weeks of the date of the letter.
- 2.6 If, in the course of an investigation, a fault is identified, the Headteacher should take immediate action to put matters right so that any potential injustice does not continue or risk happening to somebody else.
- 2.7 **If the complaint is against the Headteacher**, or if the Headteacher has been closely involved at Stage 1, the Chair of the Governing Body will carry out all the Stage 2 procedures.
- 2.8 **If the complaint is about a Governor**, the complainant should still contact the Chair of the Governing Body, who will investigate the concerns. If the complaint is about the Chair of the Governing Body, the complainant should be referred to the Vice Chair. If

the complaint is about the Governing Body as a whole, the complainant should be referred to the Chair of the Trust Board.

Stage 3: Review by the Governing Body

3.1 The Chair of the Governing Body will write to the complainant to acknowledge receipt of the written request for the Governing Body to review the complaint. The acknowledgement will inform the complainant that three members of the Governing Body will hear the complaint within twenty school days (i.e. excluding weekends and school holidays) of receiving the complaint. The letter will also explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further documents relevant to the complaint. These must be received a minimum of 10 days before the Governing Body Complaints Panel is scheduled.

3.2 A meeting of the Governing Body Complaints Panel will be convened by the Chair of the Governing Body, and a Clerk to the panel will be appointed.

The Complaints Panel can be drawn from the whole Governing Body. Governors with prior involvement must not be included on the panel. If they have not previously been involved, the Chair of the Governing Body can chair the panel. However, this does not need to be the case. It is up to the Complaints Panel to decide who should be its Chair.

3.3 The Chair of the Complaints Panel will ensure the panel hears the complaint within twenty school days (i.e. excluding weekends and school holidays) of receiving the letter. All relevant correspondence relating to the complaint will be given to each panel member as soon as the composition of the panel is confirmed.

3.4 The Clerk will write and inform the complainant, Headteacher, any relevant witnesses and members of the Panel at least five working days in advance of the date, time and place of the meeting. The notification will also inform the complainant of their right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend/advocate/interpreter and explain how the meeting will be conducted.

3.5 The Headteacher will be invited to attend the panel meeting and will be asked to prepare a written report for the panel in response to the complaint. All concerned, including the complainant, should receive any relevant documents including the Headteacher's report, at least five school days prior to the meeting. The Headteacher may also invite members of staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant to respond in writing or person.

3.6 The meeting should allow for:

- The complainant to explain their complaint and the Headteacher to explain the school's response
- The opportunity for both parties to ask questions of each other about the complaint
- Panel members to have an opportunity to question both the complainant and the

Headteacher

- Any party to have the right to call witnesses (subject to approval of the Chair) and all parties having the right to question all the witnesses
- Final statements by both the complainant and the Headteacher

It is the responsibility of the Clerk of the panel to ensure that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken or actions agreed. The notes do not need to be verbatim but should be sufficient to remind the panel of the evidence that has been presented and the reason for the decision.

- 3.7 The Chair of the Panel will explain to the complainant and Headteacher that the panel will consider its decision and that a written decision will be sent to both parties within five school days. The complainant, Headteacher, other members of staff and witnesses will then leave.
- 3.8 The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and:
- Reach a majority decision on the complaint
 - Decide upon the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint; and, where appropriate, suggest recommended changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.
- 3.9 A written statement outlining the decision of the panel must be sent to the complainant and Headteacher. The letter to the complainant should also explain how a further appeal can be made (See **Stage 4**).
- 3.10 The school should ensure that a copy of all correspondence and notes are kept on file in the school's records. These records should be kept separately from the student's personal records.

Stage 4: Referral to the Trust Board

If following review by the Governing body you still have concerns regarding the process followed in handling your complaint, you may write to the Chief Executive to request the matter be reviewed at Trust level. This will be your last recourse at school level.

The purpose of this arrangement is to give the complaint a final hearing in front of a panel of at least 3 Trustees with no prior knowledge of the details of the complaint. The complaint will be considered without prejudice. The Trustees will be independent of the management and running of the school.

The aim will be to resolve the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. We recognise that this will not always be possible and the aim would be to establish facts and make recommendations.

The Clerk to the Trustees will write to the complainant to acknowledge receipt of the written request for the Trustees to review the complaint. The acknowledgement will inform the complainant that three members of the Trust Board will hear the complaint within twenty school days (i.e. excluding weekends and school holidays) of receiving the complaint. The letter will also explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further documents relevant to the complaint. These must be received a minimum of 10 days before the Trust Board Complaints Panel is scheduled.

- 4.1 The Headteacher and Chair of Governors will be asked to prepare a written report for the panel. Other members of staff directly involved in matters arising from your complaint may also be asked to prepare statements.
- 4.2 The Clerk will write and inform the complainant, Headteacher, any relevant witnesses and members of the Panel at least five working days in advance of the date, time and place of the meeting. The notification will also inform the complainant of their right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend/advocate/interpreter and explain how the meeting will be conducted.
- 4.3 All concerned, including the complainant, should receive any relevant documents including the Headteacher's report, at least five school days prior to the meeting.
- 4.4 The meeting should allow for:
- The complainant to explain their complaint and the Headteacher to explain the school's response
 - The opportunity for both parties to ask questions of each other about the complaint
 - Panel members to have an opportunity to question both the complainant and the Headteacher
 - Any party to have the right to call witnesses (subject to approval of the Chair) and all parties having the right to question all the witnesses
 - Final statements by both the complainant and the Headteacher

As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses previously undisclosed should be introduced at this meeting. It is the responsibility of the Clerk of the panel to ensure that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken or actions agreed. The notes do not need to be verbatim but should be sufficient to remind the panel of the evidence that has been presented and the reason for the decision.

- 4.5 The Chair of the Panel will explain to the complainant and Headteacher that the panel will consider its decision and that a written decision will be sent to both parties within five school days. The complainant, Headteacher, other members of staff and witnesses will then leave.
- 4.6 The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and
- Reach a majority decision on the complaint
 - Decide upon the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
 - Where appropriate, suggest recommended changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again
- 4.7 A written statement outlining the decision of the panel must be sent to the complainant, Headteacher and Chair of Governors. The letter to the complainant should also explain how a further appeal can be made (See **Stage 5**).
- 4.8 The school should ensure that a copy of all correspondence and notes are kept on file in the school's records. These records should be kept separately from the student's personal records.

Review of the Governing Body Complaints Panel Decision

We hope that you feel your complaint has been taken handled correctly and resolved to your satisfaction. However, once the school's complaints procedure has been exhausted, if you remain unhappy with the outcome you can contact the Department for Education. A complaint may be made to the Department for Education if you believe the Governing Body is acting unreasonably or is failing to carry out its statutory duties properly.

This is done online at: www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

You should set out in full your concerns, and the reasons why the complaint is being submitted, attaching all previous correspondence relevant to the complaint. This is the final stage in the complaint handling process.

PART 2: Unreasonably persistent complainants and unreasonable complainant behaviour

We are fully committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, in a friendly, respectful and professional way. We are sure that you will understand the need to behave in a similar way as it is in everyone's best interest to help ensure the matter can be resolved as quickly and informally as possible. However, the Trust does not expect its staff, Governors or Trustees to tolerate behaviour by complainants which is unacceptable, for example, which is abusive, offensive or threatening, and they will take action to protect staff, Governors and Trustees from any such behaviour if it occurs. Also, there may be complainants who, because of the frequency of their contact with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's, complaints and potentially the running of our schools.

We anticipate that such behaviour will be a very rare occurrence but, if we consider a complainant's behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, we will tell them why and ask them to change it. If the behaviour continues, we may take action to restrict the complainant's contact with the school.

The decision to restrict access to the school will be taken by the Headteacher and CEO. Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. They may include:

- requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only)
- requiring contact to take place with a named member of staff
- restricting telephone calls to specified days and times
- asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their conduct

In all cases, we will write to tell the complainant why we believe their behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, what action we are taking and the duration of that action. We will also tell them how they can challenge the decision if they disagree with it.

Where a complainant continues to behave in a way which is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, we may decide to terminate contact with that complainant and discontinue any investigation into their complaint. If we decide to carry on treating someone as an unreasonably persistent complainant and we are still investigating their complaint six months later, we will carry out a review and decide if restrictions will continue.

Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of the school's staff, Governors or Trustees, we will consider other options, for example reporting the matter to the police, or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

Where a complainant whose case is closed persists in communicating with us about it, we may decide to terminate contact with that complainant. In such cases, we will read all correspondence from that complainant but, unless there is fresh evidence which affects our decision on the complaint, we will simply acknowledge it or place it on the file with no acknowledgement.

New complaints from people who have come under the unreasonably persistent complainants' policy will be treated on their merits.

Complaints Form

This form may be used to collate details of a complaint or as a prompt during any meeting with the complainant.	
Complainant's Name	
Student's Name	
Relationship to the Student	
Address	
Daytime / Evening Tel Number	
Outline details of the complaint:	
What actions, if any, have already been taken to try and resolve the complaint (e.g. Who did the complainant speak to and what was the response)?	
What actions does the complainant wish to see that might resolve the problem?	

Has the complainant provided any paperwork? List documents here and keep copies with this note.	
Date acknowledgement sent	By Whom
Complaint referred to:	Date: