South Gosforth First School

'Roots to grow and wings to fly'

South Gosforth First School

Complaints Policy

	Staff • Read it • Chance for feedback	FGB/Sub Committee • Approved	Accessible • Website link saved
Review Date:	**November 2026**	**November 2026**	**November 2026**
Next Review Due:	**November 2027**		
Changes: No changes since previous policy			

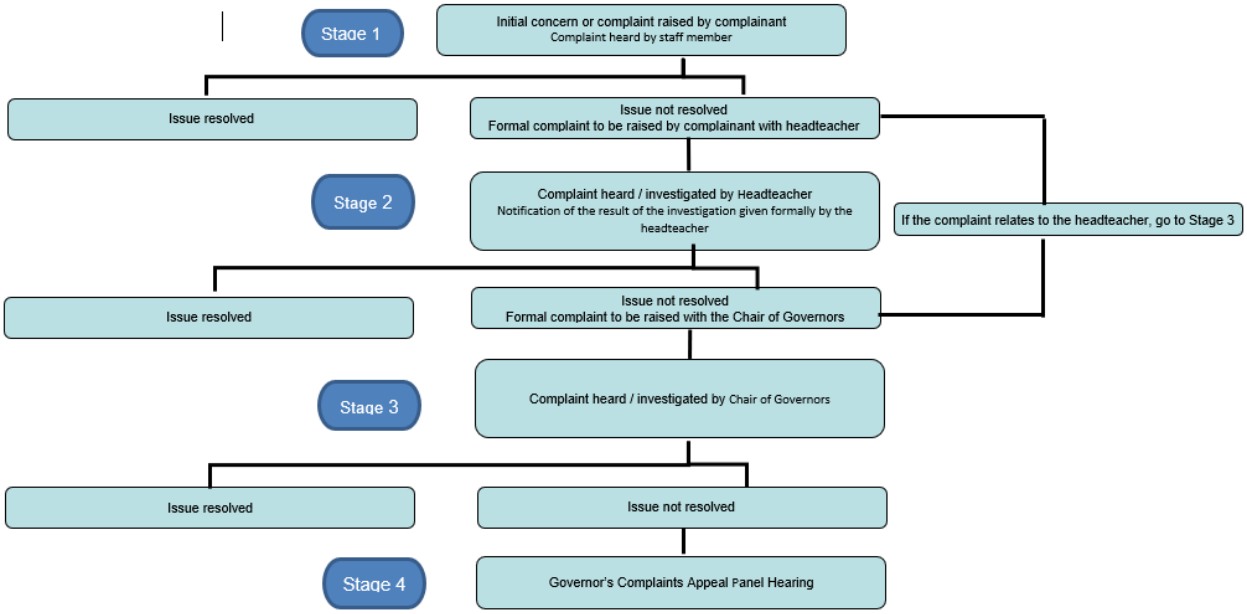
Member of staff with responsibility:

- **Mr Bradley-Adams (Head Teacher)**
- **Miss Blackburn (Deputy Head Teacher)**
- **Mrs Burnett (EYFS Lead)**
- **Mrs Logan (KS2 Lead)**

Summary of main points and actions:

- **Summary diagram of the key processes in dealing with complaints (4stages)**
  - **Heard by a staff member**
  - **Heard by Head Teacher and investigated**
  - **Heard by Chair of Governors and investigated**
  - **Heard by Governors Complaints Panel**
  - **Procedures for closing complaints and improving practice as a result of receiving a complaint.**
  - **Managing Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints**

Summary of the Key Processes in dealing with Complaints



Our School's ethos for dealing with complaints

The school's priority is to serve the needs of pupils, parents and the local community. We try to serve as efficiently and as courteously as possible but we recognise that things can go wrong. We welcome complaints and comments as an opportunity to improve the quality of the services we offer and we assure parents that they and their child will not be compromised if they raise a concern or a complaint.

In following the complaints policy, the following general principles will apply:

- We hope to be able to settle differences informally;
- We recognise the need for more formal mechanisms for dealing fairly and effectively with complaints which have proved impossible to settle informally;
- We are committed to open communication of the complaints procedure to parents, staff and governors
- We will not tolerate abusive or vexatious behaviour from complainants, whether written (including social media), verbal or physical

Should any parent have difficulty in speaking English or writing please contact the school office in the first instance or you can request support from Newcastle City Council Governor Services, Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8PU who can signpost you to appropriate support.

Introduction

This document sets out the procedures that should be followed when raising a concern or a complaint at South Gosforth First School.

There are 4 possible stages to the complaints process. If you have a concern or a complaint about an issue with our school, then you should follow the appropriate procedures as set out below.

Individual complaints will not be heard by the whole Governing Body at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any potential panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff should this follow the outcome of a serious complaint.

The 4 stages of our complaint procedure

Stage 1 (informal): Initial raising of a concern or a complaint.

Concerns should initially be raised with the class teacher, the School Office or another member of staff. The School recognises that first contact with the school can be very important in the successful resolution of issues and every effort will be made to try and resolve things informally at this stage. At this informal stage it would be useful if complainants could try and identify what actions they feel might resolve the problem.

Complaints can be raised verbally, by email or in writing.

The School will respect the views of any complainant who indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. In such cases, you should ask to speak to: the School Office, the headteacher or another senior member of staff and your concern will be referred to another appropriate staff member. If your complaint concerns the headteacher, complainants should direct their concerns to the Chair of Governors.

The School will also respect the interests of its staff and if the member of staff initially involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the School will make arrangements to refer the complainant to another appropriate staff member.

Generally, complaints should not be made through school governors, as they may need to become involved in the resolution of issue(s) at a later point. Our Governors will not act on an individual basis and if Governors are approached at this stage, they will be expected to direct any concerns back through the appropriate school procedures.

What the Class Teacher / Staff Member of staff will do:
The Teacher or member of staff initially approached, will try and resolve the matter or provide an explanation as to what has happened. The School will make every effort to resolve all concerns informally at this early stage.

Timescale for a response (Stage 1): At this stage, you should expect to receive a response to your concern or complaint at an early stage and within **15 school days** of raising the matter.

Stage 2 (formal): Complaint investigated by the Head Teacher

If a complainant still remains dissatisfied after **Stage 1** then the complaint should be raised with the headteacher. The headteacher may delegate the task of collating of information relating to the matter to another staff member but will retain the responsibility for any decision(s) or any action(s) to be taken.

In South Gosforth First School, you should seek to raise your concerns with the headteacher by one or more of the following methods:

- Request a meeting with the headteacher
- Submit your complaint in writing

What the Head Teacher will do:

The headteacher will investigate your concerns and will formally notify you of the outcome and any decisions taken in relation to your complaint. Following an appropriate investigation, the headteacher may choose to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that the event complained of will not happen again;
- Feedback on any outcomes such as an improvement in service, an agreement to review or amend a policy or an explanation as to why the actions of the school did / did not comply with LA or school policy
- Information on any further recourse through the chair of governors and / or the details of how the complaint can be progressed further.

Timescale for a response (Stage 2): At this stage, you should expect to receive a response from the headteacher within 15 school days of receipt of your complaint.

Stage 3 (Formal): Complaint heard by Chair of Governors or Governor Complaints Appeal Panel

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response from the head teacher or the complaint is about the head teacher, the complainant should write to the Chair of Governors to request that their complaint is considered further.

In this instance, complainants are required to make a formal complaint in writing to the Chair of Governors / Governing Body of South Gosforth First School which clearly outlines their complaints. These will then be investigated by either the Chair of Governors or a Governing Body Complaints Appeal Committee, depending on the nature of the complaint. Complainants should also send any documentation or other information which they have from Stage 2 of the complaints process to the governors who will be investigating.

Hard copy correspondence to one of the Co-Chair of Governors can be handed in at the school office and this will then be forwarded on accordingly. Alternatively, complainants can email their correspondence to the school office (admin@sgfs.uk) who will then forward this on directly to the appropriate governor(s). If complainants would prefer to avoid any contact with school-based staff

at this stage, hard copy correspondence can be sent to: Governor Services, Room 400, Civic Centre, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8PU

Timescale for a response (Stage 3): At this stage, you should expect to receive a response from the Chair of Governors within **15 school days** of receipt of your complaint.

Governor Complaints Appeal Committee
The Chair of Governors may arrange for a Governors Complaints Appeal Committee to formally review the complaint if it is felt that this is appropriate. Complainants need to be aware that Governor Complaint appeal hearings are formal processes. All parties directly involved have the right to provide evidence statements and to call appropriate witnesses. Complainants will have the right to bring someone along for support, but that person will not be allowed to participate in the appeal hearing itself.

The Chair (or a nominated Governor) will arrange:

· For an Appeal Panel to be set up, usually consisting of three governors or independent members, who have had no prior involvement in the matter.

· For the appointment of an appropriate Clerk for the Meeting

The normal process for an Appeal Hearing will be as follows:

· The Clerk will write to all concerned to provide details of when and where the meeting will be held and to request copies of any written submissions of evidence to be provided (usually by at least a week prior to the meeting). This evidence will then be provided to all parties concerned.

· The Appeal Panel will hear the submissions of evidence from all parties and will allow for each side to raise questions and provide any witnesses at an appropriate point in the proceedings.

· After the appropriate submissions have been received, the Appeal Panel will then withdraw and consider its decision(s).

What the Appeal Panel will do:

The Panel may choose to offer one or more of the following outcomes:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint;
- no further action

Timescale for a response from Governors Complaints Appeal Panel
In most cases, the Panel will communicate its decision(s) and reason(s) in writing – usually within **one week** of the Governor Complaints Appeal Committee hearing meeting.

Dealing with specific issues

Complaint about the Head Teacher

If your complaint is about the **Head Teacher**, or the actions/decisions taken by the Headteacher, then you should put your complaint in writing directly to the Chair of Governors, giving the reasons for your concerns. This can be done by submitting your written complaint (addressed to the Chair of Governors) either via the school office, or by contacting Newcastle Governor Services, Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8PU who will forward your complaint on to the Chair.

What the Chair of Governors will do:
The Chair of Governors will review the matter and will either provide the complainant with an appropriate response, or will arrange for an Appeal Panel of governors to meet and consider the matter further. The Chair of Governors may also seek further advice and guidance from the Local Authority or an external consultant.

Timescale for a response (Stage 3): At this stage, you should expect to receive a response from the Chair of Governors within **15 school days** of receipt of your complaint.

Complaint about a Governor

If your complaint is about a **Governor,** then you should put your complaint in writing directly to the Chair of Governors, giving the reasons for your concerns. This can be done by submitting your written complaint (addressed to the Chair of Governors) either via the school office, or by contacting Newcastle Governor Services, Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8PU, who will forward your complaint on to the Chair.

What the Chair of Governors will do:
The Chair of Governors will review the matter and will either provide the complainant with an appropriate response, or will arrange for a Panel of governors to meet and consider the matter further. The Chair of Governors may also seek further advice and guidance from the Local Authority or an external consultant.

Timescale for a response (Stage 3): At this stage, you should expect to receive a response from the Chair of Governors within **15 school days** of receipt of your complaint.

Complaint about the Chair of Governors

If your complaint is about the **Chair of Governors**, then the Governing Body will need to assign a specified governor to deal with the matter. This will usually be the Vice-Chair of Governors. You should put your complaint in writing to the Vice-Chair of Governors. This can be done by submitting your written complaint via the school office, or by contacting Newcastle Governor Services, Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8PU who will forward your complaint on to the Vice-Chair.

What the Vice-Chair of Governors will do:
The Vice-Chair of Governors will review the matter and will either provide the complainant with an appropriate response, or will arrange for an Appeal Panel of governors to meet and consider the matter further. The Vice-Chair of Governors may also seek further advice and guidance from the Local Authority or an external consultant.
Timescale for a response (Stage 3): At this stage, you should expect to receive a response from the Chair of Governors within **15 school days** of receipt of your complaint.

Anonymous Complaints
The School recognises that for a variety of reasons, some complainants wish to remain anonymous. However, in such cases, the school reserves the right to ignore the concerns being raised and in most circumstances, no further action will be taken. However, the school also reserves the right to retain some of the information raised in any anonymous complaint to support the future analysis of trends and behaviour etc.

Closure of the Complaint

The Governor's Appeal Panel represents the final stage in the School's complaints policy and the decision of the appeal panel is final. Should a complainant still remain dissatisfied with the outcome, then complainants should be advised that the only remaining option will be for the complainant to raise the matter further with The Secretary of State for Education.

Write to: Ministerial and Public Communications Division, Department for Education,

Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

Email: ministers@education.gsi.gov.uk

Telephone: 0370 000 2288

Website: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education

Managing Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints
South Gosforth First School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and to providing a thorough and accurate response to those who may wish to raise a complaint. The school will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school itself; however, South Gosforth First School does not permit their staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour of any kind and will take action to protect them from such behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

<u>For the purposes of this policy 'unreasonable complaints' include:</u>

Vexatious complaints, which:
▪ Are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, or repetitious.
▪ Insist upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reasonable expectation.
▪ Insist upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.

▪ Are designed with the sole purpose of causing disruption or disorder to the running of South Gosforth First School.
▪ Demand for redress which lacks any serious purpose or value.

Serial or persistent complaints, which:
▪ Are duplicated and sent by the same complainant once the initial complaint has been closed.
▪ Are new complaints that are submitted additionally, as part of an existing open complaint, by the same complainant.

A complaint may also be regarded as unreasonable when 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 from school staff, or agencies acting on behalf of school.
• Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
• Refuses to accept that certain issues do not fall within the scope of the school's complaints policy and procedure.
• Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints policy and procedure.
• Introduces information which is unrelated to the complaint which they have raised which they expect to be taken into account and commented on, or raises an unreasonable amount of detailed but unconnected questions and insists that they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
• Makes unjustified complaints or comments about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced as part of the complaints process.
• Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
• Repeatedly makes the same complaint, despite previous investigations (often carried out by a number of agencies) or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless, unfounded or has been addressed.
• Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into the complaint where the school's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referrals to other educational agencies, including DfE, Ofsted or The Teaching Regulation Agency.
• Seeks an unrealistic or disproportionate outcome.
• Makes excessive demands on school time by issuing frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint, either in person, in writing, by email, or by telephone whilst the complaint is being dealt with (this includes indirect contact via other educational agencies who are involved in dealing with the complaint.)

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the complainant:

• Acts maliciously or aggressively in any way.
• Uses threats, intimidation or violence.
• Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language.
• Knows the complaint to be false.
• Uses falsified information.

• Publishes negative opinions, damaging information or unfounded allegations on a public forum, such as whatsapp groups, social media apps, websites and newspapers about the school or staff working within it

The above applies regardless of the method in which the complaint is made, e.g. face-to-face, by telephone, in writing or electronically. Complainants should limit the number of communications with the school while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent, either by letter, phone, email or text, as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the member of staff, governor or agency working on behalf of the school leading the response to a complaint will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. Serial or persistent complaints will only be marked as 'serial' once the complainant has fully followed the complaints procedure (as listed in this policy). It is the complaint that will be marked as 'serial', meaning the complainant can complain about a separate issue if they feel that this is necessary. If negative behaviour from the complainant continues, the individual handling the complaint will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and giving evidence to support this. For complainants who excessively contact South Gosforth First School, causing a significant level of disruption, the school may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a 'Communication Plan'. This plan will usually be reviewed after six months if necessary.

South Gosforth First School will not stop responding to a complainant solely on the basis that they are deemed to be challenging to deal with or that they ask complex questions.
A decision to stop responding to complaints of this nature will only be considered in circumstances where one or more of the following statements apply:

• Every reasonable step has been taken to address the complainant's concerns and there is evidence of this.
• The complainant has been given a clear response to their complaint, and / or a statement of the school's position and their options
• The complainant contacts South Gosforth First School (or agencies working on behalf of the school) or other education agencies making substantially the same points each time that they make a complaint

If one or more of the above criteria are met, in making a decision to stop responding, the school will also consider if the complainant is often abusive or aggressive in their communication, makes insulting personal comments or threats towards staff, or if the school believes that their intent is to disrupt or inconvenience members of staff.

In response to any serious incidents of threatening behaviour, aggression or violence, the concerns and proposed actions to be taken will be put in writing by the Chair of Governors and the police will be informed. This may include banning this individual from the school premises.