

ALTRINCHAM GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR BOYS – COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

1. Introduction

1.1 The Education Act 2002 requires the Governing Body to have a procedure for handling complaints. Complaints at Altrincham Grammar School for Boys are rare. However, this Policy provides a framework so that where a complaint is made it can be dealt with in a fair and appropriate manner. The procedure covers complaints which may be made by *pupils, pupils' parents*, members of staff, local residents or visitors to the School. Examples of the sorts of complaint that might be made and this procedure is appropriate for are :

Bullying
Inappropriate comments
Verbal abuse by a pupil outside school
Unfair treatment by a member of staff
Concern about teaching quality
School uniform or pupil appearance
Anti-social behaviour in pupil

1.2 This complaints procedure does not cover those aspects of school life for which there are specific statutory requirements and, in particular, complaints about the provision of collective worship and religious education, special needs assessment and concerns about school admissions and exclusions from school which have specific appeal rights.

1.3 The school looks positively on most complaints. It is recognised that most people prefer not to complain and, therefore, to do so must be a matter of genuine concern. Sometimes explanation is needed to enlighten them. Sometimes complaints can be a useful engine of school improvement.

2. An overview of the procedures

2.1 There are **four stages** to the complaints procedure of the school. These are :

Stage 1:	Informal:	Expression of concern to a member of staff.
Stage 2:	Formal:	A written complaint to the Head Master.
Stage 3:	Formal:	Written – the complainant makes a complaint to the Governing Body.
Stage 4:	Formal:	Written – the complainant refers to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

2.2 It is expected that the vast majority of cases will be dealt with speedily, sympathetically and satisfactorily at the “Informal” stage. In some cases the complainant may prefer to by-pass Stage 1 and make a written formal complaint to the Head Master. That is acceptable but the Head Master retains the right to refer the complainant back to the “Informal” stage if he feels it appropriate to do so. If the complaint concerns a child protection matter it should be referred immediately to either the Head Master or the member of staff with responsibility for Child Protection (Please refer to the Child Protection Policy). **Confidentiality in this matter is crucial.**

- 2.3 Sometimes complaints may be made by a parent or member of the public to a member of the Governing Body that he/she knows. If an individual Governor is approached with a complaint the complainant should be advised to contact School and follow the procedures outlined above.

3. Procedures in detail

- 3.1 The vast majority of concerns and complaints can be resolved informally. Parents should feel able to raise concerns with members of staff (teaching or administrative) without feeling constrained by formality.

3.2.1. Stage 1

Parents should contact the member of staff by telephone or by visiting the School at Reception. If the member of staff cannot immediately deal with the matter a clear note should be made of the complainant's name, address/phone number together with date.

If the concern is of a more general nature the member of the office staff receiving the concern should refer the matter to an appropriate senior member of staff, e.g. if the concern is of a curricular nature it is appropriate to refer the matter to a Head of Department.

If the complaint concerns a pupil or group of pupils it would be appropriate to refer it to the Head of Year of those pupils or if it is concerning a more vague complaint concerning pupils to the Head of Lower to Middle School or the Head of Sixth Form.

If the complaint is against a member of staff it should be referred to the Head Master. If the complaint is or may be a child protection issue it should be referred either to the Head Master or the member of staff with responsibility for Child Protection (please refer to the Child Protection Policy). **Confidentiality in this matter is crucial.**

If the complaint concerns the Head Master the parent should be advised to contact the Chairman of the Governing Body.

- 3.2.1. **A response to a complaint should normally be given within 24 hours and certainly within 48 hours.** This may be in the form of a letter or telephone call simply advising the complainant that the matter is under investigation. A full reply should be made either via a meeting, by telephone or by letter within five working days. A short note should be made on a complaints pro-forma (available within the office) or a copy of the letter that is being sent to the complainant should be placed in the "Complaints File" in the School Office.

- 3.2.2. If at this stage the complainant remains dissatisfied he/she should be advised how to proceed towards Stage 2 of this Policy – they should be advised to write a formal letter to the Head Master.

3.3.1. Stage 2

At this stage the "Informal" procedures have failed to resolve the matter of concern. On receipt of a formal letter, the Head Master will either acknowledge the letter within three working days and provide a full response

within ten working days or will respond fully to the complainant within three working days.

- 3.3.2. If necessary the Head Master will interview witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres upon a pupil the pupil will be interviewed and given opportunities to make his case. The Head Master may wish a parent/parents to be present or may choose to have a member of staff present. If so it should be a member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable.
- 3.3.3. The Head Master will keep a full written record of meetings, telephone conversations and any other documentation using the pro-forma referred to in 3.2.1. At the end of the investigation this information will be filed within the Complaints File in the School Office.
- 3.3.4. Once all the relevant facts have been established the Head Master will write a full response to the complainant containing his judgement and the reasons for the judgement based upon the evidence before him. Where appropriate this will include a summary of the action the School will take to resolve the complaint.
- 3.3.5. The complainant should be advised that should he/she wish to take the complaint further the Chairman of the Governing Body should be so advised within five weeks of receiving the outcome letter.
- 3.3.6. If the complaint is against the action of the Head Master or if the Head Master has been very closely involved at Stage 1, the Chairman of the Governing Body should carry out all the Stage 2 procedures.

3.4.1. Stage 3

Complaints will very rarely reach this formal level. Governors involved at this level should remember that whilst the complaint may have begun against the particular member of staff it is now more broadly against the School. The matter should not be personalised.

- 3.4.2. Upon receipt of a written request by a complainant for a complaint to proceed to Stage 3, the Clerk to the Governing Body will become involved and should write to the complainant to acknowledge receipt of the written letter. The acknowledgement should inform the complainant that the complaint is to be heard by a panel of three members of the Governing Body within 20 working days of receiving the complaint. The letter should advise that the complainant has the right to submit any further documents relevant to the complaint and that these must be received in time for the panel members to study them.
- 3.4.3. The Clerk to the Governing Body should arrange to convene a Complaints Panel from members of the Governing Body. The panel members should be Governors who have had no prior involvement in the complaint. A Chair of the Panel should be selected at this stage.
- 3.4.4. The complainant will be informed of the date, time and place of the meeting at least five working days in advance. He/she will be informed of his/her right to be accompanied to the meeting by a witness/friend. The letter will also explain how the meeting will be conducted.

- 3.4.5. The Head Master is also informed of the date, time and place of the panel meeting and he will prepare a written report for the panel in response to the complainant. The Head Master's report should be received by all concerned – including the complainant – within five working days prior to the meeting.
- 3.4.6. When the meeting takes place its aim should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the School and the complainant. The meeting should allow for:
- The complainant to explain their complaint and the Head Master to explain the School's response.
 - Opportunities for the Head Master to question the complainant about the complaint and the complainant to question the Head Master about the School's response.
 - Panel members to have an opportunity to question both the complainant and the Head Master.
 - Final statements by both the complainant and the Head Master.
- 3.4.7. The Panel will then consider the evidence presented and a written decision will be sent to both parties within ten working days. Decisions may be unanimous or majority verdicts. The panel will decide upon the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint, and, where appropriate, recommend changes to the School's procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.
- 3.4.8. A written statement outlining the decision of the panel must be sent to the complainant and Head Master and a report should be made to the whole Governing Body.

4. Beyond the Governing Body

- 4.1 Complaints may be taken to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills under Section 496 of the 1996 Education Act on the grounds that the Governing Body is acting unreasonably or under Section 497 of the same Act that the Governing Body has failed to discharge its duties under the Act. The Secretary of State may contact the Governing Body for more information to consider the complaint.

T.J.G.

Reviewed by the Governing Body 2016