

Fairfield High School for Girls

Policy for School Concerns and Complaints



Approved by:	Full Trust Board	Date: September 2022
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Person Responsible:	Headteacher	

Outstanding Progress for All

Policy for School Complaints

1. Introduction

At Fairfield High School for Girls we undertake to provide an outstanding education that exceeds expectations in an open and transparent environment. We welcome feedback that we receive from parents, pupils and third parties and we accept that not all of this will be positive. We recognise that sometimes things can go wrong and people may need to raise concerns or a complaint they have with the school.

The majority of issues raised by Parents/Carers, the community or pupils, are concerns rather than complaints. We are committed to taking concerns very seriously (at the earliest stage) in the hope of keeping the number of formal complaints to a minimum. If at all possible, concerns should be resolved without the need for formal procedures. In most cases the individual delivering the service will receive the first approach. Staff should aim to resolve issues (including apologising where necessary).

Parents/Carers should in the first instance inform school should they have a concern and allow sufficient time for this to be responded to/addressed. Parents/Carers should avoid making ultimatums and avoid adopting a threatening approach in their communication with staff around these issues.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A **'concern'** may be defined as ***'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'***. A **'complaint'** may be generally defined as ***'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'***.

Fairfield High School for Girls aims to resolve the concerns or complaints as fairly and as speedily as possible. Formal complaints will be dealt with in a sensitive, impartial and confidential manner. Malicious complaints may incur appropriate action by the school. Any complaints concerning the conduct of school staff will be handled in accordance with the school's internal procedures and such an investigation will remain **'confidential'**.

It is important for people to recognise that the school is a busy organisation and that whilst we do our best, it may not be possible to offer a response immediately.

Complaints not in the scope of the procedure

Exceptions

- Admissions to schools
- Exclusion of pupils from school
- Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEND)
- School reorganisation proposals
- Matters likely to require a Child Protection investigation
- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures
- Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities
- Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information Requests

General Principles

The procedure for handling concerns and complaints is intended to:

- Be easily accessible and well publicised
- Be simple to understand and use
- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means, wherever possible
- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Allow swift handling
- Ensure a full and fair investigation
- Respect individuals' desire for confidentiality
- Address the key issues raised, provide an effective response and appropriate action
- Be used by staff and Trustees consistently, appropriately and confidently
- Require records in relation to both concerns and complaints
- Provide information to the school's Senior Leadership Team so that services can be improved

The school will try to resolve every concern, difficulty or complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and (where necessary) reviewing the school's systems and procedures in light of the matters raised.

The school needs to know as soon as possible if there are any causes for concern. Parents/Carers, pupils and the wider community should never feel – or be made to feel – that raising a concern, difficulty or complaint will adversely affect a pupil's future at the school, or place a pupil at a disadvantage in any way.

The Rules of Natural Justice

Simply put, the rules of natural justice relate to fairness. The school will ensure that all concerns, difficulties or complaints are dealt with the principles of natural justice:

- Information which relates to the matters raised will be shared with all the people involved
- Everyone will have the opportunity to present their case and respond to others involved
- The people who investigate and make decisions will be impartial
- All decisions will be made on a balanced and considered assessment of the information
- All decisions will be based on logical conclusions
- All decisions will be supported by reasons which will be explained to all those involved

Resolution Principles

It is in everyone's interest that concerns, difficulties and complaints are resolved to the satisfaction of all parties at the earliest possible stage. The way in which the concern, difficulty or complaint is dealt with after the matter is first raised by the complainant can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate.

At each stage of the complaint procedure, the school will consider how the complaint may be resolved. In considering how a complaint may be resolved, the school will give due regard to the seriousness of the complaint.

It **may** be appropriate in order to bring the complaint to a resolution for the school to offer:

- An explanation
- An apology
- Reassurance that steps have been taken to prevent a recurrence of events which led to the complaint
- Reassurance that the school will undertake a review of its policies and procedures in light of the complaint

It is important to recognise that investigations may prove a complaint to be invalid. In which case, the complainant must be informed of this and of the reasons for the decision.

It is useful if complainants are encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

An effective procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

None of the above will constitute an admission of negligence or an acceptance of liability on behalf of the school.

Fairfield High School for Girls has a ‘three-stage’ procedure for dealing with complaints.

Stage One - Resolving concerns informally – see Appendix ‘A’

For the purpose of this procedure concerns are defined as having a worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought. The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the formal stages of the complaint procedure (see below). The Trust Board encourages those that have concerns to raise them with the appropriate person at the school (e.g. your child’s Form Tutor, subject teacher, Head of Department or Head of Year – if in doubt, contact the **Company Secretary (Mrs. Murphy) on 0161 301 6452 or via her email (jmurphy@fairfieldhighschool.co.uk)** who will be able to advise) and to work constructively with that person towards resolving them. The extent to which this was both attempted and followed may be taken into consideration when assessing the reasonableness of a complaint during the formal stages of the procedure.

Formal Stages of the Complaints Procedure

The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the formal stages of the procedure. If you need to raise a concern then please do so with the relevant member of staff who will be happy to talk to you and seek to resolve it.

There are **‘two stages’** of the **‘formal’** Complaints Procedure:

Stage One – Formal investigation by the Headteacher

- A request for a formal investigation of a complaint by the Headteacher (or Chair of Trustees if the complaint is against the Headteacher) should be made in writing c/o the **Company Secretary**, or by completing the formal complaints form that is included as **Appendix ‘B’** of this procedure.
- The Headteacher (or Chair of Trustees - as appropriate) will acknowledge the request in writing no later than **10** working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of receiving it. The written

acknowledgment will (as far as possible) explain how the complaint will be investigated and the timescale for completing the investigation.

- A log of all correspondence in relation to the complaint will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Principles.
- The Headteacher will appoint an investigating officer (this will normally be the Deputy Headteacher or other appointed senior member of staff) who will consider all relevant evidence). This may include, but is not limited to:
 - obtaining statements from the complainant and those involved with the complaint
 - meeting with the complainant and those involved in the complaint
 - reviewing correspondence and other document relating to the complaint
- After considering the available evidence presented by the investigating officer, the Headteacher can decide to:
 - uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it
 - uphold the complaint in part (in other words find an aspect or aspects of the complaint to be valid, but not the whole complaint) direct for certain action to be taken
 - dismiss the complaint entirely
- The Headteacher will inform the complainant of the decision in writing, the grounds on which it was made and any actions taken as a result of the complaint. This will be within **20** working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of having issued written acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint. The written notification shall also advise the complainant of their right to escalate the complaint to **Stage 2** of the formal Complaints Procedure if they are not satisfied with the outcome at Stage 1.

Stage Two – Review by a Panel of the Trust Board

- The complainant is entitled to request a review of the decision taken at Stage 1 and the actions taken. The review is carried out by a panel of the Trust Board (to be determined by the Chair of the Trust Board) at a meeting convened by the Company Secretary to the Trust Board.
- Requests for a review of the decision taken at Stage 1 should be made in writing to the Company Secretary (**see contact details below**) no later than **‘four weeks’** after written notification of the decision taken has been received. The request should include a brief summary of the complaint, why the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1 and the outcome they are seeking.
- The Company Secretary will fulfil the role of organising the time and date of the review meeting, inviting all the attendees, collating all the relevant documentation and distributing this **‘five days’** in advance of the meeting. Minutes of the review meeting will be taken by the Company Secretary and provided with the written notification of the decision taken at Stage 2.

The following steps are taken at Stage 2:

- The Company Secretary will acknowledge the written request for the complaint to be reviewed no later than **10** working days (not including the school holidays) after receiving it.
- The Company Secretary will convene a panel of **‘two’** school Trustees and **‘one’** independent member to review the complaint. All three panel members will have no prior knowledge of the content of the complaint.

- The Company Secretary will liaise with the Complaint Panel and the school's representative to agree a mutually convenient date for the Complaint Panel Hearing, which will usually take place within **20** school days of receipt of the complainant's request, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- The Company Secretary will write to the complainant confirming the date of the Complaint Panel Hearing as soon as possible.

Documentation

- The Company Secretary will forward a copy of all paperwork relating to the complaint, including submissions by the complainant and the school to the complainant, the school's representative and the three Complaint Panel members.

All paperwork will comply with the Data Protection Act and may be redacted to protect confidentiality.

- If the complainant or the school wishes the Complaint Panel to consider any additional information, they should forward this documentation to the Company Secretary to arrive at least **five** school days before the Complaint Panel Hearing to enable the Company Secretary to forward it to all parties.
- The review meeting will take place within **20** working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) of receipt of the written acknowledgement from the Company Secretary.
- The panel may decide to invite the following to attend the review meeting:
 - the complainant
 - the Headteacher (or Chair of Trustees as appropriate) who investigated the complaint and made the decision at Stage 1
 - relevant persons involved the complaint
 - persons whom, in the view of the panel, can provide relevant advice and information relating to the subject of the complaint and the review process at Stage 2
- Where the complainant, Headteacher and/or relevant person involved in the complaint have been invited to attend the review meeting, they are entitled to be accompanied by a family member/ friend/representative as appropriate. However, legal representatives are **not** permitted to attend the review meeting.
- Where the relevant persons involved in the complaint include pupils at the school, and their attendance at the review meeting has been requested by the panel, parental permission must be sought if they are under the age of 18. Extra care will be taken to consider the vulnerability of children where they are present at a complaints hearing.
- Where the complaint is about a Trustee/Trust Board the complainant may request that the review meeting is held by an Independent Panel. This is at the discretion of the Academy Trust who will notify the Company Secretary of their decision. Where an entirely Independent Panel is required, timescales may be affected while the school source appropriate individuals for the review.

Procedure at the Complaint Panel Hearing

The Complaint Panel Hearing will be conducted as follows:

- The Company Secretary will greet the complainant, the complainant's supporter and the school's representative and welcome them into the room where the Complaint Panel has convened (any witnesses will remain outside of the room until they are called in to give their account). Attendees under the age of 18 will need to be accompanied at the hearing by a parent/carer or a person with parental responsibility
- The complainant will be invited by the Complaints Panel to give an account of their complaint.
- Any witnesses will be introduced at the appropriate point (as needed).
- There will be an opportunity to ask questions/ask for clarification.
- Witnesses will be asked to leave.
- The school's representative will be invited by the Complaint Panel to respond to the complaint and make representations on behalf of the school.
- Any witnesses will be introduced at the appropriate point (as needed).
- There will be an opportunity to ask questions/ask for clarification.
- Witnesses will be asked to leave.
- The complainant will be invited by the Complaint Panel to summarise their complaint.
- The school's representative will be invited by the Complaint Panel to summarise their response to the complaint and the school's position.
- The Complaint Panel Hearing will conclude and the complainant and the school's representative will be asked to leave the room.

The Complaint Panel's Decision

The Complaint Panel will convene in private, either immediately after the Complaint Panel Hearing or on a subsequent date, and will consider all of the documentation and everything that they have heard at the Complainant Panel Hearing.

Findings/Outcome

The Panel will consider all the information provided during the Panel meeting and will agree their findings.

Irrespective of the decision taken, the panel may also recommend steps that the complainant and the school should take to move forward from the presenting issues in the best interests of all concerned. The panel may also recommend steps to be taken that reduce the likelihood of a similar complaint being made in the future.

Such panels have no power to initiate disciplinary action against an individual (there are separate arrangements for this) or to order the Headteacher to change systems or procedures.

Recommendations

The Complaint Panel will consider any recommendations they may wish to make in light of their findings. The Complaint Panel will keep a written record of their recommendations (with reasons).

Notification of the Complaint Panel's Decision

The Company Secretary will send to the complainant and the school, a copy of the Complaint Panel's response/outcome within **'ten'** school days of the Complaint Panel Hearing.

The letter will identify each of the issues complained about, summarise how the Complaint Panel Hearing proceeded, and confirm each of the Complaint Panel's findings of fact and recommendations (if any) with reasons.

The complainant, the Headteacher (or Chair of Trustees, as appropriate) who investigated the complaint and made the decision at Stage 1, and (where relevant) the person complained about will be informed in writing of the outcome of the review meeting no later than **'10'** working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) after the review meeting has taken place.

This is the **'final stage'** at which the school will consider the complaint.

If the complainant feels that the Trust Board acted **'unreasonably'** in the handling of the complaint, they can complain to the Education and Skills Funding Agency after the complaint procedure has been exhausted. Please note that **'unreasonable'** is used in a legal sense and means acting in a way in which no reasonable school or authority would act in the same circumstances.

<https://www.gov.uk/complainabout-school>

Timescale for the completing the formal stages of the procedure

Stage One (no more than 30 working days in total)

- Acknowledgement of complaint
- Formal investigation by Headteacher
- Notification of decision

Stage Two (no more than 40 working days in total)

- Acknowledgement of request to review the complaint
- Arrangements made for a review meeting
- The review meeting takes place
- Notification of the decision

Time Limits

The school aims to resolve concerns, difficulties and complaints in a timely manner. For the purpose of this Policy for School Concerns and Complaints, a **'school day'** is defined as a weekday during term time, when the school is open to children. Term dates are published on the school's website and information about term dates is made available to Parents/Carers and pupils periodically.

Where a complaint is submitted more than **'three months'** after the incident or event (or where the complaint relates to a series of incidents or events, more than three months from the date of the latest incident or event), the school reserves the right to use its discretion not to investigate the complaint under this Policy for School Concerns and Complaints.

If the complainant is unhappy with the decision not to investigate a complaint which was submitted late, the complainant may write to the Chair of Trustees at the school asking for the decision to be reviewed. The Chair of Trustees will be provided with all documentation relating to the complaint and will review the decision not to investigate the complaint. The Chair of Trustees will not investigate the complaint itself during this review.

Complaints against the Headteacher

If a complaint is about the conduct of the Headteacher, the Chair of Trustees will investigate the complaint under **'Stage 1'** of this Policy for School Concerns and Complaints instead of the Headteacher. The Vice Chair of Trustees will review the complaint under **'Stage 2'** of this Policy for School Concerns and Complaints instead of the Chair of Trustees.

Complaints against the Chair of Trustees

If a complaint is about the conduct of the Chair of Trustees, the Headteacher will consider the complaint under **'Stage 1'** of this Policy for School Concerns and Complaints as normal, and the Vice Chair of Trustees will review the complaint under **'Stage 2'** of this Policy for School Concerns and Complaints instead of the Chair of Trustees.

In exceptional circumstances, the Chair of Trustees can delegate the responsibility for the review to the Vice Chair of Trustees.

Vexatious or Repeated Complaints

There may be occasions when, despite a complaint being considered under all stages in this Policy for School Concerns and Complaints, the Complainant persists in making the same complaint to the school. There may also be occasions when a complainant raises unreasonable persistent complaints or raises complaints about matters which do not affect them.

In all of these cases, the school reserves the right to regard the complaint as vexatious and/or repeated and may refuse to investigate it.

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 cooperate with the complaints investigation process whilst still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaint procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaint procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be considered 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 complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Education Funding Agency.
- 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 on social media platforms and newspapers/publications

Complainants should limit the number of communications with a 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.

Wherever possible the Headteacher or Chair of Trustees will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an **'unreasonable'** marking.

For Complainants who excessively contact Fairfield High School for Girls causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan.

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 Fairfield High School for Girls.

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 the community.

If a parent or carers behaviour is a cause for concern, the school can ask him/her to leave the school premises. In serious cases, the Headteacher 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 or carer may wish to make. Schools should always give the parent or carer the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing.

The decision to bar should then be reviewed to consider any representations made by the parent or carer and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent or carer 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 for which independent legal advice must therefore be sought.

Anonymous Complaints

The school will not investigate anonymous complaints under the procedure in this Policy for School Concerns and Complaints. Anonymous complaints will be referred to the Headteacher who will decide what (if any) action should be taken.

Data Protection Act 2018 and Freedom of Information Act 2000

Complaints sometimes include requests for information and documentation. Such requests will be handled in line with the Data Protection Act 2018.

For Your Information:

The Company Secretary for Fairfield High School for Girls is:

- **Mrs. Julie Murphy**
c/o Fairfield High School for Girls
Fairfield Avenue
Droylsden
Manchester
M43 6AB

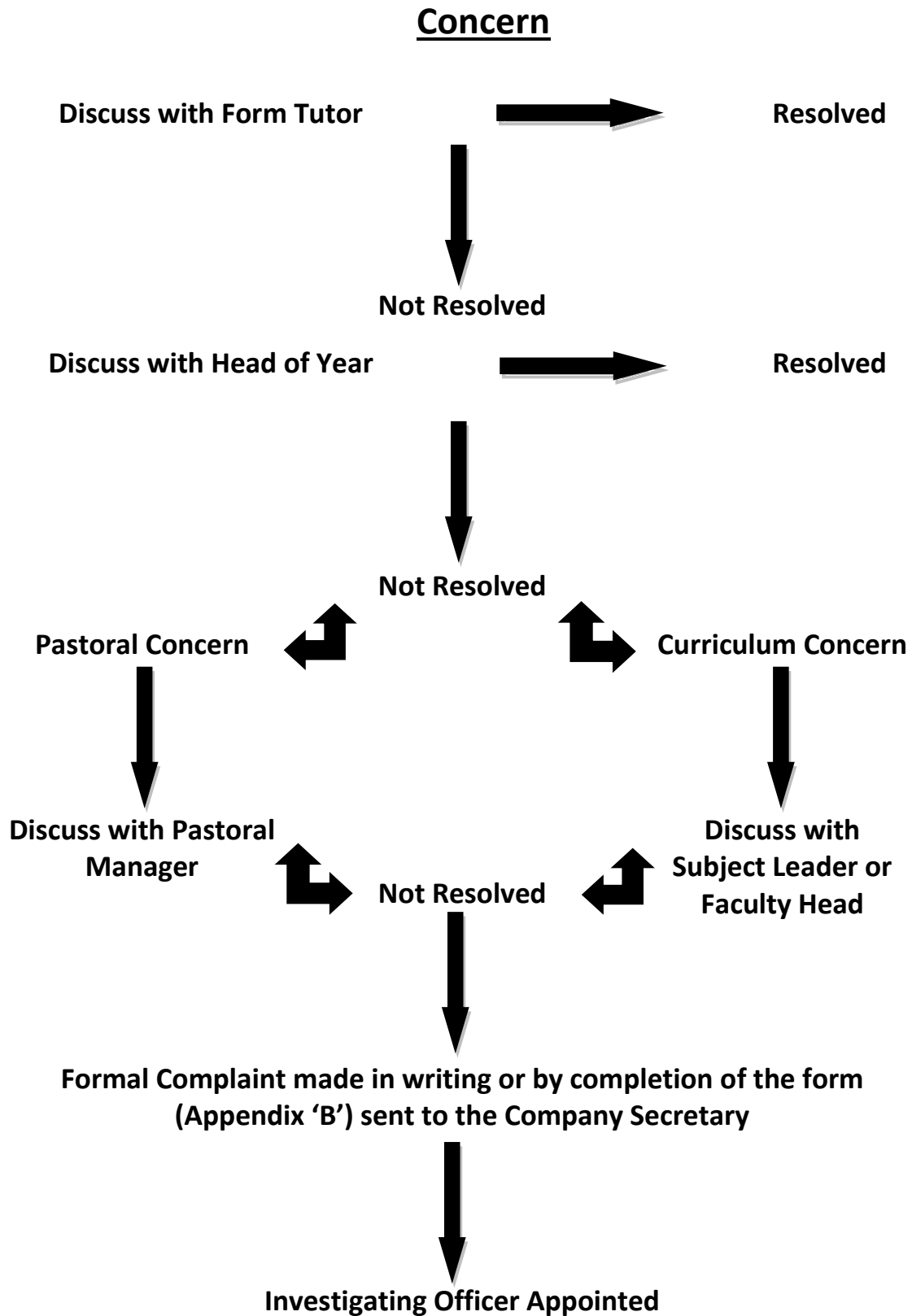
Direct Line - 0161 301 6452

Email - jmurphy@fairfieldhighschool.co.uk.

Appendix 'A'

Do you have a concern?

How to resolve a concern informally



Appendix 'B'

Formal Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Company Secretary (Mrs. Julie Murphy) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your Name:	
Pupil's Name:	
Your relationship to the pupil:	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Daytime telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
Please give details of your complaint:	
What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
Signature:	
Date:	

Official Use	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By Who:	

Appendix 'C'

Roles and Responsibilities

The Complainant

The complainant or person who makes the complaint will receive a more effective response to the complaint if he/she:

- Cooperates with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- Expresses the complaint in full as early as possible
- Responds promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- Asks for assistance if needed
- Treats all those involved in the complaint with respect

The Complaints Coordinator (or Headteacher)

The Complaints Coordinator should:

- Ensure that the Complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- Ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure will be aware of the legislation around complaints including the Equality Act 2010, Data Protection Act 2018 and Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Liaise with staff members, Headteacher, Chair of Trustees and Clerk to ensure the smooth running of the complaint procedures
- Keep records
- Be aware of issues regarding
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support – this may be needed by complainant when making a complaint including interpretation support

The Investigator

The Investigator is the person involved in '**Stage 1**' and '**Stage 2**' of the procedure. The Investigator's role can include:

- Providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - Sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - Consideration of records and other relevant information
 - Interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - Analysing information
- Effectively liaising with the complainant and the complaints coordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.
- Identifying solutions and recommending courses of action to resolve problems.

- Being mindful of the timescales to respond.
- Responding to the Complainant in plain and clear language.

The person investigating the complaint should make sure that they:

- Conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- Keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting.

Interviewing Best Practice Tips

Children/Young People

- Children/young people should be interviewed in the presence of another member of staff, or in the case of serious complaints (e.g. where the possibility of criminal investigation exists) in the presence of their parents/carers. However, it might not always be possible to conduct an interview in case it prejudices a LADO or Police investigation.
- Care should be taken in these circumstances not to create an intimidating atmosphere.
- Children/young people should be told what the interview is about and that they can have someone with them.

Staff/Witnesses

- Explain the complaint and your role clearly to the interviewee and confirm that they understand the complaints procedure and their role in it.
- Staff are allowed a colleague to support them at their interview. The colleague must not be anyone likely to be interviewed themselves, including their line manager.
- Use open not leading questions.
- Do not express opinions in words or attitude.
- Ask single not multiple questions – for example - one question at a time.
- Try to separate **'hearsay'** evidence from **'fact'** by asking interviewees how they know a particular fact.
- Persist with questions if necessary. Do not be afraid to ask the same question twice. Make notes of each answer given.
- Deal with conflicting evidence by seeking corroborative evidence. If this is not available, discuss with the Complaints Coordinator/Headteacher/Chair of Trustees the option of a meeting between conflicting witnesses.

Make a formal record of the interview from the written notes as soon as possible while the memory is fresh. Show the interviewee the formal record, ask if s/he has anything to add, and to sign the record as accurate.

The Panel Clerk (this should be the Company Secretary)

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant for the panel meeting and is expected to:

- Set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
- Collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing.
- Meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing.
- Record the proceedings.
- Circulate the minutes of the panel hearing.
- Notify all parties of the panel's decision.
- Liaise with the Complaints Coordinator.

The Panel Chair

The Panel Chair has a key role in ensuring that:

- The meeting is minuted.
- The remit of the panel is explained to the complainant and both they and the school have the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption.
- The issues are addressed.
- Key findings of fact are made.
- Parents/carers and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease – this is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person.
- The hearing is conducted in an informal manner with everyone treated with respect and courtesy.
- The layout of the room will set the tone – care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.
- The panel is open-minded and acts independently.
- No member of the panel has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure.
- Both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to state their case and seek clarity.
- Written material is seen by everyone in attendance – if a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the hearing.

- Liaise with the Clerk and Complaints Coordinator.

Panel Members

Panellists will need to be aware that:

- It is important that the review panel hearing is independent and impartial, and that it is seen to be so.

No Trustee may sit on the panel if they have had prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- The aim of the hearing, which will be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.

However, it must be recognised that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the Complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

- Many Complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents/Carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The Panel Chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible.
- Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting.

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated. The panel should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the panel should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent or carer is the complainant, the panel should give the parent or carer the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing (if any) the child/young person needs to attend.

The parent or carer should be advised however that agreement might not always be possible if the parent or carer wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting which the panel considers not to be in the child/young person's best interests.

- The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.