



COMPLAINTS POLICY

Status	Statutory	Date created	September 2008
Any other statutory names for this policy (where applicable)		Date first approved	13 October 2008
Responsibility for this policy (job title)	Headmistress	Date last reviewed	Summer 2026
Governors' Committee with responsibility for its review	Personnel Sub Committee	Frequency of review	Every 3 years
		To be put on the school website? (Yes)	Yes
Approval necessary	Whole Governing Body		

Introduction

We try to work to very high standards; we try not to make mistakes. If you do have a complaint, please let us know as soon as possible. We will make every possible effort to deal with your complaint quickly and to resolve the problem to your satisfaction. We will give careful consideration to all complaints and deal with them fairly and honestly.

This document sets out the school's procedure for addressing complaints. This policy applies to the day-to-day running of the school, the interpretation of school policies, the actions or inactions of staff at the school, school policies as determined by the Governing Body, the actions or inactions of the Governing Body, the Headmistress.

Please note that this procedure does not apply to issues concerning the admissions and exclusion appeals, decisions about your daughter's special educational needs or grievances by school staff. These are the subject of separate complaints procedures. Details of these procedures can be obtained from the school. Additionally, this policy does not apply to statutory Data Subject Access Requests (SARs), Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, Whistleblowing, Child Protection and Safeguarding investigations, or complaints regarding third-party providers using school premises, all of which are governed by independent statutory procedures.

Aims and Objectives

We will provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed, and aim to resolve it through open dialogue and mutual understanding. All complaints will be dealt with in accordance with our Confidentiality Policy.

Timescales

Whenever possible, in the interests of a prompt resolution of issues, a complaint should be raised 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, however, consider complaints made outside of this timeframe where exceptional circumstances apply. A complaint raised outside this timeframe should therefore confirm the reasons for the delay in raising it.

Reference to "school days" throughout this policy means Monday to Friday, when the school is open to students during term time. For any complaint received outside of term time, or on a weekend, holiday, or bank holiday, the complaint will be officially deemed to have been received on the first school day following the holiday period.

It is expected that the management of every complaint will progress in a timely manner. Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay to the timescales for a stage of the complaints procedure (such as other bodies investigating aspects of the complaint), the School will notify the parent and inform them of the new timescales as soon as possible.

Complaints regarding a former student will only be considered if the student left the school roll within the preceding three months, and provided the matter complies with the standard three-month limitation period from the date of the core incident.

Complaints Procedure

The procedure has three possible stages. Most cases will begin with the informal stage, and should be addressed in the first instance to the member of staff at the School most likely to be in a position to deal with the concerns expressed. Where a concern cannot be resolved after reasonable efforts to do so informally, or a more serious matter is in question, then a written complaint should be sent to the School addressed to the Headmistress.

Please note: Stages 1 and 3 of this complaints framework are strictly reserved for parents or legal guardians of students currently registered on the school roll. Members of the public, neighbours, or independent third parties who wish to raise a complaint may access Stage 2 (Formal Written Complaint) only. The Headmistress or Co-Chair of Governors will investigate their concern and issue a final written response; non-parental complaints are barred from escalating to a Stage 3 Governor Panel Hearing.

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

Most complaints can be dealt with informally. Where appropriate, complaints should initially be raised as follows:

- Educational issues: if the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, the complainant should speak or write initially to the Head of Year. Their complaint may be passed to a more senior member of staff if appropriate;
- Pastoral care: for complaints relating to matters outside the classroom, the complainant should speak or write to the Head of Year;
- Disciplinary matters: a problem over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised first of all with the Head of Year;
- Financial and Operational matters: a query relating to financial matters should be addressed in writing to the Chief Financial and Operations Officer.

Facilities Hire: If the complaint relates to the use of the Facilities by a community or private organisation, the matter should be discussed with the Chief Financial and Operations Officer.

The complainant should receive a response to the complaint within 20 school days. If the member of staff to whom the concern is expressed is uncertain how to resolve the issue, the matter will be

referred to a line manager or a senior leader. If the concern has not been resolved by informal means within 20 school days, it can be notified as a Formal Complaint under Stage 2. File notes, records, and correspondence forming the informal record must be retained and may be referred to at later stages.

It is expected that the person raising the concern will make reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution at Stage 1 and will act in a reasonable and measured way. If the Chair of Governors reasonably believes that this expectation has not been met, he/she may dismiss the concern and will write to the person raising the concern accordingly.

Informal Complaints against the Headmistress

The procedure for dealing with an informal complaint about the Headmistress is set out below:

If a complainant feels that an informal complaint regarding the Headmistress is capable of resolution informally, they may raise it directly with the Headmistress orally or in writing. The Headmistress will acknowledge the informal complaint *within 5 school days* and will seek to resolve the matter by means of direct conversation or a meeting to be held *within 20 school days* of the initial complaint. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response, or if the complaint cannot be resolved informally, they may proceed to Stage 2. Alternatively, they may choose to make their complaint about the Headmistress in writing directly to the Chairs of Governors via the Clerk, which will immediately be treated as a formal Stage 2 complaint.

Informal Complaints about the Governors

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor, or the whole Governing Body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governors via email or letter, marked clearly as "Private and Confidential". The Clerk will determine the most appropriate course of formal action.

Stage 2- Formal Resolution

If you feel that a concern has not been addressed through initial discussion, or that the concern is of a sufficiently serious nature, your complaint must be put in writing to the Headmistress (except if the complaint relates to the Headmistress -see above). This should set out the facts, state what has been done so far and state what it is the complainant considers should be done to resolve the complaint.

The complaint will be acknowledged within **5 school days** of receipt.

The Headmistress may act as the Investigating Officer (IO) or this may be delegated to a senior member of staff, a Governor or an independent investigator chosen at her discretion. At this stage, the Investigating Officer (IO) will investigate the complaint rigorously and with an open mind–this may include any or all of the following:

- Establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- Meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary)
- Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to examine the matters complained of rigorously.

If a meeting with the complainant needs to take place, then the IO will make all reasonable steps to do this within **20 school days** of the complaint being received

The Investigating Officer will put his/her findings in writing. The written findings must include all relevant documentation and information on what, if any, steps have been taken to resolve the matter, and may include recommendations as to resolution. Whenever reasonably possible, this will be done within 20 school days of the meeting with the complainant and if no meeting is to take place within 20 school days of the complaint being received.

The Headmistress will inform the complainant of the Investigating Officer's findings—as soon as reasonably possible.

If a complainant commences formal legal or court proceedings against Aylesbury High School regarding the matter under investigation, the internal complaints process will be instantly suspended and held in abeyance until those legal avenues have concluded. Furthermore, requests for financial awards, compensation, or legal damages fall entirely outside the scope of this policy and will not be adjudicated.

Stage 3 - Formal Resolution - Panel Hearing

If the complainant is not satisfied with the formal stage 2 response then they may request that the Complaints Panel of the Governing Body consider the complaint. Any such request must be made in writing, addressed to the Clerk to the Governors at Aylesbury High School, within 10 school days of the Stage 2 response being sent to the complainant. It must set out the reasons why the complainant is dissatisfied with the response, indicating which matters remain unresolved and what remedy the complainant is seeking. No new complaints may be introduced in such a request, The Clerk will respond in writing within 5 school days. If Stage 1 and Stage 2 have not been completed, the Clerk will notify the complainant explaining that the Panel cannot address any complaint until Stages 1 and 2 have been completed.

The Clerk will then ask the School to put in writing its response to the complainant's reasons. The School will do this within 20 school days.

Panel Composition and Conduct

The Panel will consist of three people who have had no prior involvement in the case or close personal association with the complainant, *excluding the Chair of Governors*. One member **must** be entirely independent of the management, governance, and running of the School.

All additional paperwork, statements, or evidence bundles that the complainant or the school wishes the panel to consider must be submitted to the Clerk at least three clear school days prior to the hearing. Material submitted after this deadline will only be admitted at the absolute discretion of the Panel Chair to avoid procedural surprise.

- Covert electronic audio or video recordings of meetings or panel hearings by any party are strictly prohibited. Explicit, written consent from all individuals present must be obtained before any recording can take place. Exceptionally, recordings may be permitted as a documented reasonable adjustment for disability, provided the Clerk is notified at least three school days in advance.

The meeting will be held as quickly as practicable, ideally *within 15 school days* of receiving the School's response. Those present will be the panel members, the Clerk, the complainant, and the Headmistress. Both the complainant and Headmistress are entitled to be accompanied by a companion or friend.

The hearing is an internal process, not a legal proceeding. Companions are present to provide moral support and should not normally be legally qualified. If a parent insists on being accompanied by a legal representative, they must notify the Clerk in their initial request. The Complaint Panel will

speak to that person directly prior to the Hearing, and they will not be permitted to act as an advocate or address the Panel unless explicitly invited to do so by the Chair.

If a complainant repeatedly refuses or fails to attend a scheduled panel hearing without a verified, reasonable justification, the panel reserves the right to convene, review the written evidence bundle in their absence, and issue a final, bin

Hearing Procedure and Outcomes

The hearing will follow a structured process:

1. The Chair will welcome participants and outline the proceedings.
2. The complainant presents their case and calls any witnesses.
3. The School representative may question the complainant and their witnesses.
4. The Headmistress presents the School's case and calls witnesses.
5. The complainant may question the Headmistress and their witnesses.
6. The complainant, followed by the School representative, will provide a closing summary.

Witnesses will only attend for the part of the hearing in which they give evidence. Panel members may ask questions at any stage. The Panel will deliberate in private accompanied by the Clerk. The Panel can choose to uphold or dismiss the complaint in full or in part, decide on appropriate resolution actions, or recommend systemic improvements.

The decision of the panel is final. The Clerk will send a full written response stating the reasons for the decision to the complainant, Headmistress, and Chair of Governors *within 5 school days*.

Complainants are legally not entitled to see details of specific disciplinary sanctions or confidential actions imposed on staff or other students due to statutory data protection laws.

Compliance and Record-Keeping

A written record will be kept of all formal complaints, including whether they were resolved at Stage 2 or proceeded to a panel hearing, alongside actions taken by the School as a result (regardless of whether they were upheld). Correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints will be kept strictly confidential.

All standard formal complaint files, logs, and panel minutes must be retained securely for exactly seven years (aligned with standard school inspection cycles) before being destroyed.

Notwithstanding standard data protection destruction schedules, any complaint documentation detailing allegations of a safeguarding nature, child sexual abuse, or institutional failures to protect children must be exempted from destruction and retained securely and indefinitely in compliance with the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) statutory directives.

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the process followed by the Panel, they may contact the Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD.

Rules of Engagement for Complainants

Active Complaints and Public Conduct

The school expects all concerns and complaints to be dealt with through the private, structured channels outlined in this policy. Because complaints are handled with strict confidentiality, complainants must not publicise active complaints, details of school staff, or ongoing investigations on public forums or social media networks. Publicising details whilst a complaint is being investigated may result in the procedure being administratively suspended.

Serial, Persistent, or Vexatious Complaints

If a complainant attempts to reopen an issue or a closely related issue that has already been exhausted under this procedure, the Headmistress will refer the matter to the Chair of Governors, who may write to the complainant to inform them that the matter is closed. The decision of the Chair of Governors is final.

The School will resist abuse of the Complaints Procedure and will not respond to complaints that are vexatious, repeated, or manifestly trivial. It may decline to deal with complaints where the number and type of complaints made by an individual or family is unreasonable. If a complaint is deemed vexatious by the Chairs of Governors, the complainant will be advised that the School will not respond further, and further correspondence will be read and filed without acknowledgment.

Complaints will be regarded as frivolous or vexatious when they match the definitions in Section 4 and the expanded list of explicit behavioral examples set out in Appendix B.

Complaint Campaigns

Occasionally the School may become the focus of a campaign and receive a large volume of complaints all based on the same subject and/or from complainants unconnected with the School. In these circumstances, the Headmistress and Chair of Governors will determine if the School is the subject of a complaints campaign and send the School's template response to all complainants, or publish a single response on the school website.

Appendix A: Policy for Unreasonable Complainants

Aylesbury High School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially. We do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from behaviour which is abusive, offensive, or threatening. Unreasonable complaints are defined as those made by persons who, because of the frequency or nature of their contact with the School, hinder our consideration of their own or other people's complaints.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint engages in any of the behaviors outlined below, including refusing to articulate their grounds, refusing to cooperate with the investigation, introducing trivial or irrelevant information, changing the basis of the complaint mid-investigation, making excessive demands on school time, or publishing unacceptable information on social media websites and newspapers.

Whenever possible, the Headmistress or Chairs of Governors will discuss concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues, the Headmistress will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and

asking them to change it. We may specify restricted methods of communication and limit contact in a communication plan, normally reviewed after six months. In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the police will be informed immediately and an individual may be barred from the school premises.

Appendix B: Detailed Examples of Vexatious Complaints

For the purposes of this procedure, the following list provides examples of complaints which will be regarded as vexatious. Such complaints are those where the complainant(s):

- Persist in pursuing a complaint where the School's Complaints Procedure has been properly implemented and exhausted (for example, where several responses have been provided).
- Change the substance of a complaint: continually raise new issues, or raise further concerns or questions upon the receipt of a response.
- Are unwilling to accept that the Governors have reached a final decision on a chosen course of action.
- Deny receiving an adequate response in spite of correspondence specifically dealing with the issues raised.
- Persist in pursuing a matter when they have already exhausted all routes of appeal.
- Do not clearly identify the precise issues that they wish to be investigated, despite reasonable efforts to help them specify their concerns.
- Continue to seek to pursue a complaint where the concerns are not within the control of the School or its governance.
- Focus on trivial matters to an excessive extent, where the resources required to investigate the problem are completely disproportionate to the nature of the issue raised.
- Harass, intimidate, or verbally abuse staff members handling the case, or display obsessive or prolific communication patterns designed primarily to disrupt or cause annoyance to school operations.

APPENDIX C - COMPLAINTS FORM

Please complete and return to the Headmistress who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Student's name:

Address (inc postcode):

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint:

What action, if any, have you already taken to try to 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 whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date: