



Launton C.E. Primary School

Complaints Policy

1. Policy Statement

The school is committed to providing a safe, respectful, inclusive and supportive environment in which pupils can learn and thrive, and in which positive relationships between the school, pupils, parents, carers, staff and the wider community are valued.

The school recognises that concerns, misunderstandings and disagreements will sometimes arise. When they do, the school believes that they are most effectively resolved through early communication, careful listening, constructive discussion and, where appropriate, restorative practice and mediation.

The purpose of this policy is therefore not simply to determine whether a complaint is justified. It is to ensure that concerns are properly heard, understood and addressed; that misunderstandings are resolved wherever possible; and that appropriate action is taken where something has gone wrong.

The school will seek to resolve concerns at the earliest appropriate stage. Where a concern cannot be resolved through discussion with the member of staff directly involved, it will normally progress through the following stages:

- 1. Teacher or relevant member of staff**
- 2. Assistant Headteacher**
- 3. Headteacher**
- 4. An Ombudsman appointed by the Governing Body**

Mediation may be used at any appropriate stage where it is considered likely to assist in resolving the matter. Mediation is voluntary and is intended to help those involved understand each other's perspectives and agree a constructive way forward.

Where a complainant remains dissatisfied following the Headteacher's consideration, an independent review may be requested. This will be undertaken by an Ombudsman appointed through the governing body but separate from the governing body itself.

The school believes that this approach promotes fairness, accountability and good relationships while providing a clear and credible means of resolving complaints.

2. Aims of the Policy

The aims of this policy are to:

- provide a clear, fair and accessible process for raising concerns and complaints;
- encourage concerns to be raised and addressed at the earliest possible stage;
- promote open and respectful communication between the school and families;
- use restorative conversations and mediation wherever they are appropriate and likely to assist in resolving a dispute;
- ensure that all parties have a reasonable opportunity to explain their perspective;
- ensure that concerns are considered fairly, objectively and proportionately;
- provide a clear route for escalation when a concern cannot be resolved at an earlier stage;
- ensure that serious matters are given appropriate senior consideration;
- provide an independent review where the school's internal process has not achieved a satisfactory resolution;
- ensure that complaints are handled consistently and within reasonable timescales;
- identify lessons arising from complaints and use these to improve the school's practice and provision; and
- meet the school's legal and regulatory obligations relating to complaints handling.

3. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to complaints concerning the school's provision, management, conduct, decisions, policies, communication or services.

- Any person over the age of 16 may raise a complaint.

The school will also consider reasonable adjustments where a complainant has a disability, communication difficulty, language difficulty or other circumstance which may create a barrier to participation in the complaints process.

4. Matters Covered by Other Procedures

Some matters are governed by separate statutory or specialist procedures and will not normally be dealt with under this policy. These may include:

- school admissions and admission appeals;
- suspension and permanent exclusion procedures;
- safeguarding and child protection matters;
- staff grievances and disciplinary matters;
- statutory special educational needs processes;
- matters subject to a statutory appeal or tribunal process; and
- matters for which another organisation has direct legal or operational responsibility.

Where a complaint contains several different issues, the school will identify which procedure is appropriate for each issue.

Safeguarding concerns will be acted upon immediately and will not be delayed because a complaint has been made.

5. Definitions

Concern

A concern is an issue, worry, question or expression of dissatisfaction which may be capable of being resolved through discussion or clarification.

Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about an act, omission, decision, communication or aspect of the school's provision which requires consideration and a response.

A complainant does not need to use the word "complaint" or any particular formal wording for the matter to be considered.

Restorative Conversation

A restorative conversation is a structured discussion intended to allow those involved to explain what happened, understand the impact on others, clarify misunderstandings and identify practical steps to repair or improve the situation.

Mediation

Mediation is a voluntary process in which an impartial person helps those involved communicate, understand different perspectives and explore possible solutions.

A mediator does not normally decide who is right or wrong and does not impose an outcome.

Independent Review

The Ombudsman appointed by the Governing Body will review all the evidence of the complaint and make a formal decision

The Ombudsman is separate from the governing body and must have no prior involvement in the complaint.

6. How the Stages Are Triggered

The complaints process is intended to be progressive rather than adversarial. Each stage provides an opportunity to resolve the concern before it moves to the next level.

Normally, a complaint should begin at the lowest appropriate level. However, a complaint may move directly to a later stage where the circumstances justify this.

Escalation does not imply that the person dealing with the previous stage acted incorrectly. It simply provides an opportunity for further consideration.

6.1 Stage 1 – Teacher or Relevant Member of Staff

Stage 1 is triggered when a concern is raised with the teacher or other member of staff most directly involved in the matter.

The concern may be raised verbally, by telephone, email or in writing.

The member of staff will make a reasonable attempt to:

- understand the concern;
- establish the relevant facts;
- explain the school's position;
- clarify any misunderstanding; and
- identify practical steps which may resolve the issue.

Stage 1 will normally conclude when:

- the complainant confirms that the matter has been resolved;
- the member of staff considers that the concern has been reasonably addressed and the complainant does not request further consideration; or
- the complainant remains dissatisfied and requests escalation to the Assistant Headteacher.

The normal target for Stage 1 is **five school days**.

A complaint should not remain indefinitely at Stage 1 simply because the parties have been unable to agree.

6.2 Stage 2 – Assistant Headteacher

Stage 2 is triggered when:

1. the complainant remains dissatisfied following Stage 1 and requests escalation; or
2. the member of staff dealing with Stage 1 considers that the matter is beyond their authority or would be better addressed by the Assistant Headteacher.

The complainant does not need to demonstrate that the teacher or other member of staff acted improperly in order to request Stage 2.

The Assistant Headteacher may also determine that Stage 2 consideration is appropriate because of the seriousness, complexity or sensitivity of the matter.

Stage 2 may include:

- reviewing the original concern and the Stage 1 response;

- speaking with the complainant;
- speaking with relevant staff or pupils;
- reviewing relevant records or correspondence;
- clarifying areas of disagreement;
- arranging a restorative conversation;
- offering mediation where appropriate; and
- identifying practical actions which may resolve the concern.

Stage 2 will normally conclude when:

- the complainant accepts the proposed resolution;
- the Assistant Headteacher considers that the concern has been appropriately addressed and there is no further reasonable action available at that stage;
- a restorative conversation or mediation results in an agreed way forward; or
- the complainant remains dissatisfied and requests consideration by the Headteacher.

The normal target for Stage 2 is **5 school days** from complaint being referred to the Assistant Head.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, where a complaint concerns the Assistant Headteacher personally, the complaint may be investigated by the Headteacher.

6.3 Stage 3 – Headteacher

Stage 3 is triggered when:

- the complainant remains dissatisfied following Stage 2 and requests consideration by the Headteacher; or
- the Assistant Headteacher considers that Headteacher intervention is necessary.

The Headteacher will review the history of the complaint and may:

- meet the complainant;
- meet relevant staff;
- review correspondence, records and relevant policies;
- clarify disputed facts;
- arrange a restorative conversation;
- offer mediation;
- propose practical steps to resolve the matter; or
- make a reasoned decision where agreement cannot be reached.

The Headteacher represents the highest level of internal consideration under this policy.

The normal target for Stage 3 is **5 school days** from the complaint being referred to the Headteacher.

The Headteacher's written response will normally set out:

- the issues considered;

- the information taken into account;
- the school's findings or conclusions;
- the reasons for the decision;
- any action to be taken; and
- the right to request independent review.

Where a complaint concerns the Headteacher personally, the Headteacher will not investigate or determine that complaint. The governing body will arrange for an appropriate independent person to oversee the relevant stage.

6.4 Stage 4 – Launton CE School Ombudsman

Stage 4 is triggered when a complainant remains dissatisfied following the Headteacher's response and requests an independent review.

The request should normally be made in writing within **ten school days** of the Headteacher's response and should identify the aspects of the complaint or response which remain disputed.

The governing body will check that the request falls within the scope of this policy and will arrange for the Ombudsman to consider it.

The governing body will **not determine the substance of the complaint**.

The Ombudsman will be separate from the governing body and will have no prior involvement in the matter.

7. Complaints Procedure – What Happens at Each Stage

Stage 1 – Teacher or Relevant Member of Staff

The complainant should raise the concern with the teacher or other member of staff most directly involved.

The staff member will:

- listen carefully;
- allow the complainant to explain their perspective;
- clarify the relevant facts;
- explain the school's position;
- identify any misunderstanding;
- consider reasonable practical steps; and
- seek early resolution.

Stage 1 is primarily intended to promote communication and early resolution rather than constitute a formal investigation.

Stage 2 – Assistant Headteacher

The Assistant Headteacher will review the concern and the Stage 1 response.

The Assistant Headteacher may:

- speak with the complainant;
- speak with relevant members of staff;
- review relevant information;
- arrange a restorative conversation;
- offer mediation;
- clarify misunderstandings;
- consider the impact of the situation on those involved; and
- identify practical solutions or actions.

Where mediation is offered, participation will be voluntary.

Stage 3 – Headteacher

The Headteacher will review the history of the complaint and the steps already taken.

The Headteacher may:

- meet with the complainant;
- meet with staff or other relevant individuals;
- review records and correspondence;
- consider relevant policies and procedures;
- arrange a restorative conversation;
- offer mediation;
- propose further practical action; or
- provide a reasoned decision where agreement cannot be reached.

The response will explain the outcome and, where appropriate, identify any actions to be taken.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, the response will explain the right to request independent review.

Stage 4 – Ombudsman

The Ombudsman will provide an independent review following completion of the school's internal stages.

The Ombudsman will normally consider whether:

- the complaint was handled fairly;
- the school's response was reasonable and proportionate;
- relevant information was taken into account;
- appropriate opportunities were provided for the complainant to explain their concerns; and
- the school's conclusions and actions were reasonable in the circumstances.

The Ombudsman may consider:

- the original complaint;
- responses provided at each stage;
- relevant correspondence;
- records of meetings;
- records of restorative conversations or mediation;
- relevant school policies; and
- additional information reasonably requested from the complainant or school.

The Ombudsman may meet with the complainant or representatives of the school where this would assist the process.

The Ombudsman will not normally conduct a completely new investigation unless it considers that this is necessary to reach a fair conclusion.

Possible outcomes may include a finding that:

- the school's handling and response were appropriate and reasonable;
- the complaint was partly justified;
- aspects of the handling of the complaint were unsatisfactory;
- further consideration or investigation is required; or
- changes to practice or procedures should be considered.

The Ombudsman will provide written conclusions and, where appropriate, recommendations.

The Ombudsman is normally the final stage of the school's complaints procedure.

8. Confidentiality and Data Protection

Complaints will be treated sensitively and confidentially.

Information will normally be shared only with those who need it in order to consider, investigate, resolve or review the complaint.

The school may not be able to disclose confidential information concerning another pupil, member of staff or other individual, including details of disciplinary or personnel action.

Information may be disclosed where required by law or where necessary to protect a child or another person.

Complaint records will be stored securely and handled in accordance with applicable data protection requirements.

9. Record Keeping

The school will maintain appropriate records of complaints, including where relevant:

- the nature of the complaint;
- the date it was raised;
- the stage reached;
- correspondence;
- action taken;
- meetings;
- restorative conversations;
- mediation;
- outcomes;
- agreed actions; and
- recommendations arising from independent review.

Records will be retained securely in accordance with the school's records management arrangements.

10. Complaints Concerning the Headteacher or Governors

Where a complaint concerns the Headteacher personally, the Headteacher will not investigate or determine the complaint.

The governing body will arrange for an appropriately independent person to oversee the relevant stage.

Where a complaint concerns an individual governor, that governor will take no part in the consideration of the complaint.

Where necessary, the governing body may appoint an Ombudsman to assist in ensuring fairness and impartiality.

All such arrangements will seek to preserve confidentiality and avoid conflicts of interest.

11. Unreasonable or Persistent Complaints

The school recognises that a complainant may be persistent, strongly critical or dissatisfied. Such behaviour does not, by itself, make a complaint unreasonable.

However, where communication becomes abusive, threatening or excessively disruptive, the school may introduce proportionate arrangements to manage communication.

These may include:

- identifying a single point of contact;
- agreeing appropriate communication arrangements;
- setting reasonable limits on the frequency of contact;
- specifying appropriate communication channels; or
- requiring communication to take place in writing.

Any such arrangements will be proportionate, communicated clearly and reviewed where appropriate.

The school will not use this provision to prevent a genuine new or substantive concern from being raised.

12. Learning from Complaints

The school regards complaints as an important source of information about its performance and relationships with pupils, families and the wider community.

The school will consider whether complaints identify opportunities to improve:

- communication;
- staff training;
- policies;
- procedures;
- decision-making;
- pastoral support;
- teaching and learning;
- organisation;
- communication with parents and carers; or
- relationships between the school and its community.

Where appropriate, actions arising from complaints will be monitored to ensure that identified improvements are implemented.

The governing body will receive appropriate anonymised information about complaints in order to identify recurring themes and support school improvement.

13. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed at least every two years, or when appropriate.

A review may be brought forward following:

- changes in legislation or government guidance;
- changes to governance arrangements;
- significant experience arising from complaints;
- recommendations from an Independent Community Review Panel; or
- changes in the school's circumstances or procedures.

Substantive amendments to the policy will be approved by the governing body.

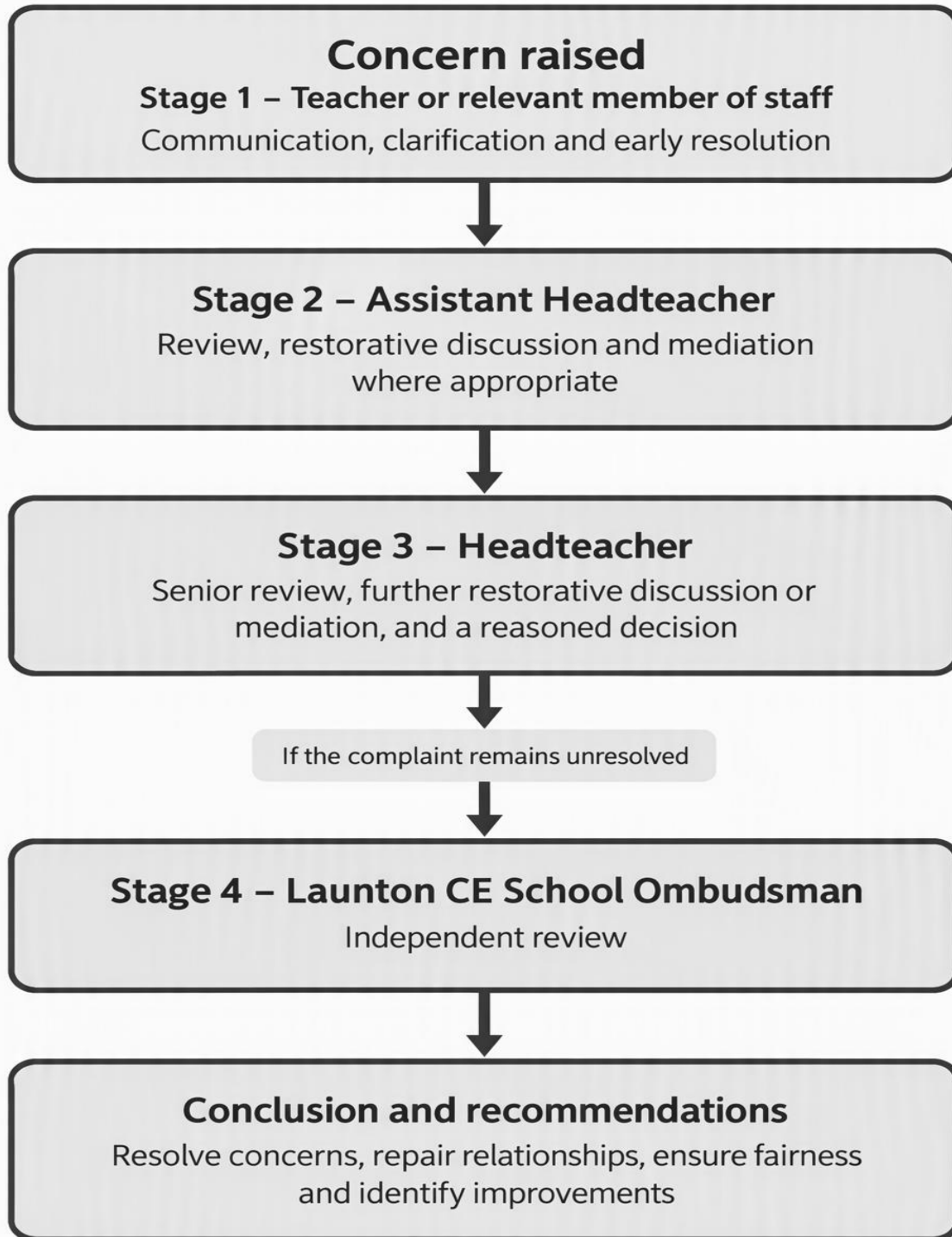
14. Availability of the Policy

This policy will be made available:

- on the school's website;
- in hard copy on request; and
- in an accessible format where reasonably required.

The school will make reasonable adjustments to enable individuals to participate in the complaints process where they have a disability, communication difficulty or other relevant need.

15. Summary of the Complaints Process



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