

Ickniel High School

Complaints Policy

2026-27

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1 Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full. To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

2 Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on [creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations](#), and refers to [good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

3 Definitions and scope

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint. A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”. The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible. A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”.

The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage. There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)

- Safeguarding matters
- Suspensions and Permanent Exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with SEN about the school's support are within the scope of this policy. Such complaints should first be made to our SENCo; they will then be referred to this complaints policy. Our [SEN policy and information report] includes information about the rights of parents of pupils with disabilities who believe that our school has discriminated against their child.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

4 Roles and responsibilities

1. The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Not publish details about the complaint on social media
- Do not approach individual governors about the complaint

2. The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the headteacher or complaints committee which includes the facts and potential solutions

3. The complaints co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- The Headteacher
- The designated complaints governor
- Any other staff member providing administrative support

The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure

- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the headteacher, chair of governors and clerk.
- Be aware issue relating to:
 - Sharing third party information
 - Additional support needed by complainants, for example interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person.
- Keep records

4. Clerk to the governing board

The clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

5. Committee chair

The committee chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee and are allowed to present their case

5 Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

5

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident. We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the time scales we have set out in this policy we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

6 Stages of complaint (not complaints against the Headteacher or governors)

The school endeavours to provide the best education possible for all of its pupils in an open and transparent environment. We welcome feedback, both positive and negative, about how we are doing. Where someone has a concern or complaint will be endeavour at all times to deal with the issues responsively and reasonably and, if necessary, put things right as quickly as possible.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Most concerns can and should be resolved informally through discussion, clarification or a review of the circumstances. The school encourages concerns to be raised at the earliest opportunity so that they can be addressed effectively.

Concerns should be directed to the appropriate member of staff in person, by telephone, email or letter. If you are unsure who to contact, guidance can be obtained from the school office.

The school will acknowledge receipt of a concern within 48 hours and, wherever possible, provide a full response within 10 working days.

Although this stage is informal, complainants are encouraged to keep a record of concerns raised, responses received and any actions agreed. These records should be retained if the matter progresses further.

To ensure concerns are considered at the most appropriate level and resolved as quickly as possible, the following stages must be followed in sequence:

Stage 1.1: Year Room Team for your child

Stage 1.2: Leadership Link for the Year Room (please refer to Mr Ahmed's welcome letter)

Stage 1.3: Associate Assistant Headteacher (Behaviour) – Mr Hince

Stage 1.4: Assistant Headteacher (Behaviour) – Mr Chopra

Stage 1.5: Deputy Headteacher (Behaviour) – Mr King-Mand

If the concern remains unresolved after all Stage 1 steps have been completed, it may be escalated to a formal complaint.

Stage 2: Formal Complaint to the Headteacher

Formal complaints must be submitted in writing, either by letter or email. A complaint may also be submitted by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant where appropriate.

When submitting a formal complaint, the complainant should provide:

- A summary of the concern and the outcome of each Stage 1 stage.
- Copies of any relevant correspondence or supporting evidence.
- The reasons why they remain dissatisfied.
- The outcome they are seeking.

A Stage 2 complaint will only be considered once all Stage 1 stages have been completed in the order outlined above. Where this process has not been followed, the complaint may be referred back to the appropriate member of staff before a formal investigation is undertaken.

Upon receipt of the complaint, the Headteacher will review the information provided to determine whether:

- The complaint falls within the scope of the school's complaints procedure.
- The Stage 1 process has been exhausted.
- There is sufficient information to conduct a formal investigation.

Support with submitting a complaint can be obtained from the school office via info@ickniold.beds.sch.uk or **01582 576561**.

The Headteacher will normally provide a written outcome within **15 school days** of the complaint being accepted for investigation. The response will outline the findings, the reasons for the decision reached and any actions taken or proposed.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they may request that the complaint be considered by the Governing Body Complaints Panel (Stage 3). This request must be made in writing to the Chair of Governors within **10 school days** of receiving the Stage 2 outcome.

Stage 3: Review by the Chair of Governors

The complainant may request a review by the Chair of Governors only after Stage 1 and Stage 2 has been fully completed. Complaints will not be considered at this stage unless the full process has been followed and a formal outcome from the Headteacher has been issued.

Requests must be made in writing to the Chair of Governors (via the school), clearly outlining the reasons for the complaint, which parts of the Headteacher's decision are being challenged, and any relevant policies the complainant believes were not properly applied.

The Chair will acknowledge the complaint within 7 school days and aim to provide a full response within 20 school days. This may include further investigation, such as meetings with staff, with appropriate records kept. The outcome letter will explain the findings and any next steps.

At this stage, the Chair will also clarify the scope of the Governing Body's role, including any limitations in overturning decisions, although recommendations may be made where appropriate. Some of the areas include:

- Decisions about class or set placement
- Curriculum choices or timetabling decisions
- Outcomes of internal assessments or predicted grades
- Behaviour sanctions (e.g. detentions, fixed term isolation decision, short-term suspensions of 5 days or fewer)
- The Headteacher's decision to direct a student to off-site or alternative provision
- Staffing decisions, including teacher allocation or staffing structure
- Teaching styles or classroom practice, unless it relates to policy breaches
- Day-to-day operational decisions made by the school leadership team
- Decisions about homework, Non-Examined Assessments or internal deadlines
- Complaints where the requested outcome is unreasonable or not achievable
- Matters where the school has followed its policies correctly, even if the parent disagrees with the outcome

Complaints about the Headteacher or governing body will be considered at this stage. If the complaint concerns the Chair, it will be handled by the Vice-Chair.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they must request escalation to the next stage within 10 school days.

Stage 4: Review Panel

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 3 (review by the Chair of Governors), the complaint may be escalated to a review panel.

The Clerk will aim to arrange the panel hearing within 20 school days of receiving the request. The panel will consist of at least three individuals who have had no prior involvement in the matter, including at least one independent member. The panel will not be made up solely of governors.

The panel will consider all documentation from earlier stages. The complainant will be given reasonable notice of the hearing date. If two reasonable dates are offered and declined, the panel may proceed in the complainant's absence on the second occasion.

Hearings are held in private. Recording is not permitted unless required as a reasonable adjustment, and only with prior consent. Both the complainant and school representatives may attend, present evidence, and call witnesses where appropriate. All written evidence must be submitted at least five days in advance.

At the hearing, both parties will present their case and respond to questions. Once presentations are complete, both parties will withdraw while the panel reviews the evidence.

The panel will then issue its findings and recommendations. The outcome may be to uphold the complaint (in whole or part) or dismiss it. Where upheld, the panel will identify appropriate actions and may recommend improvements to school procedures.

A written decision, including the findings and any recommendations, will be shared with all relevant parties within five school days.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress. The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel; if the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will aim to find a date within 2 school days of the request, where possible.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless required as part of reasonable adjustments. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present.

Each will have the opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting. On issuing notification of the date and time of the hearing the complainant and the Headteacher or his/her representative will be informed that any written documentation they wish the panel to consider will need to be submitted in time to be circulated to panel members 5 days prior to the hearing.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied by a suitable companion if they wish. We don't encourage either party to bring legal representation, but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence. The panel, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who subjected to the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the Headteacher.

The outcome

The panel can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or part

If the complaint is upheld, the panel will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 school days.

7 Complaints against the headteacher, a governor or the governing board

Complaints made against the headteacher should be directed to the chair of governors.

Where a complaint is against the chair of governors, any member of the governing board, or the entire governing board, it should be made in writing to the clerk to the governing board in the first instance. The same procedure outlined in Stage 4 will be followed.

8 Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the DfE. The DfE will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school. The DfE will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint. However, it will look into:

- Whether there was undue delay, or the school did not comply with its own complaints procedure
- Whether the school was in breach of its funding agreement with the secretary of state
- Whether the school has failed to comply with any other legal obligation

If the school did not deal with the complaint properly, it will be asked to re-investigate the complaint. If the school's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly. For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

9 Unreasonable and persistent complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- 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 co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- 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 complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the ESFA
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- Uses threats to intimidate
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- Knowingly provides falsified information
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's comments, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

Whenever possible, the headteacher or chair of governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues, the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#)
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

10

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from school premises and ensuring appropriate measures of support are provided to staff where they are the subject of aggression and/or violence.

9.2 Serial/persistent complaints

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. We may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:

- We have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts the school repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

The case to stop responding is stronger if:

- The complainant's communications are often or always abusive or aggressive
- The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff
- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

Where we decide to stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will consider any new complaints they make provided the concerns raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern.

Duplicate Complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint.

If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

11

10 Record-keeping

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or through a subject access request under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection. Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and our record retention schedule.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

11 Learning lessons

The Governing Body will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

12 Monitoring arrangements

The Governing Body will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The Governing Body will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 10.

The complaints records are logged and managed by Headteachers PA.

This policy will be reviewed by the Governing Body every two years. At each review, the policy will be approved by the Governing Body of Icknield High School.

13 Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Behaviour policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Grievance procedures
- Disciplinary procedures
- SEN policy and information report
- Privacy notices