



Peterhouse School

Complaints Procedure

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RELATED / RELEVANT POLICIES AND KEY DOCUMENTS

This document should be read in conjunction with:

Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy

Admissions & Discharge Policy

Autism Initiatives Staff Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures

SUMMARY / SCOPE

This document explains the procedure Peterhouse uses for dealing with any complaints about the school, and any facilities or services the school provides.

1 AIMS

Peterhouse aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents / carers 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
- Make sure 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 development evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

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 OUTCOMES FOR PUPILS

Peterhouse considers a close working relationship with parents / carers essential to meeting the needs of our pupils effectively, and we will address any concerns or complaints promptly and with honesty and transparency in order to support this.

The outcome of any complaint will be considered as part of the school development planning process to ensure that we can offer pupils the best provision possible.

3 LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

This document meets the requirements of section 35 of the schedule to the Education (Non-Maintained Special Schools) (England) Regulations 2011, which states that non-maintained special schools must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints relating to their school. It also refers to good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE).

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

4 DEFINITION 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
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to the above.

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

The complainant

The complainant will be expected to:

- 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
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

The investigator

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

- Interview all relevant parties as required, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report which includes the facts and potential solutions

The complaints co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator may be:

- The Headteacher
- A nominated member of the Education Services Governance Committee
- 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 Education Services Governance Committee, Clerk and Chief Executive as appropriate.
- Be aware of issues relating to:
 - o Sharing third-party information
 - o Additional support needed by complainants; for example, interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- Keep records

Clerk to the Education Services Governance Committee

The Clerk may:

- May be the contact point for the complainant and investigator.
- Arrange the complaints hearing as required
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing as required.

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

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

Timescales

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 timeframe 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 timescales 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

Complaints about our fulfilment of early year's requirements

We will investigate all written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint (see section 11) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the school is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by:

- Calling 0300 123 4666
- Emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
- Using the online contact form available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>

We will notify parents and carers if we become aware that the school is to be inspected by Ofsted. We will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

7 STAGES OF COMPLAINT (PLEASE SEE SECTION 8 FOR COMPLAINTS AGAINST HEADTEACHER OR GOVERNORS)

Stage 1: Informal

The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Headteacher as appropriate, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school office by phone on 01704 506682 or email admin@aipeterhouse.org .

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within three school days, and investigate and provide a response within 14 school days

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the Headteacher or other designated senior member of staff, as appropriate. If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

Stage 2: Formal

Formal complaints can be raised:

- By letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- By a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

The Complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

We are disability positive. If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office on 01704 506682 or via admin@aipeterhouse.org .

The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.

The Headteacher (or designated member of the senior leadership team) may request a meeting to clarify concerns, and seek a resolution. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting, and should inform the school of the identity of their companion in advance.

In certain circumstances, the school may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest.

If this is the case, the school will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment.

The Headteacher (or other person appointed by the Headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 14 school days.

Stage 3: Education Services Governance Committee

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the Clerk of the Education Services Governance Committee in writing within 14 school days.

The complainant should contact the Clerk to the Education Services Governance Committee

- By letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

The Clerk will need the details of the complaint as set out above, as well as details from the complainant on how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 14 school days.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the Clerk to the Education Services Governance Committee in writing within 14 school days. Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of the request within 3 school days.

Stage 4: Submit the complaint to an independent reviewer

The independent reviewer is appointed by or on behalf of the Autism Initiatives. This person must not, at any time, have been a governance / education services governance committee member of the school, or a member of staff or supply staff at the school, and must not have been the parent of a registered or former registered pupil at the school. They must also not have been directly involved in any matter detailed in the complaint.

The independent reviewer will meet with the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate. The independent reviewer may request access to relevant information. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses may be called as appropriate to present their evidence.

The independent reviewer, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions.

The complainant, Autism Initiatives representative and Headteacher, and where relevant, the subject of the complaint, will be given a copy of the findings and recommendations made by the independent person.

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 14 school days.

8 COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE HEADTEACHER OR A GOVERNOR

Complaints made against the Headteacher should be directed to the Chair of the Education Services Governance Committee.

Where a complaint is against the Chair of the Education Services Governance Committee or any member of the Education Services Governance Committee, it should be made in writing to the Clerk to the Education Services Governance Committee in the first instance.

9 UNREASONABLY PERSISTENT COMPLAINTS

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

- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure, beyond all reason
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner, e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the timeframes it sets out
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns, 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.

If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place. 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

Stopping responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

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 our school site.

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 that the local process is complete
- Direct them to Autism Initiatives 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.

10 RECORD KEEPING AND CONFIDENTIALITY

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 stored securely, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating or reviewing the complaint.

This is except where a Subject Access Request is made under data protection law, in which case only the elements specific to that individual will be released, 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 the IRMS Records Management Toolkit for Schools.

11 LEARNING LESSONS

The Education Services Governance Committee may review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher / senior leadership team, 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 Education Services Governance Committee will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The governance committee will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 12.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the Headteacher.

This policy will be reviewed by School Business Leader every three years. At each review, the policy will be approved by the Education Services Governance Committee.

REVISION STATUS

This Review Date	Details of Changes	Sections Changed	Author	Date of next review
March 2018	General revision	Throughout	Conny Brandt	March 2021
April 2021	Updated links	Help, Support & Advice	Conny Brandt	March 2024
March 2024	Updated throughout		Conny Brandt	March 2027
Endorsed by the Education Services Governance Committee - 19.04.2024				
March 2025	Updated terminology	Throughout	Conny Brandt	March 2028
Endorsed by the Education Services Governance Committee - 22.04.2025				