Longcause Community
Special School

COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

Signature of Head:	Anne Hutchinson
Date:	11.02.2026
Signature of Chair of Governors:	Fred Jenkins
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Changes and reviews:

30.01.26 Policy reviewed- add in independent member for stage 3 panel
Paper copy will be made available as requested
DFE will check if followed procedures
Records kept for 6 years
Redacted minutes

31.01.2025: Policy reviewed – no changes.

January 2026: Policy reviewed – no changes.

1. Introduction

Our goal is to provide high quality education for children on the autism spectrum, to be a centre of excellence. We respect and celebrate people on the autism spectrum. We are committed to enhancing their life, well-being, abilities and successes. We have a passion to understand, support, teach and enhance. We value compassion and professional excellence working in partnership with families

We are committed to encouraging feedback from everyone and will respect and cater for differences in age, gender, race, culture, religion, language, literacy, disability or sexual orientation. We will treat everyone fairly.

Compliments, comments and complaints can be made through a variety of channels:

- Call us
- E-mail us
- Write to us
- Visit us

2. Compliments and Comments

Good feedback in the form of comments and compliments are very much appreciated by the school. The school will collect such information and display these as appropriate.

We use the compliments we get as part of our self-evaluation work to support us in knowing what we do well. We use the comments we receive to help us understand where we can improve and make changes to existing systems, processes or practices. This is supplemented by the comments families make on questionnaires and comments at annual reviews or care reviews. Compliments on our work motivate the staff team to continually strive to get things right and maintain a high quality of work.

3. 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
- 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 improvement 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. A copy of this policy is published on the school website and is available in paper form upon request.

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

4. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements of section 29 of the Education Act 2002, which states that schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides.

It is also based on guidance for schools on complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE), including the model procedure, and model procedure for dealing with serial and unreasonable complaints.

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.

5. Definitions and Scope

5.1 Definitions

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"
- A **complaint** is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action"

5.2 Scope

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
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances

- Staff discipline
- School re-organisation proposals
- Curriculum
- Collective worship

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

6. Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 The complainant is asked 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

6.2 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

6.3 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, clerk and Plymouth City Council
- Be aware of issues 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

6.4 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

6.5 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

7. 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

7.1 Time scales

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

8. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the headteacher or governors)

8.1 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.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 5 school days, and investigate and provide a response within 10 school days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the headteacher or designated member of the senior leadership team, as appropriate.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

8.2 Stage 2: formal

Formal complaints can be raised using the Complaints Form (Appendix A):

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

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

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office.

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 5 school days.

The headteacher (or designated member of the senior leadership team) will call 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 5 school days.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the clerk to the governing board within 10 school days.

How to escalate a complaint

Complaints can be escalated by contacting the clerk to the governing board:

- 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 15 school days.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the clerk to the governing board in writing within 10 school days. Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

The clerk will acknowledge receipt of the request within 5 school days.

8.3 Stage 3: submit the complaint to the review panel

Convening the panel

The review panel consists of the first 3 members of the governing board available, who don't have direct knowledge of the complaint. These individuals will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 10). The review panel will include at least **one member independent of the management and running of the school**, in accordance with DfE requirements."

If not enough impartial governors are available, we will seek panel members from other schools or the local authority. We will make sure the governors we source are suitably skilled and can demonstrate that they are independent and impartial.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The clerk will aim to find a date within 5 school days of the request, where possible.

If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting.

At the meeting

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending 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 an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

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 will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representatives have completed presenting 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 subject of the complaint, and make a copy of the findings and recommendations available for inspection by the headteacher. Minutes shared with complainants will have personal information relating to third parties redacted, in line with data-protection law.

The outcome

The committee can:

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

If the complaint is upheld, the committee 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 10 school days.

9. Complaints against the headteacher, a governor or the governing board

9.1 Stage 1: informal

Complaints made against the headteacher or any member of the governing board should be directed to the clerk to the governing board in the first instance.

If the complaint is about the headteacher or 1 member of the governing board (including the chair or vicechair), a suitably skilled and impartial governor will carry out the steps at stage 1 (set out in section 6 above).

9.2 Stage 2: formal

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the chair and vice-chair or
- The entire governing board or
- The majority of the governing board

An independent investigator will carry out the steps in stage 2 (set out in section 6 above). They will be appointed by the governing board, and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation.

9.3 Stage 3: review panel

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the chair and vice-chair or
- The entire governing board or
- The majority of the governing board

A committee of independent governors will hear the complaint. They will be sourced from local schools or the local authority, and will carry out the steps at stage 3 (set out in section 6 above).

10. Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of a Stage 3 appeal and wishes to pursue the matter further this should be done by following the Local Authority's procedure for dealing with those complaints that fall outside statutory requirements. Complaints relating to schools should be directed to the Local Authority nominated officer for school complaints in writing, by e-mail, by telephone or in person.

It must be understood however, that it is not the Local Authority's role to reinvestigate and direct the Governors or Headteacher to take a particular course of action, but to help find a solution to a complaint. The Local Authority will listen to the complaint, ask questions and give advice on how to break the deadlock. The Board of Governors is not obliged to accept their advice about how a complaint might be resolved, provided the school has acted lawfully.

Plymouth City Council is not able to:

- overturn the panel's decision
- re-investigate the original complaint
- review the accuracy of minutes taken or documents provided
- order that compensation is paid
- direct the school to discipline / exclude pupils
- force the school to discipline / dismiss staff
- instruct the school to apologise

Parents are also at liberty to comment positively or negatively to OFSTED via their correspondence address.

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can also refer their complaint to the DfE. The Department for Education will consider complaints **only about whether the school has followed the correct procedures**, not about the substance of the original complaint.

The DfE will not re-investigate the matter of the complaint. It will look at whether the school's complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies that the school holds were adhered to. The DfE also looks at whether the school's statutory policies adhere to education legislation.

The DfE will intervene where a school has:

- Failed to act in line with its duties under education law
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions

If the 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

We will include this information in the outcome letter to complainants.

11. Persistent Complaints

11.1 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.

11.2 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 consider.
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 the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint if there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

11.3 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.

12. Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

13. 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. Records of complaints will be retained for **a minimum of 6 years** after the final resolution, in line with IRMS retention guidance

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.

14. Learning lessons

The governing board 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.

15. Monitoring arrangements

The governing board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The governing board will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 11.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the HR Lead.

This policy will be reviewed by the headteacher and full governing board every 3 years.

At each review, the policy will be approved by the full governing board.

16. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and procedures
- Admissions Policy
- Exclusions Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Disciplinary Policy
- SEND Policy and School Information Plan
- Privacy Notices

Appendix 1: Scope of this Complaints Procedure

Exceptions	Who to contact
● Admissions to schools ● Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs ● School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Plymouth Local Authority.
● Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our safeguarding and child protection policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.
● Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. **complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.*
● Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
● Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
● Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
● Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
● National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

Appendix 2: Complaint Form

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

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: **Postcode:** **Day time telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:**
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

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:
Complaint referred to:
Date: