



Concerns, Complaints and Resolution Policy (Parents and Carers)

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Concerns, Complaints and Resolution Policy (Parents and Carers)

Introduction

Gosforth Group (“the Trust”) wants every parent and carer to feel listened to, respected and supported.

Most concerns can be resolved quickly through open and honest conversations with the staff directly involved. However, if these initial discussions do not resolve the matter and you feel a complaint is necessary, this policy explains how you can raise it, what you can expect from us, and how we will work together towards a fair and timely resolution.

Our approach follows the Department for Education (DfE) best practice guidance, ensuring complaints are handled fairly, impartially, consistently and promptly.

1. Concerns and complaints not covered by this policy

Some matters must follow separate statutory procedures and therefore fall outside the scope of this policy, including:

School Admissions: School admissions are subject to a separate statutory admissions and appeals process.

Pupil Exclusions: Complaints relating to fixed-term or permanent exclusions are dealt with through the statutory exclusions process.

Safeguarding concerns: are managed in accordance with separate statutory safeguarding and child protection procedures.

Staff disciplinary processes: Complaints that raise concerns about staff conduct may be considered under this policy to establish the substance of the complaint. Where concerns about individual conduct, capability or potential misconduct are identified, these will be formally referred and managed under the Trust’s Disciplinary Policy, which operates separately from the complaints process.

The Trust may confirm that concerns have been appropriately addressed; however, it is unable to share any information relating to individual disciplinary or capability processes,

actions or outcomes, in accordance with confidentiality and employment law requirements.

Staff grievances: Where the issue relates to a member of staff raising a grievance (for example, in relation to workload, treatment or workplace disputes), it must be addressed in accordance with the Trust's Resolutions (Grievance) Policy.

Complaints from Members of the Public: In line with Department for Education guidance, complaints raised by individuals who are not parents or carers of a pupil fall outside the scope of the school's parental complaints procedure. Such matters must be addressed through the appropriate school or Trust channels. Further information about how to make a complaint or concern is available on the school's website.

Trustees and School Governors: Complaints or concerns relating to Trustees or School Governors are managed in accordance with the Trust's established governance arrangements and relevant Codes of Conduct. These documents are available on the Trust website and the relevant school website within the Governance section.

2. What a concern might look like

A concern is a query, worry, or issue that you would like the school to be aware of, but which can usually be resolved quickly and informally through discussion.

3. Examples of a concern

- Questions about your child's progress, homework, or classroom experience
- Minor issues with communication
- Queries about routines, expectations, or day-to-day school organisation
- Early worries about friendships, behaviour, or wellbeing
- Problems resulting from a misunderstanding
- Requests for clarification about school processes or decisions
- Notifying the school of something affecting learning or behaviour

Parents and Carers are encouraged to raise concerns promptly and openly so that the school can investigate and resolve matters at the earliest stage.

In most cases, concerns can be resolved by speaking directly to:

- Your child's class teacher or form tutor
- A member of the pastoral or year team
- Your child's subject teacher (for concerns relating to a particular subject or lesson)

The details of your concern and its outcome will be recorded using the Trust's safeguarding and concerns management system (CPOMS). You will receive written confirmation of the outcome of your concern via email.

5. If your concern remains unresolved

If your concern remains unresolved following informal discussion, you may choose to escalate the matter through the Trust's formal complaints and resolution process. The formal procedure is intended for use where informal attempts to resolve the issue have not been successful.

6. What a complaint might look like

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about any aspect of a school's or the Trust's actions, services or decisions, where attempts at informal resolution have not been successful and the individual wishes the matter to be formally reviewed or resolved.

7. Examples of concerns that may escalate to a complaint

- Incorrect, inconsistent, or unclear information provided by the school or Trust.
- Poor or delayed communication, including unanswered calls or emails.
- Consequential administrative errors, such as incorrect records or missing documentation.
- Concerns regarding staff conduct or professional practice.
- The school or Trust does not follow published policies or procedures.
- Undue delay or lack of response when matters are escalated.
- Issues with teaching, classroom organisation, or disrupted learning.
- SEN support is not being implemented, monitored, or reviewed as agreed.
- Lack of effective action following reports of bullying.
- Health and safety concerns not being addressed.
- Unequal access to activities, opportunities, or resources.

8. How to raise a formal complaint

The table below sets out the information required at each stage of the concerns, complaints, and resolution process. This ensures that complaints can be reviewed thoroughly, fairly, and efficiently.

To submit a formal complaint, please complete the online complaints form, which can be accessed via the '**Contact Us**' section of the website. Once all required information has been submitted, you will receive an automatic acknowledgement confirming receipt of your complaint.

SECTION	INFORMATION REQUIRED
Section A: Personal and Pupil Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your name • Address • Contact details • Preferred contact method • Best time to contact • Child's name • School • Year group • Relationship to the child
Section B: Stage of the Formal Process	Indicate Stage 1, Stage 2, or Stage 3.
Section C: Details of Your Complaint (up to 250 words)	Explain what happened and why you remain dissatisfied.
Section D: Steps Taken to Resolve the Issue (up to 250 words)	Outline who you spoke to and what actions were taken.
Section E: Desired Resolution (up to 250 words)	Explain what outcome you believe would resolve the issue.

9. Stages of the formal complaints and resolution process

The table below provides an overview of the formal stages of the Trust's complaints and resolution process and explains how a complaint will be considered at each stage.

Timescales shown above are target response times; matters may be resolved sooner wherever possible.

FORMAL STAGES	PROCESS	TIMES / KEY INFORMATION
Stage 1: School-Level Investigation	<p>Stage 1 Complaints must be submitted via the Concerns and Complaints Online Form</p> <p>A senior leader within the school will review the complaint and provide a written response.</p> <p>If you remain dissatisfied, you may escalate the complaint to Stage 2.</p>	<p>Target Stage 1 investigation outcome response time: within 10 working school days of receipt.</p> <p>Where necessary, timescales may be extended with reason and by mutual agreement.</p>

<p>Stage 2: Trust-Level Investigation</p>	<p>Where you remain dissatisfied following the Stage 1 outcome, the complaint may be escalated to Stage 2: Independent Investigation.</p> <p>Stage 2 requests must be submitted via the Concerns and Complaints Online Form no later than 10 working school days from the date of the Stage 1 outcome letter.</p> <p>At this stage the complaint will be reviewed by a senior leader appointed by the Trust who is independent of the school.</p> <p>You will be provided with a written Stage 2 investigation outcome letter.</p>	<p>Target Stage 2 investigation outcome response timescale: 20 working school days.</p> <p>Where a complaint is particularly complex, this timescale may be extended. In such cases, you will be informed in writing of the reason for the extension and provided with a revised target response date.</p>
<p>Stage 3: Independent Complaint Review Panel</p>	<p>Where you remain dissatisfied following the Stage 2 outcome, the complaint may be escalated to Stage 3: Complaints Panel Review.</p> <p>Stage 3 Complaints Panel Review requests must be submitted via the Concerns and Complaints Online Form within ten working school days of the Stage 2 outcome letter.</p>	<p>Stage 3 Complaints Panel Target Timescales</p> <p>Complaints Panel paper review: 15 working school days from receipt of the Stage 3 Complaints Panel Review request.</p> <p>Re-opened Stage 2 investigation outcome: 10 working school days from the date of the letter confirming the decision to re-open the case.</p> <p>Scheduling of a Full Complaints Panel Review Meeting: 10 working school days from the date of the letter confirming the decision to progress to a full Complaints Panel Review.</p> <p>Full Complaints Panel Review outcome: 10 working school days from the date of the Full Complaints Panel Review Meeting.</p>

10. Stage 3 panel composition

The Complaints Panel will normally consist of:

- One Trustee
- The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Deputy CEO
- One senior colleague appointed by the Trust, independent of the school

If the complaint concerns the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the Complaints Panel will consist of two Trustees and one panel member who is independent of the Trust.

Details of complaints, including the names of individuals involved, are not shared with staff or Trustees who may be required to sit on a Review Panel. This ensures that a panel can be convened later without any conflict of interest.

If any Trustee or Trust representative who may be required to sit on a Stage 3 Review Panel becomes aware of the substance of a complaint before the panel stage, the Trust will, where reasonably practicable, arrange for the panel to be re-constituted. This may include appointing panel members from another academy trust or an external governance service.

You may request a change to the panel, or to individual panel members, if you believe there is a risk of bias. The Trust will consider any such request and will not unreasonably withhold approval.

10.1. Stage 3 - Part 1: Documentation review

The Panel will first review the Stage 2 documentation to determine whether:

- The Trust's complaints procedure has been followed correctly
- The process was fair and proportionate
- All relevant information was appropriately considered

Where procedural irregularities or material omissions are identified, the Panel may recommend that Stage 2 is reopened with your agreement.

10.2. Re-opening Stage 2 (Where agreed)

Where Stage 2 is reopened, the Panel may recommend one of the following:

- The original Stage 2 Investigating Officer reconsiders the complaint, addressing the identified issues; or
- A new Investigating Officer, with no prior knowledge of the complaint, is appointed to undertake a fresh review.

10.3. Stage 3 - Part 2: Full panel meeting

Where no procedural irregularities are identified, you will be invited to attend a Stage 3 Complaints Panel Review Meeting.

For clarity;

- The Complaints Panel is independent of the school and earlier stages of the process. Its role is to review how the complaint was handled, not to reinvestigate the matter.
- New information or evidence will not normally be accepted at this stage, as it will not have been considered during the Stage 2 investigation.
- Where genuinely new and material information arises, the Panel may recommend referral back to Stage 2, with your agreement.

At this stage, you will be given the opportunity to present your case to the Panel, including an explanation of why the Stage 2 investigation or decision(s) are considered to be flawed, unreasonable, or not conducted in accordance with the Trust's complaints procedure.

10.4. Complaints Review Panel decision and outcome

In reaching its decision, the Complaints Panel will consider whether:

- the Trust's complaints procedure has been followed correctly at Stage 2;
- the Stage 2 investigation was conducted fairly, impartially and proportionately; and
- the conclusions reached at Stage 2 were reasonable and supported by the information available at the time.

The Complaints Panel will not reinvestigate the complaint or substitute its own findings for those made at Stage 2 but will review whether the process and decision were appropriate.

The Complaints Panel will confirm its findings and any recommendations in writing. The decision of the Panel is final and concludes the Trust's Complaints and Resolution Process.

11. Referral to external bodies

If, following receipt of the outcome of the Stage 3 Complaints Panel Review, you remain dissatisfied, you may choose to refer your complaint to the Department for Education (DfE).

The DfE will consider whether the school or the Trust has complied with its statutory duties and legal obligations. It will not normally reinvestigate the substantive issues raised in the complaint.

You can contact the Department for Education in writing at:

School Complaints Unit
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Or online via: www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

12. Use of external support during the formal complaints process

The Trust may, in some circumstances, make use of external professional support to assist in the handling of a complaint. Any external involvement is intended to support the quality, fairness and efficiency of the process and will not replace or override the decision-making responsibilities of the relevant school or Trust leaders.

12.1. Stage 1: School-level resolution

At Stage 1, the Principal or Head of School remains the lead decision-maker for the complaint.

Where the Principal or Head of School considers it appropriate, for example, due to the complexity of the matter, the need for specialist subject expertise, or capacity considerations, external professional support may be considered to assist with:

- Clarifying technical or specialist information
- Providing procedural or regulatory advice
- Obtaining further details from you, where required
- Supporting the collation and organisation of relevant evidence

Any external involvement at this stage is optional and may only take place with Trust approval. External support acts solely in an advisory capacity, and the Principal or Head of School retains full responsibility for the investigation, findings and outcome issued at Stage 1.

12.2. Stage 2: Trust-Level Investigation

At Stage 2, the Trust will appoint an independent Stage 2 Investigating Officer, who will act as the lead decision-maker for this stage of the process.

Where the Trust considers it necessary or beneficial, external specialist support may be engaged to assist the Investigating Officer. This may include, for example:

- Independent professional expertise
- Specialist technical or safeguarding advice

- Interviewing and evidence-gathering support
- Administrative or clerking support
- Drafting a report of findings for the Investigating Officer's consideration

External contributors may support the information gathering and analysis process; however, the Investigating Officer remains wholly responsible for evaluating the evidence, reaching conclusions, and issuing the written Stage 2 outcome.

12.3. Use of external support; General Principles

- Any use of external support will be transparent, and you will be informed where external assistance is being used.
- External support cannot make findings, determinations, or recommendations on behalf of the school or the Trust.
- External advisers must have had no prior involvement in the matter under consideration.
- Where external support is used, the Trust's confidentiality and data protection requirements apply in full.

13. Persistent or repetitive complaints

Where a complaint becomes persistent, repetitive, or unreasonably prolonged, or where all stages of the Trust's Complaints and Resolution Process have been exhausted, the Trust may determine that no further action is appropriate.

In such circumstances, the Trust will notify you in writing that the complaints process has been concluded and that the matter is considered closed. Further correspondence relating to the same matter will not normally receive a response, unless new and substantive information is provided.

The Trust also reserves the right not to investigate complaints that it considers to be:

- vexatious or malicious;
- unsubstantiated or unfounded; or
- repetitive, where the same matters have already been fully investigated and concluded under this or a previous version of the policy.

This provision is intended to ensure that the complaints process is applied fairly and proportionately, and that Trust and school resources are used appropriately.

14. How the Trust collects and processes Personal Data

When a concern or complaint is raised, the Trust collects and processes the information provided, such as your name, contact details, and details of the concern or complaint

(including any confidential or sensitive information), solely for the purpose of handling and responding to the matter.

This information is held securely by the Trust and may be shared with against involved in investigating or reviewing the concern or complaint. Information is shared strictly on a need-to-know basis and only where it is necessary to carry out the investigation or review.

15. Record keeping

The Trust keeps a written record of all complaints, including the actions taken at each stage, how the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. These records include copies of correspondence, emails, and notes from meetings or telephone conversations.

Records are maintained in accordance with Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, including details of whether a complaint was resolved at an earlier stage or progressed to a full Complaints Panel Review.

All complaint records are treated confidentially and stored securely. Access to these records is restricted to individuals involved in investigating or reviewing the complaint and those with a legitimate governance or statutory role.

Complaint records may be accessed by statutory bodies, including Ofsted and the Department for Education (DfE), or disclosed where required by law, for example in response to a Subject Access Request, Freedom of Information request, or in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR.

Complaint records are retained in line with the Trust's Record Retention and Disposal Policy and Data Protection Policy.

16. Monitoring and review

This policy is monitored by the Trust's Communications, Assurance and Engagement Manager and is approved by the Trust Board. It is reviewed annually within the Summer Term, or earlier where required, in response to changes in legislation, guidance or Trust business needs.

The Trust reviews the actions taken in response to all complaints, including those not upheld, to identify learning and opportunities to improve procedures and practice.

Summary information may be reported to the Trust Board to support continuous improvement, without identifying individuals.

17. Policy availability

A copy of this policy is available on the Trust and individual school websites and can be provided to parents and carers on request. The policy can also be made available in additional formats, including large print, audio, or translated versions, upon request.

18. What parents and carers can expect from the Trust

When you raise a concern or make a complaint, you can expect the Trust and its schools to:

- Treat you with courtesy, dignity, and respect at all times.
- Acknowledge your concern promptly and explain the next steps clearly.
- Seek to resolve matters at the earliest possible stage, wherever appropriate.
- Ensure a fair, thorough, and impartial investigation, carried out by an appropriate and independent member of staff.
- Keep you informed about the progress of your concern or complaint and provide responses within the timescales set out in this policy.
- Handle information sensitively and confidentially, in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR.
- Make sure no parent or carer is treated less favourably for raising a concern or complaint.
- Provide clear explanations, outcomes, and reasons for decisions made.
- Learn from complaints, whether it is upheld or not, to improve practice and strengthen processes across the Trust.
- Ensure Review Panels are impartial, with members who have had no prior involvement in the matter.

19. What the Trust asks from parents and carers

When raising a concern or a complaint, we ask parents, and carers to:

- Communicate respectfully with all staff, recognising that we will do our best to support, investigate and resolve the issue.
- Clearly explain the concern, providing relevant facts, dates, and information to help us understand the matter fully.
- Follow the structure and stages of this policy, allowing informal resolution wherever possible before escalating to formal stages *
- Allow reasonable time for the school or Trust to investigate and respond.
- Work collaboratively with staff and provide any additional information requested during an investigation.
- Maintain confidentiality, particularly in matters involving other pupils or families.

- Avoid unreasonable behaviour, including persistent, repetitive or inappropriate contact, or behaviour that is abusive or aggressive towards staff.

* We recognise that, in exceptional circumstances, it may be inappropriate to progress through the informal stage and/or Stage 1 of the formal procedure. In such cases, we encourage you to contact the Complaints and Resolution Officer to discuss the specific circumstances before proceeding.

20. Accessibility and support

To ensure fair access, the Trust may provide a support officer to assist individuals in understanding this policy, presenting information, or accessing the complaints procedure, including through alternative formats, language support, or reasonable adjustments for additional needs.

Please note, this support is limited to facilitating access and does not relate to the merits of the complaint itself.

21. Contact information

Parents and carers who require assistance or clarification regarding any aspect of this policy may contact the Trust using the details below.

Email: complaints@gosforthgroup.org.uk

Telephone number: 0191 429 9797 ext. 4034

22. Related policies and supporting information

- Parent Guide to School Complaints Parent Complaint Guide (developed by Parent Kind, in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted)
- Schools Safeguarding Policy
- School Attendance and Behaviour Policy
- School Admissions Policy
- School Parent, Carer and Visitor Code of Conduct Policy
- Gosforth Group's Data Protection Policy
- Gosforth Group Record Retention and Disposal Policy
- Complaints relating to Trustees and Governors