



# HANNAH MORE

## PRIMARY SCHOOL

**Policy Title:** Complaints Policy and Procedures

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**Signed by the Headteacher:**

*Kevin Hawkins*

## **Hannah More Primary School**

### **Complaints Policy**

#### Introduction

This policy explains how Hannah More Primary School handles concerns and complaints.

At Hannah More, we value being open. We believe our school can improve by addressing concerns raised by parents and the community. We value good relationships and will do our best to keep them strong. This means we will try to resolve any concerns or complaints quickly and to everyone's satisfaction.

We welcome feedback from parents about what we do well and where we can improve. We regularly seek your views through 'Parents' voice' and surveys. We will carefully consider all feedback and review our policies and practices accordingly.

We will treat all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously, and will explain and follow the school's procedures for dealing with your concerns. In return, we expect parents and others to behave respectfully towards all school community members, and not express disagreements with the school inappropriately or in front of students.

All school staff and governors will be familiar with this policy and the school's procedures for handling concerns and complaints. This policy is available on the school's website and on request to parents.

We will review our policy regularly and update it if needed. Staff and governors will receive training on handling concerns and complaints - individually, as a group, or for specific groups, like office staff or governors.

Our complaints policy describes three stages of responding to a complaint – informal, formal stage one and stage two.

The informal stage aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate school level. We advocate resolving complaints at this stage wherever possible, in the interests of maintaining good home/school relations.

Stage one is the first formal stage where the headteacher or school governor responsible for handling complaints considers and acts on a written complaint.

Stage two escalates a complaint to an appeal panel of governors.

Here is how each stage works:

#### Informal stage – your initial contact with the school

Many concerns will be dealt with informally when you tell us about them. Your first point of contact should be your child's teacher or the Learning Support Assistant in your child's class.

When you raise a concern, we will always listen and take you seriously. If we can't resolve it immediately, we will arrange to meet with you or contact you by phone or in writing as soon as possible.

If a staff member feels it necessary, they may refer you to someone better able to help with specific issues, for example the SENDCO if it concerns Special Educational Needs.

If necessary, we will contact appropriate people to assist us with our enquiries into your concern. We will clearly communicate to you any agreed actions or monitoring of the situation. We will usually update you on our progress within 15 school days. Once we have responded to your concern, you can ask for the matter to be considered further if you are not satisfied with the resolution.

If you are still not satisfied that the issue has been resolved after this informal approach, your concern can become a Stage One formal complaint.

#### Stage One - formal consideration of your complaint

At this stage you will need to write and send us a formal complaint. Normally, you should address this to the headteacher. If your complaint is about the headteacher, send it to the school marked "for the attention of the chair of governors."

We will acknowledge your complaint in writing within three school days, and will include a copy of these procedures with our acknowledgment. We usually respond in full within 15 school days. If this isn't possible, we'll write to explain why and let you know when we expect to provide a full response.

We may invite you to a meeting to discuss your complaint and get more details. You can ask someone to come with you to help explain your complaint. The headteacher or chair of governors may also have someone with them if they wish.

After the meeting, the investigator will talk to witnesses and gather statements from others involved. If the complaint relates to a student, we may talk to the student and, if appropriate, others who were there at the time of the incident.

We'll usually talk to students with a parent or carer present unless this delays the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint, or the student prefers their parent or carer not to be involved. In such cases, another staff member the student feels comfortable with will be present.

If the complaint is against a staff member, it will be handled under the school's confidential procedures as required by law.

The investigator will keep signed and dated records of all meetings, phone conversations, and other related documents.

Once we have all the relevant facts, we'll send you a written response explaining the decision and reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, we'll indicate what we're planning to do. We may invite you to a meeting to discuss the outcome as part of our commitment to maintaining good relations with you.

Please see the next page for closure of complaints.

If the complaint has not been resolved, complainants can request to proceed to Stage 2.

## Stage Two – Governors' Appeal Panel

The purpose of this process is to determine whether the investigation and conclusions in Stage One were fair. It is run by a panel of three governors who do not know the details of your case. They will look at evidence from you and the investigator and speak with witnesses. This is for them to establish facts and make recommendations to ensure that the school has taken the complaint seriously.

The Stage Two process works formally, using the following steps:

1. If you believe that your Stage One complaint was handled unfairly, you should write to the chair of governors about this within four weeks of the date of the Stage One written response. After this date, governors may have been informed about the Stage One process to help the school improve, and they would be unable to form a Stage Two panel.
2. The chair of governors will contact you back within five school days to check that this process may be able to help you. Most of the time it can but, in rare cases, the issues of disagreement after Stage One may be things the school cannot change directly - for example, a law. If you do not respond to correspondence about this within four weeks, governors may need to be informed about the Stage One process and would be unable to form a Stage Two panel.
3. After establishing that a Stage Two panel may be able to help you, the chair of governors will invite a panel of three governors with no knowledge of your case. If the chair of governors was the complaint investigator, they will not be on this panel. The chair of the panel will try to arrange a meeting within 20 school days.
4. The complaint investigator will prepare a pack of documents related to the investigation and the outcome for the panel. The panel can ask for more information from other sources if needed.
5. We will write to you at least five school days in advance to let you know the date, time, and place of the meeting. We hope you will feel comfortable with the meeting taking place at the school but we will try to arrange to meet elsewhere if you prefer. With this letter we will include any relevant correspondence or reports regarding Stage One, and ask you if you want to submit more written evidence to the panel. You should submit any additional documents at least one day before the meeting.

The letter will explain what will happen at the meeting and that you can bring someone with you. You may choose anyone you would like, but we recommend that you choose someone you trust but who is not directly connected with the school. They are there to support you and witness the proceedings, and can speak on your behalf if you wish.

No new evidence or witnesses should be introduced at the meeting unless previously disclosed. If this turns out to be necessary, the meeting will be paused so the other party can consider and respond to the new evidence.

If needed, the complaint investigator may invite relevant witnesses to the meeting with the agreement of the chair of the panel.

6. The chair of the panel will try to make you feel comfortable, as we understand that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating. The chair of the panel will ensure that the meeting is properly recorded. These records are the property of the governing body, which may or may not choose to share them with you. Meeting records often name individuals, so they are generally considered confidential. Usually, the written outcome of the panel meeting will give you all the information you need. If you want a copy of the meeting records, please

let us know before the meeting; if the panel agrees, the clerk can be asked to maintain confidentiality in these records.

During the meeting, you can expect opportunities to:

- Explain your case and why it should be heard at Stage Two.
- Hear the complaint investigator's response.
- Raise questions through the chair.
- Be questioned by the complaint investigator through the chair.
- Have the panel members question you and the complaint investigator.
- Make a final statement along with the complaint investigator.

At the end of the meeting, the chair will explain that the panel will now consider its decision and that you, the complaint investigator and the headteacher will receive written notice of the decision within three school days. All participants except the panel and the clerk will leave.

7. The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence to:
  - Reach a unanimous or majority decision on the case.
  - Decide on the appropriate action if necessary.
  - Recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar problems in the future.
8. The clerk will send you, the complaint investigator and the headteacher a letter stating the panel's decision. The letter will also explain that if you want to pursue the issue further you are entitled to have the handling of the complaint reviewed by the Secretary of State for Education.

We will keep a copy of all correspondence and notes on file in the school's records, but separate from students' personal records.

### **Closure of Complaints**

The governors and the local authority (LA) will do their best to resolve a complaint, but sometimes it's just not possible to meet all the wishes of the person complaining. Sometimes, we just have to "agree to disagree."

Complaints are usually important in helping the school to improve, but sometimes they become unhelpful. Persistent complaints can take a lot of time and distract from our duty to care for all students. For this reason, we may decide to stop responding to the person (including personal approaches, letters, emails or telephone calls) if their complaint has gone through our official process and we believe we have done everything we can to resolve and learn from it. The LA will support us, especially if the complaint is causing distress to staff and/or pupils.

If you've gone through the school's internal complaints procedures (with or without a complaints review panel) and still have reasons to complain about the outcome, you can contact the Secretary of State for Education through the Department for Education (DfE) website, <https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe>. They will ask you to provide copies of correspondence you have had with the school about your complaint.

We advise parents that unless the school is shown to have acted unreasonably or not followed their own procedures, there is likely to be little further action that can be taken, as governing bodies are allowed to handle many issues without involving the local authority or the Secretary of State.