

Alfred Lord Tennyson School	Page 1 of 20
Complaints Policy	Issued: December 23
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APPROVAL BY	FULL GOVERNING BODY

Complaints Policy

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This document has been produced based on Model complaints procedure Model complaints procedure [1] and Complaints appeal panels: maintained schools from The Key [2]

1. Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Alfred Lord Tennyson School (ALTS) about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

2. The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Alfred Lord Tennyson School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If the complainant has difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect those views. In these cases, the Headteacher (unless the complaint is about the Headteacher, in which case the Chair of Governors) will refer the complainant to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Deputy Headteacher or the Chair of Governors will refer the complainant to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, ALTS will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

3. How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person in writing. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or Headteacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher via the school office, and should be placed in a sealed envelope and marked Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office, and should be placed in a sealed envelope and marked Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body via the school office. The complaint should be sealed and marked Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure (Appendix 1 Complaint Form). If the complainant requires help in completing the form contact the Clerk of Governors who will be able to assist. The complainant can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice for support to do this.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

4. Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

5. Time scales

The complainant must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame only if exceptional circumstances apply.

6. Complaints received outside term time

We will consider complaints made outside term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

7. Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by ALTS other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

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 NNC.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under the school's child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.
	Any person who has serious concerns may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) [3].
Exclusion of children from school*	The appeal process in respect of an exclusion is described in the school Exclusion Policy [4].
	*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy [5] can be made through the school's complaints procedure.
Whistleblowing	The school has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all employees, including temporary staff and contractors [6].
	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: https://www.gov.uk/contact-dfe [7].
	Volunteer staff who have concerns about the school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. They may also be able to complain directly to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of their complaint.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Complaints against staff which relate to their conduct with children will be addressed in line with the Managing Allegations against School Staff guidance found in the DfE document Keeping Children Safe in Education [8]. In all cases of complaints involving safeguarding against school staff the Headteacher should be the only point of contact. If the concern is about the Headteacher contact should be made with the Chair of Governors via the School Office. The Chair and Headteacher are trained in

Exceptions	Who to contact
	the correct procedures to follow in this respect.
	Other complaints about staff will be investigated and 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 are required to have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service and must be contacted directly.
National Curriculum - content	Contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against ALTS in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

8. Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, ALTS wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

9. Withdrawal of a Complaint

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



10. Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by telephone.

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.

Within this response, the Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 30 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions ALTS will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage 2 11.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 - a meeting with members of the governing body's complaints committee, which will be formed of the three, impartial, governors selected by the clerk. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 14 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 28 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from ALTS available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible

 request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

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 must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. Appendix 2 shows an Example Complaints Panel Agenda. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and ALTS with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing (see Appendix 3 Example Outcome Letter and / or Complaints Panel Decision from Key [9]), within 3 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by ALTS.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent governors.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions ALTS will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

12. Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of

their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by ALTS. They will consider whether ALTS has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD.

13. Contact Details

School	01933 353762
Headteacher	head@alts.northants.sch.uk
Chair of Governors	chair@alts.northants.sch.uk
Vice-Chair of Governors	vice-chair@alts.northants.sch.uk
Clerk of Governors	linda@syzygyleisure.co.uk
Designated Officer for Northamptonshire Children's Trust	LADOReferrals@northamptonshire.gov.uk Telephone: 01604 364031

14. Roles and Responsibilities

14.1. Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

14.2. **Investigator**

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - o sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - o consideration of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The Headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator (this could be the Headteacher / designated 14.3. complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - o additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

14.4. Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010 [10], the Freedom of Information Act 2000 [11], the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 [12] and the Guide to the UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) [13].
- will offer three alternative dates for the meeting and set the date, time and venue
 of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are
 invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1
 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in
 advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- · record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

14.5. Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all
 parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.
 If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- · the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- · the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).



14.6. Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so.

 No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.
 - We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting.
 Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting.
 - Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.
 - The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
 - If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.
 - However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

15. References

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- [3] Children First Northamptonshire, "Report a concern about an adult working with children and young people," [Online]. Available: https://www.nctrust.co.uk/protecting-children-information-for-professionals/Pages/report-a-concern-about-an-adult-working-with-children-and-young-people.aspx. [Accessed 15 December 2023].
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- [13] Information Commissioner's Office, "Guide to the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)," [Online]. Available: https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/. [Accessed 15 December 2023].
- [14] Alfred Lord Tennyson School, "Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy".
- [15] Alfred Lord Tennyson School, "Online Safety Policy".
- [16] Alfred Lord Tennyson School, "ICT Acceptable Use Policy".

16. Safeguarding

Safeguarding our children is our priority – see Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy [14].

children stay safe online – see Online Safety Policy [15] and ICT Acceptable Use Policy [16]. All concerns must be reported to our Designated Safeguarding leads: Mrs K O'Connor, Mrs S Smith, Mrs J Appleby and Mrs L Bunker.
children stay safe online – see Online Safety Policy [15] and ICT Acceptable Use Policy [16]. All concerns must be reported to our Designated Safeguarding leads:
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children stay safe online – see Online Safety Policy [15] and ICT Acceptable Use Policy [16].
Online safety lessons are conducted regularly within the school to help to ensure that

Appendix 1. Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Headteacher via the school office. The Headteacher 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.
Are you attaching any paperwork: It so, please give details.
Cimphung
Signature:
Date:
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Date:
Dutc.

Appendix 2. Example Complaints Panel Agenda

Complaints Panel Meeting Agenda Alfred Lord Tennyson School <a href="mai

- Welcome and introductions by the chairperson, who explains that the governors must have regard to the school's Complaints Policy in their conduct of the review and in reaching their decision.
- The Complainant puts their case, explaining the reasons for this complaint
- Questioning by the governors only
- The School put their case
- Questioning by the governors only
- Summing up by the Complainant
- Summing up by the school
- The school representatives, and complainants leave the meeting

At the end of their consideration the Committee will:

- determine whether to dismiss or uphold the appeal in whole or part, including, if appropriate, referring the matter back to the Headteacher/Chair of Governors for further consideration
- where upheld, decide on appropriate action
- advise the complainant and Headteacher of their decision
- advise the complainant of any further action they could take if they remain dissatisfied

The Clerk to the Committee will arrange for the School's Complaints Register to be amended to include a brief summary of the complaint and the decision of the Complaints Committee and for the matter to be reported to the Governing Body.

This stage would normally be expected to take no more than 20 school days.

In cases where the matter has been referred back for further consideration the Complaints Committee will be reconvened.

Appendix 3. Example Outcome Letter

Strictly Private and Confidential

Dear < complainant>

Re: Your complaint of <date>

I write further to the Complaint Panel hearing of <hearing date>.

Governors considered the points you raised in your complaint and have recorded their views within the Minutes, these are provided below:

Point 1: <Point 1 outline>

Governors *<Consideration of the point>*. The governors *<upheld / dismissed / partially upheld>* this part of the complaint.

Point 2: <Point 2 outline >

Governors < Consideration of the point>. The governors < upheld / dismissed / partially upheld> this part of the complaint.

Point 3: <etc>

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In accordance with the School's Complaints Procedure, this hearing is the last stage of the school's internal procedure and the Panel's decision is final.

In accordance with the Procedure, if you remain dissatisfied with the outcome, you are able to make further complaint to the Secretary of State for Education and or Ofsted.

Yours sincerely

<Name of Clerk>

Clerk to Governors

Appendix 4. Notes of Complaint Process

Complaint raised within 3 months of incident.

	Raise to:
Complaint against:	(via the school office, and should be placed in a sealed envelope and marked Private and Confidential)
School staff (except Headteacher)	Headteacher
Headteacher	Chair of Governors
Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body	Clerk to the Governing Body

Time scales:

Stage 1:	
Acknowledged	5 school days
Completed	30 school days

Stage 2:	
Request to escalate to Stage 2	Raise to Clerk of Governing Body. Within 14 school days of receipt of the
	Stage 1 response.
Acknowledged	Clerk to record date of request and acknowledge receipt of request.
	Within 5 school days
Convene a meeting	Within 28 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request.
	Three dates to be offered.
Clerk will inform complainant date, time and venue of the meeting	At least 10 school days before the meeting
Clerk will request any further written material to be submitted to the committee	At least 5 school days before the meeting
Any written material will be circulated to all parties.	At least 5 school days before the date of the meeting
The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and ALTS with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing.	Within 3 school days of the meeting

