



## Complaints Procedure

Approved by:	F&P Committee	Date: 27/02/2026
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## 1. Aims

Bow 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 the Headteacher or person appointed by the Headteacher<sup>1</sup>
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Ensure 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

In the interest of good relations, we try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible.

Where this is not possible, formal procedures as described in this policy will be followed.

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

## 2. 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.

## 3. Definitions and scope

### 3.1 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”*

### 3.2 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
- Exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline
- School re-organisation proposals
- Curriculum
- Collective worship

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

While arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) about the school’s support for these students are within the scope of this policy.

Such complaints should first be made to the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENDCO) in the first instance they will then be referred to this complaints policy as appropriate.

## 4. Roles and responsibilities

### 4.1 The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

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

Not publish details about the complaint on social media
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#### 4.2 The investigator

Usually the Headteacher will appoint an individual to look into the complaint, and establish the facts. They will:

Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
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Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
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Prepare a comprehensive report to the headteacher or complaints committee which includes the facts and potential solutions
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#### 4.3 The complaints co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

The headteacher or other delegated member of the school's Senior Leadership Team
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The designated complaints governor
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Any other staff member providing administrative support
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The complaints co-ordinator will:

Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
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Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the headteacher, chair of governors, clerk and local authority in maintained schools
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Be aware of issues relating to:
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Sharing third party information
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Additional support needed by complainants, for example interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
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Keep records
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#### 4.4 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
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Arrange, where appropriate, the complaints hearing
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Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing
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#### 4.5 Committee chair

The committee chair will:

Chair any complaints panel 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

## 5. 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
How to raise a concern or make a complaint

### 5.1 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 time frame 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 time scales 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

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

### 6.1 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 usually this would be the class teacher, subject leader, Head of Year or member of the Senior Leadership Team. Complainants are welcome to raise concerns directly with the Headteacher but should be aware that the investigation of the complaint may then be delegated by the Headteacher as appropriate. While concerns, at this early stage, can be raised either in person or by letter, telephone or email. Complainants should be aware, however, of the dedicated proforma attached as an appendix to this policy which the

school will need to be completed if and when a formal stage of the procedure is implemented.

If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school reception or Headteacher's PA at [bs@bow-school.org.uk](mailto:bs@bow-school.org.uk) who will assist them.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within **three** school days, and investigate and provide a response within a further **five** school days.

The informal stage will usually involve a meeting or telephone discussion between the complainant and the person identified by the HT to look into the matter, this will usually be a member of the school's Senior Leadership team but may also be the most relevant middle leader such as Director of Learning, Head of Department or Pastoral Leader. If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

## 6.2 Stage 2: formal

Formal complaints can be raised:

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

However, complainants should be aware that, in order to support a full and fair investigation of the complaint, the proforma attached as appendix 1 will need to be completed. This proforma ensures that adequate detail is provided to support the investigation of the complaint and must include:

Specific relevant dates and times
The names of witnesses
Copies of any relevant documents
The desired outcome or what the complainant feels would resolve the complaint

Complainants should note that failure to provide any/all of the above may mean that the complaint cannot be fully and fairly investigated. If a complainant need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office or the Headteacher's PA on [bs@bow-school.org.uk](mailto:bs@bow-school.org.uk)

The Headteacher will:

Record the date the complaint is received
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Acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within <b>three</b> school days.
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The Headteacher (or a designated person) will then:

Call a meeting to clarify concerns, and seek a resolution
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Please note that the complainant may be accompanied to this meeting, and should inform the school of the identity of their companion in advance. However, please also note that 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) will then:

Conduct their own investigation.
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Provide a written conclusion of this investigation within <b>ten</b> school days.
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### Escalating a complaint

The school recognises that, following the exhaustion of stage 1 (informal) and stage 2 (formal) elements of this procedure a complainant may wish to escalate the matter to the Governing Body. If, therefore, following receipt of the conclusion of the investigation, the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should:

Escalate the complaint by informing the clerk to the governing board within <b>five</b> school days
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Please note that requests received outside of this time frame will <b>only</b> be considered in exceptional circumstances.
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When escalating their complaint, complainants can do so:

By letter or email
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Over the phone
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In person
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Through a third party acting on behalf of the complainant
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At such a point the clerk to the governing body will need:

The details of the complaint as set out above
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Details from the complainant on how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently, and <u>what they feel would resolve the complaint.</u>
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### 6.3 Stage 3: Review Panel

#### Convening the panel

Upon receipt of the escalated complaint, the Governing Body will convene a review panel.

This panel will consist of the first 3 members of the governing board available, who must not have had direct knowledge of the complaint.
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These individuals will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 10).
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The governors will select a panel chair from among themselves.
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It should be noted that, if not enough impartial governors are available, the school will seek panel members from:

- other schools
- the local authority].

We will also 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 **15** 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 **five** school days before the date of the meeting.

#### At the meeting

The meeting will be held in private.
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Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations <u>are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it.</u>
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Prior knowledge and consent of all parties, should recording be permitted, will be sought before meetings or conversations take place
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Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.
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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. <b>Please note</b> - we don't encourage either party to bring legal representation, but <u>will consider it on a case-by-case basis</u> - 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 <b>are not</b> permitted to attend.
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.

### **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 **five** school days.

## **7. Complaints against the Headteacher, a governor or the governing board**

### **7.1 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 one member of the governing board (including the chair or vice-chair), a suitably skilled and impartial governor will carry out the steps at stage 1 (set out in section 6 above).

### 7.2 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.

### 7.3 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, the local authority] and will carry out the steps at stage 3 (set out in section 6 above).

## 8. Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the DfE. The DfE will not re-investigate the matter of the complaint. It will look at:

Whether the school's complaints policy was adhered to.
Whether any other relevant statutory policies that the school holds were adhered to.
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
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Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions
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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.

## 9. Persistent complaints

### 9.1 Unreasonably persistent complaints

This section should be read in conjunction with the school's policy for managing serial or unreasonable 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 time frames 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.

**9.2 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 take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
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Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint
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If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

### 9.3 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
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Sending a template response to all of the complainants
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If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

## 10. Record keeping

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, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and record retention schedule.

## **11. Learning lessons**

The governing board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

## **12. Monitoring arrangements**

The governing board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The Governing Body 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 PA to the Headteacher.

This policy will be reviewed by Headteacher every two years and will be approved by the Governors' Business Sub-Committee.

## **13. Links with other policies**

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Exclusions policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- Whistle-blowing policy
- SEN policy and information report
- Privacy notices

## **14. Serial or Unreasonable Complaints**

While Bow School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain and, on this basis, will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Bow School defines unreasonable behaviour, in regard to complaints, as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Bow School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

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 Bow School.

<b>Complaint Form</b>			
Please complete and return to the Headteacher who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.			
Your name:			
Pupil's name/Tutor Group (if relevant):			
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):			
Address:		Postcode	
Mobile telephone No		Alternative telephone No	
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it. (Please be specific, dates/times etc.)			

**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 Only**

**Date Acknowledgement sent:**

**By who:**

**Complaint referred to**

**Date referred:**

**Investigation Concluded**

**Date Concluded:**

**Date Conclusion Sent :**