Connected Futures Partnership

Authoring our story.

Dorothy Gardner Nursery School
Mary Paterson Nursery School
Tachbrook Nursery School
Essendine Primary School
Hallfield Primary School
Oxford Gardens Primary School
Queen's Park Primary School
Queen's Park Family Hub
Bayswater Children's Centre

Complaints Policy

SEPTEMBER 2026

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Policy lead	Executive Headteacher / Governance Professional
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1. Aims and principles

Connected Futures Partnership Federation (CFP) welcomes feedback and takes concerns and complaints seriously. We aim to resolve concerns at the earliest appropriate stage while ensuring that anyone who wishes to make a formal complaint can access a fair, transparent and impartial procedure.

- be accessible, straightforward, impartial and non-adversarial;
- address all material points raised and provide a clear, reasoned response;
- investigate fairly and proportionately, using an impartial person or panel where required;
- treat complainants, staff, governors and children with dignity and respect;
- respect confidentiality while recognising that information may need to be shared to investigate or safeguard;
- make reasonable adjustments for disability and consider communication or language needs;
- keep complainants appropriately informed about progress and any unavoidable delay; and
- use learning from complaints to improve federation practice.

Raising a concern, asking a challenging question or making a complaint will not in itself be treated as unreasonable behaviour. CFP will not disadvantage a child or family because a complaint has been made.

2. Legal framework

For CFP maintained schools and maintained nursery schools, this policy has regard to section 29 of the Education Act 2002 and the Department for Education (DfE) best-practice guidance and model complaints procedure for maintained schools. The Governing Board is responsible for establishing the procedure and ensuring that it is published online as required.

The federation includes community and family services as well as schools. Where a complaint relates to a service that is governed by a separate local-authority, commissioning, statutory or provider complaints process, that process will take precedence and the complainant will be signposted appropriately.

3. Definitions and scope

3.1 Concern and complaint

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt about an issue considered important and for which reassurance is sought. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.

A complainant does not have to use the word 'complaint' for the matter to be treated as one. CFP will consider the substance of the communication and, where necessary, clarify with the person whether they wish to use the formal procedure.

3.2 Who may complain

The complaints procedure for maintained schools is not limited to current parents and carers. Unless a separate statutory procedure applies, a complaint may be made by a parent/carer, former parent/carer, pupil, member of the public or other person about a school provision, facility or service.

3.3 Matters dealt with under other procedures

Some matters have separate statutory or specialist routes and will not be determined through this general complaints procedure. These include, as applicable:

- school admissions;
- statutory assessment and certain decisions relating to Education, Health and Care Plans;
- suspensions and permanent exclusions;
- child-protection referrals or immediate safeguarding concerns, although a complaint about the school's handling of a safeguarding matter may fall within this procedure where appropriate;
- staff grievances, disciplinary or capability matters;
- whistleblowing by workers;
- data-protection complaints where the relevant data-protection process applies;
- complaints about third-party providers using CFP premises, where the provider has its own complaints procedure; and
- matters for which another statutory appeal or complaints route applies.

Complaints about the support CFP provides for pupils with SEND are within this procedure unless the issue is one for a separate statutory route. The relevant school's SEN Information Report explains the arrangements for complaints about SEND provision.

4. Accessibility, support and confidentiality

Complaints may be raised in person, by telephone, in writing, by email or through a representative acting with the complainant's authority. Where a person has difficulty putting a complaint in writing, the school will provide reasonable assistance and confirm the complaint in a form the complainant can check.

A complainant may be accompanied at meetings. Legal representation is not normally necessary, but requests will be considered fairly and case by case. CFP may decline a particular companion where there is a demonstrable conflict of interest or another good reason, and will explain this so that an alternative can be arranged.

Information will be shared only where necessary for the fair handling of the complaint, safeguarding, legal obligations or another legitimate purpose. CFP asks all parties to respect confidentiality and the privacy of children and others. It does not impose a blanket prohibition on discussing or publishing a complaint.

5. Time limits

Complaints should normally be raised within 3 months of the incident or, where there is a series of related incidents, within 3 months of the most recent incident. CFP will consider complaints made outside this period where there are good reasons for delay and it remains possible to investigate the matter fairly.

A complaint received outside term time will normally be treated as received on the first school day after the holiday period. 'School days' in this policy means days on which the relevant school is open to pupils, unless stated otherwise.

Where CFP cannot meet a published timescale, the complainant will be told the reason, the action being taken and a revised expected date. Complex complaints may require additional time to investigate properly.

6. Stage 1 – informal resolution

Many concerns can be resolved quickly through discussion with the relevant member of staff, Head of School or setting leader. The complainant should raise the matter as soon as reasonably possible through the relevant CFP setting office.

The setting will normally acknowledge an informal concern within 5 school days and aim to respond within a further 5 school days. Where a meeting would assist, one may be offered. The person responding will listen to the concern, clarify the outcome sought and seek a proportionate resolution.

A complainant is not required to attempt repeated informal resolution. If they wish to make a formal complaint, or the matter is not resolved informally, it will move to Stage 2.

7. Stage 2 – formal complaint

A formal complaint should be submitted to the relevant school/setting office for the attention of the Headteacher. It should, where possible, explain what happened, relevant dates and people, any supporting evidence, what has already been done to resolve the issue and what outcome the complainant is seeking.

The formal complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 school days. The Headteacher will investigate or appoint a suitably impartial person to investigate. Where the Headteacher has had substantial prior involvement or is the subject of the complaint, section 9 applies.

The investigator may meet or speak with the complainant and relevant people, consider records and other evidence, and seek clarification where necessary. Children will only be involved where appropriate and in a way that takes account of their age, understanding, SEND and welfare.

A written Stage 2 response will normally be issued within 10 school days of acknowledgement. It will set out the conclusions and reasons, any action or recommendations that can appropriately be shared, and how to request Stage 3 if the complainant remains dissatisfied.

A request to escalate should normally be made to the Governance Professional within 10 school days of the Stage 2 response. Requests made later will be considered where there are reasonable grounds.

8. Stage 3 – Governing Board complaints panel

8.1 Convening the panel

The Governance Professional will acknowledge a Stage 3 request within 5 school days and arrange a panel of at least 3 suitably skilled and impartial governors who have had no prior involvement in the complaint. Where sufficient impartial CFP governors are not available, governors from another maintained school may be used through appropriate reciprocal or independent arrangements.

The panel hearing will normally be arranged within 15 school days of the escalation request where reasonably practicable. The Governance Professional will make reasonable efforts to agree a date. If a complainant repeatedly rejects reasonable dates or is unable to attend, the panel may proceed in their absence on the written evidence after giving fair notice.

A complainant who believes there is likely to be bias may request an independent panel and should explain the basis for that concern. The Governing Board will consider the request fairly and will not unreasonably refuse it where the appearance of bias could undermine the process.

8.2 Papers and attendance

Relevant papers will normally be circulated to the panel and parties at least 5 school days before the hearing. Personal information may be redacted where necessary and lawful. The complainant may attend and may be accompanied by a suitable companion.

The Chair will ensure that the hearing is fair, respectful and non-adversarial. Both sides will have an appropriate opportunity to explain their case, respond to relevant evidence and answer questions. Witnesses may be invited where this is necessary to determine the complaint fairly.

8.3 Panel decision

After considering the evidence in private, the panel may:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- not uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- recommend appropriate action to resolve the complaint; and
- recommend changes to systems, policies or practice to reduce the likelihood of recurrence.

The panel's written decision, reasons and any recommendations will normally be issued within 10 school days of the hearing. The complainant will also be provided with the approved minutes, subject to any necessary lawful redactions. The Stage 3 decision concludes CFP's internal complaints procedure.

9. Complaints about senior leaders and governors

To preserve impartiality, complaints about people who would ordinarily handle a stage of the procedure will be redirected as follows:

Complaint	Route
Complaint about a Head of School / setting leader	Normally handled at Stage 2 by the Executive Headteacher or an impartial person appointed by them.
Complaint about the Executive Headteacher	Directed to the Governance Professional and handled by the Chair of Governors or another suitably impartial governor.
Complaint about the Chair of Governors	Directed to the Governance Professional and handled by the Vice-Chair or another suitably impartial governor.
Complaint about an individual governor	Directed to the Governance Professional and handled by the Chair, or another impartial governor where necessary.
Complaint jointly about the Chair and Vice-Chair, the majority of the Governing Board, or the whole	An independent investigator and/or independent governor panel will be arranged as appropriate so

Governing Board	that the complaint can be considered without actual or apparent conflict.

Where the usual route cannot provide sufficient impartiality, CFP will adapt the arrangements while preserving the substantive stages and fairness of the published procedure, and will explain the variation to the complainant.

10. After the CFP procedure – complaint to DfE

Once the internal procedure is complete, a complainant who believes that a maintained school has handled the complaint improperly may ask the Department for Education to consider the matter. DfE does not normally re-investigate the merits of the original complaint; its role includes considering whether the school followed its procedure and complied with relevant education law, and whether the governing body acted unlawfully or unreasonably.

The final Stage 3 outcome letter will explain how to use the current DfE school complaints service. In some circumstances, including where a child is at risk of harm, missing education, the complainant is being prevented from completing the procedure, or there is evidence of unlawful or unreasonable action, DfE may consider a matter before the local process is complete.

11. Unreasonable, persistent, duplicate and campaign complaints

11.1 Principles

Most complainants engage constructively, including where they strongly disagree with CFP. A complaint will not be labelled unreasonable simply because it is persistent, challenging, critical or ultimately not upheld. Restrictions will only be considered where behaviour or contact itself becomes unreasonable and interferes materially with the federation's ability to operate or deal fairly with the matter.

11.2 Examples of unreasonable behaviour

- refusing to identify the substance of a complaint or the outcome sought despite reasonable help;
- refusing to cooperate with the published procedure while insisting that the complaint be resolved;
- repeatedly raising substantially the same matter after the procedure has been completed, without material new evidence;
- making excessive, repetitive or overlapping contacts that place disproportionate demands on staff;
- knowingly providing materially false information or persistently changing the complaint so that fair investigation becomes impracticable;
- using threatening, abusive, discriminatory or harassing language or behaviour; or
- insisting on outcomes that the school has no lawful power to deliver.

11.3 Proportionate communication arrangements

Before restricting contact, CFP will normally explain the concern, identify the behaviour that needs to change and give the complainant an opportunity to engage differently. Proportionate arrangements may include a single point of contact, agreed communication channel, consolidated responses or reasonable limits on frequency. Any restriction will be recorded, kept under review and will not prevent a genuinely new complaint from being considered.

Threats, violence, hate incidents or other potentially criminal behaviour may be reported to the police. Any restriction on access to premises will be considered separately, lawfully and proportionately under the Parent, Carer and Visitor Code of Conduct and relevant safeguarding/site-security arrangements.

11.4 Duplicate complaints and campaigns

Where another person raises substantially the same resolved complaint, CFP will consider whether they raise any materially new issue. If not, CFP may explain that the matter has completed the local procedure without disclosing confidential information about another complainant.

Where a large number of substantially identical complaints are received, CFP may use a published or standard response where appropriate, while preserving access to the complaints procedure for individual issues that require separate consideration.

12. Records, data protection and confidentiality

CFP will maintain an appropriate record of formal complaints, including the issues raised, actions at each stage, outcome and any recommendations or organisational learning. Records will be held securely and retained in accordance with the federation's retention schedule and data-protection requirements.

Complaint information will not routinely be shared with the whole Governing Board where doing so could compromise the impartiality of a later panel. Governors may receive anonymised or aggregated information for assurance and improvement purposes.

A subject access request or Freedom of Information request does not automatically entitle a person to the complete complaint file. Any request will be considered under the applicable information-rights legislation, including exemptions, third-party rights and necessary redactions. Information will be provided to DfE, Ofsted or another body where CFP is legally required or otherwise lawfully permitted to do so.

13. Learning and governance oversight

The Governing Board and Executive Headteacher will consider themes and learning from complaints while protecting confidentiality. This may include changes to policy, communication, training, systems or practice.

The Governing Board will receive proportionate information about the number, stage, broad themes and timeliness of complaints, together with assurance that agreed actions have been completed. Individual case detail will only be shared where necessary and appropriate.

14. Publication and review

The complaints procedure will be published on each CFP maintained school's website, not solely on a federation website. Copies will also be available on request and reasonable support will be offered to people who cannot readily access the online version.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Governing Board and sooner if legislation, DfE guidance, federation structure or learning from complaints requires amendment.

15. Related CFP policies and procedures

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- SEND Policy and SEN Information Reports
- Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions Policy
- Admissions arrangements
- Staff Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notices
- Parent, Carer and Visitor Code of Conduct
- Equality Policy / Objectives
- Attendance Policy

Appendix 1: Formal complaint form

Name	
Relationship to school/setting (if applicable)	
Address	
Email / telephone	
School / setting concerned	

Please summarise your complaint and include relevant dates, people and events:

_____

_____

_____

What steps have already been taken to try to resolve the matter?

_____

_____

_____

What outcome would you like CFP to consider?

_____

_____

_____

Please list any documents or other evidence you are providing:

_____

_____

_____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you need help to complete this form or require a reasonable adjustment, please contact the relevant CFP school/setting office.

Appendix 2: Complaint handling checklist

☐ Complaint acknowledged and correct procedure/scope confirmed.
☐ Reasonable adjustments or communication needs considered.
☐ Desired outcome clarified.
☐ Investigator is sufficiently impartial.
☐ Relevant evidence identified and retained securely.
☐ Safeguarding issues separated/escalated immediately where required.
☐ All material complaint points addressed.
☐ Response gives conclusions and reasons.
☐ Next-stage escalation route and deadline included.
☐ Panel members checked for prior involvement/conflict.
☐ Panel papers circulated fairly and in good time.
☐ Outcome, reasons and recommendations recorded.
☐ Learning/action owner and deadline recorded.
☐ Final letter includes current DfE route.
☐ Complaint record retained in accordance with CFP requirements.