LAWRENCE SHERIFF SCHOOL RUGBY

A Teaching School Hub

Complaints Policy
(for use by Parents and Carers of current pupils)

Last review date	Summer 2026
Review period	Annual by SLT/Triennial by Academic Strategy Committee
Next Review date	Summer 2027
Reviewed by	Teresa Mpofu/SLT
Approving committee	Academic Strategy Committee
Policy type	Legislative
Other related policies	Complaints Policy (for external complaints)

Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents/carers of pupils at the school.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- be impartial and non-adversarial
- facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- make sure 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

Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents/carers of pupils at the school.

It is also based on government guidance on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations, and refers to good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE).

This policy complies with our Funding Agreement and Articles of Association.

Policy for Hearing and Dealing with Concerns and Complaints

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".

This school is committed to working in close partnership with all members of the school community. The school places great value on the role which parents/carers and carers can play in supporting children's learning. Staff and Trustees actively encourage a positive relationship between the school and the families of children who attend the school.

We seek to speedily resolve all concerns and would emphasise that most are resolved through informal discussion with a member of the pastoral team, class teacher or form tutor, who should be contacted in the first instance if parents/carers have any general concerns. Please note that all complaints are confidential and therefore if your complaint relates to a disciplinary issue, we will not reveal any sanctions imposed on other pupils. If there is a continuing concern, this can be directed through the formal stages as outlined in the school's complaints procedure, detailed below.

Nothing in this policy applies to complaints which are made from persons other than parents/carers of registered pupils at the school. A separate policy has been established to dealing with external complaints.

Please note that the following matters are excluded from the scope of this complaints policy:

- Admissions to the school.
- Any issues relating to Non Examined assessment (NEA). These will be dealt with through the Internal Appeals Policy for Exams.
- Suspension and exclusion of pupils from the school.
- Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- School re-organisation proposals.
- Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation.
- Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities.
- Whistleblowing.
- Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures.
- Withdrawal from the curriculum (parents/carers can withdraw their child from any aspect of religious education, including the daily act of collective worship. They do not have to explain why).

It is in everyone's interest that concerns are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the parent/carer and the school can be crucial in determining whether the concern will escalate to a complaint. To this end all staff and Trustees are aware of the procedure to be followed if a concern is raised. Also, whilst not wishing to encourage complaints, parents/carers should note that they have a duty to raise a matter as soon as conveniently possible. It can then be investigated more effectively whilst information is fresh in the minds of all parties.

Where a concern has not been resolved during the initial contact, a parent/carer may request that the complaint is dealt with under the school's formal complaint process. The school operates a three stage process. Stage 1 involves the investigation on behalf of the Headteacher; stage 2 investigation by Headteacher or a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and stage 3 a formal hearing before the complaints panel. A parent/carer must begin the complaint at the informal stage and any attempt to by-pass the procedures will result in the complaint being referred back to the appropriate stage for action.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, the school 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.

Procedure for dealing with complaints

Stage 1: Initial Complaint

Where a concern has not been resolved informally, the parent/carer may raise a formal complaint with the school by email to: contact@lawrencesheriffschool.com. The complaint will be referred to the Headteacher, who will delegate it to an appropriate member of the middle or senior leadership team to investigate. Where a parent/carer has a number of complaints under this policy, the same investigator may deal with all complaints at the same investigation.

Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher, and has not been resolved informally, the parent/carer may raise a formal complaint with the Chair of Trustees by sending an email marked Private and Confidential to: governanceprofessional@lawrencesheriffschool.com. The complaint will be referred to the Chair of Trustees to undertake the role of the Headteacher in arranging an appropriate investigation.

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.

The parent/carer will receive a verbal or written response to the concern or complaint raised from the member of staff investigating within 15 school days. Where it is not possible to respond fully within that time period, the parent/carer will be informed of the reasons why and a new deadline set for providing a full response.

Please note:

Any matter raised more than four months after the event being complained of will not be considered, except in exceptional circumstances (in the reasonable opinion of the school).

Any anonymous complaints will not be investigated unless there are exceptional circumstances (in the reasonable opinion of the school).

Stage 2: Investigation by Headteacher or SLT

Where a complaint has not been resolved at stage 1, the parent/carer may write to the school requesting a further investigation. The parent/carer must put their complaint in writing using Appendix A and send it to

the PA to the Headteacher marked "strictly private and confidential". The complaint will be referred to the Headteacher, who may refer it to another member of senior leadership team to investigate. Where a parent/carer has a number of complaints under this policy, the same investigator may deal with all complaints at the same investigation.

Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher, the Chair of Trustees will undertake the role of the Headteacher in arranging an appropriate investigation.

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 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.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the PA to the Headteacher using the email contact@lawrencesheriffschool.com or by calling the school and asking to speak to the Headteacher's PA. Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher, the complainant should contact the Governance Professional for assistance using the email governanceprofessional@lawrencesheriffschool.com

The parent/carer will receive a verbal or written response to the concern or complaint raised from the member of staff investigating within 15 school days. Where it is not possible to respond fully within that time period, the parent/carer will be informed of the reasons why and a new deadline set for providing a full response.

Stage 3: Complaint heard by the Trustees' Complaints Panel

The parent/carer must write to the Trustees using the email governanceprofessional@lawrencesheriffschool.com and complete the form in Appendix B within 10 school days of the date of the letter notifying them of the outcome of Stage 2, to confirm that they wish their complaint to be heard by the Trustees' complaints panel. On receipt of the form in Appendix B, within this timescale, the governance professional will convene a complaints panel. Where a complaint is received outside that timescale, no further action will be taken by the school.

The Trustees' complaints panel hearing is the last school based stage of the complaints process and is not convened to merely rubber stamp previous decisions. Individual complaints will not be heard by the whole Trust Board at any stage as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following the upholding of a serious complaint. Where a parent/carer has a number of complaints under this policy, the same panel may deal with all complaints at the same hearing.

The Trustee's will nominate 3 people to have delegated powers to hear the complaint at this stage. Two of the panel members will be Trustees and the third will be a person who is independent from the management and operation of the school. All panel members will have no direct knowledge of the complaint. The panel will appoint their own chair.

If the complaint is:

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

Stage 3 will be heard by a completely independent committee panel.

The remit of the complaints panel is to:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur

The panel will meet within 20 school days of receipt of the complaint. If no dates within this timescale are convenient to the parent/carer, the panel may meet outside this period. Where, after reasonable efforts have been made by the school, a date cannot be agreed between the school and the parent/carer, the panel may set a date to hear the complaint and may do so in the absence of the parent/carer.

The parent/carer will be invited to attend the meeting and may be accompanied by a friend or representative.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. No evidence received after this day will be considered by the panel unless in exceptional circumstances (in the reasonable opinion of the panel).

The parent/carer will be notified in writing of the panel's decision, usually within 5 school days.

A copy of the decision letter from the Complaints Panel will be sent to the complainant, Headteacher, Trust board, and where relevant the person who was complained about. The letter will confirm the end of the school's and Trust's involvement with the complaint and explain any further rights of appeal.

Withdrawal of a complaint

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

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 3.

The form for this can be found at: Complain about a school: State schools - GOV.UK

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Further information on how a parent can complain to either the DfE or Ofsted can be found on the following webpage:

https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

Vexatious Complaints

Very rarely, the school may take a decision to close a complaint where the parent/carer is still dissatisfied despite the significant level of scrutiny provided by these procedures. We will do all we can to assist in the resolution of a complaint but sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the parent/carer's wishes and it may be a case of "agreeing to disagree". If a parent/carer persists in making representations to the

school which are wholly or substantially similar to a complaint which has exhausted the internal procedures or where complaints or representations are made which are false or where the intention is to disrupt the smooth running of the school (in the reasonable opinion of the school), then the school reserves the right to take no further action in respect of that complaint.

General and Monitoring

All complaints and correspondence/hearings under the complaints policy are treated as confidential and will only be disclosed when required to do so by law.

The Trust Board will keep a record of complaints and review on an annual basis the operation of the complaints policy, the number of formal complaints received reaching Stage 2 or above and the stage at which these complaints were resolved.

In the event of a complainant believing that the school has failed to comply with its own complaints' procedure or that the school's complaints procedure does not comply with statutory requirements, the complainant may complain to the DfE. Details of how to do this may be found on the Department for Education website: Complain about a school: State schools - GOV.UK

APPENDIX A – Stage 2 Complaints Form for complaint to Headteacher at Lawrence Sheriff School

Please note: this form should not be submitted to the PA to the Headteacher (or Governance Professional where the complaint is against the Headteacher) until Stage 1 of the process has been completed.

Complainant's Name	
Pupil's Name	
Complainant's relationship to pupil	
Address of complainant	
Daytime telephone number	
Mobile number	
Email address	
Please give details of your original complaint	
Who did you speak to or correspond with under Stage 1, when and what was the response?	
Please indicate why you are dissatisfied with this response	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
Signed	
Date	

APPENDIX B – Stage 3 Complaints Form for complaint to Trustees at Lawrence Sheriff School

Please note: this form should not be submitted to the Governance Professional until both Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the process have been completed.

Complainant's Name	
Pupil's Name	
Complainant's relationship to pupil	
Address of complainant	
Daytime telephone number	
Mobile number	
Email address	
Please give details of your original complaint	
Who did you speak to or correspond with under Stage 1, when and what was the response?	
Please indicate why you were dissatisfied with this response	
Who did you speak to or correspond with under Stage 2, when and what was the response?	
Please indicate why you were dissatisfied with this response	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
Signed	
Date	