



# **Complaints Policy**

June 2025

## Table of Contents

### Part 1 | Our Approach to Handling Complaints

1.	About this Complaints Policy	2
2.	Scope of our Complaints Policy	2
3.	General Principles	4
4.	Who Can Make a Complaint?	4
5.	What to Expect from the Complaints Process	4
6.	The difference between a concern and a complaint	5
7.	Raising a Concern or Making a Complaint: Summary	6
8.	Timescales	6
9.	Complaints received outside of term time	7
10.	Confidentiality	7
11.	Anonymous Complaints	7
12.	Resolving Complaints and Possible Outcomes	8
13.	Requirement for Good Faith Engagement	8
14.	Serial and/or Unreasonable Complaints	9
15.	Withdrawing a Complaint	9
16.	Additional Guidance on the Complaints Process	9

### Part 2 | The Process to Raise a Concern or Make a Complaint

17.	Stage 1: Informal Resolution	10
18.	Stage 2: Formal Complaints	11
19.	Stage 3: Final Stage (Governor Panel Hearing)	13
20.	After Stage 3	16

#### Appendix 1: Roles and Responsibilities

#### Appendix 2: Governor Panel Hearing Meeting – What to Expect on the Day

#### Appendix 3: Complaint Form

#### Appendix 4: Policy for Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

# Part 1 | Our Approach to Handling Complaints

## 1. About this Complaints Policy

1. The Norwood School’s Governors and the Headteacher<sup>1</sup> are committed to providing the best educational experience they can for all students attending this school.
2. The Governors and the Headteacher recognise the importance to everyone of dealing fairly, quickly and effectively with any genuine complaint which a student or parent or other interested person may have in relation to the school’s decisions, or things the school has done or not done.
3. Under Section 29(1) of the Education Act 2002, governing bodies of all maintained schools in England are required to have procedures in place to deal with complaints relating to the school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides. The law also requires that procedure to be publicised. Accordingly, the Governing Body of The Norwood School has adopted this Policy.

## 2. Scope of our Complaints Policy

4. This Policy covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by The Norwood School apart from complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below. For the avoidance of doubt, matters under points 1-10 in the table below **cannot** form the basis of a complaint under this Policy.

#	Exceptions	Who to contact
1	<b>Admissions to schools</b>	Contact the Local Authority directly.
2	<b>Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs</b>	Contact the Local Authority directly.
3	<b>School re-organisation proposals</b>	Contact the Local Authority directly.
4	<b>Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complaints about child protection matters are handled under Lambeth’s Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</li> <li>• If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact Lambeth’s Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). The Lambeth LADO email: <a href="mailto:LADO@lambeth.gov.uk">LADO@lambeth.gov.uk</a></li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> For simplicity this Policy refers to “**Headteacher**”. However as at April 2025 The Norwood School is led by Co-Headteachers. Each Co-Headteacher individually acts with the full authority of the role of Headteacher. **There is no escalation route from one Co-Headteacher to the other.**

#	Exceptions	Who to contact
5	<b>Exclusion of students from school</b>	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at:  <a href="http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</a>.</p> <p>Complaints about the application of the school's Behaviour Policy can be made through the school's complaints process. The Behaviour Policy can be found under the 'About Us' section on the school website:  <a href="https://www.thenorwoodschool.org/attachments/download.asp?file=33&amp;type=pdf">https://www.thenorwoodschool.org/attachments/download.asp?file=33&amp;type=pdf</a></p>
6	<b>Whistleblowing</b>	<p>There are several routes depending on the specific issue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Norwood School has an internal whistleblowing procedure available to all employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</li> <li>• For people in education who do not want to raise matters directly with their employer, The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers. Referrals can be made at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>.</li> <li>• Volunteer staff who have concerns about The Norwood School <b>must</b> complain through the school's complaints process. You may also be able to complain directly to the Lambeth or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</li> </ul>
7	<b>Staff Grievances</b>	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
8	<b>Staff Conduct</b>	<p>Complaints about staff conduct will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member because of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
9	<b>Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use School premises or facilities</b>	Providers have their own complaints processes to deal with complaints about their services. Please contact them directly.
10	<b>National Curriculum - Content</b>	Contact the Department for Education at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>

5. If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, Local Authority safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may affect The Norwood School's ability to meet the timescales set out in this Policy. Alternatively, it could lead to a complaint under this Policy being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.
6. If a complainant begins legal action against The Norwood School about the same issue, the school may pause the complaints process until the legal case is resolved.

### 3. General Principles

7. **This Policy seeks to encourage informal resolution wherever possible.** The complaints process is not about blame. It is based on investigation and is not adversarial. Everyone should try to work together to find a fair and practical way forward.
8. **All complaints will be treated as confidential.** Only people investigating the complaint will have access to details about the complaint, and information about the complaint will only be shared where it is necessary to ensure the process is fair and effective. Information will not be shared publicly unless required by law.
9. **The Norwood School is responsible for handling complaints under this Policy.** If a complainant sends a complaint to the Local Authority about something which is in scope to this Policy, the Local Authority will pass it to the school, and you will be informed.

### 4. Who Can Make a Complaint?

10. This complaints process is not limited to parents or carers of students that are registered at The Norwood School. **Any person**, including members of the public, may make a complaint to The Norwood School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide.

### 5. What to Expect from the Complaints Process

#### 5.1. Our Approach

11. We take all complaints seriously. When you raise a complaint, it will be investigated thoroughly (appropriate in the circumstances) and impartially.
12. The aim of the complaints process is to determine whether The Norwood School has:
  - complied with relevant legislation,
  - observed relevant guidance, and
  - otherwise acted appropriately given the circumstances.
13. It is important to recognise that the complaints process is not simply a route to express dissatisfaction in the hope of a different outcome. The complaints process is intended to give people a route to address specific concerns and ensure that The Norwood School meets its responsibilities and adheres to proper procedures. Where genuine issues are identified any necessary steps may be taken to rectify them.

## 5.2. The Stages in the Complaints Process

Stage	Summary
1. Informal Resolution Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You should bring your concern or complaint to the attention of school staff to seek a resolution – this would usually be the class teacher or line manager.</li> <li>There is no specific route that you need to follow to raise your concern or complaint informally with school staff.</li> </ul>
2. Formal Resolution Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the issue is not resolved at Stage 1, you can submit a formal complaint.</li> <li>Again, there is no specific route that you must follow, but we encourage you to use the Complaint Form at the end of this Policy to set out the issues in your complaint.</li> <li>The school will investigate and respond to your complaint following the processes and timescales set out in this Policy.</li> </ul>
3. Governor Panel Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the issue is not resolved at Stage 3, you can refer your complaint to a panel of at least three Governors.</li> <li>That hearing will follow the processes and timescales set out in this Policy.</li> <li>Note that you cannot move straight to Stage 3 without engaging fully with and completing the previous stages.</li> <li>All Stage 3 Panel Hearings take place in person in the school.</li> </ul>

## 5.3. Potential Outcomes of the Complaints Process

- There are only certain outcomes that are possible from the complaints process (see Section 12 below). We encourage you to consider this before starting the complaint process to avoid frustration or disappointment later on if you are unable to achieve your preferred outcome.
- You should also consider if there is a different route that better suits the issue you are concerned about (see Section 2 above).

## 6. The difference between a concern and a complaint

- A **concern** means *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.
- A **complaint** means *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.
- It is in everyone's interest that genuine 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 process. The Norwood School takes concerns seriously and will try to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.
- If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Headteacher can refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher can refer you to another staff member. The member of

staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The most important factor is the ability to consider the issues objectively and impartially.

20. We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, The Norwood School will seek to resolve the issue internally through the stages outlined within this complaints process (see Part 2 of this Policy).

## 7. Raising a Concern or Making a Complaint: Summary

21. Our complaints process is explained in detail in Part 2 of this Policy. In summary:
- You can make a complaint **in person, in writing or by phone**. Someone else can raise a complaint on your behalf, but they must have your **permission**.
  - Start by raising your concern with either the **class teacher or line manager**. If it cannot be resolved informally, you can make a formal complaint.
  - A Complaint Form is available at the end of this document ([Appendix 4](#)) to help you structure your complaint. If you need help filling it in, please contact the school office or ask an independent organisation like Citizens Advice.
  - Submit any complaint via the school office. Indicate whether this should go to the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors or the independent Clerk to governors (depending on your complaint).
  - Please do not contact individual Governors directly about your complaint – they have no power to act on an individual basis and doing so could delay your complaint.
  - In line with equality law, we will make reasonable adjustments to support anyone who needs help accessing or taking part in the complaints process. Please contact the school office if you would like to discuss this.

## 8. Timescales

22. It is in everyone's interests that complaints are raised as soon as possible so that The Norwood School has a meaningful opportunity to respond to and to seek to address the issue quickly.

23. Therefore you must raise your complaint within **3 calendar months** of:

- the incident happening; or
- the last in a series of related incidents.

**Note:** the 3-month deadline is not affected by school closures and will keep running during school holidays.

24. Telling a member of staff that you intend to complain is **not enough**. You must send in your complaint within the 3-month timeframe.
25. To give everyone clarity, The Norwood School **will normally not accept complaints made more than 3 months after the incident** (or last incident). However, we recognise that individual circumstances may be complex. Therefore, the Chair of

Governors may agree to accept a late complaint – but only where there are compelling exceptional reasons which are outside the complainant’s control. **Complainants must not assume they will get agreement to accept a late complaint. You are urged to bring issues to school staff sooner rather than later.**

26. Where we mention “days” this means **school days**. This excludes weekends, school holidays, inset days and public holidays.

## 9. Complaints received outside of term time

27. If a complaint is sent during a school holiday, it will be treated as received on the first school day of the next school term.

## 10. Confidentiality

28. All complaints will be treated as confidential. This means:

- only people investigating the complaint will have access to details about the complaint, and
- it may also be necessary to share details of the complaint with staff members who are named in the complaint, or who, by virtue of their role, may be either the subject of the complaint (directly or indirectly) or are potential witnesses to the issues in the complaint.

29. Information will not be shared publicly unless required by law.

## 11. Anonymous Complaints

### 11.1. Fully Anonymous Complaints

30. We do not normally accept anonymous complaints. This is because we need to be able to speak with the person raising the issue to properly understand it and respond appropriately.

31. However, in some cases – for example, if a complaint raises a serious concern about the safety or wellbeing of a student or member of staff – the Headteacher or Chair of Governors may decide to investigate it, even if no name has been given. This will depend on the nature of the concern and whether further action is needed. In situations such as safeguarding or bullying, we may also involve external agencies.

### 11.2. Keeping Your Identity Confidential

32. We understand that someone making a complaint may prefer to keep their identity confidential. However, this presents serious practical challenges to carrying out a fair and effective investigation, especially as a complaint moves through the different stages (Stages 1, 2 and 3).

33. For this reason, we are not normally able to accept complaints where the person does not want their identity to be shared with key people involved – such as staff members, the Headteacher, or Governors. Please see also section 10 above on Confidentiality.

## 12. Resolving Complaints and Possible Outcomes

34. At every stage of the process, The Norwood School aims to find a fair and reasonable resolution. This may not always match exactly what the complainant would prefer, but we ask all parties to consider whether the school's response is reasonable in the circumstances.
35. Where appropriate, we may acknowledge that a complaint has been upheld in full or in part. In these cases, the school may offer one or more of the following:
- an explanation,
  - an admission that the situation could have been handled differently,
  - an assurance that steps will be taken to prevent the same issue from happening again,
  - details of any changes that have been or will be taken, and a timescale for those changes,
  - an undertaking to review (and, if needed, amend) relevant school policies, and/or
  - an apology.
36. However, it is important to understand that there are limits to what the complaints process can achieve. For example, it cannot:
- Change records or decisions made by other organisations,
  - Change decisions made by courts, tribunals or other legal bodies,
  - Reveal or decide any disciplinary action taken against staff,
  - Reopen decisions on admissions, exclusions, or safeguarding (these have separate processes – see Section 2 above),
  - Change national education policies or the curriculum, or
  - Award financial compensation.

## 13. Requirement for Good Faith Engagement

37. All parties involved in a complaint – the complainant and the school – are expected to **engage in good faith at every stage of the process**. This means approaching the procedure in a fair, open, and honest way, with a genuine intention to find a reasonable resolution. It is important to understand that a reasonable resolution may be different from a complainant's preferred outcome.
38. Following the formal steps of the complaints process does not automatically mean someone is acting in good faith. For example, a complainant:
- may submit what appears to be a full and detailed complaint, but then try to introduce new or unexpected information later in the process that they had access to earlier but chose not to share in advance, or
  - might try to move quickly to the next stage without meaningfully engaging at the previous one.

Both can suggest a lack of genuine intent to resolve the issue and may be seen as acting in bad faith.

39. If there are indications of a lack of good faith, this will be shared with the Stage 3 Panel (if the complaint reaches that stage). The Panel may take this into account when deciding whether the school has acted reasonably and in deciding what outcome, if any, to require from the school.

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

40. Sometimes, after proper investigation a complaint may be found to be unfounded, deliberately misleading, malicious or vexatious, or otherwise without merit.
41. In other cases, someone may remain dissatisfied even after all stages of the complaints process have been completed and continue trying to reopen the same issue.
42. In these situations, the Chair of Governors will write to the complainant to confirm that the school's complaints process has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.
43. For more detail, please see the school's Policy on Serial and Unreasonable Complaints ([Appendix 4](#)). This also explains how we manage unacceptable behaviour during the complaints process.

## **15. Withdrawing a Complaint**

44. If a complainant says they intend to withdraw their complaint – for example, during a conversation with school staff or with the school's independent clerking service – we will ask them to confirm this in writing by a set date. If no written confirmation is received by that date, the complaint will be treated as withdrawn.
45. To provide clarity and certainty for everyone involved, once a complaint has been withdrawn, it cannot be resubmitted. An attempt to re-submit the same complaint will be handled in line with the process in Section 12 above.

## **16. Additional Guidance on the Complaints Process**

46. From time to time, The Norwood School may provide additional guidance about the processes for raising a concern or submitting a complaint. Such guidance will be approved by the Full Governing Body and published on the school's website.
47. If there is ever a conflict between any guidance and this Policy, this Policy will take priority.

## Part 2 | The Process to Raise a Concern or Make a Complaint

### 17. Stage 1: Informal Resolution

48. You can raise a concern or complaint in person, by telephone, by email, or in writing (via the school office). A third party may do this on your behalf, as long as they have your permission to do so. The school will normally seek to confirm that such consent has been given.
49. Concerns **must** be raised with either the class teacher or Headteacher. If, despite good faith engagement between the school and the person raising the concern, the issue remains unresolved, the next step is for the person raising the concern to make a formal complaint (Stage 2).
50. Complainants **must not** approach individual Governors to raise concerns or complaints:
  - Governors have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure. This can lead to delays in forming a Stage 3 Panel to hear the complaint if this proves necessary.
  - Going directly to one or more Governors may be seen as an attempt to bypass the proper process and could suggest that the complainant is not engaging in good faith.
  - If a complainant has sought to contact one or more Governors directly about the complaint this **will be communicated to any future Stage 3 Panel**, and may be considered when assessing whether there has been good faith engagement in the process by the complainant.

## 18. Stage 2: Formal Complaints

51. If you have not been able to resolve your concern or complaint informally at Stage 1, you can make a formal complaint.

### 18.1. Preparing your Complaint

52. You can submit your Stage 2 complaint in person, by phone, or in writing (preferably using the Complaint Form).

53. If you choose to submit a written complaint you should explain it in your own words. To help you cover all the key points, we encourage you to use the Complaint Form (see [Appendix 3](#) to this Policy).

54. If you need help writing your complaint, you can ask the school office or contact an independent organisation such as Citizens Advice.

55. If you have a disability or other support needs, we will consider reasonable adjustments to help you access or complete this process.

### 18.2. Submitting your Complaint

56. If you are submitting a relevant complaint, please send it to the appropriate person:

- **Complaints about school staff (excluding the Headteacher)** must be sent to the Headteacher via the Headteacher's Assistant. Please mark as Private and Confidential.
- **Complaints about the Headteacher** must be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the Headteacher's Assistant. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- **Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual Governor or the whole Governing Body** must be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

57. If you wish to make a complaint in person or by phone, we recommend you contact the school office in advance to make an appointment to lodge your complaint.

### 18.3. Special Arrangements for Certain Complaints

58. 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 Stage 2 actions.

59. If the complaint is about:

- the Chair and Vice-Chair jointly,
- the entire Governing Body, or
- the majority of the Governing Body,

then 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.

#### **18.4. Acknowledgement of your Complaint**

60. Where the Headteacher is handling the complaint, they may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team. However, the final decision must still be made by the Headteacher.

61. For complaints referred to the Chair of Governors or Clerk, an investigator will be appointed.

62. The Headteacher (or investigator) will:

- Record the date it was received, and
- Acknowledge it in writing (by letter or email) within **5 school days**.

63. In their response, the Headteacher (or investigator) will seek to clarify:

- the nature of your complaint,
- what remains unresolved, and
- what outcome you are hoping for.

The Headteacher (or investigator) can also consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate of doing this.

#### **18.5. Investigating your Complaint**

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

- interview relevant people, including those named in the complaint, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish, and
- keep written records of all meetings/interviews.

65. You will receive a written response within **20 school days** of the complaint being acknowledged.

66. If this deadline cannot be met, we will explain the reason for the delay and give you a new date.

#### **18.6. Responding to your Complaint**

67. The response will explain:

- What actions were taken during the investigation,
- What decision was made and why,
- Any steps the school will take to put things right, if needed, and
- How to move to Stage 3 if you are still not satisfied.

## 19. Stage 3: Final Stage (Governor Panel Hearing)

68. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wish to take the matter further, you may escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a hearing before a panel of three Governors. This is the final stage of the complaints process.
69. Stage 3 is a serious step, which involves significant time and resource from all involved. Complainants should usually only request a Governor Panel Hearing where they have clear and significant concerns, can explain what they believe the school should have done differently, and outline why their preferred outcome is reasonable.

### 19.1. How to request a Governor Panel Hearing

70. A request to escalate a complaint to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk, via the Headteacher's Assistant, within **10 school days** of receipt of the Stage 2 response.
71. 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**.
72. Late requests will only be considered if there are compelling exceptional circumstances. Whether this is the case will be decided by the Chair of Governors. **Complainants must not assume that late requests to move to Stage 3 will be agreed. You are urged to make any request within the stated timescales.**

### 19.2. Arranging a Hearing

73. The Clerk will contact you to agree a date for the Governor Panel Hearing. The aim is to hold the hearing within **20 school days** of receiving your Stage 3 request.
74. Finding a suitable date depends on coordinating the diaries for you, the panel members, the Clerk, and relevant school staff. For this reason, everyone is encouraged to offer as much flexibility as possible. More limited availability means a greater likelihood of delays.
75. If the hearing cannot be arranged within 20 school days, the Clerk will find the next available date for everyone and keep the complainant informed.
76. If you reject reasonable proposed dates without good reason, the Chair of Governors will set a date for the hearing and inform you. The hearing will then go ahead on that date, even if the complainant cannot attend. The panel will base its decision on the written submissions from you and the school.

### 19.3. Format of the Hearing

77. Panel Hearings take place **in person in the school**. Complainants who choose to proceed to this stage are expected to ensure they will be able to attend.
78. For the avoidance of doubt, Panel Hearings do not take place virtually, and there is not a hybrid option for some participants to join virtually.

### 19.4. Who sits on the Panel

79. The Governor Panel Hearing will be made up of **at least three Governors** who have had no prior involvement in the complaint and who have no conflict of interest. The Staff Governor at The Norwood School will not form part of a Stage 3 Panel.

80. Governors can be from The Norwood School or from another school.
81. The Clerk will take care of convening the Panel. There should, where possible, be at least one governor from outside the school on the Panel, but otherwise will be formed of three governors from The Norwood School.
82. The Panel members will agree among themselves in advance who will serve as Chair.

### 19.5. Bringing a supporter (optional)

83. The Governor Panel Hearing is non-adversarial and seeks to be relatively informal. Therefore, you have the option of bringing **one** other person for support, such as a relative, friend, or independent third party. A support cannot also be a witness.
84. You must inform the Clerk in advance if you will bring a supporter. You must send the Clerk their name and the capacity in which they are attending. Remember that as far as possible the Panel will expect to hear from you directly rather than from your supporter.
85. It is your responsibility to ensure that your supporter can attend the meeting. The hearing will not normally be rescheduled if your supporter becomes unavailable. If this does happen, you can bring someone else to support you.
86. Finally, please note that a Governor Panel Hearing is not a legal process or a court. It is not a place to discuss detailed points of law. For this reason, the complainant and the school are not encouraged to bring legal representatives to the meeting to discuss points of law (but they may attend as a supporter).

### 19.6. Bringing Witnesses to a Governor Panel Hearing

87. Both the complainant and the school may ask someone to attend the Governor Panel Hearing as a **witness**, but this is optional.
88. A witness must have **direct knowledge** of the situation and can share what they personally saw or experienced. They are not there to give opinions or say what they think the outcome should be.
89. Each witness may be accompanied by a supporter if they wish. If the witness is a school employee they may be accompanied by a colleague or union representative.
90. The person inviting the witness is responsible for:
  - ensuring the witness **understands why they are being asked to attend and that attending is voluntary** (since a Panel Hearing is not a court and a witness cannot be forced to attend),
  - explaining to the witness that they will **only be at the hearing for a short time** to give their evidence and answer questions. They will wait outside until called and leave once they have finished speaking. Witnesses do **not** stay for the rest of the hearing, and
  - ensuring the witness knows the **time, date and place of the hearing**.
91. If a witness fails to attend on the day without giving notice, the Panel Chair will again decide whether the hearing will proceed, based on the circumstances and the

explanation given. If the witness has provided a written statement this will normally be sufficient to enable the hearing to continue.

92. Last-minute or unexpected witnesses will normally not be allowed, unless there is a **very good reason**. The Panel Chair has discretion and will consider whether the request has been made in good faith.

### **19.7. Confidentiality**

93. All participants must respect the confidentiality of a Governor Panel Hearing.
94. Media representatives are not permitted to attend. Complainants may not bring a media representative to support them.

### **19.8. Before the hearing: paperwork and preparation**

95. At least **5 school days** before the meeting, the Clerk will:
- Confirm the date, time and venue of the hearing with all parties,
  - Ensure the venue is accessible, and
  - Request any additional written material to be submitted at least **4 school days** before the hearing.
96. If you are seeking to provide new information at Stage 3, you should note:
- Stage 3 is not the proper time to present new evidence; you will be asked to explain why this evidence was not available to you earlier in the complaint process, and the Chair will decide whether or not to accept the evidence. The presumption is that new evidence should not be accepted at Stage 3.
  - The panel will not accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of everyone involved.
  - The panel will not consider new complaints or unrelated evidence at this stage. New complaints must start again from Stage 1.
97. All documents will be shared with all parties at least **2 school days** before the hearing.

### **19.9. What happens if you cannot or do not attend**

98. Preparation for a Panel Hearing involves a substantial amount of time and resource for all concerned. Therefore once a date is agreed it will normally not be changed.
99. If you know in advance that you cannot attend for reasons outside your control, you must give **at least 72 hours' notice and explain why**. The Clerk will discuss rearranging the Panel Hearing with the Panel Chair. A Panel Hearing will only be rearranged once, and if you inform the Clerk that you cannot attend the re-arranged Panel Hearing, the complaint will be treated as withdrawn.
100. If you give less notice than this, the Panel Hearing will proceed in your absence as planned and based on your written submissions.
101. If you do not attend on the day, the Panel will wait for 15 minutes after the start time. If you do not arrive within this time, the Stage 3 Panel Hearing will proceed as planned and based on your written submissions.

### **19.10. What happens during the Panel Hearing meeting**

102. The Governor Panel Hearing will follow the steps set out in [Appendix 2](#).

### **19.11. Requesting a Recess during the Panel Hearing**

103. Governors understand that the issues raised in some complaints can involve emotive topics. Therefore the complainant can request one or more brief recesses during the Panel Hearing.

### **19.12. How the Governor Panel makes its Decision**

104. After the Panel Hearing meeting, you and any school staff will leave the meeting. The Governor Panel Hearing will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in private. The committee can:

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

105. If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the Governor Panel 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.

### **19.13. After the Hearing: Outcome and Next Steps**

106. The Chair of the Panel will send a written explanation of the outcome to both the complainant and the school within **10 school days**. At this point, the complaint process comes to an end.

107. The letter will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if you remain dissatisfied with how your complaint has been handled.

### **19.14. Complaints involving the Governing Body**

108. If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair of Governors and/or the Vice-Chair of Governors; or
- the entire Governing Body; or
- the majority of the Governing Body

then Stage 3 must be heard by a committee of Governors who are **not** members of The Norwood School's Governing Body.

## **20. After Stage 3**

109. A Stage 3 Panel Hearing is the end of the complaint process under this Policy.

110. If the complainant believes the school did not follow this Policy in handling their complaint or that the school acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education once Stage 3 is complete.

111. The Department for Education will not usually reinvestigate the complaint itself or overturn the school's decision. Instead, they will consider whether the school followed the relevant legal requirements and statutory policies regarding the complaint.
112. The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://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*

Adopted by the Governing Body of The Norwood School on 1.7.25

---

**Chair of Governors,  
The Norwood School**

## Appendix 1: Roles and Responsibilities

### Complainant

- A1. 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, and
  - refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

### Investigator

- A2. If an Investigator is appointed to look into a complaint they must have the right experience for the task. This could be, for example, a Chair of Governors from another school, a Human Resources professional, or someone from the Local Authority.
- A3. The Investigator's role is to establish the facts and provide a clear, fair and thorough investigation. This involves:
- Speaking sensitively and in detail with the complainant to understand their view of events and who was involved
  - Interviewing staff, students or others who may have relevant information
  - Reviewing records and other evidence
  - Analysing all the information collected
  - Working with the complainant to understand what outcome the complainant feels would put things right
- A4. The Investigator should:
- Approach all interviews with an open mind and ask follow-up questions where needed
  - Take notes or arrange for someone else to record discussions
  - Keep all documents safe and secure during the investigation
  - Be aware of deadlines and aim to complete the investigation on time
  - Write a clear report for the Headteacher or Governors, explaining the facts, identifying possible solutions, and making recommendations
- A5. The Headteacher or Governors will then decide whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint, and will write to the complainant with the outcome – including information on what to do next if they remain dissatisfied.

### **Clerk to the Governing Body**

- A6. The Norwood School uses an **independent clerking service** to support Governor Panel Hearings at Stage 3. The Clerk acts as the main point of contact for both the complainant and the Governor Panel. The Clerk is responsible for:
- Making sure everyone involved understands their rights and responsibilities
  - Arranging the date, time and location of the hearing — making sure it works for everyone invited and that the venue is accessible
  - Gathering and sharing written information related to the complaint — such as documents from Stage 2 and any written statements from the school or complainant — and sending these to all parties in good time before the hearing
  - Taking notes during the hearing (to ensure there is an accurate record)
  - Sharing the minutes with all parties afterwards
  - Informing everyone of the Stage 3 Governor Panel's decision once it has been made.

### **Panel Chair of the Governor Hearing Panel**

- A7. One of the Governors on the Governor Hearing Panel will act as the Panel Chair. The Panel Chair is responsible for making sure the hearing is fair, respectful and well-run. They will:
- Liaise with the Clerk generally to ensure the process is run efficiently
  - Work with the Clerk to ask both sides to send in any extra information they want the Governor Hearing Panel to consider, by a set deadline before the meeting
  - Make sure the meeting is calm, respectful, constructive and non-confrontational
  - Help put complainants at ease – this is particularly important if the complainant or a witness is a student
  - Clearly explain the Governor Hearing Panel's role at the start of the meeting
  - Ensure everyone attending has access to the written materials (subject to ensuring confidential and compliance with data protection laws is respected)
  - Give both the complainant and the school the chance to explain their positions and to ask questions – either in writing before the hearing or by speaking at the meeting
  - Focus the discussion on the key issues
  - Help the Governor Hearing Panel reach clear findings based on the facts
  - Ensure the Governor Hearing Panel stays open-minded and acts fairly and independently
  - Confirm that no Governor Hearing Panel member has been involved in the complaint before or has any conflict of interest
  - Ensure the meeting is properly recorded by the Clerk

- A8. If a new issue comes up during the Panel Hearing and more time is needed to think about it, the Panel Chair may pause the meeting briefly so everyone has a chance to consider and respond.

### **Governor Panel members**

- A9. Governor Panel members should be aware that:

- The hearing must be **independent and impartial**, and must also be seen to be so
- No Governor may take part if they have been involved before in the complaint or related events
- The **Staff Governor** cannot sit on the panel
- The aim of the panel is to **resolve the complaint** and, where possible, support **reconciliation** between the school and the complainant

- A10. We recognise that some complainants may not be satisfied if the panel does not uphold their complaint. In some cases, the panel may only be able to clarify the facts and make recommendations.

- A11. Governor Panel members should also be aware that:

- Many complainants may feel nervous or uncomfortable in a formal meeting
- Parents and carers often feel emotional when discussing matters that affect their child
- If the complainant is a **child or young person**, extra care must be taken to make sure they feel safe and supported
- The panel should consider the **tone and atmosphere** of the meeting to avoid anyone – and in particular a child or young person – feeling intimidated
- The views of a child or young person should be treated with the same respect as those of any adult
- If the **child or young person is the complainant**, the panel should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them take part
- If the **parent or carer is the complainant**, they should be asked whether the child or young person needs to attend any part of the meeting
- The panel may decide that it is **not appropriate** for the child or young person to be present for certain parts of the meeting – if so, this will be explained to the parent
- In all cases, the **welfare of the child or young person is paramount**.

## Appendix 2: Governor Panel Hearing Meeting – What to Expect on the Day

### Purpose and Aim

- A1. The aim of the Governor Panel Hearing is to resolve the complaint and, where possible, support reconciliation between the school and the complainant.
- A2. The Chair of the Panel will ensure that a note is taken of the meeting. This will normally be done by the Clerk to the Governing Body.
- A3. Although the meeting follows a structured format (set out below), the Chair will aim to keep the process as informal as possible, in recognition of the sensitivities involved, and to help everyone feel at ease.

### Order of the Meeting

- A4. The Governor Panel Hearing will usually follow the steps below. All parties will have the opportunity to ask questions but at specific points in the meeting. Only the Panel Members may ask questions at any point.

Step	Details
1	The Panel Chair welcomes the complainant (and their supporter) and school staff, and introduces everyone present.
2	The Panel Chair explains: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the purpose of the meeting,</li> <li>• the procedure being followed, and</li> <li>• the importance of confidentiality.</li> </ul>
3	The Panel Chair confirms that all written evidence has been shared with all parties.
4	The complainant presents a summary of their complaint, calls any witnesses, and explains what specific outcome they are seeking
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Governor Panel asks questions of the complainant and any witnesses.</li> <li>• Then the school may ask questions of the complainant and any witnesses.</li> </ul> <p><i>Responses should be brief and relate to the questions asked.</i></p>
6	The school presents their response to the complaint, including action taken to address the complaint at Stages 1 and 2 of the procedure, and may call any witnesses.
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Governor Panel asks questions of the school and any witnesses.</li> <li>• Then the complainant may ask questions of the school and any witnesses.</li> </ul> <p><i>Responses should be brief and relate to the questions asked.</i></p>
8	The complainant summarises their complaint, highlighting anything that has emerged from the questions discussed. <b>Note: no new points can be added.</b>

9	The school summarises its position, highlighting anything that has emerged from the questions discussed. <b>Note: no new points can be added.</b>
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Panel Chair asks each party if they feel that they have had a fair hearing; if they have any comments to make on the process itself, this is their opportunity to set out their concerns briefly.</li> <li>• The Panel Chair and reminds everyone of the confidentiality of the case.</li> </ul>
11	The Panel Chair thanks everyone and explains when the outcome will be communicated. All parties then leave the room together.

### New Information / Late Evidence at the Governor Panel Hearing

- A5. The Panel normally expects to receive all relevant information and evidence in advance, so that it can be read and considered properly. In most cases, late evidence should not be necessary.
- A6. Presenting new information at the last minute – especially during the hearing itself –can undermine the fairness and integrity of the complaint process. For the avoidance of doubt: no-one should assume that late evidence will be accepted. Every effort must be made to provide all relevant information as early as possible, ideally during Stage 2.
- A7. If either the complainant or the school wishes to introduce new information / late evidence, they must first:
- explain why it was not provided earlier, and
  - provide a very good reason why it should be accepted at this stage.

The Panel Chair will decide whether to accept the new information / late evidence. If the reasons are not strong enough, it will not be accepted.

- A8. Even if the new information / late evidence is accepted, the Panel may consider whether the delay in sharing it reflects a failure to engage with the complaints process in good faith. This could affect any decision about whether the school acted reasonably in relation to the substance of the complaint.
- A9. If new information / late evidence is accepted, the Panel Chair will decide whether an adjournment (of the Chair’s choosing) is needed to give all parties time to consider and respond. This will depend on the circumstances of the complaint.

### After the meeting

- A10. The Governor Panel will consider the complaint in private and must reach a **unanimous or majority decision**. They will also decide:
- what action (if any) should be taken to resolve the complaint
  - whether changes should be recommended to reduce the risk of similar issues in future.
- A11. The Clerk will record the decision and the reasons behind it, and will prepare a decision letter in consultation with the Panel.
- A12. The Chair will send the outcome in writing to the complainant and the school, usually within **10 school days**. If there is a delay, the complainant will be notified and given a reason.

A13. The panel's decision is final. However, the complainant will be advised of further steps they can take if dissatisfied with how the complaint was handled, such as referring the matter to the Secretary of State.

### Appendix 3: Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Headteacher (via the school office) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

<b>Part 1: Your Details</b>	
Your name:	
Pupil's name (if relevant):	
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Daytime telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
Email address:	
<b>Part 2: Your Complaint</b>	
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.	
<b>Part 3: How you have tried to resolve the issue so far</b>	
Have you tried to resolve the complaint informally?	
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, please provide a brief summary of the outcome and why you feel that your complaint has not been resolved satisfactorily.	

If no, please provide a brief summary why you have not tried to resolve the complaint informally.

***Part 4: Resolution***

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

***Part 5: Attachments, Evidence and Paperwork***

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

***Part 6: Attestation***

I certify that the information provided is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Signature:

Name:

Date:



## Appendix 4: Policy for Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

- A1. The Norwood School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour. We will take action to protect them from behaviour that is abusive, offensive or threatening.
- A2. The Norwood School defines **unreasonable behaviour** as any behaviour that makes it more difficult to consider a complaint properly, whether because of the **frequency** or **nature** of the complainant's contact with the school. This may include situations where a complainant:
- refuses to explain their complaint clearly, or to set out what outcome they are seeking, even when offered support;
  - refuses to co-operate with the complaints process;
  - will not accept that certain issues are outside the scope of the complaints process;
  - insists the complaint is handled in a way that goes against the school's procedure, good practice, government guidance or relevant legislation;
  - provides trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account, carefully considered and then commented on in detail;
  - raises many detailed but unimportant questions and demands they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
  - makes unfounded complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
  - changes the basis of the complaint in the course of the investigation;
  - repeatedly makes the same complaint (in spite of previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
  - refuses to accept the outcome of a properly handled complaint, including when it has been reviewed by the Department for Education;
  - seeks an outcome that is unrealistic;
  - makes excessive demands on school time while the complaint is being dealt with, for example through frequent, lengthy and/or complicated contact with staff in person, in writing, by email and by telephone;
  - uses threats to intimidate;
  - uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence;
  - knowingly provides false or misleading information; and/or
  - publishes unacceptable or defamatory content about the school or its staff on social media or other public platforms.

- A3. While a complaint is being reviewed, complainants are asked to limit their communication with the school about the complaint to what is necessary for the investigation. Repeated contact by phone, letter, email or text may delay the process and is not helpful.
- A4. Wherever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will speak with the complainant informally before deciding that the behaviour should be considered unreasonable.
- A5. If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining:
- Why the behaviour is causing concern
  - That it is considered unreasonable
  - What needs to change
- A6. If a complainant continues to contact The Norwood School in ways that disrupt our work, we may introduce a **communication plan**. This may limit how the complainant can contact the school (for example, by email only), and how often. This will be reviewed after six months.
- A7. 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 The Norwood School.

K Hunter