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| **School:** | **Haywards Farm, Northcroft and Juniper House Schools** |
| **Policy:** | **Complaints Policy** |

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis; however, should a need arise, it will be reviewed when required.

This policy will be read, understood, and signed by all staff yearly and when changes have been made in line with government and DfE guidelines and changes.

**Document Control:**
This policy is linked to: Safeguarding , Health and Safety and Accessibility

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| **Owner:** | Amegreen Education | **Approval:** | Proprietors |

| **Change History** | | | |
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| **Version** | **Date** | **Description** | **Change ID** |
| 1 | January 2023 | Created and implemented | LP |
| 2 | March 2023 | Proprietor Approval | RR/GC |
| 3 | July 2023 | Update with the development of the governing board | RR/GC/LP |
| 4 | July 2023 | Update with the development of the governing body and QA system | RR/CG |
| 5 | April 2024 | Update with the development of the governing body and QA system | RR/CG |
| 6 | August 2024 | Planned annual review - general updates to reflect the development of the school | RR/GC/AW/AM |
| 7 | May 2025 | Rebranding & reformatting | TWR |
| 8 | Sept 2026 | Amended | RR/GC/AW |

## Contents


Rationale ..... 2

Who can make a complaint ..... 2

Timescales ..... 3

The difference between a concern and a complaint ..... 3

Management of complaints ..... 4

Unreasonable Complaints ..... 4

Complaints from students ..... 6

Complaints by parents/carers ..... 6

Record keeping and confidentiality ..... 9

External complaints ..... 9

Useful contact information ..... 10


### Rationale

Amegreen Education aims to provide high-quality education and pastoral care to its students within a nurturing environment. There may however be situations where parents or students wish to make a complaint. The primary purpose of this policy is to set out the process and expectations for complaining about the school.

This complaints procedure is provided in accordance with Part 7 of the Independent School Standards. The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year will be made available on the school's website.

### Who can make a complaint

This Policy applies to complaints from parents/carers of current students, and students themselves. There is no provision for parents of prospective students or parents/carers of children who are no longer at the school to make a complaint, except where the complaints process was initiated in writing to Head of School while the student was still enrolled.

Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue and exclusion reviews – see the Safeguarding Policy and Exclusion Policy for more details.

## Timescales

It is expected that complaints are made as soon as possible after an incident arises (although three months is generally considered to be an acceptable time frame in which to lodge a complaint). The procedures below will be followed in the event of a complaint being made by parents or carers against the school.

It is in the interest of all parties that any complaints are resolved as quickly and efficiently as possible. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. These help set a reasonable expectation for both parties to follow and factor in availability of key staff as well as essential time for preparation and reflection to facilitate the best possible outcome.

'Working days' refers to Monday-Friday during term-time when the school is open. Term dates are available on the school website. Please note that the timescales and management of any complaint can be significantly affected by the involvement of external agencies such as the police or children's social care.

## The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern can be defined as an expression of worry, dissatisfaction, or a desire for clarification about a situation, service, or outcome. It often represents an individual's perception or opinion rather than a formal request for action.

**Characteristics of a Concern:**

- Informal in nature and typically addressed through conversation or simple discussion.
- Focuses on issues that can be resolved quickly and easily without in-depth investigation.
- Often reflects personal preferences, opinions, or minor inconveniences that do not breach policies or procedures.

**Examples of Concerns:**

- A pupil is unhappy with the menu for lunch.
- A parent feels that communication could be more frequent or clear, but no rules were violated.

A complaint is a formal expression of dissatisfaction regarding a service, decision, or action that requires a thorough review and response. It usually alleges a breach of policy, failure to meet agreed standards, or significant inconvenience or harm.

**Characteristics of a Complaint:**

- Formal and requires an official process for resolution.
- Involves issues that are serious, recurrent, or systemic in nature.
- May require detailed investigation, documentation, and a formal response.
- Evidence either supporting or disproving the complaint is usually available.

**Examples of Complaints:**

- A parent alleges that their privacy was breached by sharing personal information without consent.
- A student reports discrimination by a teacher.

## Management of complaints

We take all concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve any matter raised, as quickly as possible. However, we expect that most complaints can be resolved informally with the appropriate member of staff. It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally (Stage 1), without the need to invoke formal procedures (Stages 2 & 3). A formal complaint against the Headteacher should be put in writing to the Chair of Proprietors who will follow the procedure set out in Stage 2.

The Head of School will make a decision about whether a complaint raised in writing should be considered a concern, or a Stage 1 or Stage 2 complaint. The format in which the complaint is worded and the context around the complaint will be considered when this decision is made.

For example, a brief email expressing dissatisfaction may be considered a concern, whereas a detailed email referring to previous verbal conversations is more likely to be considered a Stage 2 complaint. The Head of School will also consider whether a complaint is unreasonable and therefore will not be considered in line with the below procedures. If the complaint is against the Head of School, the Director Of Education will manage the complaint including making a decision about the level it should be considered at.

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a 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.

## Unreasonable Complaints

The school is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the 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.

The Head of School may decide a complaint is unreasonable. Whenever possible, the Headteacher will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' evaluation. In the first instance of a complaint which is considered 'unreasonable', a letter will be provided to the complainant explaining why their complaint has been deemed unreasonable.

If the behaviour continues, the Head of School will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable, asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the 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 usually be reviewed after 6 months.

If the complaint is against the Head of School, any decisions around the management of the complaint will be made by the Director of Education.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- where the complaint is demonstrably without foundation or merit.
- 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 while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure.
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be considered and commented on, or 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.
- seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated, and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
- where there has been an unexplained delay between the incident in question and the making of the complaint.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:

- maliciously
- aggressively, including but not limited to using threats, intimidation, or violence
- using abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language
- knowing it to be false or using falsified information
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from the school.

## Complaints from students

The procedures below will be followed in the event of a pupil making a complaint against a member of staff, a fellow pupil or any other person or situation either in school or outside.

- maliciously
- Students may wish to talk to an adult they trust about a situation relating to school or to a situation outside school.
- Students are reminded that, although they may speak to any member of staff, there may be occasions where information will have to be referred to other agencies such as Children's Services.
- Within school, students may talk to any member of Education Staff.
- A pupil may merely need a trusted adult to talk a situation through with and may not be making a formal complaint. However, all actual complaints made by students will be recorded by the member of staff in the Complaints Log. The school response to the complaint will also be recorded. If the complaint is serious the pupil's parents/carers will be informed of both the complaint and the outcome. Some complaints will be referred to other agencies or to the Local Authority. If necessary, a meeting will be called to discuss the issues further.
- A pupil may ask to speak to an adult from an outside agency. The school will, wherever possible, put the pupil in contact with a representative of the appropriate agency. The referral will be noted in the pupil's file.
- If the complaint is an allegation against a member of staff, then the school's safeguarding policy must be followed in addition to recording the complaint. Failure to follow this process may result in disciplinary action.

## Complaints by parents/carers

Complaints made by parents/carers will be acknowledged via the below procedures, which are broken down into three stages.

- Stage 1: informal complaint raised with a member of staff verbally or in writing
- Stage 2: a formal complaint in writing to the Head of School.
- Stage 3: a formal review of a Stage 2 complaint by an independent panel
- Further detail on each of the stages is set out below.

### Informal Complaint (Stage 1)

If parents or carers have a complaint against the school, they may initially wish to contact the school informally either by telephone, in writing or personally after making an appointment. The school will ask the complainant what they think might resolve the issue. The school will consider and work to resolve the complaint as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The school will respond with the outcome of the complaint **within 10 working days** of receiving the complaint. Where further investigations are necessary that may exceed this period, amended time limits will be communicated with an explanation for the delay.

An informal complaint provided in writing will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter. A matter raised verbally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing, but a record of the matter will be made.

A complaint which has not been resolved by informal means to the parent's satisfaction within the specified timescales, the parent/carer should follow the procedures for Stage 2.

**Formal Complaint (Stage 2)**

If a parent is dissatisfied with the response to the complaint under Stage 1, or the complaint requires investigation or involves dissatisfaction with some aspect of the school's policies or management, the complaint should be made under Stage 2.

The full details of the complaint should be set out in writing and sent with all relevant documents and full contact details to the Head of School (contact details are at the end of this document). The parent/carer should also explain how they hope Stage 2 will resolve the issue. The complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within three working days during term time, and as soon as practical during the holidays, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely timescale.

The Head of School will investigate the complaint further and respond in writing within **10 working days** of receiving the formal complaint in writing. Where further investigations are necessary that may exceed this period, amended times will be communicated with an explanation for the delay.

If the complaint is against The Head of School, the complaint should be addressed to the Chair of Proprietors. Their contact details are at the end of the document. The school will investigate and respond **within 20 working** days of receiving the formal written complaint.

**Formal Complaint (Stage 3)**

If a parent is dissatisfied with the Stage 2 outcome, the parent can request that the complaint be referred to the Complaints Panel under Stage 3. Please note that a reflection period of **5 working days** is required before Stage 3 of the complaints process can be requested. A Stage 3 panel hearing should be requested **within 15 working days** of receipt of the Stage 2 outcome.

To request a Stage 3 panel hearing, a parent/carer should adhere to the above timescales and write to the Chair of Proprietors setting out their grounds of appeal. Any supporting evidence which the parents/carers wish to rely on should also be provided with the grounds of appeal.

Please note that the Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure.

- The role of the Complaints Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:
  - the documents provided by both parties and
  - any representations made by the parents and School staff
  - and to reach a decision, on the balance of probabilities, as to whether each complaint is made out in whole or in part.
- It is not within the powers of the Complaints Panel to directly or indirectly adjudicate on any matters of law; this means that a Panel shall not be convened in order to consider any contention that the school has failed to interpret or apply any legal provision correctly.
- It is not within the powers of the Complaints Panel to impose sanctions on staff, pupils or parents.

Following a formal request for a panel hearing, the Director of Education will consider the grounds for appeal and whether it fits within above purpose of the complaints panel. Acknowledgment of the request along with a decision of whether there will be a panel hearing will be provided **within 5 working days** during term time and as soon as practical during the holidays.

If a panel is to be convened, the Director of Education will arrange a panel to hear the complaint. The panel will comprise three people not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one member of the panel will be independent of the running and management of the school. The member should not only be outside the school's workforce, and not a member of governing body/proprietorial body but also should not be otherwise involved with the management of the school. A Chair will be designated for the panel hearing.

The date of the panel meeting will consider the availability of the parents or carers as well as the school and will take place **within 30 working days** of receiving formal notification that the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the Stage 2 complaint, and their desire to proceed to Stage 3.

As soon as reasonably practicable, and in any event at least ten working days before the panel, written notification will be sent to each party confirming the date, time and place of the hearing. Copies of any additional documents you wish the panel to consider should be received at least five working days prior to the panel hearing. A copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the panel will be circulated to all parties prior to the panel, unless there is a specific reason this cannot be done, in which case this reason will be clearly explained.

Parents or carers will be invited to bring with them another person or persons to support them at the panel hearing if they wish. The panel hearing does not confer a right on a parent to have a legal representative to make representations on their behalf at the hearing.

The panel will hear the complaint and will hear the outcome of the school's investigations and its response to these. All present at the hearing is permitted to take notes for reference purposes. The school will ensure formal minutes are taken of the hearing. All those attending

are expected to behave respectfully at all times. We do not tolerate abuse or rude behaviour, and any such presentations may result in the panel being terminated by the Chair. The Chair is permitted to adjourn the panel hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue. This may include an adjournment to take legal advice. When the Chair considers that all the issues have been sufficiently discussed; they will conclude the Hearing.

After the hearing, the panel will then make findings and recommendations which will be communicated in writing **within 10 working days** of the conclusion of the hearing to the Proprietor, Director of Education, the Head of School, the parent or carer and, where appropriate, the person complained about.

If a parent does not exercise the right to attend a panel hearing, the panel will meet in line with this policy. The school's arrangements for the panel hearing will be reasonable to facilitate the parent(s) exercising the right of attendance.

The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the school's complaints procedure.

## Record keeping and confidentiality

A written record of all complaints, whether upheld or not and their resolution, regardless of whether they proceeded to a panel hearing or not, will be kept on the school premises by Head of School (Equality Act 2010) and made available to the Proprietor and Ofsted inspectors on request. The school will record the progress of the complaint and the outcome. These records and any correspondence relating to a complaint will remain confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Education Act requests access to the records.

The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year will be published on the school website.

Specific complaints made about the school are a private matter. The school will not share details of complaints with any external parties who do not have a legitimate interest in the matters (such as the press or members of the public). Parents/carers and students are expected to follow the same courtesies. Matters discussed in or arising from the complaint's procedures are not to be shared with others. This includes publishing information on social media. Any instances of this may result in the decision to class a complaint as 'unreasonable'. Public sharing of information does not allow for a fair investigation.

## External complaints

The complaints procedure exists to support the swift and effective resolution of any complaints about the school. However, parents/carers may choose to complain directly to external agencies such as OFSTED if they believe the school are not meeting the requirements. OFSTED can be contacted on 0300 123 1231 or at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

## Useful contact information

Amegreen Head Office can be reached on 0118 334 8777.

| Name & Role | Contact information |
|---|---|
| **Claire Exton**<br>Head of School (Haywards Farm School)<br><br>**Bridget Cooper-Eastwood**<br>Head of School (Northcroft School)<br><br>**Sarah Strudley**<br>Head of School (Juniper House School) | Claire Exton<br>claire.exton@amegreened.co.uk .<br>Haywards Farm School<br><br>Bridget Cooper-Eastwood<br>bridget.cooper-eastwood@amegreened.co.uk<br>Northcroft School<br><br>Sarah Strudley<br>sarah.strudley@amegreened.co.uk<br>Juniper House School |
| **Alex Walsh**<br>Director Of Education | Telephone: 07496 850480<br>Email address: Headteacher@amegreened.co.uk<br><br>Haywards Farm School, Station Road, Reading, Berks RG7 4AS<br><br>Northcroft School, Northcroft Lane, Newbury, Berks RG14 1BU<br><br>Juniper House School, Englefield Road, Theale, RG7 5DU |
| **Rachel Redgwell**<br>Chair of Proprietors & Director of Amegreen Children's Services | Telephone: 07584 128056<br>Email address: Rachel.Redgwell@amegreencs.co.uk<br><br>Amegreen Children's Services, 18-20 West End Road, Mortimer, RG7 3TF |