NAS Complaints Resolution Procedure

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1. Introduction

We take great pride in the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to our pupils. We are committed to providing high quality, transparent and accessible services to everyone we educate.

However, we recognise that parents may, from time to time, have concerns about the progress, achievement, behaviour or welfare of their child. Parents are encouraged to make those concerns known to staff so that they can be addressed in partnership with the School.

If parents have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated with care and in accordance with this Complaints Procedure. **This Procedure should be read in conjunction with the NAS Complaints Policy (QS-0010),** a copy of which is available on the School website and can be made available on request to the school office.

2. Scope

This Procedure applies to parents of current pupils and parents of past pupils if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still registered at the School. Although this Procedure is made available to parents of prospective pupils for information, it is not available for use by them.

All references to '**parents**' or '**you**' means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for a pupil about whom the complaint relates and includes guardians and carers.

The School will not normally investigate anonymous complaints or complaints sent as part of a Complaints Campaign[1]. However, the Head of Assurance & Compliance, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

3. Timescales

[1] This would include, for example, large volume of complaints all based on the same subject from complainants unconnected with the school.

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively and within clear and reasonable timescales as set out in this Procedure. Please note that for the purposes of this Procedure, 'school days' refers to week days (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays. This means that during school holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although the School will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay and proceed as quickly as possible on commencement of the school term. If there is any delay due for any other reason, such as the need for further investigation, parents will be informed and the reasons for an extension to the usual timeframe will be clarified in writing.

To assist the School in responding to complaints as quickly as possible, parents are expected to proceed with their complaints in a timely and reasonable manner. As such, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the School as soon as possible, usually within 3 months of an issue arising. We will consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint within the timeframe and where the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

We intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits are set for each stage of our Complaints Procedure**.** To this end it is expected that if parents wish to escalate their complaint to the next stage of the procedure, they will generally do this within 10 school days of conclusion of the relevant stage. Depending on the circumstances, the School may, acting reasonably, treat a complaint as closed if parents have not proceeded within this timeframe. These time limits may not apply, for example, if it can be shown that there were good reasons for not making the complaint earlier, and/or proceeding to the next stage of this Procedure, and it is still possible to investigate the complaint properly.

4. Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 (Informal Complaint)

- This is the first opportunity for us to resolve your concerns.
- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a concern or complaint, they should raise it directly with their child's teacher, classroom assistant/learning mentor or via the School office. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to parents' satisfaction. If the individual receiving the complaint cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult with their line manager/member of the senior leadership team.
- Staff will email a copy of the concern/complaint/feedback to the Head of Incidents & Complaints via the Your.Views@nas.org.uk inbox for oversight and logging purposes.
- Complaints made directly to a member of the senior leadership team will usually be referred to the relevant teacher, classroom assistant/learning mentor unless the member of the senior leadership team deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.
- The relevant staff member will seek to resolve matters at Stage 1 within 15 school days of the issue being raised by the parents.
- We hope parents' complaints will be resolved at Stage 1 but should the matter not be resolved, parents may elevate it to the formal stage (Stage 2) as set out below.

Parents should note that:

- Any complaint relating to the Principal, or a member of the School Governance Group (SGG) must be raised in the first instance with the Education Directorate who will, if an

informal resolution cannot be reached, investigate the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

- Any complaint relating to the Chair of the School Governance Group (SGG) must be raised in the first instance with the Vice-Chair of the School Governance Group (SGG) who will, if an informal resolution cannot be reached, investigate the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

- Any complaint relating to a Trustee must be raised in the first instance with the Chair of Trustees (or Vice Chair of Trustees, if the complaint relates to the Chair of Trustees) who will, investigate the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

- Any complaint relating to the Chief Executive Officer must be raised in the first instance with the Chair of Trustees who will, if an informal resolution cannot be reached, investigate the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2 (Formal Complaint)

- If parents are not happy with the response at Stage 1, then parents should put their complaint in writing to the Principal within 10 school days of Stage 1 being concluded.

- Parents should set out the details of the complaint, and explain how they consider the complaint could be resolved.

- Staff will email a copy of the complaint to the Head of Incidents & Complaints via the Your.Views@nas.org.uk inbox for oversight and logging purposes.

- We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint in writing within 5 school days of it being received by the School.

- An investigation will be carried out by a nominated individual (identified by the Principal/Chair or Vice Chair of the School Governance Group (SGG)/Chair or Vice Chair of Trustees, as appropriate). Either the investigator or Principal/ Chair or Vice Chair of the School Governance Group (SGG)/Chair or Vice Chair of Trustees (as appropriate), may offer to speak with the parents. Whenever reasonably possible, this will take place within 28 school days of the written complaint being received from the parents.

- The investigator will put her/his findings in writing for the Principal/ Chair or Vice Chair of the School Governance Group (SGG)/Chair or Vice Chair of Trustees' consideration.

- Once the Principal/ Chair or Vice Chair of the School Governance Group (SGG)/Chair or Vice Chair of Trustees is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and the parents will be informed of this decision in writing. Whenever reasonably possible, this will be done within 28 school days of the written complaint being received from the parents.

- Where the parents remain dissatisfied they may request the complaint is dealt with at Stage 3 via a Complaints Panel meeting. Any such request must be set out in writing, stating where the parents remain dissatisfied and what remedies are being sought. Parents should also include any supporting evidence with their request. The request must be lodged within 10 school days of the parents receiving the Stage 2 findings in writing. Parents should write to the Director of Assurance and Compliance at Your.Views@nas.org.uk or by post to:
  Lesley Andrews
  Director of Assurance & Compliance

The National Autistic Society
Weston House
42 Curtain Road
London
EC2A 3NH

Stage 3 (Complaints Panel)

- The Director of Assurance and Compliance will either directly reply or invite the Clerk of the School Governance Group (SGG) to acknowledge receipt of the parents' request for a Stage 3 Complaints Panel meeting, normally within 3 school days of receiving the request.

- The Complaints Panel will comprise of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. One Complaints Panel member will be independent of the running of the School. A member of the School Governance Group (SGG), provided they have no conflict of interest, may sit as an independent Complaints Panel member.

- The Complaints Panel will point one of their members to act as Chair of the Complaints Panel.

- Parents may attend the Complaints Panel meeting and be accompanied by one other person if they so wish. This may be a relative, teacher, friend or colleague. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. The Principal may also be accompanied at the meeting by one other person if they wish.

- The Chair of the Complaints panel will invite the School to put in writing its response to the complaint and provide this within 15 school days. At the end of that period (whether or not the School has responded) the Chair of the complaints panel will convene a meeting of the Complaints Panel. That meeting will be held on the School premises (where possible) and normally within 20 school days of the end of the School's response time. For the avoidance of doubt, the parents are entitled to make further written submissions ahead of the Complaints Panel meeting, provided these are submitted to the clerk or Chair of the Complaints panel no later than 5 school days before the Complaints Panel meeting.

- The manner in which the Complaints Panel meeting is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Complaints Panel, and shall be as informal as circumstances allow.

- The Chair of the Complaints Panel may hold the meeting virtually.

- Unless the Chair of the Complaints Panel has received a request in advance of the Complaints Panel meeting for it to be electronically recorded, and has provided their express written permission to do so, any electronic recordings of meetings or conversations is prohibited.

- The Complaints Panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of the Chair.

- The Complaints Panel may ask for a notetaker to be present (such as a member of the School's administrative ream), to take notes of the proceedings. These notes are not intended to be a verbatim transcript, but are simply for the benefit of the Complaints Panel, so that they can focus on listening to the parents' concerns. All those present at

the meeting will also be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes.

- The Complaints Panel will proceed irrespective of whether or not the parents and/or their companion attend. If the parents fail to attend on the day without compelling reasons, the Complaints Panel will still proceed in their absence and the process will continue to its conclusion. Any further attempt to re-open the matter may be considered as falling under the "Serial, vexatious, or persistent complainants" section as set out in the Complaints Policy.

- After due consideration of all the merits of the complaint, and all facts the Complaints Panel considers relevant, the Complaints Panel will make findings as to whether to dismiss the complaint in whole or in part; whether to uphold the complaint in whole or in part; and/or whether to make any recommendations.

- The Complaints Panel will write to parents with its decision as soon as reasonably practicable, aiming to do so within 28 school days of the Complaints Panel meeting (although additional time may be needed if the Complaints Panel considers it necessary to carry out further investigation following the meeting).

- The Complaints Panel's decision is final and represents the conclusion of the School's complaints procedure.

- A copy of the Complaints Panel's findings and any recommendations will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents and, where relevant, the person complained about as well as the Chair of Trustees and the Principal. These will also be made available for inspection on the school premises by NAS and the Principal.

5. Withdrawal of a complaint

If you wish to withdraw your complaint, you will be asked to confirm the withdrawal in writing.

6. What parents can do it they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 3

Stage 3 is the final step in the School's Complaints Procedure. If parents remain dissatisfied they may contact external agencies as follows:

- If the School place is funded by a Local Authority, the parent may choose to share their concerns with the relevant Local Authority Officer / Department overseeing their child's place
- Ofsted who can be contacted on 0300 123 1231 or via email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

7. [Delete if not required: Complaints relating to the fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework Requirements

In order to comply with the EYFS statutory framework requirements, written concerns or complaints relating to the fulfilment of the EYFS statutory framework requirements will be dealt with in accordance with the following process:

- the written concern/complaint will be acknowledged within 10 school days;
- the Principal will ensure the concern or complaint is investigated which may include meeting with the parents and the Head of Early Years. A written response notifying the

parents of the outcome of the investigation will be sent within 28 school days of the complaint being received;

- where the parents remain dissatisfied, the school in conjunction with the Director of Assurance and Compliance, will ensure that a Complaints Panel will be convened in accordance with Stage 3 of this policy.

A record of the written complaints and their outcome will be maintained and made available to Ofsted on request.

Parents are further advised that where they have concerns regarding the School meeting EYFS requirements they may contact Ofsted on 0300 123 4666 or via email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk