Highcroft School

Complaints Policy

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Complaints Policy

Policy Number:	EDU.POL.034	Policy Owner Job Role	Quality Manager
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Contributors	Rob Arrowsmith		
Mandatory Policy	No		
Note	This policy must not be amended without prior approval of the Education Director		

Table of Contents

Section	
1	**Supporting Documents**
2	**Introduction**
3	**Aim & Scope**
4	**Abbreviations/Definitions**
5	**Policy Content**
6	**Responsibilities**
7	**Training Requirements**
8	**Equality Impact Statement**
9	**Sources of Information / References**
10	**Version Control (where else is this policy located, ie. Circle, Nourish, Radar)**
11	**Appendices**

1. Supporting Documents

This policy connects to the following Keys policies:

- Data Protection Complaints Policy
- Data Protection and Privacy Notices Policy
- Safeguarding Children in Education Policy (EDE.POL.002)
- Behaviour Policy (EDU.POL.027)
- Admissions Policy (EDU.POL.002)
- Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Policy (EDU.POL.012)
- Staff Disciplinary and Grievance procedures
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy (EDU.POL.022)

Related policies are held within RADAR in the School's policy folder.

2. Introduction

At Highcroft School, we welcome feedback and treat every complaint as a chance to put things right and to improve. We want parents and carers to feel able to raise a

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concern, knowing that we will listen, act fairly and respond in good time. This policy sets out how we handle concerns and complaints, and how we deal with complaints about the way we have used personal data.

Our approach is calm, open and relational, in keeping with the Keys Connect model. We aim to resolve most concerns quickly and informally, close to the point at which they arise. Raising a concern or complaint will never count against a pupil or their family.

During the last twelve months Highcroft School received 0 formal complaints.

3. Aim & Scope

This policy applies to all staff, pupils, parents and carers, and visitors at Highcroft School. It aims to:

- Give parents and carers a clear and fair way to raise a concern or complaint and have it considered.
- Set out the stages, the timescales and who is responsible at each step.
- Meet our duties for handling complaints about personal data under the Data Protection Act 2018, as amended by the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025.

This policy covers complaints from parents and carers of pupils registered at the school. Complaints about the way we have used personal data may also be made by pupils, staff and others, and these are handled under the data protection route in Section 5.

Some matters have their own procedures and are not dealt with under this policy. These include admissions decisions, suspensions and permanent exclusions, child protection and safeguarding referrals, staff grievance and disciplinary matters, and any complaint that has a separate statutory route. Where this is the case, we will tell you which procedure applies and where to find it.

4. Abbreviations and Definitions

In this policy:

- A concern is an expression of worry or doubt about which a person seeks reassurance or action. Most concerns are raised and settled informally.
- A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction that asks for a formal response under this policy.
- A data protection complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the way the school, as data controller, has handled personal data relating to the person making the complaint.
- A data subject is the person to whom the personal data relates.
- A working day is any day on which the school is open to pupils.

5. Policy Content

5.1 Principles and Approach

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At Highcroft School, we listen properly and take every concern seriously. We are fair, open and impartial, we keep complaints confidential, and we resolve concerns as early and as close to the source as we can. We work within clear timescales and keep complainants informed of progress, we make the process easy to use, and we offer reasonable adjustments where they are needed. We learn from complaints and use them to improve, and no pupil, parent or carer will be treated less favourably for raising a concern in good faith.

Managing Challenging and/or Vexatious Complaints

While we aim to resolve all complaints respectfully, we recognise that some behaviours may hinder the process. The following behaviours may be considered unreasonable and unacceptable: -

- Use of aggressive, abusive, or threatening language or conduct.
- Excessive or repetitive contact that disrupts school operations.
- Refusal to engage with the complaints process constructively.
- Publishing false, misleading or abusive content that significantly undermines the complaints process.

Our response strategy will be: -

- To initiate an informal discussion with the complainant to clarify expectations.
- To issue a formal written warning outlining unacceptable behaviour if necessary.
- To implement a communication plan, such as limiting contact to one channel.
- To seek advice from the relevant authority, legal adviser or safeguarding agency where appropriate.

The school, together with Keys Group, is committed to its duty of care for all staff members and the wider school community. We enforce a zero-tolerance policy regarding the behaviours mentioned above. We reserve the right to implement appropriate measures to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff and the community.

5.2 How We Handle Complaints

Most concerns are best resolved quickly and informally. The stages below give a clear route if a concern is not settled at first. We deal with complaints about personal data through the separate data protection route set out later in this section.

Stage 1: Raising a concern informally

In the first instance, please raise your concern with the member of staff most directly involved, for example the class teacher or form tutor. You can do this in

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person, by telephone or in writing. We aim to acknowledge a concern within two working days and to resolve it within five working days. If your concern is about the headteacher, please raise it with the Chair of Governors, James Madine.

Stage 2: Making a formal complaint

If you are not satisfied with the response at Stage 1, you can make a formal complaint in writing to the Headteacher, Stephanie Goddard, at stephanie.goddard@keyseducation.ac.uk or by post to Highcroft School, The Green, Cockfield, Bishop Auckland, County Durham. Please set out the details of your complaint, what has already been done, and what you would like to happen.

We will acknowledge a formal complaint within five working days. The headteacher, or a senior member of staff they appoint, will look into the complaint, may invite you to a meeting, and will send a written response within fifteen working days. If we need more time, we will tell you and give you a revised date. Where the complaint is about the headteacher, the chair of governors will carry out this stage.

Stage 3: Panel hearing

If you are not satisfied with the outcome at Stage 2, you can ask for your complaint to be heard by a panel. Please make this request in writing within ten working days of receiving the Stage 2 outcome.

The panel will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters of the complaint. At least one panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school. You may attend the hearing and be accompanied by one person if you wish. We will normally hold the hearing within fifteen working days of receiving your request.

The panel will make findings and may make recommendations. We will give a written copy of the findings and any recommendations to you and, where relevant, to any person the complaint was about. A copy is kept at the school and is available for inspection by the proprietor and the headteacher.

The outcome at stage 3 is final and there are no further stages thereafter, including a further opportunity to appeal the outcome.

Timescales at a glance

- Stage 1: acknowledged within two working days, resolved within five working days.
- Stage 2: acknowledged within five working days, written response within fifteen working days.
- Stage 3: panel hearing requested within ten working days of the Stage 2 outcome, hearing normally held within fifteen working days of the request.

Records and confidentiality

We keep a written record of all formal complaints, whether they were resolved at the formal stage or proceeded to a panel hearing, together with any action we took

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as a result, whether or not the complaint was upheld. We keep correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints confidential, except where access is requested by the Secretary of State or by a body conducting a statutory inspection of the school, ISI.

We will tell you, on request, the number of formal complaints registered in the preceding school year.

Complaints about personal data

Complaints about the way we have handled personal data are dealt with under our separate Data Protection Complaints Policy. The summary below explains the route. The full procedure, including how to ask for an internal review, is set out in that policy.

From 19 June 2026, anyone who believes we have mishandled their personal data has the right to complain to us, as data controller, before taking the matter to the Information Commissioner. This route is open to parents, carers, pupils, staff and others.

You can make a data protection complaint to our Data Protection Officer, Hannah Calway, at Hannah.calway@keys-group.co.uk, or by post to Highcroft School, The Green, Cockfield, Bishop Auckland, County Durham, DL13 5AG. You can use our data protection complaint form, available at school, or contact us by any other means, including by telephone or in person.

We will acknowledge your complaint within 30 days of receiving it. We will look into it without undue delay, keep you informed of progress, and tell you the outcome.

If you are not satisfied with how we have handled your data protection complaint, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office at ico.org.uk, or by post to Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF. We ask that you give us the chance to put things right first.

5.3 Recording, Monitoring and Reporting

We record formal complaints and data protection complaints on Radar, including the outcome and any action taken. The headteacher monitors complaints for patterns and reports a summary to the governing body at least once a year. The data protection officer keeps a separate log of data protection complaints and reports on them as part of our data protection oversight.

5.4 Equality and Inclusion

At Highcroft School, this policy is applied fairly and without discrimination, in line with the Equality Act 2010. We make reasonable adjustments so that pupils, parents and carers with a disability or other needs can use the complaints process. We monitor the impact of this policy on people with protected characteristics.

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The school will make reasonable adjustments throughout the complaints process to support disabled complainants or those who require communication support.

6. Responsibilities

6.1 Pupils

Pupils can raise a concern with any member of staff they trust and can ask that adult to help them put it into words. We treat concerns from pupils with the same care as those from parents and carers.

6.2 Staff

Staff respond to concerns promptly and courteously, try to resolve them at the first stage, and pass any formal complaint to the named complaints lead without delay. Staff keep a clear record of what was raised and what was done.

6.3 Leadership

The Headteacher, Stehpanie Goddard, oversees the handling of complaints, deals with formal complaints at Stage 2, and makes sure staff are trained to handle concerns well at first contact.

6.4 Governance

The proprietor and governors oversee this policy, sit on the panel at the hearing stage where required, and receive a summary of complaints at least once a year.

6.5 Parents and carers

Parents and carers help us by raising concerns early, giving us a fair chance to respond, and providing the information we need to look into the matter properly.

6.6 Named leads

The named lead for complaints at Highcroft School is Stephanie Goddard. The named lead for data protection complaints is the Data Protection Officer, Hannah Calway, who can be contacted at Hannah.calway@keys-group.co.uk.

7. Training Requirements

All staff receive briefing on this policy and on handling concerns well at first contact. Reception staff, the senior leadership team and the data protection officer receive specific briefing on the data protection complaints route, so that complaints are recognised and handled correctly from the first point of contact. We refresh this training at least once a year, and whenever legislation or guidance changes.

8. Equality Impact Statement

All policies will be developed and implemented in a manner that promotes equality, diversity, and inclusion, ensuring fair and equitable treatment for all individuals. Policies must align with relevant equality legislation and reflect the expectations

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and standards set by our regulatory bodies. They will demonstrate a commitment to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering an inclusive environment that respects and values the diverse needs, backgrounds, and experiences of those we support, as well as our workforce.

9. Sources of Information / References

This policy reflects current statutory guidance and legislation, including:

- The Education and Skills Act 2008, section 94, under which the independent school standards are made.
- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Part 7 of the Schedule, Standard 33, on the manner in which complaints are handled.
- The Independent School Standards: Guidance for independent schools, April 2026, paragraphs 7.1 to 7.5.
- The Data Protection Act 2018, as amended by the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025, section 164A, on complaints by data subjects to controllers, in force 19 June 2026
- The UK General Data Protection Regulation.
- The Information Commissioner's Office guidance on handling data protection complaints, 2026.
- The Equality Act 2010.

10. Version Control

This document can also be found in Radar. This policy is reviewed annually, or sooner if legislation or statutory guidance changes. The named owner of this policy at Highcroft School is Stephanie Goddard.

11. Appendices

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11.1 Appendix A: School-Specific Annex

At Highcroft School, the following local arrangements apply:

- Named complaints lead: Stephanie Goddard
- Data Protection Officer: Hannah Calway, Hannah.calway@keys-group.co.uk
- Chair of Governors: James Madine
- How to contact the school admin.highcroftschool@keyseducation.ac.uk, Highcroft School, The Green, Cockfield, Bishop Auckland, County Durham, DL13 5AG
- Recording system used for complaints: Radar
- Inspectorate: ISI.

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