# OLD PALACE & CHILDREN'S HOUSE FEDERATION

# CONCERNS & COMPLAINTS POLICY

**ADOPTED AUTUMN 2025**

# CONCERNS & COMPLAINTS POLICY

## Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is mainly aimed at parents or carers of children who are registered at Children's House Nursery or Old Palace Primary School, but it is not limited to them.

Any member of the public may make a complaint to the federation about any provision of facilities or services that its schools provide.

Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), the federation will use this complaints procedure.

## The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought.'

A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.'

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest opportunity. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. The Federation takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, the individual school will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the school will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior, but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, the Federation will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

## How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing (letter or email) or by telephone.

Concerns should be raised with staff in the office at the school to which the complaint refers. They will direct the complaint to the appropriate member of staff. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints during the actual procedure.

Complaints that involve or are about the Head of School at Children's House should be addressed to the Executive Headteacher. Complaints that involve or are about the Executive Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the Old Palace school office. Please mark the envelope as 'private and confidential.'

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the clerk to the governing body via the Old Palace school office. Please mark the envelope as 'private and confidential.'

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact one of the school offices.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

## Anonymous complaints

The federation will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Executive Headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

## Complaint campaigns

If we receive what we consider to be a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject and possibly from complainants not connected to the schools in the federation, then we will treat these complaints as being part of a campaign and respond in one of the following two ways, depending upon the nature and scale of the complaint:

- send the same response to all complainants; or
- publish a single response on the federation's website.

## Timescales

Complainants must raise the complaint within 90 days of the incident, or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 90 days of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside this time frame only if exceptional circumstances apply.

## Complaints received outside term time

Complaints received at a weekend or during school holidays will be considered to have been received on the first school day after the weekend/holiday period.

## Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services offered by Children's House Nursery or Old Palace Primary School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

| Exceptions | Who to contact |
|---|---|
| • Admissions to schools/nurseries<br>• Statutory assessments of special educational needs<br>• School re-organisation proposals | Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of special educational needs or school reorganisation proposals should be raised with the local authority |
| • Matters likely to require a child protection investigation | Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.<br><br>In the first instance these should be raised with the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead at the relevant school. |
| • Exclusion of children from school* | Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. |
| • Whistleblowing | We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.<br><br>The secretary of state for education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer.<br>Referrals can be made at www.education.gov.uk/contactus.<br><br>Volunteer staff who have concerns about one of our school should complain through the federation's complaints procedure.<br><br>You may also be able to complain direct to the local authority or the DfE (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint. |

| | |
|---|---|
| • Staff grievances | Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the federation's internal grievance procedures. |
| • Staff conduct | Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the federations's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.<br><br>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed. |
| • Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use federation premises or facilities | Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service.<br>Complaints can be raised directly with the provider or sent to the school, so they can be forwarded on.<br>For example, complaints regarding school catering at Old Palace will be directed Nourish Contract Catering. |
| • National curriculum – content | Please contact the DfE at www.education.gov.uk/contactus. |

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against the Federation in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

## Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, the Federation wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part.

In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an apology.
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review federation/school policies in light of the complaint

## Withdrawal of a complaint

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

## Complaints: Stage One

At Children's House, formal complaints must be made to the Head of School (unless they are about the head of school), via the school office.

At Old Palace, formal complaints must be made to the Executive Headteacher (unless they are about the Executive Headteacherl), via the school office.

It is recommended that they are submitted in writing, using the complaint form. The office can provide support in completing this.

The relevant school will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing.

An initial response will be provided within 5 school days. Within this response, the head of school/ headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The head of school/headteacher will consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

During the investigation, the head of school/ headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the head of school/headteacher will provide a formal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the head of school/ headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the federation will take to resolve the complaint.

The head of school/ headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of stage one. If

the complaint is about the head of school, executive head teacher or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or vice-chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at stage one.

If the complaint is jointly about the chair and vice chair, or the entire governing body, or the majority of the governing body, stage one will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of its investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

## Complaints, Stage Two

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at stage one and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to stage two – a meeting with members of the governing body's Complaints Committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to stage two must be made to the clerk, via the Old Palace school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the stage one response. 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.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the stage two request. If this is not possible, the clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide among themselves who will act as the chair of the complaints committee. If there are fewer than three governors from the Federation available, the clerk will source any additional, independent governors through the local authority's governor services team, in order to make up the committee.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making its decision it will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that if the complainant is invited, the dates are

convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible

- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 7 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from stage one of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented.

The committee can:

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

If the complaint is upheld, in whole or in part, the committee 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.

The chair of the committee will provide the complainant and the Federation with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days. The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the Federation.

If the complaint is jointly about the chair and vice chair or the entire governing body or the majority of the governing body, Stage Two will be heard by a committee of independent governors. The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the federation will take to resolve the complaint. The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

## Next steps

If the complainant believes the federation did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed stage two.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the Federation. They will consider whether the Federation has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE online at 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

## Roles and responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- cooperate with the federation 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
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on any form of social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through
    - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
    - verification of signatures and consent where multiple signatories are added to a complaint
    - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint

- consideration and analysis of records and other relevant information

- liaising with the complainant and the federation as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- ensure that the selection of interviewees does not bias either party
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the head of school/ headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The head of school/ headteacher will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

School Administrative Team

- liaise with staff members, the head of school/headteacher, chair of governors, clerk and local authorities (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- answer any queries the complainant may have regarding the application of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
  - sharing third party information
  - additional support – this may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support
- keep records.

Clerk to the governing body

The clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible

- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example stage one paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale

- record the proceedings

- circulate the minutes of the meeting

- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee chair

The committee's chair, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting

- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy

- complainants, who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting, are put at ease

- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant

- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR – if a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the complainant and the school involved are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, through written submissions ahead of the meeting or when appropriate verbally in the meeting itself

- the issues are addressed and

- key findings of fact are made

- the committee is open-minded and acts independently

- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of

the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure

- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints coordinator, if the school has one).

Committee member

Committee members should be aware that:

- The meeting must be independent and impartial and should be seen to be so. No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it
- The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations
- Many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child

## Policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints

Children's House Nursery and Old Palace Primary School are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. The federation will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our schools.

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 Federation defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with one or both of our school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process
- refuses to specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcome they seek, despite offers of assistance
- introduces trivial, irrelevant or historic information that they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by

telephone while the complaint is being dealt with

- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways that are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- 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 including referral to the DfE
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- knowingly provides falsified information and/or
- publishes unacceptable information/ defamatory content on social media or other public forums.
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language, aggression or violence

Complainants should limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the 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.

Whenever possible, the head of school/ headteacher or chair of governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable'* marking.

If the behaviour continues, the head of school/ headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it.
For complainants who excessively contact Children's House Nursery and/or Old Palace Primary 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 be reviewed after six months.

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 grounds of Children's House Nursery and/or Old Palace Primary School if this is deemed necessary to safeguard pupils, staff or parents.

## Persistent correspondents

If complainants frequently contact one or both of the schools in the federation, causing a significant level of disruption, but refuse to engage with the complaints procedure, the federation can:

- restrict the complainant to a single point of contact via an email address; and/or
- limit the number of times the complainant can make contact.

This restriction will normally be limited to the complainant's capacity to complain.

For all other issues the complainant can contact the school as normal.

**Appendix 1:**

## Children's House Nursery Complaint form

Please complete and email to admin@childrenshouse.towerhamlets.sch.uk or alternative hand the form into the school office. Receipt will be confirmed in writing.

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|---|
| Your name: |
| Pupil's name (if relevant): |
| Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant): |
| Address:<br><br>Daytime/evenings telephone numbers: |
| Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it. |
| What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage? |
| Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details. |
| Signature: Date: |
| Official use: |
| Date acknowledgement sent: |
| By whom: |
| Complaint referred to: |
| Date: |

## Old Palace Primary School Complaint form

Please complete and email to admin@oldpalace.towerhamlets.sch.uk or alternative hand the form into the school office. Receipt will be confirmed in writing.

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|---|
| Your name: |
| Pupil's name (if relevant): |
| Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant): |
| Address:<br><br>Daytime/evenings telephone numbers: |
| Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it. |
| What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage? |
| Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details. |
| Signature: Date: |
| Official use: |
| Date acknowledgement sent: |
| By whom: |
| Complaint referred to: |
| Date: |