



Compliments and Complaints Procedure Policy

Date: November 2004
Reviewed: November 2011
Reviewed: November 2015
Reviewed: January 2018
Reviewed: December 2018

NORTHGATE SCHOOL ARTS COLLEGE (ACADEMY TRUST) **COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

Compliments

It is always good to receive a compliment.

Compliments received from young people, staff, parents/carers, local authorities and other external agencies will be properly recorded, acknowledged (where appropriate) and conveyed to the individuals being thanked and to all other interested parties. A compliment may refer to the young people, staff, a group/team or Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust) as a whole.

Compliments and expressions of appreciation are valuable in monitoring the effectiveness of Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust).

Compliments can provide useful learning points and examples of good practice which can be shared throughout the organisation to promote our young people's self-esteem and encourage staff to continue to provide and improve on the excellent provision we offer.

An individual wishing to make a compliment can do so either:

- a. In person
- b. Via an advocate
- c. By telephone
- d. By letter
- e. By email to bursar@northgate.northants-ecl.gov.uk
- f. Via the school website www.northgate.northants.sch.uk
- g. By completing the form attached to this policy (Appendix A)

All compliments will be brought to the attention of the Executive Head Teacher and if applicable the staff concerned will be advised of the details of the compliment by their line manager.

Compliments and expressions of appreciation will be announced in whole school assemblies and/or celebrations held throughout the year. If applicable they will also be posted on our website and within our newsletters.

A record of all compliments will be maintained for all stakeholders to view. This will be kept in the main reception area on all sites.

Complaints

We take all complaints seriously.

We are sorry if anyone is not happy with us, and we want to put things right if we possibly can. We know that complaints give us valuable feedback and help us to improve our services – we want to listen and learn.

The underlying principle of this policy is that, if at all possible, any issues, concerns and complaints ought to be handled and resolved informally (usually by the staff directly concerned) without the need to invoke a formal referral and process. It is expected that most concerns will be resolved without the need to go any further.

Complaints can be made verbally or in writing and all complaints received will be investigated and responded to.

The procedure explains what to do if you or your child feels unhappy about something and how to arrange to talk to someone or to go on to make a formal complaint.

Schools are not responsible for complaints about the behaviour of young people outside of school hours, unless the young person is involved in extra-curricular activities provided by Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust) at that time.

Child protection, disciplinary or legal proceedings will take precedence over complaints procedures and timescales.

Complaints may be received about any of the following:

- a. Teaching and learning
- b. Provision of extra-curricular activities
- c. Bullying issues
- d. Matters relating to exclusions
- e. Policies and procedures and their application
- f. How behaviour management systems are applied
- g. The behaviour or attitude of staff at the school
- h. Community facilities or services that the school provides

The above list is not exhaustive, however there may be occasions when a complaint is received, but due to the nature of the complaint it will need to be referred to and responded to outside of the complaints process.

Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust) would not normally be expected to progress complaints which refer to the following matters:

- a. A previously withdrawn complaint
- b. A repeat complaint that can be evidenced as having already been fully investigated by Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust)
- c. Complaints relating to matters subject to legal proceedings, grievance or disciplinary proceedings or child protection matters
- d. Matters for which there is a statutory appeal process in place
- e. Complaints relating to matters over 12 months old, that cannot be fairly or reasonably investigated because of the delay
- f. A complaint which is unclear, frivolous or vexatious

Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints and Unacceptable Behaviour

Occasionally Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust) may encounter a small number of complainants whose behaviour is unacceptable, for example is abusive, offensive or threatening. In these circumstances Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust) will take action to protect staff from this behaviour.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

All information relating to a complaint will be handled in a sensitive way ensuring that confidentiality is maintained. Any personal information obtained in relation to a complaint is only used for that purpose.

Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust) will ensure that personal information is dealt with correctly and securely and in accordance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which came into force 25 May 2018, and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Advocacy and Support

Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust) will only respond to complaints and representations made by a representative or an advocate where they are eligible, or have permission to act on the pupil, parent or carer's behalf. Where an advocate is seeking to progress a complaint, Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust) will ensure appropriate written permission is obtained before progressing matters or releasing any information.

Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust) understands that for some families making a complaint can be difficult and at times stressful. If you wish to receive GDPR support in making a complaint please contact the Family Support Managers or if you or your child requires an interpreter to support you through the stages of the complaints process.

Publicising this Policy

It is a legal requirement that this policy is publicised. Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust) will ensure that this policy is included in:

- a. The information given to new parents when their children join Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust)
- b. The home/school agreement
- c. Posters displayed in areas of the school that will be used by the public, such as reception or the main entrance
- d. Document supplied to community users including course information or letting agreements
- e. Guidance notes on Compliments and Complaints
- f. As a resource on e-parent
- g. Newsletters
- h. Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust) website

How to make a complaint

We encourage any complainant to make every effort to resolve any concerns informally.

Please help us to resolve any concerns or complaints that you may have by following the stages below.

You can have a representative accompany you at any stage in the complaints process.

An individual wishing to make a complaint can do so either:

- a. In person
- b. Via an advocate
- c. By telephone
- d. By letter
- e. By email to bursar@northgate.northants-ecl.gov.uk
- f. Via the school website www.northgate.northants.sch.uk
- g. By completing the form attached to this policy (at stage 2 of this procedure – Appendix B)

The Northgate School Arts College Complaints Procedure has three stages:-

1. Initial Approach
2. Formal Complaint (to Executive Head Teacher, Head of School or Chair of Governors)
3. Appeal (to Governor Committee)

Stage 1 – Initial Approach

Guidelines

- The vast majority of concerns and complaints can be resolved informally, often straight away by the Class Teacher, Head of School or Executive Head Teacher.
- The school aims to ensure that parents feel able to raise concerns with staff without undue formality, either in person, by telephone or in writing. There may be occasions when it is appropriate or helpful for someone to accompany or act on behalf of a parent.

- Parents may not be clear at first that they are making a complaint. They may wish to ask a question or express an opinion. A preliminary discussion with school staff will usually clarify the issue and help parents to decide whether they wish to take the matter further.

Procedure

1. Parents will have an opportunity for informal discussion of their concerns with an appropriate member of staff. This discussion will aim to clarify the nature of the parent's concern and assure them that the school wishes to hear about it. The discussion will also aim to clarify what kind of outcome the parent is seeking.
2. If the member of staff first contacted cannot deal with the matter immediately he/she should make a firm arrangement to deal with it at a future date or refer the matter to the Headteacher or another appropriate member of staff. In either case a note of the name, date and contact details of the complainant should be taken. The first contact should check to make sure the referral has been successful.
3. The Executive Head Teacher will ensure that staff have guidelines about when to refer a matter and to whom.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint to Headteacher or Chair of Governors

Guidelines

- The Executive Head Teacher will determine who has responsibility for responding to a formal complaint, including the decision about his/her own involvement at various stages.
- If the complainant is dissatisfied with the action of the Executive Head Teacher, or the Executive Head Teacher has been very closely involved informally, the Chair of Governors should carry out all the Stage Two procedures, with support if necessary from another governor, and with advice from the academy legal team and/or H R provider if required.
- Individuals on the governing body should not become involved at this stage to avoid prejudicing their possible future involvement.

Procedure

1. Parents who wish to pursue a formal complaint at Stage Two will be asked to put the complaint and their desired outcome in writing to the Chair of Governors or Headteacher. The Chair of Governors/Executive Head Teacher (or designated member of staff), will acknowledge the complaint orally or in writing within three days of receipt giving a brief explanation of the complaints procedures and a target date for providing a response. Ideally, this will be within ten days. If it is not possible to deal with the matter in this time, the complainant should be informed of when it is likely to be concluded.
2. The Chair of Governors/Executive Head Teacher (or a designated member of staff) may offer an opportunity for the complainant to meet him/her. The complainant will, if she/he wishes, be allowed to be accompanied by a friend or relative who can speak on his/her behalf. Interpreting facilities should be made available if required.
3. If necessary the Chair of Governors/Executive Head Teacher (or a designated member of staff) will interview any witnesses or take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, the pupil may also be interviewed, normally with a parent/guardian present. In some circumstances this may not be possible or appropriate and a senior member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable will attend with him/her. If a member of staff is complained against, the needs of that person should be borne in mind. Advice may need to be sought from the School's Human Resources provider.

Stage 3 – Appeal to Panel of Governors

Guidelines

- Complaints rarely reach the appeal stage, but it is important that governing bodies are prepared to deal with them. At this stage, the Chair of Governors may wish to seek advice from the legal team/H R provider.
- The aim of the appeal to a panel of governors is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it may only be possible to establish the facts of a situation and make recommendations about future action, and to satisfy the complainant that their complaints have been taken seriously.
- It is important should a complaint reach the appeal stage that the governing body is impartial and independent and is seen to be so. Individual complaints should not be considered by the full governing body. The governing body should therefore establish a panel to deal with complaints, by nominating a pool of five governors from which three, non-staff, can be drawn for any hearing.
- Panel members should have had no prior involvement with the complaint. Generally, the Chair of Governors is not on the panel as she/he may be involved at the earlier stage. The Governing body should have regard to the advantages of having a mix of types of governor on the panel and be sensitive to issues of equal opportunity in the composition of the panel.
- Individual governors should not get involved in looking into complaints before this stage to avoid prejudicing their potential involvement. If individual governors are approached by parents or others with complaints, they should refer the complainant to the schools complaints procedure, making the necessary introduction to a member of staff or headteacher if appropriate.
- Complaints that reach the appeal stage will do so because the complainant is not satisfied with the response so far. In this situation it is perhaps helpful for the governing body to view any complaint as being against the school rather than an individual staff member whose actions may have lead to the original complaint.
- All except for the governor's panel and any advisers should then withdraw and the panel should consider the evidence. This should include a judgement about the validity of the complaint; appropriate action to be taken by the school and/or the parent; and where appropriate, recommendations on changes to the schools' systems or procedures to ensure similar problems do not arise in the future.
- The school should ensure that a copy of all correspondence and notes is kept confidentially on file in the school. This should be separate from pupils' personal records.
- The broad outcomes recommended by the panel can be reported to the next full governing body or appropriate committee with the identity of all those taking part kept confidential. The governing body should monitor implementation of the recommendations.

Stage 4 – Complaining to the EFSA and Ofsted

If you feel that the Governing Body or Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust) have acted unreasonably about your concerns, you can write to the Education Funding Agency. Where possible you will need to put your complaint in writing and list the steps you have already taken and the responses you have received.

Complaints about Northgate School Arts College (Academy Trust) should be sent to:

- Via the Department for Education's school complaint form (using the link below)
<https://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/schoolperformance/school-complaints-form>

or

- By post to:
Department for Education, Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 2GJ

Alternatively, you may wish to complain to OFSTED. You should contact the helpdesk on 0300 1234 234 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Staff on the help desk will discuss your concerns with you, advise you about whether to put your complaint in writing or suggest other ways to deal with your concerns.

To make a formal complaint to OFSTED you will need to write to:

Enquiries, National Business Unit, OFSTED, 5th, 6th and 7th Floors, Piccadilly Gates, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD. Further information can be found on the OFSTED website:

www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/complaints-ofsted-about-schools-guidance-for-parents

General Principles

- The resolution of a complaint provides the potential opportunity for the school to improve its practice and develop a strong partnership with parents.
- The complaints procedure should be easily accessible and well publicised so that parents know how to raise concerns.
- It is desirable for any concern/complaint to be addressed by a member of staff/governors at a level closest to the cause for the concern.
- Procedures should be as speedy as possible, consistent with fairness to all. (suggested timescales are provided in the model for schools to adopt or adapt to suit their circumstances).
- A complaint is distinct from any formal disciplinary procedure. Staff who may be questioned as part of a complaints procedure must be treated fairly and have an opportunity to put their case. They should be offered support in responding to any investigation into a complaint.
- If it becomes apparent to the Executive Head Teacher, Head of School or Chair of Governors that the parent's concern/complaint has the potential to be a disciplinary issue, advice should immediately be sought from the School's H R provider.
- Confidentiality is important in securing the confidence of all concerned. Conversations and correspondence must be treated with discretion. Parents need to feel confident that a complaint will not disadvantage their child. However, the parties should realise that some information may have to be shared to carry out a thorough investigation.
- If the investigation of a complaint shows that it is justified, then the school should consider how to make amends in an appropriate way.
- Staff and Governors in schools should have the opportunity to take part in training or briefing to raise their awareness of the procedures and develop their skills in dealing with people who wish to complain.
- All complaints should be recorded and monitored to identify issues and allow any lessons to be learned by the school.
- Every complaint should be acknowledged as 'genuinely felt' by the complainant.

APPENDIX I – Model procedure for the Conduct of a Stage 3 Governors Panel Hearing

1. The Chair of the committee should invite all parties (except any witnesses) into the room, introduce them and explain the role of each person.
2. The Chair should explain to all present that the purpose of the hearing is to review the complaint and try to resolve it and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it may only be possible to establish the facts of a situation and make recommendations about future action.
3. The Chair should then ascertain whether the proposed procedure is acceptable. If so, the meeting will proceed along the following lines.
 - The complainant describes his/her complaint and may call witnesses
 - The headteacher may seek clarification from the complainant and any witnesses.
 - The Governors' Committee or its advisers may seek clarification from the complainant and any witnesses.
 - The Headteacher will respond to the complaint and may call witnesses.
 - The complainant may seek clarification from the Headteacher and any witnesses.
 - The Governors Committee (including any Advisers) may seek clarification from the Headteacher and any witnesses.
 - The Headteacher will be given the opportunity to sum up.
 - The complainant will be given the opportunity to sum up.
 - Both parties will leave the room to allow the Committee to deliberate but any advisers may remain to offer technical and procedural advice.
4. The Committee should make a decision or judgement on:-
 - the validity of the complaint
 - appropriate action to be taken by the school and or/parent
 - and, where appropriate, recommendations on changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure similar problems do not arise in the future.
5. The decision or judgement will be confirmed in writing within five days.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

STAGE 1

If you have any concern or complain about the matters within the school, please let the Executive Head Teacher know immediately. It will be investigated fully, with the help of appropriate members of the school staff. Every effort will be made in an informal way, to settle the matter quickly and you will then be asked to say whether you are satisfied with the result. If the complaint involves the Executive Head Teacher you should initially write to the chair of Governors and then to a Governor Committee if this is not resolved.

STAGE 2

Should you, for any reason, not be satisfied, an opportunity will be provided for you to take your complaint to the School's Governing Body. You may also express your views in person at a meeting with governors. You may bring a friend with you, if you choose to attend the meeting, and you will be sent written details explaining how the Governors will hear your complaint.

Your complaints will be fully investigated and the decision which the governors reach will be sent to you in writing.

STAGE 3

If you are still dissatisfied, you may complain to Department of Education or OFSTED
NSAC/SW/Dec18/V3

STAGE 4

We expected that very few complaints would reach Stage 3. If they do and you are still not satisfied parents/carers may take the matter up with the Secretary of State for Education.

If a complaint is made about Religious Education or Collective Worship, Sex Education or Drug Education Stages 1 and 2 are also followed.

The most important part of this procedure is Stage 1, which asks parents and Northgate School to do everything possible to settle complaints in an informal way, and thus avoid the need for more formal steps.