Compliments, Complaints and Representations Procedure

This Compliments, Complaints and Representations Procedure meet regulatory requirements but is also integral to the work of our schools, which will ensure that complaints are dealt with in a manner that can be demonstrated to be open and fair.

This procedure outlines the process to be followed in the event of a compliment, complaint or representation. The Polaris community maintains that children, young people and families have a right to have their views listened to and taken into account.

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Associated documents:	All Child Protection and Safeguarding policies and procedures
	Whistle Blowing Procedure

This procedure forms part of the Polaris Community Quality Management System in line with ISO- 9001:2015 standards and applies to all companies within the Community unless stated otherwise. All group companies are detailed in the current legal structure.

Contents

Purpose 2
Compliments 3
Representations 4
Definition of a Complaint 4
Flowchart Process for Complaints 5
Stage 1 5
Stage 2 6
Stage 3 Complaints Panel Hearing 7
Procedure Details 8
Interaction of this procedure with other procedures 8
Eligibility and Timescales 8
Complaints by Children 9
Complaints Regarding the Head Teacher 10
Representations & Pre-Complaints Process (Informal stage) 10
Stages of complaints 10
Withdrawal of Complaint 15
Monitoring and Quality Assurance 15
Protected Disclosure (Whistleblowing) 15
Guidance on Abusive, Unreasonable, Persistent or Vexatious Complainants 15
Reflect on practice 16
Contact Details 16
Review Dates 16
Appendix 1 - School Complaint Form - Confidential 17

Purpose

The Polaris community regards compliments, complaints and representations as an important tool to help monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of the service we give to children, their families and local authorities.

The Compliments, Complaints and Representations Procedure has been designed to:

- Be clear and easy to use.
- Ensure that the people who use services are treated with dignity and respect, are not afraid to make a complaint, and have their concerns taken seriously.
- Ensure complaints are dealt with in a fair and impartial manner.
- Ensure that any concerns about the protection of children are referred immediately to the relevant Children's Social Care team or to the Police.
- Ensure that as many complaints as possible are resolved swiftly and satisfactorily at a local level.
- Ensure a fair process and adequate support for everyone involved in the complaint.
- Ensure that the child or adult making the complaint receives a full response without delay.

- Provide information about the child or adult's rights of access to other means of redress, such as Registering Bodies, Local Authorities, or the relevant Ombudsman.
- Ensure that the organisation monitors performance in handling complaints, delivers what they have promised, learns from complaints and uses this learning to improve services for everyone who uses them.

Complaints may be made in connection with a failure to provide services that can be reasonably expected.

This Procedure is open to anyone for whom the service has agreed to provide a service or an appropriate representative on their behalf. The procedure also applies to complaints from parents/carers of children, i.e. persons for whom education is being provided at the school. A copy of this procedure is available to parents/carers of children who attend our school.

This complaints procedure does not apply to prospective pupils and therefore does not cover complaints about failure to admit a pupil. However, we recognise that such concerns may still be raised in practice.

To ensure transparency and consistency, members of the public who wish to raise concerns about admissions decisions (including failure to admit a pupil) should do so by contacting the Headteacher. These concerns will be acknowledged and considered in line with our commitment to fairness and openness, although they fall outside the scope of this formal complaint's procedure.

Parents can still make a complaint even if their child has left the school, whether they left by choice or were excluded. Complaints should normally be made within three months of the incident or the child leaving. Complaints submitted after this timeframe may be considered out of scope' unless there are valid reasons, such as new evidence or safeguarding concerns.

Compliments

The Polaris community values feedback of any positive experiences. It is important for us to know how well each service is performing on a local and strategic level. We take into consideration feedback obtained in planning and reviewing service delivery. If you would like to pay us a compliment, this can be done in several ways, including but not limited to; phone call or via letter or e-mail to the person who you wish to compliment and copy this to the Headteacher.

The Headteacher will gather these compliments from a range of sources, and it is ultimately their responsibility to collate all compliments and report on it in monthly reporting and in some services, compliments may be used to inform a periodic review of the quality of education.

Representations

Representations are matters other than complaints, which give rise to some level of concern, which requires consideration. This process can be followed prior to the formal complaint process and is the informal stage of this process.

The Polaris community hopes that many of the issues that someone may be concerned about can be settled and resolved at the earliest opportunity and responded to by the Headteacher prior to embarking into the Complaints process.

It is strongly recommended that the Headteacher endeavours to resolve any concerns or issues raised at the earliest opportunity preventing the need for it to be considered as a complaint and investigated via thecomplaints process.

Any issues dealt with without the need to escalate to a complaints process must still be recorded along with any actions and outcomes using the agreed local procedure.

Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is defined as 'the expression of dissatisfaction concerning the service provided by the service, or of the actions of an individual providing that service'.

We recognise that sometimes raising a concern may not be enough and that you may wish to take the matter through our complaint's procedure.

If feedback or comments indicate that, the school may not have followed correct procedure or regulation this will be considered as a complaint.

If the complaint is against a member of staff within theschool, including concerns about volunteers or supply staff, the Headteacher will consult with HR. Where a complaint concerns the Head Teacher, it should be referred directly to the Managing Director of Education or submitted to the designated email address provided at the end of this procedure.

The schools will follow a **3-stage** complaints process.

Flowchart Process for Complaints

Representations & Pre-Complaints Process (Informal stage)

The Headteacher will make every effort to resolve any concerns or issues raised at the earliest opportunity and will only initiate the complaints process where appropriate.

It is normally appropriate to communicate directly with the member of staff concerned. This may be by letter, by telephone or in person by appointment.

Complainant satisfied with outcome.

YES → Resolved NO → Complainant advised of option for next stage.

Stage One

Formal Problem Solving – completed locally

The Headteacher will attempt to resolve locally – clarification, explanation, negotiation, mediation, practical action by allocated person in consultation with complainant. Senior Managers will be kept informed. Response – determined within 10 working days of complaint being made, (or maximum of 20 working days by agreement with the complainant) and outcome letter sent to complainant Record of complaint should be kept on local system used by the school in a confidential secure database.

Complainant satisfied with outcome?

YES → Resolved NO → Complainant advised and consulted regarding option for next stage

(Complainant to request to progress stage 2 within 20 working days Giving reasons why they are not happy with the stage 1 outcome and wish to progress to stage 2).

Stage Two

Independent investigation

(by a person who has been identified by the Headteacher / or another senior manager and who had no prior involvement with the complaint nor management responsibility for the school in question).

The chosen Investigating Officer once appointed will contact the complainant within 5 working days to arrange a time to discuss the complaint and formulate a clear 'statement of complaint' that can be investigated.

The statement of complaint should usually be completed within 10 working days of the complainant's first discussion with the investigating officer. The reasons for any delay in completing the statement of complaint must be noted in the investigation report.

Investigation undertaken and report completed (within 20 working days from the date the statement of complaint is agreed with the complainant; complainant kept informed, and their agreement sought if more time required).

The Headteacher reviews the final report, providing the outcome to the complainant within 7 working days of receiving the final report. The final report will be included as part of the outcome letter. In most circumstances, the full report will be shared with the complainant, but the Headteacher will make a final decision on what is shared. NB The report may be redacted to comply with GDPR requirements.

Record all documents and actions on the local system used by the service. Complainant satisfied with outcome?

YES → Resolved. NO

Complainant has 20 working days from receipt of the outcome of stage 2 to explain why they are not satisfied with the outcome and to request progression to Stage 3

Stage 3: Complaints Panel Hearing

The complainant should inform the Head Teacher preferably in writing that they wish to progress their complaint to Stage 3, within 20 working days of receipt of written confirmation of the outcome of Stage 2, providing reasons why they are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 of the procedure.

The Headteacher willacknowledge this request within 10 working days, with an explanation of the Stage 3 process. The Headteacher will notify Senior Managers in writing.

The complainant, and the school representative[s], will be informed in writing of the outcome, usually within 5 school days of the panel meeting.

Procedure Details

It should be noted that this complaints procedure does not replace child protection/allegations, grievance or disciplinary procedures. **Any complaint, which indicates that a child may have been harmed, or placed at risk of harm, must be dealt with under Child Protection/Allegations procedures**.

NB Any correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 109 of 2008 Education and Skills Act.

Interaction of this procedure with other procedures

If the complaint concerns any matter about which is currently being dealt with under child protection/allegations, grievance or disciplinary procedures, or through any court or tribunal the service may decide it is not appropriate for complaint to be progressed further. A record of any decisions made should be kept for reference.

The child or adult making the complaint will be informed of this decision in writing, with an explanation of the reasons, and may resubmit the matter for consideration within one year of the conclusion of the other proceedings. The complaints procedure cannot be used to consider or investigate matters that have been dealt with by the Courts or via other procedures.

Eligibility and Timescales

Who can make a complaint or representation?

- Children, young people and parents / carers of the children who are in receipt of services from any of our schools within the Polaris community.
  In addition to the above, their advocates, anyone with parental responsibility or their representatives, including local authorities.
- To allow for a proper investigation, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the school as soon as possible. In general, any matter raised more than 3 months after the event, being complained about, will not be considered, except at the discretion of the Head Teacher/Senior Leader.
- Factors which will be considered in this decision include:
    - Whether or not it was reasonable to expect the complainant to have made their representations within this timescale, and
    - Whether or not it is still possible to consider the complaint effectively and fairly, despite the passage of time.

- This decision and the reasons for such a decision will be provided in writing to the person making the complaint.
- Where the complainant is a child or was a child at the time of the matters cited, the discretion to refuse to consider the complaint is unlikely to be applied.

If the complainant wishes to remain anonymous, then the school may be unable to fully investigate the situation and will not be able to provide an outcome. If there is any indication of a child being at risk, the information will be passed on to the relevant Local Authority.

Complaints by Children

It is important that children are satisfied with the service they receive.
The complaint must be about services provided by the school. The complaint can be made by the child themselves or on behalf of a child by:

- A parent/carer.
- Any person who is not a parent of him/her but who has parental responsibility.
- Any other person within the Local Authority who has responsibility for the child and is considered to have sufficient interest in the child's welfare—such as a social worker.

Where a child may not be able to easily access written information, it is the responsibility of the school to ensure that alternative methods of communication are used to make this information accessible. This enables all children to raise a complaint or make a representation if they wish to do so. Some children may be unsure whether they want to make a complaint. We encourage all children to speak to key staff members. For pupils who are non-verbal or have communication difficulties, we support them in expressing concerns in any way they can.

Where a child uses this procedure, the Polaris Community shall ensure that they are aware that they can call upon independent support. For our children in care, they can request an advocate to accompany them to any meetings in relation to their complaint or representation.

It is clearly understood and accepted that a child may need and wish for some assistance and support in making his/her complaint and, where appropriate, the service will seek to arrange this, through advocacy or other appropriate services. It will be clearly and carefully explained to a child that the service's attitude toward him/her will not be negatively influenced by virtue of a representation or complaint having been made and that standards of service provision will be unaffected.

Where a complaint involves both the school's responsibilities and those of the local authority, the school will coordinate with the local authority to ensure each part of the complaint is investigated by the appropriate body. The complainant will be kept informed of who is responsible for each aspect, and investigations will be conducted in line with statutory guidance and the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Children will always be assured that their complaint or representation is being taken seriously, and their views are being listened to. The same applies to anyone making a complaint. No one who lodges a complaint shall be subject to any reprisal for making a complaint or representation.

Every opportunity shall be made for any complaint or representation to be resolved at an early stage. At the outset, the complainant should be asked for their desired outcome. If the representations/pre complaints process has not resolved the issue and the complaint has been accepted as grounds for investigation the following formal process will then begin.

Complaints Regarding the Head Teacher

Any complaints concerning the Head Teacher must be submitted directly by the complainant to the Chair of Governors via the designated complaints email address.

Upon receipt, the Chair of Governors will determine the appropriate course of action.
The nature and context of each complaint may vary, and some concerns may be resolved informally or through initial clarification before formal escalation is necessary. The Chair of Governors will assess each complaint on a case-by-case basis and determine the most appropriate route for handling, ensuring fairness, impartiality, and adherence to the school's complaints policy and the Independent School Standards.

Representations & Pre-Complaints Process (Informal stage)

It is normally appropriate to communicate directly with the member of staff concerned. This may be by letter, by telephone or in person by appointment. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information, and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved by this informal stage.

In the case of serious concerns, it may be appropriate to address them directly to the Head Teacher (or to the Governors if the complaint is about the Head Teacher). If the complainant is uncertain about who to contact, advice can be sought from the school office.

Information which might assist the process, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events, and copies of relevant documents should be provided to the person dealing with the concern.

Stages of complaints

Stage 1: Formal Problem Solving

The Headteacher/senior leader will identify the most appropriate person to respond to the Complainant (if not themselves) and that person will then lead on the complaint at this stage and will keep the Senior Managers updated.

The Head Teacher or other appropriate manager should conclude complaints being dealt with at Stage 1 within 10 working days of being notified of the complaint. This timescale may however be extended by mutual agreement by a further 10 working days if it is felt the Complaint can be satisfactorily dealt with, but more time is needed.

If the matter is resolved, the Head Teacher or other appropriate manager will provide a clear written response to the complainant this should, as far as possible, answer all issues raised by the complainant, be as helpful as possible and apologise for any shortcomings in the service found and what action the service intends to take as a result of the investigation into the complaint, the clear content of this letter will be instrumental in minimising complaints progressing to Stage 2.

If the complaint cannot be resolved at Stage 1 the complainant will be informed of his/her right to pursue the matter further through the Head Teacher and asked to do so within 20 working days.

If the Complaint is considered sufficiently serious to warrant a more formal investigation, if there are several complaints, or if it is particularly complex and/or indications suggest that an Independent Person should be appointed due to potential or actual conflict of interest Stage 2 of the Complaints process should be implemented.

All documentation associated with the complaint must be uploaded to the relevant database system used by the service by the person that dealt with the complaint.

Stage 2: Independent Investigation

The complainant should contact the Head Teacher in writing or verbally, providing reasons why they are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 1 of the Complaints procedure and that they wish to proceed to Stage 2 (this must be requested by complainant within 20 working days).

The Head Teacher would then contact the complainant to explain their role, advise on the process and agree to the next steps within 5 working days of receiving the request. They will also identify the appropriate person to act as the 'investigating officer'.

This will be somebody who has had no previous involvement with the matter concerned. This may be an appropriate manager from within the service or an external contracted individual with relevant qualifications and experience. The Head Teacher/senior leader will determine who should be assigned to investigate. Any such appointment will be made known to and discussed with all parties prior to the commencement of the investigation. In appropriate circumstances, local authority/trust social workers will be informed of the complaint and of the progress of the investigation and outcome.

No one who is the subject of, or who has been involved in seeking to resolve, the complaint at Stage 1 will be responsible for any investigation conducted under Stage 2.

The chosen Investigating Officer once appointed will contact the complainant within 5 working days to arrange a time to discuss the complaint and formulate a clear 'statement of complaint' that can be investigated. The statement of complaint should usually be completed within 10 working days of the complainant's first discussion with the investigating officer. The reasons for any delay in completing the statement of complaint must be noted in the investigation report.

The beginning of the 'Stage 2' timescales begins when the 'statement of complaint' is agreed by the complainant. If a complainant raises new aspects to be considered these can be considered at stage 2 if appropriate without the need to return to Stage 1.

In some circumstances the task of an independent investigator may be one of ensuring that the complainant is aware of his/her right to complain. Where appropriate this could include making the complainant aware of their right to seek advice from a solicitor, member of parliament, local Councillor, local government ombudsman and various voluntary organisations which seek to represent the interests of children in public care and their parents.

The independent investigator will have access to:

- Content and context of the complaint made;
- The policies and procedures within that particular school;
- Relevant file records (written consent to be provided by the complainant where the investigating officer is external to the Polaris community and the complaint is from a parent).

The complainant may bring a support person to any meeting convened and they should confirm in advance that they will be doing so providing details of who they will be bringing. The role of the support person is to listen and provide support to the complainant and not to ask questions. In the case of a child, they may attend with an advocate. The Headteacher shouldensure that the person leading the investigation is briefed to ensure that the complainant is adequately supported in the meeting and that notes are taken and kept.

All persons relevant to the complaint should be informed of the complaint and interviewed by the investigating officer to provide explanation of their account of the matters complained against.

A meeting may be proposed involving both those complaining and those complained against, should this be deemed helpful in resolution of the complaint received. However, this is not recommended where any persons involved are likely to feel intimidated.

On conclusion of the investigation a written report will then be prepared by the person undertaking the investigation (the investigation & report completed within 20 working days where possible from the agreement of the statement of complaint), and sent to the Head Teacher will incorporate the process of the investigation, findings of each point of the complaint (i.e. whether upheld or not upheld) recommendations of any actions required and learning outcomes.

The Head Teacher will review the draft report for quality purposes and provide feedback to the investigating officer as appropriate and seek to understand any areas that require further clarification.

The Head Teacher will then provide a written response to the complainant outlining the findings and summarising outcomes and recommendations within including a copy of the investigation report (this should be completed within 7 working days from report being received from the investigating officer). In most circumstances, the full report will be shared with the complainant, but the Head Teacher will make the final decision on what is shared.

This should, as far as possible, answer all issues raised by the complainant, be as helpful as possible and apologise for any shortcomings in the service found and what action the service intends to take as a result of the investigation into the Complaint.

The response to the complainant will state whether each aspect of the complaint has been **upheld, partially upheld** or **not upheld**.

Fully Upheld

The investigation of the complaint has found that:
All elements of the complaint are found to be accurate and there is sufficient and/or consistent evidence to support this.
The standard of service provided to the complainant fell below service and/or regulatory requirements and/or has had a negative impact upon the complainant.
Recommendations are made to lead to service improvement and to capture learning.

Partially upheld

The investigation of the complaint has found that:
On the balance of information, a proportion/number of elements of the complaint are found to be accurate and there is sufficient and/or consistent evidence to support this.
On the balance of information, a proportion/number of elements of the complaint are not upheld and this is due to absence of evidence or because information has been found to be factually inaccurate.

In relation to some aspects of the complaint, the standard of service provided to the complainant fell below service and/or regulatory requirements and/or has had a negative impact upon the complainant.

Where complaints are partially upheld consideration is given to the relative weight of the elements of the complaint that are upheld.
Recommendations are made to lead to service improvement and to capture learning.

Not upheld

The investigation of the complaint has found that:
On the balance of information, there is insufficient evidence to support the complaint and/or

the complaint has been found to be factually inaccurate.

On the balance of information, there is insufficient evidence that the standard of service provided to the complainant fell below service or regulatory requirements.

Consideration is given to recommendations for service improvement and learning is captured. Where the Complaint is in regard to the conduct of an employee of service, the HR Business Partner should be consulted during the investigation.

Those who are subject of the Complaint should be informed in writing of the outcome of the Complaint together with any actions arising and a copy of the investigation report. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint, Stage 3 can be initiated.

Stage 3: Complaints Panel Hearing

If the complainant continues to feel that their complaint has not been dealt with to their satisfaction, Stage 3 may be implemented. The Headteacher should explain the option of progression to Stage 3 to the complainant. The complainant should inform the Head Teacher preferably in writing that they wish to progress their complaint to Stage 3, within 20 working days of receipt of written confirmation of the outcome of Stage 2, providing reasons why they are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 of the procedure.

The complaints panel will comprise at least three persons who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. One member of the panel shall be independent of the management and proprietary board and running of the school.

The Headteacher will acknowledge this request within 10 working days, with an explanation of the Stage 3 process. The Headteacher will notify Senior Managers in writing.

The panel arrangements allow a parent to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish. The panel will first receive written evidence from the complainant. The panel will then invite representatives of the school [usually the Head Teacher or Deputy Head], as appropriate, to make a response to the complaint. Where there is a panel hearing of a complaint.

It will be chaired by an independent member (Senior Polaris Education staff/ another Head Teacher). The other two members should be independent of the school and not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.

The panel may also have access to the records kept of the process followed. The complainant, and the school representative[s], will be informed in writing of the outcome, usually within 5 school days of the panel meeting. The matter will then be closed as far as the school is concerned. If the complainant believes that the Proprietary Body has acted illegally or arbitrarily in handling the complaint, then you may make representations to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

The complaint may be withdrawn either verbally or in writing by the complainant. The service must write to the complainant to confirm the withdrawal of the complaint. In such circumstances, it is good practice for the school to give consideration as to whether it wishes to continue to consider the issues that gave rise to the complaint and any consequent learning outcomes.

Monitoring and Quality Assurance

The Headteacher should keep a record on their database of **all** complaints, details of who made the complaint, timescales (start/end dates), what was the outcome, whether the complaint was upheld, not upheld, has the outcome been shared with the relevant people and is this evidenced? A record of any learning outcomes from complaints should be maintained to support continuous improvement and will be reviewed within Governance meetings. In accordance with the Independent School Standards Regulations (ISSR), the school is required to publish the number of formal complaints received in the preceding academic year.

Protected Disclosure (Whistleblowing)

The Polaris Community aims to nurture an environment for children, parents and staff and all others who want to raise issues and draw attention to gaps in service provision without fear of reprisal. There is a Whistleblowing Policy for reporting circumstances that may arise where employees feel unable to raise concerns directly with the service.

Guidance on Abusive, Unreasonable, Persistent or Vexatious Complainants

Polaris Community is committed to working with all complainants equitably, fairly and objectively. We do not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour by complainants. Unacceptable behaviour is behaviour, which is abusive, offensive or threatening, which may include:

Using abusive or foul language on the telephone or face to face;
Sending multiple e-mails*
Leaving multiple voicemails*
*the term 'multiple' here denotes receiving either form of contact consistently and over a period of time.

In the event that the relevant stages of complaint have been adhered to and fully completed and this has been relayed to the complainant, the Headteacher /Managing Director should consider whether the complainant is now 'inappropriately persistent or vexatious'.

Features of a persistent or vexatious complainant may include:

- A person who makes the same complaint repeatedly (with minor differences) but never accepts the outcomes;
- A person who seeks an unrealistic outcome and persists until it is reached;
- A person with a history of making other unreasonably persistent complaints.

The same standard of response must always be provided to the complainant, and the service will always be committed to anti-discriminatory practice.

Where a situation becomes unworkable, or the procedure has been fully implemented, the Head Teacher /Managing Director will advise the complainant of the reason that they may be considered as unreasonably persistent complainants and why the behaviour falls into this category and any other recourse to action that may be available to the complainant.

Where the complainant's complaint is closed, and the complainant persists in communicating about it, the Headteacher /Managing Director may decide to terminate contact with the complainant.

Reflect on practice

The Polaris community welcomes the opportunity to reflect on practice and service provision and share learning across the Polaris community to provide a safe and positive experience for children. The complaints procedure should offer a useful tool for indicating where our services may need improving; conversely, compliments can indicate to us what we are doing well.

Contact Details:

If you are unable to go to the school directly to raise a complaint, you can email us at schoolcomplaints@polariscommunity.co.uk This email is monitored by designated staff.
We aim to acknowledge all complaints promptly and handle them in line with our Complaints Procedure.

Review Dates

N/A

Appendix 1 - School Complaint Form - Confidential

The school can provide either a paper or electronic copy of this form upon request.
Please complete this form and return it to Headteacher who will acknowledge its receipt and inform you of the next stage in the procedure.

Your name: ……
Relationship with school [e.g. parent of a pupil on the school's roll]:……..
Pupil's name if relevant to your complaint]:……..

Your Address:

Daytime telephone number: ……
Evening telephone number: ……

Please give concise details of your complaint, [including dates, names of witnesses etc…], to allow the matter to be fully investigated:

You may continue on separate paper, or attach additional documents, if you wish.
Number of Additional pages attached =

What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? [i.e. who have you spoken with or written to and what was the outcome?]

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Signature:
Date:

School use:
Date Form received:
Received by: Date acknowledgement sent:
Acknowledgement sent by:
Complaint referred/sent to: Date: