



Alder Bridge School

Concerns and Complaints Procedure - 2016/7

November 2016

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1. Purpose:

Alder Bridge School aims to provide a safe, secure and happy environment. The children, parents, residents, friends and staff make up the school community. Good relations and communication between the school and parents is encouraged at all times. In the event of a concern or a complaint by a parent we will endeavour to resolve this quickly and efficiently under the following procedure.

The school's values are concerned with meeting the needs of pupils, parents and other stakeholders. The Board of Trustees believes that feedback is an important ingredient in self-evaluation and raising standards; with our core purpose to offer high quality Steiner Waldorf education for all our children.

2. Principles in Practice.

The underlying principle is that concerns will be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures.:

- 2.1 We believe that the education of our children can be most effective when there is close co-operation, mutual trust and respect between all those involved in their upbringing and education.
- 2.2 We offer the following opportunities for communication: Newsletter, class evenings, individual parents evening, surveys and there is always the opportunity to contact Teachers at almost anytime outside School. We encourage all members of the community to contribute to the life of the school through these channels. We also welcome practical suggestions that can help us improve our communication and the way we work.
- 2.3 Our Concerns and Complaints Procedure aims to deal with issues in a fair and open manner. We intend to respond to questions and criticism promptly and to do all we can reasonably do to resolve any problems amicably.
- 2.4 This procedure may be supplemented where the issues involves allegations of professional misconduct, criminal offences, including matters covered by our safeguarding/child protection procedure or others that might result in a member of staff facing disciplinary action. In such cases, an urgent investigation will take place and evidence gathered from appropriate parties. We are obliged in such matters to maintain confidentiality. without due process, legal procedure and/or natural justice would be compromised.
- 2.5 We endeavour to take all reasonable steps to resolve complaints via the procedure set out in this document. There may be circumstances where resolution proves to be impossible. On those rare occasions, once all stages of our procedure have been exhausted, the Business / Education Manager and Trustees reserve the right to treat the matter as closed subject only to further steps that may be open to the complainants

Independent Schools in England are required by regulation to offer a procedure for complaints as set at the end of this document¹. In addition, this procedure is intended to help sustain a positive ethos within our school so that problems can be listened to appropriately and resolved wherever possible. The requirement to have a concerns and complaints procedure will not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern informally. All stakeholders should feel that their concerns or complaints can be voiced and will be considered seriously. The school takes informal concerns seriously and aims to resolve them at the earliest stage, which should minimise the numbers that develop into formal complaints. Staff will endeavour to resolve issues on the spot although discussion and consideration over time may be helpful and desirable in many instances.

Formal procedures will be put into place when initial attempts to resolve the issue through are concerns procedure are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

¹ Please refer to Form A7 - DfE INFORMATION

N.B. In rare circumstances where the behaviour of the complainant gives reason for it, the Trustees reserve the right to handle a complaint according to the school's **Vexatious or Habitual Complaints Procedure**²

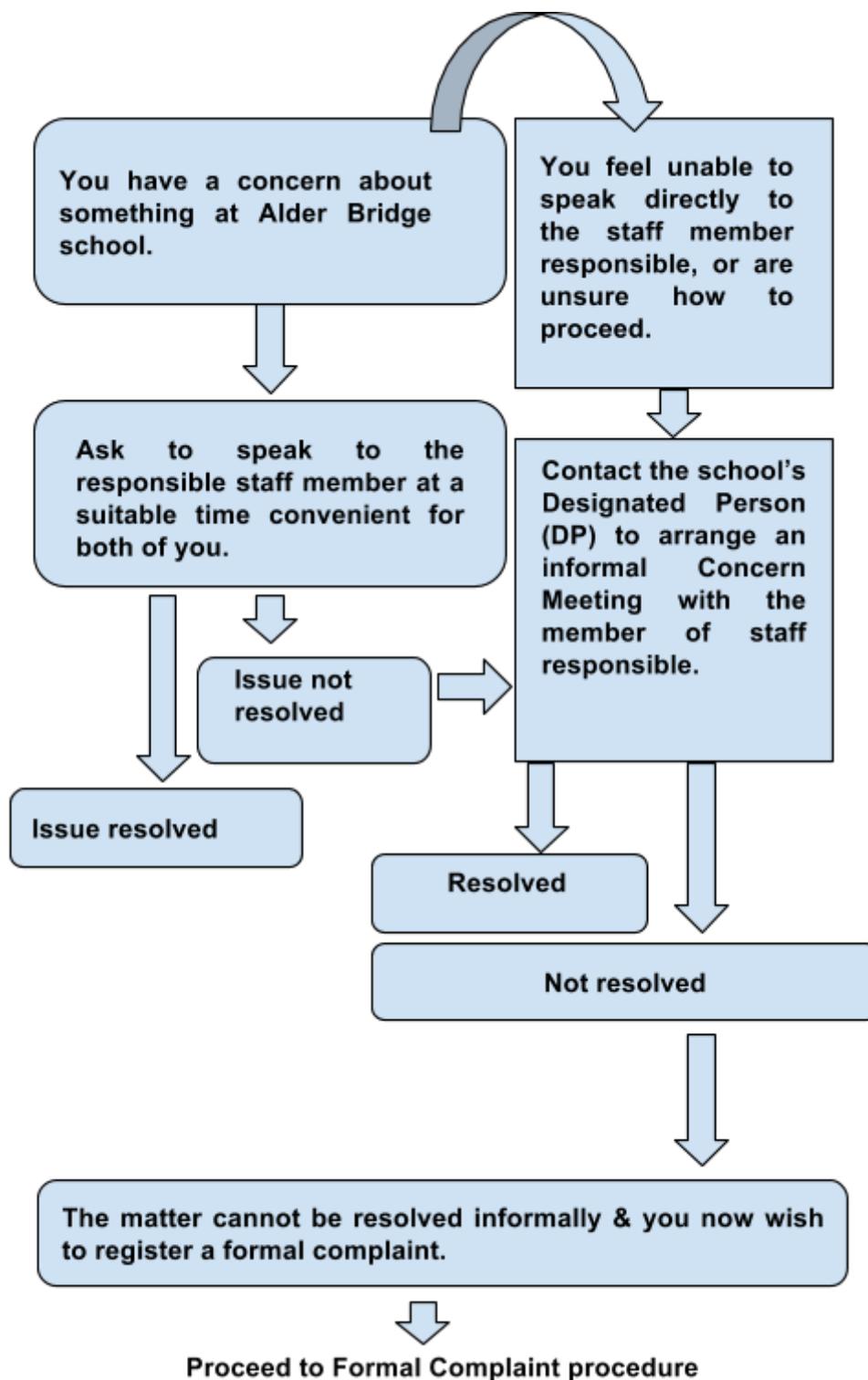
Moreover, should the complaint relate to the following, please communicate via the following channels rather than via the Concerns and Complaints procedure:

- Complaints by staff relating to grievances about their employment should refer to the School's **Grievance Procedure**.
- Complaints about the actions of a trustee should be reported to the **Chair of Trustees** in the first instance (should the Chair be involved in the complaint or witness to an incident, please report to the Board of Trustees).
- Complaints about the actions of another parent - This should be reported to the **Chair of Trustees** who will investigate whether action can be taken by the school (should the Chair be involved in the complaint or witness to an incident, please report to the Board of Trustees).
- Allegations of abuse should be discussed with the **Designated Person for Safeguarding** or the trustee responsible for Safeguarding in the first instance. For a definition of abuse, refer to the school's **Child Protection/ Safeguarding policy(ies)**;
- Any Issues between the school and community groups/PTFA should be resolved informally by discussion.

² Please refer to Form A6 at the back of this document HABITUAL OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINANTS POLICY

3. Concerns

The following flowchart provides a step by step overview of Alder Bridge School's Concerns and Complaints Procedure for Informal Concerns³:



We hope that this procedure will help us to listen to and acknowledge your concerns and to treat you fairly and consistently. We are committed to treating your concerns seriously and to finding solutions that work for you and others involved.

³ A copy of the Concerns Procedure Flowchart can be found at the back of this document - Form A1

N.B. This part of the procedure is available to parents, prospective parents, young people aged 16 & over or other people affected by the life of the school (can be found in the Parents Handbook).

3.1 If you have a concern about any aspect of the school, please speak to the person directly responsible for the subject of your concern. Normally this would be:

- Concerns about teaching or aspects of the education – your child’s Early Years’ Practitioner or Class Teacher.
- Concerns about general administrative aspects of the school – the School/Office Administrator or Business Manager.
- If for any reason you feel unable to speak directly to the person concerned, please contact either the Education Manager or the School Business Manager (the Designated Person - or **DP** as referred to herein) appropriate for either the Pedagogical or School aspect of Alder Bridge School; who will facilitate a meeting with the member of staff involved [contact information can be found on the School’s website, in the Parents’ Handbook or via the Office].

3.2 Members of staff have been asked to record⁴the reason for any concern as well as next steps that may be identified during the conversation (i.e. actions arising. Where this is agreed to be unnecessary, the note will state the nature of the concern and “no further action required”). You will be asked to sign the note & this will be filed for review by the school’s DP. It is the DP’s responsibility to follow-up.

[N.B. It is essential for all records to be kept together & in chronological order]

3.3 If the concern is complex, or cannot be resolved in this way, we offer the services of independent mediators. Working in consultation with the DP, the mediators aim to provide a secure, confidential process intended to assist good communication and to help find appropriate resolution. Mediation can take place when all those involved agree to it.

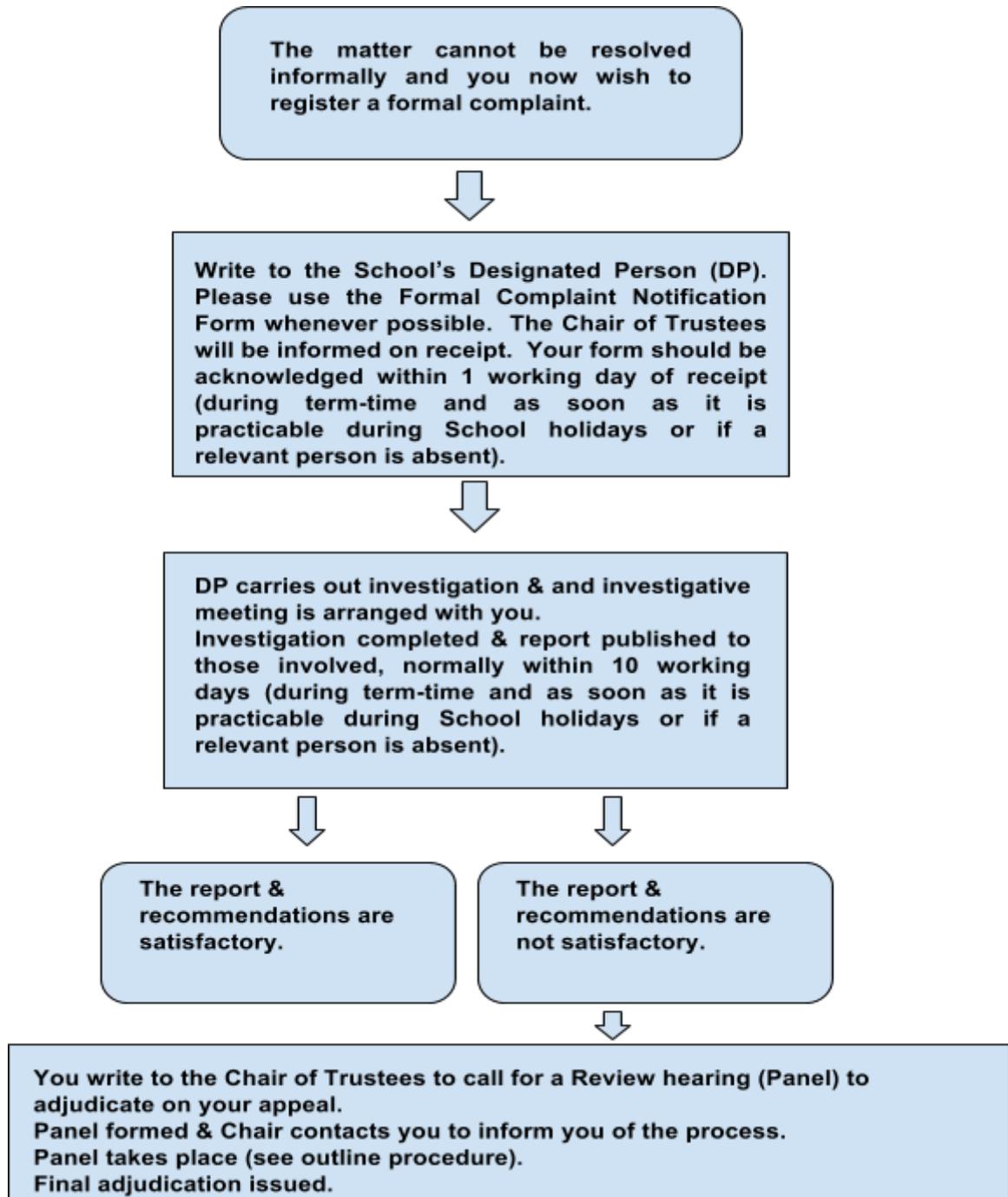
3.4 Mediators will not retain notes of matters discussed during the process of mediation, except in the form of any agreed outcomes, which we do in order to ensure that these can be followed up.

3.5 While we would not wish to put a fixed timescale to matters of concern, we are aware that concerns should not be allowed to prolong. We would normally expect any informal concerns to be resolved speedily. If mediation is used, the entire process would normally be completed within 21 working days where practicable during school term-time . You will be consulted & your agreement sought for an extension (e.g. in order to ensure that sufficient time is given to the process of resolution).

⁴ Please refer to Form A3 at the back of this document - CONCERNS RECORD FORM

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The following flowchart provides a step by step overview of Alder Bridge School's Concerns and Complaints Procedure for Formal Complaints⁵:



It is our aim to deal with any issues that may arise through our Concerns Procedure. However, if the matter cannot be resolved informally you should raise it as a formal complaint by putting it in writing to the following:

Dorit Ferreira - Chair - Board of Trustees
Alder Bridge School
Bridge House
Mills Lane
Padworth
Berkshire
RG7 4JU

⁵ A copy of the Formal Complaint Procedure Flowchart can be found at the back of this document - Form A2

Please ensure the envelope clearly states to whom it is For the Attention Of (FAO); and moreover, mark it PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL. Should the issue relate to a serious allegation (e.g. abuse), please refer to our Safeguarding Policy.

N.B. We will do everything reasonable to manage your complaint within the timescales set out here. In the interests of accuracy & natural justice, however, the procedure may sometimes take longer (for example, where further investigations are necessary). If this happens the DP will contact you in order to discuss an extended timescale and new time limits set with the complainant sent details of these. On occasion, the school may need to extend the time to respond to a complaint because of resource or capacity issues (for example non-term time or due to absence), or because additional information needs to be obtained. In such cases, the school will provide a holding letter, explaining the reason for the delay, and providing a date by which a response will be supplied.

Complaints at this stage will be registered for the purposes of inspection.

- 4.1 As Alder Bridge School does not have a Head Teacher, complaints, when not resolved informally, should be directed to the Education Manager or the School Business Manager (whomever is appropriate DP), depending upon the nature of the complaint and whether that member of staff has any previous involvement in the case, which may compromise the investigation. You should put your complaint into writing addressed to the DP **and for attention of the Chair of Trustees**, who will register that a formal complaint has been received (Trustees will not be involved with handling the complaint at this stage unless the complaint involves either the School Business or Education Manager). Please use the Formal Complaint form⁶ where possible. If you need help in setting out your complaint the DP will assist you in this.
- 4.2 You should receive acknowledgement of a formal complaint within 1 working day and we aim to offer an investigative meeting within 5 working days (during term-time and as soon as it is practicable during School holidays or if a relevant person is absent).
- 4.3 The DP will ensure that a full investigation is carried out into the circumstances of the complaint & once the DP is satisfied that all the relevant facts have been established, you will be informed in writing of their judgement. All parties will receive copies of the relevant documents.
- 4.4 This process will normally take no more than 10 working days (during term-time and as soon as it is practicable during School holidays or if a relevant person is absent).
- 4.5 Although informed that there has been a formal complaint, the school's Trustees will take no part in dealing with the matter up to the panel stage (unless both DPs are involved in the complaint).
- 4.6 If you do not agree with the report or recommendations of the DP, you can call for a **Review Panel hearing**⁷. The trustees will then appoint the panel. Normally two members of the Panel would be Trustees who have not been involved in handling the complaint. The third member of the panel would be a suitably qualified person independent of the schools' management or governance. The appointment of the panel is the responsibility of the schools' Trustee/governance team.
- 4.7 Once appointed, the Panel Chair will contact you within 48 hours* to inform you of the procedure and composition of the Panel , this will include:
 - the date & time of the hearing - normally within 14 days* .

⁶ Please refer to Form A4 at the back of this document - FORMAL COMPLAINT NOTIFICATION

⁷ Please refer to Form A5 at the back of this document - REVIEW HEARING - GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCT.

- the process and aim -
 - members of the panel will review the complaint confidentially, with objectivity and without fear or favour;
 - the Panel will hear your concerns and may call for the staff members against whom the complaint has been made;
 - The role of the panel is to verify whether the school has acted appropriately and to judge whether there is a need to change any of its procedures in the light of this complaint.
- If you want to supply any further information you should do so within one week of the date of the panel hearing. All further information will be made available to all those involved. Any new information supplied at the time of a Panel Hearing may result in a delay of a final decision or the need to reconvene the meeting at a later date
- The decision of the Panel will be final. The school offers no further appeal to the decision of a Review Panel

4.8 The panel will make themselves familiar with the procedure and information relevant to the complaint and convene a Panel Hearing as soon as possible.

4.9 Following the hearing, the Panel Chair will inform you and the subject of the complaint of their decision in writing, normally within 10 working days*.

4.10 The same basic procedure applies where the complaint is of a more general nature, e.g. about some aspect of the operation of the school.

N.B. No part of this procedure should be understood in the nature of a staff disciplinary or grievance procedure. As employers, the Trustees are constrained to act under rules of confidentiality in such cases. Please see note 2.4

** Please Note:* Although we will aim to resolve any complaint as quickly as possible, an extended time frame may be required should the complaint not be made during term-time, where relevant person is absent or other extenuating circumstances. In such cases, we will respond as soon as it is practicable.

5. The Right to be Accompanied

You have the right to be accompanied at complaint meetings by one other person, who may be a relative, friend or supportive acquaintance (legal representation will not normally be accepted).

The right comes from law made by Parliament and set out in an Act – such rights are known as ‘statutory rights’. The statutory right to be accompanied applies to all formal Complaints, grievance or disciplinary meetings and to all appeal meetings.

6. Complaints Records:

6.1 We keep the following records of complaint:

- The complaint will be listed with the date it was first raised;
- The nature of the complaint;
- Dates of meetings, communications & those attending them;
- Whether the matter was resolved;

- Copies of all documentation;
- Complaint records will be kept confidential & secure.

NB Only complaints relating to the education and care of a specific child would be kept within the child's files. A note will be kept in the complaints file with brief description and outcome. Complaints against specific members of staff would also have a similar note in their personnel file; and will be retained for a period of 7 years from the time the complaint investigation has been completed.

The DP will ensure that the complainant is happy with written records of their meetings and that the complainant signs copies to certify documents being a 'true record'.⁸

6.2 The school will publish the number of complaints dealt with each year, as required by regulation. This record will be made available to school inspectors when they conduct inspections in accordance with the law.

7. **Non-Parental Complaints:**

At the discretion of the Trustees, this procedure will also be used in an adapted form, as appropriate for concerns or complaints from neighbours or members of the general public affected by some aspect of the operation of the schools

8. **Other Agencies:**

As Alder Bridge School is an independent school, we are inspected by the School Inspection Service (rather than Ofsted). Consequently, should your complaint not be resolved via our Concerns and Complaints Procedure, you can refer your complaint in writing to:

The School Inspection Service
The Clock Tower
5 Farleigh Court
Old Weston Road
Flax Bourton
Bristol
BS48 1UR

8.1 As Alder Bridge School is an independent school, you can also send your complaint in writing to:

Independent & Boarding Team
Department for Education
Mowden Hall
Staindrop Road
Darlington
DL3 8BG

Date: November 2016

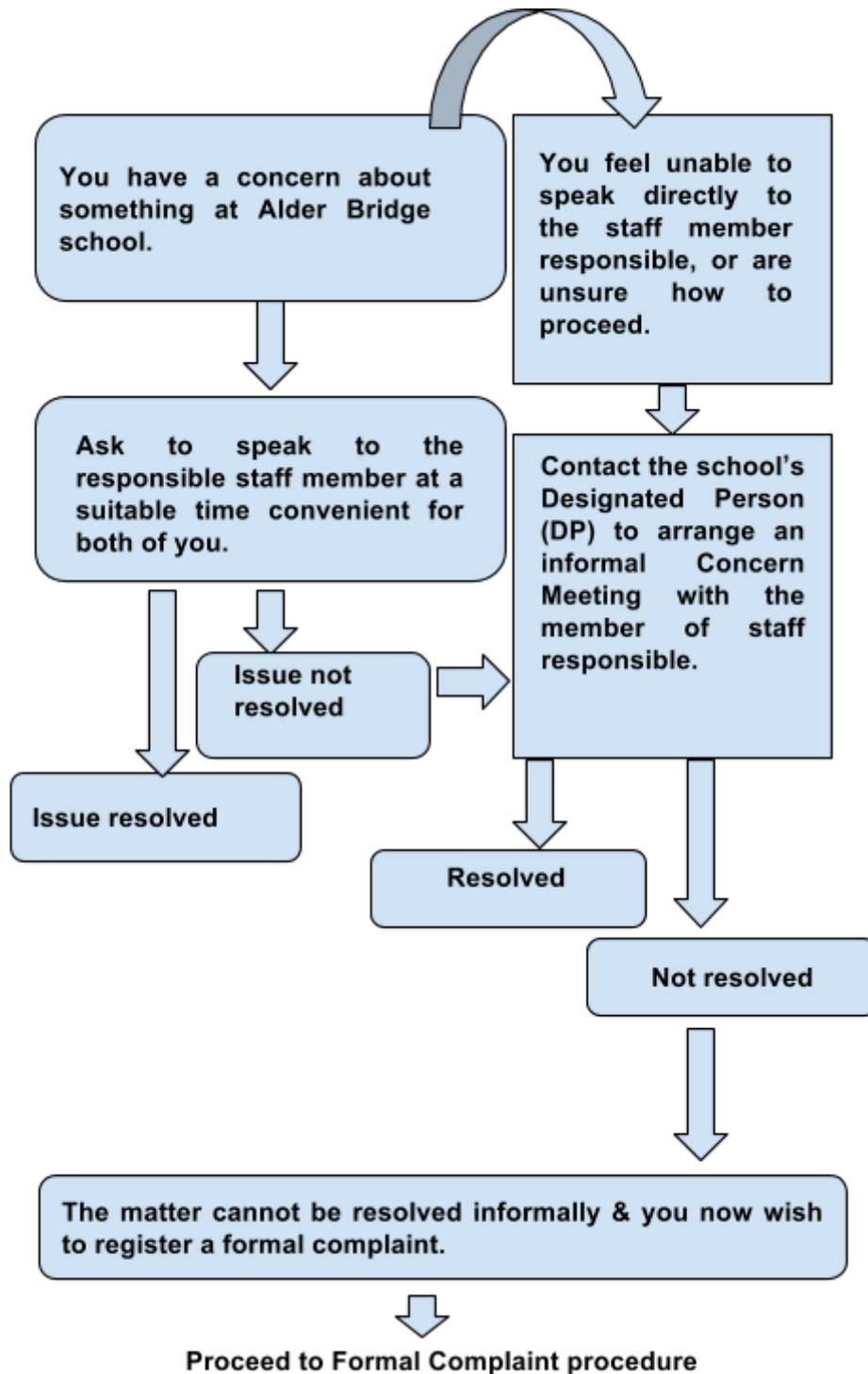
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⁸ Please refer to Form A8 at the end of this document for the Confidentiality Statement relating to confidentiality within the Concerns and Complaints Procedure.

APPENDICES

Form A1

Flowchart - Overview for Concerns & Complaints Procedure
Informal Concerns:



Form A2

**Flowchart - Overview for Concerns & Complaints Procedure
Formal Complaint:**

The matter cannot be resolved informally and you now wish to register a formal complaint.



Write to the School's Designated Person (DP). Please use the Formal Complaint Notification Form whenever possible. The Chair of Trustees will be informed on receipt. Your form should be acknowledged within 1 working day of receipt (during term-time and as soon as it is practicable during School holidays or if a relevant person is absent).



DP carries out investigation & an investigative meeting is arranged with you. Investigation completed & report published to those involved, normally within 10 working days (during term-time and as soon as it is practicable during School holidays or if a relevant person is absent).



The report & recommendations are satisfactory.



The report & recommendations are not satisfactory



You write to the Chair of Trustees to call for a Review hearing (Panel) to adjudicate on your appeal.
Panel formed & Chair contacts you to inform you of the process.
Panel takes place (see outline procedure).
Final adjudication issued.



Alder Bridge
Steiner-Waldorf School

FORM A3

Alder Bridge School Concerns Record Form

(For the informal stage of Concerns' & Complaints' Procedure)

Briefly summarise the nature of the concern(s):

Are there any further actions, or agreed next steps following this meeting. If so what are they?

Other observations:

Name

Name (member of staff):

Date:



Alder Bridge
Steiner-Waldorf School

Form A4

Alder Bridge School Formal Complaint Notification
(Formal stage of Complaint Procedure)

Your name & contact details:

Please set out the issues of your complaint.
Please be as specific as possible, giving dates, sequence of events:

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please list it here.

What do you feel needs to be done to resolve this matter?

Signed:

Date:

Please return this form to the school's designated Complaints' Officer, who will inform the Chair of Trustees that a formal complaint has been lodged.
We recommend that you keep a copy of this form for your own records.

Form A5
Review Hearing – Guidelines for Conduct

The Panel Chair is responsible for the conduct of the hearing. Normally the Panel Chair would be the "independent" panel member. The following notes provide a general overview of the way a hearing will normally be conducted:

The role of the Panel Hearing to verify whether the school has acted appropriately and to judge whether there is a need to change any of its procedures in the light of this complaint.

The Panel Chair will ensure that the proceedings are accurately recorded.

Normally, no new information, witnesses or other evidence can be allowed at the time of the Panel Hearing. New information should be made available 7 days prior to the hearing so that everyone has time to consider & respond to it. New evidence supplied later than this may lead to an adjournment of the hearing.

1. Prior to the hearing, the parties should wait in separate rooms. The Review Panel will hear evidence from the parties separately .
2. The Chair welcomes the complainant & companion, introduces the Review Panel & outlines the process that will be followed.
3. The complainant is asked to explain their objections to the conclusions of the investigation.
4. Agreed witnesses may be called (normally witness evidence will be provided in written form).
5. The Panel may ask questions for clarification.
6. The complainant & companion leave the meeting room.
7. The Chair welcomes the member of staff representing the recommendations of the investigation, introduces the Review Panel & outlines the process that will be followed.
8. The staff member explains the original response to the panel: steps 4, 5, 6 follow as above.
9. The panel considers what it has heard & the evidence & may recall either party for to answer further questions.
10. The panel considers its decision – either to:
 - a. give a verbal summary of its unanimous decision;
 - b. reserve its decision for up to 36 hours , at the end of which a final judgement will be issued in writing;
 - c. state that it is unable to arrive at a decision, in which case the procedure should be restarted with a different panel.⁹
11. The deliberations of the panel are confidential. If there is a split decision, the Chair has the casting vote.
12. The panel decision will –
 - a. uphold or deny the complaint according to the evidence available. In addition:
 - b. it may recommend changes to school procedure or other measures to help ensure similar complaints do not re-occur;
 - c. it may require the school to take action to redress the complaint, e.g. to issue an apology, or statement of correction
13. The parties will be recalled to the meeting room for either to -
 - a. hear a brief summing up from the panel, or
 - b. to be told of the decision to reserve judgement
 - c. to be told that the panel, having been unable make a decision, will dissolve with a new panel to be convened at the earliest possible opportunity
14. If there is to be a summing up, the panel Chair should explain that he will give its view of what they have heard, that this is not an opportunity for either party to 'argue the matter further, however, after the verbal summary has been made the parties may put a limited number of questions to the panel to assist their understanding of the adjudication.
15. The outcome of the panel will be confirmed in writing within 10 working days.
16. The school's internal procedure is complete.

⁹ While the final option should be available, in reality, a non-decision of this type ought to be rare. To record a non-decision is, in effect, a panel is passing a vote of no-confidence in itself...

FORM A6

Alder Bridge School Habitual or Vexatious Complainant Policy

1. Introduction.

- 1.1 This policy applies to all complainants and applies to situations where a complainant, either individually, or as part of a group, is considered to be acting as an 'habitual or vexatious' complainant.
- 1.2 In this policy the term 'habitual' means 'done constantly or as a habit' and 'vexatious' is recognised in law and means 'denoting an action or the bringer of an action that is brought without sufficient grounds for winning, purely to cause annoyance to the defendant'. In this policy we are making provision to deal with people who seek to be disruptive or cause disproportionate work by pursuing an unreasonable course of conduct.
- 1.3 The term complainant in this policy includes requests made under the Data Protection Act 1998, and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 & reference to the complaints procedure may include the making of requests under those Acts.
- 1.4 Habitual and / or vexatious complainants can be a problem for School staff & Trustees. The difficulty in handling such complaints can place a strain on time & resources. The School endeavours to respond with positivity, and with patience and sympathy to the needs of all complainants. There are times, however, when there is nothing further that can reasonably be done to assist or to rectify a real or perceived problem.

2. Scope of Policy.

- 2.1 This policy should only be used in exceptional circumstances after all reasonable measures have been taken to try to resolve complaints under the School's concerns and complaints procedures. However it is not necessary for a complaint to have reached the panel stage before this policy can be invoked. Judgement and discretion are essential in applying the criteria to identify potential habitual or vexatious complainants and in deciding on the appropriate action to be taken.
- 2.2 The policy should only be invoked following careful consideration of all the issues by the DP & Chair of College (senior teacher). There must also be authorisation from the Chair of Trustees. If the complaint is principally or to a reasonable degree against the Chair of Trustees then authorisation will be from a 3 person panel as for a Review Panel Hearing.
- 2.3 No individual involved in the issues of the complaint may authorise for a complaint to be handled under this policy.

3. Definition of Habitual or Vexatious Complainant.

- 3.1 Each case will be considered individually and decided on its merits. However, a complainant (and/or anyone acting on their behalf) may be deemed to be habitual or vexatious if previous or current contact with them shows that they may meet any or all of the following criteria to a significant degree.

3.2 Where complainants:

- Persist in pursuing a complaint where the school's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and exhausted (e.g. where several responses have been provided).
- Change the substance of a complaint: continually raise new issues, or raise further concerns or questions upon receipt of a response. The school will take care not to discard new issues that are significantly different from the original complaints and which may need to be addressed as separate complaints.
- Are unwilling to accept documented evidence of action.
- Are unwilling to accept that the Trustees have reached a final decision on a chosen course of action.
- Deny receiving an adequate response in spite of correspondence specifically dealing with the issues raised.
- Persist in pursuing a matter when they have already exhausted all routes of appeal.
- Do not clearly identify the precise issues which they wish to be investigated, despite reasonable efforts to help them specify their concerns.
- Continue to seek to pursue a complaint where the concerns are not within the control of the school or its governance team.
- Focus on trivial matters to an extent which it is out of proportion to their significance & continue to press only those points (we do recognise, however, that what is a 'trivial' matter is a highly subjective judgement and will exercise care in applying this criteria).
- Have, in the course of addressing a complaint, had an excessive number of contacts with the school representatives placing unreasonable demands on staff time. A contact may be in person or by telephone, letter, e-mail or fax. (Discretion will be used in determining the precise number of "excessive contacts" applicable under this section, using judgement based on the specific circumstances of each individual case).
- Make unreasonable demands on those dealing with a complaint, refusing to accept that these may be unreasonable. For example, insist on responses to complaints or enquiries being provided more urgently than is reasonable or within the Concerns and Complaints Procedure or normal recognised practice.
- Make repeated counter-complaints against those dealing with the issue, especially with the clear intention of influencing the outcome of the procedure
- Are known to have recorded meetings or face-to-face / telephone conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of other parties involved.
- Have threatened or used physical violence towards staff at any time. This will, in itself cause personal contact with the complainant and/or their representatives to be discontinued and the complaint will, thereafter, only be continued through written communication. All such incidences will be documented. The school will consider any complainant who make threats or uses actual physical violence towards staff as a vexatious complainant. The school will inform the complainant of the action to be taken with regard to any further communication received and reserves the right to take legal action in such cases.

- Have harassed or been personally abusive or verbally aggressive on more than one occasion towards staff dealing with the complaint. We recognise that complainants may sometimes act out of character in times of stress, anxiety or distress; and will make reasonable allowances for this. However, the Trustees have a duty of care to their employees and reserve the right to take whatever action is deemed necessary to secure their reasonable safety. Any form of harassment, abusive behaviour or verbal aggression will be recorded & legal action may be taken.

4. Strategy for Dealing with Habitual or Vexatious Complainants.

4.1 Where complainants have been identified as habitual or vexatious under the scope of this policy, taking account of the above criteria, the Trustees will determine what action to take. The DP will implement such action and will notify complainants, in writing, of the reasons why they have been classified as habitual or vexatious and what action will be taken. They will also be notified of the review procedure (See Section 5 below).

4.2 This notification may be copied for the information of others already involved in the complaint or with matters closely related to it. A record must be kept, for future reference of the reasons why a complainant has been classified as habitual or vexatious.

4.3 It may be decided to decide to deal with habitual or vexatious complainants in one or more of the following ways:

- Withdraw contact with the complainant either in person, by telephone, by e-mail, by fax, by letter or any combination of these, provided that at least one form of contact is maintained. If staff to withdraw from a telephone contact with a complainant there will be an agreed statement available for them to use at such times.
- To restrict contact to liaison through a designated person.
- Notify the complainant in writing that the Trustees have responded fully to the points raised and have tried to resolve the complaint but there is nothing more to add and continuing contact on the matter will serve no useful purpose. The complainant should be notified that any form of contact, either orally or in writing, in relation to their complaint, or any further complaints relative to the same period of time, or the same or similar issues as an earlier complaint, is at an end, and that further contact received will be acknowledged but not answered.
- Temporarily suspend, or terminate, the contract between the individual and the school.
- In extreme circumstances inform the complainant that the school intends to take legal action.

5. Review Decisions and Withdrawing 'Habitual or Vexatious' Status

5.1 Once a complainant has been determined as habitual or vexatious, such status will be regularly reviewed; and, where appropriate, withdrawn at a later date. Such action may be appropriate where a complainant subsequently demonstrates a more reasonable approach or submits a further complaint for which the normal complaints procedures would appear appropriate.

5.2 Complainants also have an opportunity to have their habitual or vexatious status withdrawn.

5.3 The Trustees will review their decisions to categorise a complainant as habitual or vexatious at least every six months. In addition, they will review that decision on receipt of a request to do so from the person so categorised, provided such a request has not been received in the preceding six months.

- 5.4 If the person categorised as habitual or vexatious is not satisfied with the decision reached, they may request that the decision is reviewed by the Trustees; which will appoint an appeal panel of 3 to review the decision (panel as for Review Hearing). Such a request for a review may only be received once in any six month period. Notice of that decision will be given, as far as is practicable, within 15 working days of receipt of the request.
- 5.5 The panel on review may either withdraw the categorisation of a person as habitual or vexatious or amend the strategy being applied to that person.
- 5.6 If Trustees consider it appropriate to withdraw the status of habitual or vexatious complainant, normal contact with the complainant and application of the school's Concerns and Complaints Procedure will be resumed. Notice of that decision will be given.
- 5.7 Copies of all decisions relating to the categorisation of a person as a habitual or vexatious complainant will be sent to Personnel who will hold and maintain a central register of such decisions.
- 6. Monitoring Arrangements**
- 6.1 Anonymised information will be presented annually to the Governing body with details of complainants who are categorised as habitual and / or vexatious.
- 7. General**
- 7.1 Nothing in this policy affects an individual's statutory rights.
- 7.2 If Trustees are approached by individuals identified as habitual/vexatious complainants they may, if they so wish, ask a neutral Designated Person to write to those individuals on their behalf; to explain that the Trustees will not be able to deal with the particular issue whilst they continue to be a vexatious/habitual complainant.

FORM A7

Department for Education information: How can I make a complaint about an independent school?

In choosing an independent school for their child parents must accept that any disputes must be pursued directly with the school in the light of any legal advice they receive.

The Department has no powers to investigate complaints on behalf of individuals. However, any allegations of a failure to meet the standards which form the basis for school inspection would be carefully considered; and appropriate action taken if necessary to ensure the school meets the standards which all pupils and their parents have a right to expect. If parents wish to make us aware of such concerns they should set out the full facts in writing but it will remain the responsibility of the parents to pursue their particular complaint against the school.

All independent schools must have a written Complaints procedure. Schools must ensure that all parents and prospective parents are aware of the existence of the Complaints procedure and must supply a copy on request.

The required provisions of the complaints procedure (as stipulated by *The Education [Independent School Standards] Regulations 2014* pending amendments thereafter) are specifically:

The School ensures that a Complaints procedure is drawn up and effectively implemented which deals with the handling of complaints from parents of pupils and which:

- A. Is in writing;
- B. Is made available to parents of pupils;
- C. Sets out clear time scales for the management of a complaint;
- D. Allows for a complaint to be made and considered initially on an informal basis;
- E. Where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with sub-paragraph (d), establishes a formal procedure for the complaint to be made in writing;
- F. Where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e), makes provision for a hearing before a panel appointed by or on behalf of the school and consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint;
- G. Ensures that, where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school;
- H. Allows for a parent to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish;
- I. Provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulates that a copy of those findings and recommendations is—
 - (i) provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and
 - (ii) available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher;
- J. provides for a written record to be kept of all complaints that are made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e) and—
 - (i) whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and
 - (ii) action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld); and
- K. Provides that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Please note: Concerns relating to welfare or abuse of a child should immediately be reported to the local Social Services Department or Police who have powers to investigate and who will be able to offer advice and support parents and their child.



Alder Bridge Steiner-Waldorf School

Form A8

Confidentiality Statement

All documents relating to a complaint are held securely in the school's complaint file. Should a member of staff or Trustee be implicated in a complaint, a brief outline of the complaint and the outcome will be held confidentially within their Personnel file. This will link to paperwork held confidentially within the Complaints file.

In addition to the paper Complaints file, there is also an electronic Complaints Folder where electronic versions of all documents relating to complaints are held. Only Personnel, Senior Management, Trustees and government appointed inspectors have access to either of the Complaints Files. The school will only allow complaints documentation to be viewed outside of these to meet our legal obligations and to pursue or defend legal proceedings on behalf of the school, its staff or its trustees. Certain documents (where legally required) will be shared with any member of staff or Trustee implicated in the complaint to ensure that they are fairly informed of the nature of the complaint, the process of the Concerns and Complaints Procedure and any relevant outcome following that procedure.

After the appropriate period of time, the documents will be disposed of in line with requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and any other relevant legislation in force at that time.

The person handling the complaint will make reasonable endeavours to establish what information the complainant is happy to be shared with those implicated in the complaint; and any witnesses that might need to be interviewed.

The complainant should also be aware that they should direct all their conversations and correspondence about the complaint, to the person handling the complaint. The only exception to this is at meetings that has been arranged by the person handling the complaint in an attempt to move towards a resolution of said complaint. If the complainant breaches these restrictions, it may be necessary for the school to close the complaint in order to protect the rights of the school's employees and Trustees. The complainant may also be subject to procedures under the school's Habitual or Vexatious Complainant Policy.