Hawthorn School Complaints Policy

Introduction

At Hawthorn School, we are committed to fostering a strong relationship with our community, including parents, carers, and neighbors. We recognise that, at times, concerns may arise regarding aspects of the farm or school operations. In such instances, it is our duty to approach complaints with openness, professionalism, and a clear resolution process.

This policy outlines the steps we take to handle complaints efficiently, ensuring transparency and accountability. Our objective is to listen attentively, take appropriate action, and communicate outcomes effectively.

Stages of the Complaint Procedure

Informal Stage

Complaints typically reach the school in one of three ways:

- By telephone
- By letter
- In person

Handling Telephone Complaints

- Complaints made via telephone should be directed to the School Chair.
- If the Chair is unavailable, a message should be taken, and the complainant informed that a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) will return their call at the earliest opportunity.

Handling Written Complaints

- Complaints received by letter or email should be passed directly to the Chair, who will decide which staff member should handle the response.
- If a complaint involves a potential safeguarding concern, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for guidance before initiating any investigation.

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Handling In-Person Complaints

- If a complaint is made in person, the complainant will be referred to the Chair, if available.
- If the Chair is unavailable, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Headteacher will determine the best course of action for addressing the complaint.

Investigation & Communication Timeline

We acknowledge that complainants may not always have the full context of a situation when raising concerns. Therefore, a thorough investigation will be conducted as soon as practicable. While investigations may take time, it is crucial that complainants are kept informed throughout the process:

- Acknowledgment:
  - The complainant will receive a telephone call confirming receipt of their complaint by the end of the next working day.
- Regular Updates:
  - The complainant will be provided with updates at least every five working days, either by telephone or email.
- Resolution Aim:
  - Our goal is to resolve all informal complaints within 10 working days of the initial complaint. However, in most cases, complaints should be resolved in less than 10 working days.

Formal Stage

If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the informal stage, they may submit a formal written complaint to the School Chair, who will conduct a further investigation.

- The School Chair will respond with a decision within 10 working days.
- If a decision cannot be reached within this timeframe, the complainant will be informed of the delay.

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Appeal Stage

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after the formal stage, they have the right to appeal.

Appeal Process:

- A three-person panel will be assembled by the Company Secretary to review the complaint.
- Panel members must not have been involved in the complaint at any previous stage.
- The Company Secretary has full discretion over panel member selection.

- The company secretary is impartial and can be contacted via email helenaleeper@outlook.com

Hearing Procedure:

- A hearing will be scheduled, and the complainant will be invited to attend.
- The complainant may bring a support person if desired.
- The panel will carefully review the case and make their decision.

Outcome Communication:

- The panel will provide written findings and recommendations to the following parties:
    - The complainant
    - The Proprietor/School Chair
    - The individual about whom the complaint was made (if applicable)
- A written response from the hearing panel will be issued within 15 working days.

Escalation of Complaints About the Chair or Headteacher

If a complaint is regarding the Chair or Headteacher, or if the complainant remains dissatisfied with the appeal response received, they have the option to seek further support from independent and impartial organisations for guidance and resolution.

Independent Support & Advice:

- Citizens Advice – Provides free, confidential advice on legal rights and complaints procedures. Visit Citizens Advice

- Child Law Advice – Offers free legal advice on education law and child welfare matters. Visit Child Law Advice

- Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) – If a complainant remains dissatisfied after exhausting all internal processes, they can escalate their concerns to the LGO, which investigates complaints about public services, including education settings. Visit the Local Government Ombudsman

These independent organisations ensure fairness, transparency, and impartiality in handling complaints related to the school and farm.

This measure reassures complainants that no conflict of interest exists, demonstrating robust governance and transparency to regulatory bodies, such as:

  - Kent County Council (KCC)
  - Department for Education (DfE)
  - Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills)

Record-Keeping & Confidentiality

- A written record will be maintained at every stage of the complaint process, regardless of whether the complaint is resolved informally, formally, or via appeal.
- All complaints and related communications will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Only the following individuals will have access to complaint-related information:
  - Proprietor/School Chair
  - The individual involved in the complaint (if applicable)
  - The Appeal Panel (if the case reaches this stage)

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For further inquiries or to submit a complaint, please contact:

Hawthorn School, Chalkhill Farm, New House Lane, Canterbury, CT4 7BF
Email: chalkhillfarm123@gmail.com
Website: Chalkhillfarm.co.uk

This policy is reviewed annually. The next review is scheduled for September 2026.

Policy reviewed by: Julie Hardy (Director and Chair)
Date reviewed: 02/09/25