



# **Hutchesons' Grammar School**

## **Complaints Policy and Procedure**

**Policy Owner:** Mrs J Galloway, Interim Bursar & Director of People

**Policy Approval:** Mr R Ronan, Rector & CEO

**Version Control:** Version 1.8 – October 2024

**Policy Review:** October 2026

## **1. Introduction**

Hutchesons' Grammar School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School with care and in accordance with this Complaints Procedure. Hutchesons' Grammar School makes its Complaints Procedure available to all parents of pupils via the Parent Portal and in the School office during the school day, and Hutchesons' Grammar School will ensure that those who request it are made aware that this document is published or available.

Complaints by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil to which the complaint relates was still registered as a pupil at the School.

"Parent(s)" means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for a current pupil about whom the complaint relates.

## **2. What constitutes a Complaint?**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done, or has acted unfairly.

## **3. What is not a Complaint (under this Procedure)?\***

- a matter which is considered to be part of normal school operation and can therefore be resolved using the established communication links between staff, parents and pupils. For example, a routine matter relating to the education of a pupil.
- a matter relating to the application of sanctions as outlined in the Behaviour Policy (up to and including exclusions).
- Subject Access Requests - which should be made in writing to the Bursar.
- a grievance by a member of staff, which is eligible for handling through the School's Staff Grievance Procedure.
- an issue relating to a Financial Assistance decision.
- an appeal related to Admissions. Please refer to the Admissions Policy.
- an attempt to have a Complaint reconsidered where the School Procedure has been completed and a decision has been issued.
- an issue raised by a current pupil – current pupils should raise any concerns relating to school matters via the Pastoral System or a Head of Department. In exceptional circumstances a complaint from a pupil will be considered under this policy only with agreement from the Rector.
- an issue raised by a former pupil that was not raised when a registered pupil (except where these relate to Historic Abuse in which case they should be raised via the Depute Rector, Pastoral).

\*NB This is not an exhaustive list.

#### **4. Anonymous Complaints**

Complaints submitted anonymously will be considered if there is enough information in the complaint to enable the School to make further enquiries. If there is insufficient information to enable the School to respond to an anonymous Concern or complaint, it may decide not to pursue it further. However, the School will record and consider the issues raised, so that corrective action can be taken if appropriate.

If a person does not wish to make a formal Complaint, but the School is made aware of it, it will be recorded by the School at the appropriate level.

Any decision not to pursue an anonymous Complaint will be authorised by the Rector and one other member of the Hutchesons' Leadership Team (HLT).

#### **5. Who can use this procedure?**

This procedure applies to:

- complaints by current parents (i.e. parents who have a child who is registered as a pupil at the School, when they notify their complaint to the School); and
- complaints made by the parents of a former pupil provided the complaint was notified in writing to the School whilst the relevant pupil was still registered as a pupil.

This procedure does not apply to parents of prospective pupils (including those who have accepted a place at the School in respect of their child but where that child has not yet started at the School).

There is no formal procedure governing the making of a complaint to the School by any person: (a) who is not a parent; or (b) who is a prospective parent. Any non-parent or prospective parent who wishes to make a complaint should do so by putting it in writing to the Rector, who will consider how best to respond.

#### **6. Time Limit**

A Complaint should be raised as soon as problems arise to enable prompt determination, investigation and swift resolution. This Procedure sets a time limit of three months to raise a Complaint, starting from when the complainant first became aware of the problem, unless there are special circumstances for requesting consideration of a Complaint beyond this time.

#### **7. Resolving Complaints**

It is important that the focus of this Procedure remains in finding a solution to the Complaint. There are many ways in which a Complaint can be resolved, for example:

- an apology is given.
- an explanation is given.
- an admission is made that the situation could have been handled differently or better.
- an assurance is given that actions will be taken to attempt to prevent a recurrence.
- an explanation of the steps that have already been taken, or will be taken, to ensure that if substantiated, it will not happen again.
- an undertaking is given to review the relevant School Policies or Procedures where necessary, in light of the Complaint.

## **8. The Three-Stage Complaint Procedure**

The Complaint Handling Procedure has three stages. The School reserves the right to deviate from this Procedure with the approval of the Rector.

In certain cases where appropriate, matters will be dealt with under other School policies or procedures.

If the Complaint relates to the actions of a member of the Hutchesons' Leadership Team (HLT), the Complaint will immediately be referred to the Rector. The stages of the Procedure will be adjusted to a two-stage process: Investigation and Appeal.

If the Complaint concerns the actions of the Rector, this will be referred directly to the Chair of the Board. The Chair will appoint one or more members of the Board to investigate the Complaint and prepare a report for the Chair who will then consider the issue.

### **Stage 1 - Informal**

Wherever possible, the School will strive to deal with matters informally, via Stage 1. Therefore, Parents are encouraged to raise issues or concerns informally with the relevant member of staff. Discussing the issue or concern may clarify the matter and resolve any misunderstandings satisfactorily and it is hoped that most concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.

Where the complaint relates to learning and teaching in the Secondary school, it should be referred to the relevant Head of Department, who will, under normal circumstances, deal with the complaint directly with the parents and the member of staff concerned. The Head of Department will inform the relevant Head of House and member of staff when action has been taken. If the complaint relates to a primary pupil, it should be directed to the class teacher or the relevant Depute Rector in the Primary School.

Complaints not relating to learning and teaching should be referred to the Head of House in the Secondary School, or in the Primary School to the relevant Depute Rector.

Where the member of staff cannot resolve the matter alone it may be necessary to consult a more senior member of staff.

A written and dated record will be kept of all concerns and complaints.

If the matter cannot be settled to your satisfaction you are advised within 5 term-time days (excluding weekends) to move to the procedure outlined in Stage 2 below.

## 8.1 Stage 2 – Formal

If a complaint cannot be resolved informally you should write to the Rector by sending an email to [rector@hutchesons.org](mailto:rector@hutchesons.org) or by letter addressed to the Rector at the School to request a formal investigation under Stage 2 of this procedure..

This request will be acknowledged by the Rector, within two term-time days (excluding weekends), and referred to an appropriate member of the Hutchesons' Leadership Team (HLT) to conduct an investigation.

This individual, the complaint reviewer, will be responsible for determining the nature of, and investigating or hearing a Complaint and will ensure that they:

- contact the complainant to establish the nature of Complaint, identifying what has happened so far, and who has been involved.
- identify what remains unresolved.
- establish what the complainant feels would put things right and that they would consider appropriate as a resolution.
- interview those who are the subject of the Complaint and anyone else involved in the matter, allowing them to be accompanied if they so wish, providing this individual is not a lawyer.
- conduct the interview with a fair and open mind and be prepared to persist in deliberations to ensure a meaningful conclusion for all parties.
- keep contemporaneous and signed notes of the interview.
- write a comprehensive report of findings (facts), including any recommendations, the decision reached and the rationale for the decision.
- write a letter responding to the complainant, which will be approved by the Rector, explaining the outcome within 20 term-time days (excluding weekends).

The complaint will be recorded on the Complaints Register at this stage, which will not record personal or identifying details of those subject to the complaint.

It may be necessary to appoint an Independent Person to determine and investigate a complaint, which will be at the discretion of the Complaint Reviewer and with the approval of the Rector. At Stage 3, this decision lies with the Chair of the Board.

Where the Rector is absent or conflicted, their role within the complaints policy should be taken by the Senior Depute Rector.

If, following the response at stage 2, you remain dissatisfied, you may wish to move to stage 3 of this procedure.

## **8.2 Stage 3: Appeal**

An appeal request must be made in writing to the Clerk to the Governors within 5 term-time days (excluding weekends) of receipt of the outcome letter following Stage 2 and will include full details of the grounds for the appeal and the outcome sought. The Clerk to the Governors will acknowledge receipt of the request within two term-time days (excluding weekends) of receipt of appeal.

The Clerk to the Governors will meet the Chair of the Board who will review the case to date and will:

- identify the basis of the appeal, if not clear in the request.
- decide who is to hear and determine the appeal.
- determine if further investigations are required.
- arrange an Appeal Hearing.

The Chair may hear and determine an appeal or may appoint one or more members of the Board (the "Panel") to do so.

The Panel or the Chair will endeavour to communicate the outcome of the appeal to the complainant in writing within 20 term-time days (excluding weekends) of the acknowledgement and where that is not possible, will ensure the complainant is advised of any amended timescales. The outcome of the Stage 3 Appeal will be final and conclusive.

## **8.3 Extension to Timescale**

Not all investigations will be able to meet the stated deadlines, due to complexity, school holiday periods, availability of personnel etc. Where there are clear, justifiable reasons for extending the timescales, a member of the Hutchesons' Leadership Team will exercise judgement and will set new time limits, and the complainant will be notified of the extension and the reasons in writing. This extension will be recorded in the Complaint Record.

A request from a complainant to extend or delay the investigation timeline (for instance, for a complainant to submit additional evidence to their initial submission) will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

## **8.4 Withdrawn Complaints**

Should a Complaint be withdrawn, the matter will be considered closed. However, it may be that the School considers it appropriate to look at the matters raised in the Complaint, even though it has been withdrawn. At no time will the School try to influence a complainant to withdraw a Complaint.

## **9. Confidentiality and Data Protection**

In handling Complaints, and processing any personal data in respect of Complaints, the School will have regard to legislative requirements under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulations and will comply with our Privacy Policy.

Complaints will be handled with an appropriate level of confidentiality and information released only to those who need it for the purposes of investigating or responding to the Complaint. However, complainants should be aware that where a Complaint has been raised against a particular individual or individuals, it may be necessary to provide those concerned (or any relevant witnesses) with details about the nature of the Complaint to allow them the opportunity to respond to the allegations or provide relevant witness evidence. In some cases, the identity of the complainant may be apparent even though the name of the complainant is not revealed.

Where a Complaint has been raised against a pupil or member of staff and has been upheld, the complainant will be advised of this. However, specific details affecting the individuals involved, particularly where disciplinary action is taken, will not be shared with the complainant.

On some occasions it may be necessary to make third parties outside the School aware of the Complaint. This would happen, for example, if a child's safety was at risk or it became necessary to refer matters to the Police.

## **10. A matter relating to Pre School or After School Care**

Pre-School Parents or those using After School Care may, at any time, register a complaint directly to the Care Inspectorate by:

- completing an on-line complaints form.
- telephoning the Care Inspectorate on 0345 600 9527.
- writing to any Care Inspectorate office.

## **11. Basic Principles, Behaviours and Expectations of Complainants**

Complainants are subject to the same expectations regarding their behaviour as all others who interact with the School, its staff and its pupils. The School has a duty to protect staff from unacceptable behaviour and measures will be taken to protect staff as necessary.

Aggressive or abusive behaviour towards staff will not be tolerated. In addition to any physical threats, the definition of unacceptable behaviour includes for example raised voices, public discussion including social media or digital communication, derogatory remarks or rudeness, and any written or verbal approach that may cause staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused. Inflammatory remarks and unsubstantiated allegations are also considered unacceptable behaviour.

In cases where behaviour is considered unacceptable, the complainant will be advised by the appropriate member of the Hutchesons' Leadership Team that their language/behaviour is considered unacceptable. They will be asked to moderate their behaviour, and they will be advised that if the unacceptable action or behaviour continues, the School will cease to communicate with the complainant.

In all cases, if physical violence is threatened or used, the School will report this to the Police.

Other examples of inappropriate behaviour include:

- demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale.
- unreasonable levels of contact, eg volume of emails or telephone contact.
- insisting on speaking to a particular staff member when that is not possible.
- repeatedly changing the substance of a Complaint or raising unrelated Concerns.
- refusing to cooperate with the process.
- denying statements made at an earlier stage.
- using electronic recording tools without consent of others involved.
- persistent refusal to accept a decision or explanation made in relation to a Complaint, and/or continuing to pursue or attempting to re-open a Complaint without presenting any new evidence.
- having insufficient or no grounds for their Complaint or refusing to specify the grounds for their Complaint and appearing to be making the Complaint only to annoy, or for undeclared reasons.

Individuals have the right to complain to the School more than once, if subsequent issues arise. However, repeated use of this Procedure becomes unreasonable when the effect of the repeated or additional Complaint(s) is to harass staff or prevent the School from pursuing its legitimate business or implementing a legitimate decision.

We will only consider repeated use of these procedures as being unreasonable, in exceptional circumstances, but we reserve the right to refuse to consider repeated Complaint(s) in those exceptional circumstances.