Castle School
Together We Learn

Complaints Policy and Procedure

September 2026

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Cambridgeshire County Council

This is a school specific policy based upon the Cambridgeshire County Councils Model Complaints Policy for Maintained schools 2026.

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1. Introduction to the Complaints Policy

1.1 In accordance with Section 29(1) of the Education Act 2002, all maintained schools and maintained nursery schools must have and publish procedures to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides, for which there are no separate (statutory) procedures. Please note that there are some issues which fall outside of the scope of the complaints policy as they are dealt through different processes, for example these include complaints about staff conduct. The complete list and further details are available in Appendix 1.

The difference between feedback, concerns and complaints

1.2 Castle School is committed to listening carefully to parents and the wider school community and takes all feedback, concerns and complaints seriously. Feedback is defined as information, comments or observations shared with the school with the intention of informing, improving or contributing to school practice. It is distinct from a complaint and does not trigger the formal complaints procedure. However, we recognise that parents expect to be heard, and all feedback will be considered by the school and may be used to inform future practice and decision making.

1.3 A concern is an expression of worry or doubt over an issue, for which reassurances are sought. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about actions taken, or a perceived lack of action, on behalf of the school. Whether raised as a concern or complaint, the school will take all matters seriously, respond promptly, and make every effort to resolve them as quickly as possible. Resolution in this context means either reaching an agreed outcome or where this isn't possible, ensuring the complaint has been fully considered in accordance with the complaints procedure and a final outcome communicated.

1.4 It is in everyone's interest that any concerns or complaints are resolved at the earliest stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise matters formally. In this case, the school will seek to resolve the issue through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

Who can make a complaint?

1.5 This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school.

1.6 Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to the school about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Where complaints are not covered by separate statutory procedures (such as exclusions or admissions appeals), they will be considered under this complaints procedure. There are some issues which will fall outside of the scope of the complaints policy – these are listed in Appendix 1.

1.7 In line with principles of administrative fairness, complainants will normally be given the opportunity to complete the school's complaints procedure in full. However, where the Headteacher or Chair of Governors determines that there is evidence that a complainant's behaviour meets the criteria set out in the school's Serial and Unreasonable Complaints Policy, the school may take proportionate action at any stage of the process. This may include managing contact, defining the scope of correspondence, or limiting responses where appropriate. The school will not normally treat a complainant as 'serial' or 'persistent' simply for pursuing a complaint, but may do so where the frequency, nature or impact of contact becomes unreasonable.

1.8 Once the complaints procedure has been completed, any further correspondence relating to the same matter may be managed under the school's Serial and Unreasonable Complaints Policy, which is included as Appendix 2 of this policy.

1.9 Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated. However, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, will decide whether an anonymous complaint warrants an investigation.

1.10 In the event that the school receives multiple complaints relating to substantially the same issue and/or from complainants unconnected with the school, we may respond by issuing a standard response or by publishing a single response on the school's website.

1.11 The Governing Body will ensure that any third-party providers using school premises have their own complaints procedures in place.

Purpose of the Complaints Procedure

1.12 The purpose of our complaints procedure is to provide a comprehensive, open, transparent, fair and timely process through which:

- ✓ something that may have gone wrong can be identified, acknowledged and, where necessary, resolved;
- ✓ an apology may be offered where appropriate;
- ✓ the school can, where appropriate, learn from complaints, making it less likely that a similar issue will be raised in the future.

1.13 At each stage in the procedure, we are seeking to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In response to a complaint, we may offer one or more of the following:

- ✓ an explanation;
- ✓ an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- ✓ an assurance that steps will be taken to prevent recurrence;
- ✓ details of actions taken or planned, including relevant timescales;
- ✓ an undertaking to review school policies or procedures;
- ✓ an apology;
- ✓ a decision that no action is necessary or justified supported with a full explanation.

1.14 A written record will be kept of all complaints, along with details of how they were investigated and resolved and any actions taken. The Governing Body will not normally award financial compensation unless required to do so by virtue of legislation. If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

1.15 On a periodic basis the Governing Body may receive anonymised reports on complaints to support organisational learning, policy review and school improvement.

2. How to raise a concern or make a complaint

2.1 A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third-party acting on behalf of the complainant, provided appropriate consent has been given. Where a person is unable to make a complaint themselves, a friend or other family member may do so on their behalf; however, that person does not become the complainant.

2.2 Whilst the school acknowledges that complainants may seek legal advice, the complaints procedure is a non-legal process. The school will correspond with the complainant and will not normally engage directly with the legal representatives (or advocates where relevant) or accept complaints submitted by them. Legal representatives will not be permitted to attend meetings held as part of this procedure.

2.3 Concerns should initially be raised with either the class teacher, or a more senior member of staff. We will listen carefully and seek to resolve matters in accordance with our policies and procedures and in the best interests of your child. Most concerns can be resolved informally and do not require progression to the formal stages of the procedure.

2.4 If the issue remains unresolved, the person raising the concern has the option of making a formal complaint.

2.5 To support a timely and effective response, complainants are encouraged to:

- ✓ summarise the main aspects of the complaint clearly;
- ✓ provide full details as early as possible;
- ✓ work with the school in seeking a resolution to the complaint;
- ✓ respond promptly to requests for information or meetings;
- ✓ ask for assistance as needed;
- ✓ treat all those involved with respect;
- ✓ refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

2.6 To ensure complaints can be considered fairly, efficiently and within published timescales, complainants are asked to limit the length of their complaint to **two sides of A4 or less (font size <12).** Where a complaint exceeds this length, the school will request that the complainant provides a concise summary of this length before progressing the complaint. The school may pause progression until a concise summary has been received. Complainants should focus on:

- ✓ the key issues;
- ✓ the relevant facts;
- ✓ the outcome(s) sought.

Where needed, the school may make reasonable adjustments or provide support to enable a complainant to present their complaint concisely.

2.7 This approach ensures that matters are clearly understood and that responses address the key issues effectively. Complaints which are excessively lengthy or unfocused make it more complex for the school to respond in a way which deals with the underlying issues at the heart of the complaint. The complaints process is not a legal forum, the school will focus on the substance of the complaint, rather than the volume, tone, or legal framing.

2.8 The school reserves the right to determine the scope of the complaint, focusing on the key issues identified. The school may not respond to every individual point raised however the response will focus on the substantive issues necessary to determine the complaint. This approach ensures the complaint is addressed in a proportionate and efficient manner.

2.9 The school acknowledges that some complainants may use digital or AI tools to assist in drafting correspondence. Regardless of how a complaint is prepared, the school's response will focus on the substantive issues.

2.10 Parents of children with additional needs may wish to seek advice from SENDIASS (a parent led service which can provide help and support for parents to resolve disagreements with schools). They can be contacted via SENDIASS@cambridgeshire.gov.uk or on 0300 365 1020.

2.11 Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no authority to act individually, and prior involvement may prevent them from participating in a complaints panel, should it be required.

2.12 Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be addressed to the Headteacher via the school office. Complaints about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office. Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole Governing Body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body via the clerk@castl.cambs.sch email address of via the school office for paper correspondence. All such correspondence should be marked Private and Confidential.

2.13 A template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure and complainants are encouraged to use it. If complainants require help in completing the form, please contact the school office.

2.14 In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, we will make reasonable adjustments where necessary, to enable access to this procedure. For example, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in submitting a complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

2.15 If the complainant contacts the Local Authority, then they will be directed to the school complaints procedure on the school's website. The Local Authority has no statutory powers of intervention in school complaints.

Timeframes for complaints

2.16 We will aim to consider complaints as quickly and efficiently as possible. Any significant deviation from published timescales or process will be recorded and communicated to the complainant.

2.17 Complainants must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will only consider complaints made outside of this timeframe if exceptional circumstances apply. This time limit has been established because investigation is more difficult over time: memories may not be as clear as they would have been earlier, records may not be as readily available, and witnesses may no longer be employed at the school.

2.18 In exceptional circumstances, the Headteacher (or Chair of Governors) will decide whether to accept complaints submitted outside this timeframe. In such instances the complainant will need to offer an explanation as to why there has been a delay in making a complaint. Any decision made in this respect will be made in a lawful, rational, reasonable and proportionate manner.

2.19 Where a complaint includes multiple issues, some of which lie outside the timeframe, the Headteacher (or Chair of Governors) will determine which complaints can be considered, taking account of their relevance to the substantive issue or issues made within the timescale.

2.20 If the complaint is received outside of term time, the calendar day timings for managing the complaint will start on the first school working day (including staff training days) after the holiday period.

2.21 If it is not possible to meet published timescales, new timeframes will be set, and the complainant will be informed of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay. If external bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint (e.g. the police), there may be an impact on the school's ability to adhere to timescales, or the procedure may have to be suspended until those investigations are complete. If a complainant commences legal action in relation to their complaint, the procedure may be suspended until those proceedings have concluded.

3. Preliminary stage – Dealing with concerns informally

3.1 The school notes the advice, contained within the Parent Guide to School Complaints (issued by the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted in association with other organisations) which advises parents to:

- ✓ try to resolve concerns quickly and only escalate if you truly need to;
- ✓ be clear on the outcome you are seeking from the school and ensure it is realistic;
- ✓ make your complaint constructive and focus on possible solutions.

3.2 Therefore, before the formal processes are used the school will normally seek to resolve matters informally in line with DfE guidance.

3.3 Some issues are likely to be best resolved through discussion with the class teacher. In some cases, though, it may be appropriate to raise the matter with a member of the leadership team or the Headteacher.

3.4 Initially school staff may seek to resolve matters through the provision of information, clarification and, where appropriate, reassurance. Where there is a significant level of concern or it cannot be resolved at this level, staff may refer the matter to the Headteacher or another senior member of staff, who will then seek to resolve the matter through further discussion.

3.5 Whether attempts to resolve concerns at an informal stage are by telephone conversation or through meetings, school staff may take a note of any agreed action points and summarise these at the end of the conversation. Where appropriate and agreed, a record of actions may be shared with those involved.

4. Stage 1 – Making a formal complaint to the Headteacher

4.1 If matters are not resolved through collaboration or discussion, the complainant or Headteacher may determine to address the complaint more formally.

4.2 There are several ways of making a formal complaint. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the complaint form) or by telephone. The complainant is asked to be concise and clear about the issue(s) and to state what would, for them, provide a reasonable and acceptable resolution to the complaint.

4.3 The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 5 school days. Within this response, the Headteacher may seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved, consider the outcome being sought and decide whether a meeting would support resolution. The complaint will be investigated so that the complainant receives a formal written response within 15 school days of receipt of the complaint.

4.4 In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for the Chair of Governors (or a senior member of staff, nominated governor or an independent investigator), to lead or support the Stage 1 investigation. This may include joint working or an individual leading the investigation and response. The approach taken will depend on the nature of the complaint and will be decided by the Headteacher.

4.5 Regardless of the approach taken, there will be one formal Stage 1 investigation and response within the school's two-stage complaints process. Any earlier correspondence may be treated as informal.

4.6 The Headteacher (or investigator as set out in 4.4) will:

- ✓ investigate the matters raised thoroughly, considering all relevant evidence;
- ✓ interview those involved (as appropriate);
- ✓ keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation;
- ✓ respond to the complainant.

4.7 On occasion, it may not be possible to investigate the complaint within the stated timeframe and, in these circumstances, the Headteacher (or investigator) will contact the complainant explaining the reason for the delay and provide a revised timeframe.

4.8 If the complaint is about the Headteacher, the complaint form should be sent directly to the Chair of Governors, via the clerk to the Governing Body. In this instance, an investigation will be undertaken by the Chair of Governors (or alternatively another nominated governor or an independent investigator may be sought). The investigator will determine the outcome; however, the response letter will normally be sent from the Chair of Governors.

4.9 If the complaint is about the Chair of Governors or an individual governor, the complaint should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body, who will arrange for the complaint to be heard by the Vice Chair or another governor, and then a committee of members of the Governing Body if it progresses to the next stage. If the complaint is jointly about the Chair of Governors and Vice Chair, or the entire Governing Body, or the majority of the Governing Body, then the issue will be managed by the Clerk and considered by an independent investigator. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

4.10 Complainants are expected not to make covert recordings of meetings or conversations. The school will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings that have been obtained without the informed consent of all parties.

5. Stage 2 – Referring a formal complaint to a Governors' Panel

5.1 Where the complainant wishes to escalate the complaint to the final stage, the complainant may ask the Clerk to convene a panel of governors who have had no prior involvement or any conflict of interest to consider the complaint. The complainant should complete, and submit to the Clerk, a Governor Panel request form (available from the Clerk or the school office). They should do this within 10 school days of the date of issue of the Stage 1 outcome letter. Complainants are asked to limit the length of their request form to two sides of A4 or less. Where the request form exceeds this length, the Clerk may request that the complainant provides a concise summary of this length before progressing the complaint.

5.2 If emailing, the complainant should take care to ensure that they have the official email address for the Clerk. In the subject field of the email, the complainant should write, 'Governor Panel Request'. If delivering or posting a letter, the complainant must address it to the Clerk at the school address and write 'Governor Panel Request' on the envelope'. The Clerk should record the date the request is received and acknowledge the request within 5 school days.

5.3 Requests submitted outside the 10 school day timeframe will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. Where this is unclear, the Clerk may consult the Chair of Governors, who will determine whether the panel will proceed.

5.4 The panel will consider the complaint afresh, taking into account all the evidence presented. This means that the panel will independently review the substantive issues raised in the initial complaint and reach its own conclusions. In doing so, the panel will consider the evidence gathered at Stage 1, together with any further relevant representations, and will determine whether the complaint should be upheld in whole or in part.

5.5 If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the panel will:

- ✓ decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- ✓ where appropriate, recommend reviews of and/or changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

5.6 The panel will not consider any new complaints at this stage. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

5.7 The panel will focus on the substance of the original complaint. The process cannot be used to consider cases where the complaint was not dealt with in accordance with published timeframes.

Whilst normally the governor's panel will only review written evidence, the Chair of Governors will consider allowing in person representation if this is requested by the complainant. If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting to present their case, they may bring someone along to provide support but not represent them. If this is the case the Headteacher (and/or Stage 1 investigator) may also be invited to attend the meeting to present their views. However, this need not be at the same time as the complainant, and it will be for the panel to decide the format and agenda for the meeting. Neither party should have legal representation, and representatives from the media will not be permitted to attend.

Role of the Clerk to the Governors

5.8 The Clerk will:

- ✓ act in a 'progress chasing' role to track the complaint and to ensure that timeframes set out within the policy are being adhered to wherever possible;
- ✓ ensure that the complainant is kept up to date, including where timeframes have not been met and the reasons why;
- ✓ inform the Governing Body of any shortcomings in the delivery of its complaints procedure, both during the process and subsequently;
- ✓ arrange for the outcome to be communicated to all relevant parties so they receive it at the same time.
- ✓ ensure that a written record of the complaint is kept, along with details or whether they were resolved following the formal procedure or progressed to a panel hearing;

5.9 The Clerk will ensure that correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints are stored confidentially. Complaint documentation does not form part of the child's educational record.

Convening the Panel

5.10 The Clerk will convene a panel comprising 3 members who have had no prior involvement with the complaint or have any conflict of interest. Members of the panel will elect a Chair from among themselves. If there are fewer than 3 school governors available, the Clerk will source suitably skilled and independent governors from another school's Governing Body.

5.11 A Local Authority adviser may be invited to the meeting, at the discretion of the governors, to give procedural advice only.

5.12 The Clerk will liaise with the panel members to agree a date, time and venue for the meeting. This is most likely to be held at the school, but may be held virtually.

5.13 All written material relating to the complaint will be circulated to the panel members normally at least 5 school days before the meeting. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

5.14 The panel will normally meet within 20 school days (starting from the day when the panel request was received, or the next school day if that was not a school day). If there are exceptional reasons why this timescale cannot be adhered to, the Clerk will inform the complainant of the reasons and provide a revised timeframe.

5.15 When the Governor Panel form is received, the Headteacher (or the respondent at Stage 1) will be invited, by the Clerk, to review the request and to provide any further written representations to the panel in response.

5.16 The information to be sent by the Clerk to the panel should comprise the following:

- ✓ the original completed complaints form;
- ✓ the Stage 1 response to the complaint from the Headteacher (or the respondent at Stage 1);
- ✓ the completed Governor Panel form;
- ✓ any additional written representations from the Headteacher (or the respondent at Stage 1);

- ✓ the evidence used for the original investigation at Stage 1. For example, evidence statements from staff or children, incident logs, letters, external reports etc.

The panel may, via the Clerk, request any additional documents or clarification from either party ahead of the meeting where points remain unclear.

The Panel meeting

5.17 The panel meeting will normally be clerked by the Clerk to the Governing Body. Where this is not possible the Chair of Governors will ensure that an alternative suitable person is responsible for the clerking function. The meeting will be held in private.

5.18 At the start of the meeting the panel will elect a Chair who will be responsible for the conduct of the meeting and for liaising with the Clerk subsequently to ensure that all parties receive timely notification of the outcome within 5 school days of the date of the meeting.

5.19 The panel must take care to ensure that it does not favour one side or the other for any reasons other than those arrived at through an objective assessment of all the evidence.

5.20 Should the panel consider that they do not have sufficient evidence or information to consider all aspects of the complaint they may wish to adjourn until such evidence is available and then reconvene.

Communicating the Outcome

5.21 The panel will ensure that all matters discussed remain confidential. The Clerk will communicate the outcome, and set out the reasons for it, in a letter to the complainant, the outline of which will have been formulated by the panel in the meeting. The final version will be agreed and signed by the Chair of the panel. The outcome letter will be sent to the complainant and the Headteacher at the same time. This will be in the form of an email or letter. Whilst the letter should avoid unnecessary detail, there should be sufficient information to demonstrate that the issues were considered in full, provide an explanation of the decisions taken and

include details of any actions or recommendations that will be taken to resolve the complaint.

5.22 A written record will be kept of the complaint together with the outcome. Correspondence, statements and records relating to the complaint will be filed confidentially.

5.23 The Stage 2 panel outcome letter concludes the school complaints process, and the school will not enter into any further correspondence with the complainant about the issues raised.

5.24 If the complainant believes the school has not handled their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education (DfE) after they have completed Stage 2.

5.25 The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint. The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to: Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD.

APPENDIX 1

Issues outside of the scope of the complaints policy

Exceptions	**Who to contact**
Admissions to schools Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Childrens Services representation and complaint procedure - Cambridgeshire County Council
Matters likely to require a Child Protection investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Child Protection and Safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns about the safety or welfare of a child, then you may contact the local safeguarding board: Making a Referral | Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Partnership Board (safeguardingcambspeterborough.org.uk)
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. *Complaints about the application of the Behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.
Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle blowers in education

	who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about a school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the Local Authority or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under a school's internal grievance procedure.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under a school's internal disciplinary procedure, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus
Data Use and Access	Complaints relating to data protection or information rights will be managed through a separate process in accordance with the school's Data Protection policy.

APPENDIX 2

Serial and Unreasonable Complaints Policy

1. Commitment to fair and accessible complaints handling

We are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly, impartially and in a timely manner, and to providing a high-quality service to those who raise concerns. We recognise that raising concerns is an important right and we will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school unless this becomes necessary in line with this policy. However, we do not expect our staff or governors to tolerate behaviour that is abusive, offensive, threatening, or otherwise unreasonable. We will take proportionate action to protect staff, governors and the effective operation of the school where such behaviour occurs.

2. Definition of unreasonable behaviour

We define unreasonable behaviour as behaviour by a complainant which, in the view of the school acting reasonably and proportionately, hinders or has the potential to hinder:

- the fair, efficient and effective consideration of a complaint; and/or
- the effective operation of the school, including its ability to deliver education and safeguard pupils; and/or
- the wellbeing, safety, or professional capacity of staff or governors, including where behaviour causes undue stress, harassment, or intimidation; and/or
- the ability of the Headteacher, senior leaders, or governing body to carry out their roles without disproportionate or unreasonable diversion of time and resources.

This may include behaviour which, individually or cumulatively:

- places excessive or unreasonable demands on school time, staffing or resources;
- requires a disproportionate level of senior leadership involvement to the detriment of the school's core functions;
- undermines the school's ability to manage complaints in a fair, orderly and timely manner;
- has a significant adverse impact on the school community, including pupils, staff and governors.

In applying this definition, the school will act reasonably, proportionately and in accordance with its duties under the Equality Act 2010, including making reasonable adjustments where appropriate.

The school recognises that complainants may feel frustrated or distressed. Persistence alone does not constitute unreasonable behaviour, and a complainant will not be regarded as unreasonable solely because they pursue a complaint or make multiple complaints, provided their behaviour remains reasonable.

3. Examples of unreasonable behaviour

Examples of behaviour that may be considered unreasonable include (but are not limited to) where a complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds and desired outcome, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways incompatible with the complaints procedure or good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information and expects it to be taken into account;
- raises large numbers of detailed questions and insists they are fully answered immediately or to their own timescales;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint or seeks to re-open an issue without new and relevant evidence;
- refuses to accept the outcome of the complaint after the procedure has been fully and properly followed;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff or seeks to have them replaced;
- directs complaints at multiple staff members or governors in a manner which is persistent, personal or intimidating;

- ⌦ makes excessive demands on school time through frequent, lengthy or complex contact across multiple channels;
- ⌦ persistently threatens or pursues legal action or formal escalation routes without reasonable grounds, or before the school's complaints procedure has been completed;
- ⌦ submits or expects the school to respond to excessive volumes of documentation or repeatedly expands the scope of the complaint;
- ⌦ pursues complaints in a manner which is disproportionate, persistent or antagonistic, and which the school reasonably considers to have no clear benefit to resolving the issue or supporting the pupil's education or wellbeing;
- ⌦ uses threats, intimidation, abusive, offensive or discriminatory language, or acts in a way that poses a risk to staff or others;
- ⌦ knowingly provides false information;
- ⌦ records, publishes, or threatens to publish communications with the school in a way intended to exert pressure or cause distress;
- ⌦ publishes unacceptable or defamatory information about the school or its staff on social media or other public forums;
- ⌦ makes multiple complaints, whether similar or different, where the frequency or cumulative impact places a disproportionate burden on the school's resources or disrupts its effective operation.

4. Managing unreasonable behaviour

Where concerns arise about a complainant's behaviour, the Headteacher (or Chair of Governors, where appropriate) will normally seek to address the matter informally in the first instance.

If the behaviour continues, the school will write to the complainant:

- ✓ explaining why the behaviour is considered unreasonable, with reference to this policy;
- ✓ setting out the expected standards of behaviour;
- ✓ outlining the actions that may be taken if the behaviour does not change.

The school will not normally apply restrictions that limit or cease responses until the complaint has been fully considered (in line with the complaints procedure), unless the behaviour is sufficiently serious to justify immediate action.

Where behaviour continues despite clear expectations having been set, and the school reasonably considers that it is having a disproportionate impact on staff, leadership capacity or the effective operation of the school, the school may take one or more proportionate actions set out below.

4.1 Actions the school may take

Where behaviour continues to be unreasonable, the school may take one or more of the following proportionate actions:

- implement a communication plan, including:
    - ✓ specifying a single point of contact
    - ✓ limiting methods or frequency of communication
    - ✓ setting reasonable timescales for responses
- limit or cease responding to further correspondence where:
    - ✓ the issues raised have already been addressed; and
    - ✓ no new and relevant information is provided; and
    - ✓ further responses would not be a proportionate use of resources
- temporarily suspend engagement with the complainant where behaviour is significantly disruptive, pending the complainant's agreement to engage in line with the expectations set by the school
- formally notify the complainant that their behaviour is being managed under this policy
- restrict access to staff or premises in line with school policies, where necessary to protect staff or pupils.

Decisions taken under this section will be based on a clear record of the complainant's behaviour, including the frequency and nature of contact and its impact on staff, leadership capacity and the effective operation of the school.

The school is not required to respond to correspondence or behaviour which unreasonably diverts public resources away from pupils' education, safeguarding or welfare. The application of this policy will not prevent the school from considering any new safeguarding or welfare concerns, which will always be reviewed in line with the school's safeguarding procedures. The school will ensure that any action taken is reasonable and proportionate to the circumstances, taking into account the individual context where appropriate. Decisions under this section will be taken by the Headteacher or Chair of Governors (as appropriate) and may be reported to or reviewed by the governing body.

4.2 Communication of decisions

Any action taken under this section will be:

- ✓ communicated clearly in writing;
- ✓ explained with reference to this policy;
- ✓ proportionate to the circumstances'
- ✓ subject to periodic review (normally within 6 months, where restrictions remain in place).

5. Complaints about the handling of complaints

The school will not normally accept a new complaint that solely concerns the handling of a previous complaint where:

- ✓ the school's complaints procedure has been fully and properly followed; and
- ✓ a final response has been issued.

In such cases, the matter will be treated as a continuation of the original complaint and may be managed under this policy as unreasonable or persistent behaviour.

The school will consider such a complaint only where there is clear evidence of:

- ☒ a failure to follow the school's published procedure; or
- ☒ significant new information which was not previously available.

Repeated requests to re-open or re-investigate a complaint without new and relevant evidence will not be considered.

Where the complainant remains dissatisfied, they will be advised of their right to refer the matter to appropriate external bodies, such as the Department for Education, where applicable.

6. Serious incidents

In response to any serious incident of aggression, abuse or violence, the school will take immediate action, which may include:

- ✓ reporting the matter to the police;
- ✓ restricting access to the school site;
- ✓ taking any other proportionate steps necessary to ensure the safety of staff, pupils and governors.

The school will confirm such actions in writing.

APPENDIX 3

School Complaint Form

Please provide your details	
Full name	
Address (including postcode)	
Email address	
Phone number	
Details of Complaint. Please provide a summary of your complaint (**maximum two sides of A4 or less).** Please focus on: • the key issues; • the relevant facts; • the outcome(s) sought.	

Resolution: What would represent for you an acceptable resolution to the complaint?
Signed: **Date:**

APPENDIX 4

Castle School supplementary arrangements.

This appendix supplements and clarifies the CCC policy; it does not replace or create an additional complaints stage. Where an individual issue falls within a separate statutory procedure, that route continues to apply. The CCC main policy and Appendices 1–3 remain the governing procedure.

A4.1 School contacts and confidential routing

Castle School

Courtney Way

Cambridge CB4 2EE

School office: 01223 442400

office@castle.cambs.sch.uk

Clerk@castle.cambs.sch.uk

These published school contacts are the initial routes unless a separate official contact has been supplied in writing.

- ✓ Informal concerns should normally be raised with the class team or pathway/senior leader.
- ✓ Formal Stage 1 complaints should be addressed to the Headteacher via the school office, marked "Private and Confidential – Formal Complaint".
- ✓ Complaints about the Headteacher must be routed unopened and without the Headteacher reviewing them to the Chair of Governors via the Clerk.
- ✓ Complaints about the Chair, individual governors or the whole Governing Body must be routed directly to the Clerk.
- ✓ The school will arrange secure forwarding rather than requiring the complainant to explain the confidential allegation to the person complained about.

For Stage 2, requests should be addressed to the Clerk to Governors, marked "Governor Panel Request – Private and Confidential". Governors who could be required for the panel should not correspond on the substance of live complaints.

A4.2 Clear expectations for the complaint and school response

The CCC policy asks complainants to provide a focused summary normally no longer than two sides of A4, identifying the main issues, relevant facts and outcome sought. Families may supply supporting evidence separately. Where assistance, interpretation, advocacy or reasonable adjustments are needed, Castle will help identify the issues rather than using length or format alone to screen out genuine concerns. A request for clarification will identify precisely what information is necessary and whether the formal timetable is affected. Urgent welfare and safeguarding matters are not held pending a summary.

- ✓ Families should explain what happened, the dates and people involved where known, why it matters, what has already been tried, and the change or answer sought; respond to necessary requests for clarification and treat staff respectfully.
- ✓ Castle will acknowledge and investigate within the CCC model timescales, agree or clearly explain the scope of investigation, consider relevant evidence, communicate reasoned findings and escalation arrangements, and explain any justified delay with a revised date.
- ✓ A complaint is not a disciplinary hearing or litigation process. Confidential personnel or third-party information will not be disclosed in an outcome letter where the recipient is not legally entitled to it.

A4.3 Group, collective, campaign and duplicate complaints

Where many messages raise substantially the same school-wide issue, Castle may undertake one coordinated investigation and issue a consistent response, a standard reply or a suitable public statement, as already permitted by the CCC model. Identifiable complainants will be told how their issue is being handled and how the published complaints stages apply.

Where several families raise concerns about the same incident, but its impact, provision, safeguarding or circumstances differ for individual learners, those specific issues will be separately identified and considered. Personal pupil information must not appear in a group response or public statement. A person may act as group representative only with appropriate authority. A parent joining a group does not surrender their own relevant complaint rights.

If a previously investigated concern is resubmitted by another parent, relative or representative, the school will check whether the sender has a distinct legitimate interest, materially new evidence, an individual learner issue or a separate safeguarding matter before deciding whether it can rely on the previous investigation. It will not disclose another complainant's personal case records. Petitioning or coordinated parental advocacy alone is not unreasonable behaviour.

A4.4 AI-assisted, template and disproportionately lengthy complaints

The CCC model expressly recognises AI and digital drafting tools. Castle will not reject a complaint solely because AI, translation, dictation or a template has been used. The complainant remains responsible for checking factual allegations and explaining the real concern. The school will focus its investigation and answer on substantive issues. It may summarise duplicative material, clarify a factual allegation and respond collectively to repeated points rather than rebut every assertion or legal citation.

AI-generated scenarios, unsupported accusations or repeated correspondence do not by themselves justify treating an individual as vexatious. Where frequency or behaviour causes evidenced significant disruption, the decision-maker may consider the CCC Appendix 2 and the separate Castle Parent and Carer Communication Policy, preserving new complaints, safeguarding, welfare needs, equality adjustments and statutory information rights. Families should avoid entering identifiable health, learner, staff or safeguarding information into public AI tools unless appropriate protections are in place.

A4.5 SEND accessibility, learner voice and adult learners

Castle educates learners aged 2–19 with severe, profound and complex learning and communication needs, including learners who use AAC or communicate through behaviour, gesture and non-verbal means. Investigations must seek the learner's perspective where relevant and possible, using accessible communication and taking care not to lead, coach or cause avoidable distress. Independent advocacy or specialist support may assist where appropriate.

Requests for communication adjustments (including a supported conversation, an alternative format, interpreting, assistance with the two-page summary, or additional reasonable time) will be considered and recorded. Where a learner is aged 18 or over, the school will recognise their own information and decision-making rights. Disclosure

to parents or others may require consent or another lawful basis and will take account of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 where applicable.

A4.6 Separated parents, parental responsibility and confidentiality

The school will establish who has parental responsibility and any relevant court order or information-sharing restriction, taking proportionate steps to verify authorisation. It will not assume that one parent may prevent another person with parental responsibility from receiving information to which they are legally entitled, or that each parent is entitled to personal information about other family members. Where a complaint relates to a particular learner, school responses will respect the learner's rights, safeguarding considerations and third-party confidentiality.

A4.7 Safeguarding, allegations and staff welfare

Possible child protection issues, allegations about adults, low-level concerns and urgent welfare risks will be identified and passed promptly into the relevant Castle safeguarding or staff-conduct route, including LADO consultation where thresholds or procedures require it. They will not be delayed by the complaints timetable or a communication restriction. The school will give the complainant an appropriate process update without disclosing confidential employment information.

Staff receiving threatening, abusive or intimidating correspondence should preserve the evidence, avoid argument or personal exchanges, and promptly report the matter to a senior leader. The school may nominate an alternative contact, arrange welfare/HR support, and seek LA or police advice where proportionate. Any premises restriction is a separate lawful and proportionate decision, not an automatic consequence of making a complaint. Genuine criticism and lawful external reporting remain permitted.

A4.8 Implementation, recording, learning and monitoring

The school will maintain a central restricted-access record showing receipt date, complaint scope, stage, decision-maker, evidence, acknowledgement and outcome dates, reasonable adjustments, findings, communications, and any implementation actions. Outcomes which promise a correction, pupil support change, explanation, apology, policy review or staff learning will identify an owner, target date and completion check. Closure of a complaint does not remove the need to complete agreed actions.

The Headteacher will provide anonymised trend information to the Governing Body, except where conflicted, the Clerk will oversee the independence and procedural handling of governors' panel cases. Monitoring will include adherence to deadlines, types of complaint, patterns of repeat contact, agreed action completion and any disproportionate impact on families requiring communication adjustments. Feedback will inform school improvement without compromising confidentiality.

A4.9 Relationship to the Parent and Carer Communication Policy

Routine enquiries and daily home–school contact are governed by the Castle Parent and Carer Communication Policy, which proposes acknowledging or answering routine written enquiries within three school days. A message that is or becomes a formal complaint moves to the CCC complaints timetable. No contact plan may prevent a genuine new complaint, a safeguarding alert, urgent pupil welfare communication, an EHCP/statutory process, lawful information requests or access to a relevant external authority.

APPENDIX 5

Castle School – quick operational guide: responsibilities and formal timescales

Point in process	Responsible route	Expected action
Informal concern	Class teacher/pathway or senior leader	Try to resolve promptly through clarification and discussion; no additional formal complaints stage.
Formal Stage 1	Headteacher or appropriately appointed investigator	Acknowledge in writing within 5 school days; formal written investigation outcome within 15 school days of receipt, or explain delay and revised date.
Stage 2 escalation	Complainant to Clerk	Normally request within 10 school days of Stage 1 outcome; explain matters disputed and refer to the panel form/route.
Stage 2 receipt	Clerk to Governors	Acknowledge within 5 school days; protect independence, arrange 3 uninvolved panel members.
Governors' panel	Independent panel / Clerk	Normally convene within 20 school days of the request; circulate papers normally at least 5 school days before meeting.
Final written decision	Panel Chair / Clerk	Issue outcome within 5 school days of panel meeting; explain that school procedure has concluded and how to contact DfE.
Routine written enquiry	Class team / office / appropriate leader	Communication Policy standard: normally acknowledge or answer within 3 school days; formal complaint deadlines prevail once engaged.

"School days" and "school working days" are interpreted as provided in the CCC model, including its treatment of staff training days and holidays. Neither parent-imposed deadlines nor response expectations in the routine communication policy override formal statutory or published complaint procedures.

Practical triage check before any decision not to reply further

- → Has the relevant CCC complaint stage actually been completed and the response sent?
- → Does the new message contain a new incident, pupil-specific impact, material evidence, safeguarding concern or statutory information request?
- → Have we checked reasonable adjustments, access needs, the individual's authority and any possible school delay or failure?
- → Is a decision under CCC Appendix 2 evidenced, necessary, proportionate, in writing and subject to review?
- → Have staff been told exactly what communications remain open, particularly absence, medical changes and urgent welfare matte