

All schools in our partnership want their pupils to be healthy, happy and safe, and to achieve. They recognise that parents, guardians or carers play an important part in making this happen. Cooperation between parents, staff and governors leads to a shared sense of purpose and a good atmosphere in the schools.

Each level of the procedure set out in the following pages offers the opportunity for concerns and complaints to be resolved as quickly as possible.

# The Nebula Partnership

## A Procedure for handling concerns and complaints

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Frettenham Primary School  
Hainford VC Primary School  
Horsford VA Primary School  
Old Catton VC Junior School  
White Woman Lane Junior School  
St. Faiths' Primary School



Nebula  
where stars are born

## A Procedure for handling concerns and complaints

# THE NEBULA PARTNERSHIP

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All schools in Norfolk want their pupils to be healthy, happy and safe, and to achieve. The schools in our partnership recognise that parents, guardians or carers play an important part in making this happen. Cooperation between parents, staff and governors leads to a shared sense of purpose and a good atmosphere in the school.

Each level of the procedure set out below offers the opportunity for concerns and complaints to be resolved as quickly as possible.

All Complaints will be dealt with confidentially and we expect complainants to observe confidentiality also.

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### Level 1 – informal

Parents, carers or guardians should, in the first instance, make an appointment to speak to the class teacher about the concern (unless the class teacher is the subject of the complaint. In this instance the complainant should go directly to the head of school). It is best to resolve issues at this point.

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#### **Guidance on informal level 1:**

- *Concerns should initially be handled informally in a manner that offers the best way of resolving issues.*
  - *A class teacher should offer an appointment to discuss the issue as quickly as possible, as this will give both parties time to talk about it calmly and politely without being interrupted. This can allow parties to remain calm. It will also show a commitment to resolving issues.*
  - *It is important for parents to recognise that schools are busy organisations and that it may not be possible to offer an appointment straight away.*
  - *The parties involved should be encouraged to offer their view of what would be a realistic resolution to the problem.*
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### Level 2 - informal

Parents, carers or guardians dissatisfied with the result of the discussions with the class teacher should ask for an appointment to meet with the head of school:

<i>Frettenham Primary</i>	<i>Head of School</i>	<i>Mr Gyles Longhurst</i>
<i>Hainford VC Primary</i>	<i>Head of School</i>	<i>Mr Paul Cross</i>
<i>Horsford VA Primary</i>	<i>Head of School Holt Road</i>	<i>Miss Tracy Anderson</i>

<i>Horsford VA Primary</i>	<i>Head of School Mill Lane</i>	<i>Mrs Tanya Kirton</i>
<i>Old Catton VC Junior</i>	<i>Head of School</i>	<i>Mrs Kate Connelly</i>
<i>White Woman Lane Junior</i>	<i>Head of Lower School Head of Upper School</i>	<i>Mr Nick Johnson Mr Daniel Richmond</i>
<i>St. Faiths' VC Primary</i>	<i>Head of School</i>	<i>Mrs Lesley Rix</i>

**If a resolution to the issue is proving difficult to find, parents, carers or guardians should ask for an appointment with a member of the executive deputy headteacher team.**

**The executive deputy headteacher can speak to one member of the governing body about the issue who may be willing to offer informal intervention. However, there is no obligation on any governor to become involved at this level.**

**If a governor chooses to be involved, he/she will join the meeting with the complainant and executive deputy headteacher.**

**Where the first approach by a complainant is made to a governor, the next step must be to refer the complainant to the appropriate person and advise them about the procedure. It would be useful if governors did not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or be involved at the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the procedure.**

*Old Catton and White Woman Lane Federation  
Executive Deputy (responsible for School Improvement across the Nebula Partnership)  
Mrs Nicky Pellatt*

*The Harnser Federation (Frettenham, Hainford and St. Faiths')  
Executive Deputy (responsible for SEND across the Nebula Partnership)  
Mrs Jenni Porter*

*Horsford VA Primary School  
Executive Deputy (responsible for EYFS across the Nebula Partnership)  
Miss Kirsty Anatola*

**If everyone involved is unable to resolve the issue then it may be necessary to ask for information or support from a Children's Services Representative. The issue that is the focus of the complaint will determine the person contacted. The executive deputy should know who to ring or the Customer Service Centre will be able to offer information on 0844 800 8020 or e-mail: [information@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:information@norfolk.gov.uk)  
This paragraph applies if the school cannot resolve the complaint or needs additional advice and/or support in order to do so as opposed to the complainant not liking the response received from school staff.**

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**Guidance on informal level 2:**

- *It is always best to resolve issues informally at the earliest possible time but if the person is not satisfied with the result of the talk with head of school then he/she can ask for an appointment to meet with the executive deputy headteacher.*
- *It is in everyone's interest, particularly the child or children, for concerns and complaints to be sorted out quickly and smoothly.*
- *The aim should be that discussions end on a positive note with no bad feeling.*
- *It is good practice for the executive deputy headteacher to write a letter to parents summarising what has been agreed regarding the issue.*
- *The executive deputy headteacher may feel that a particular governor's input would be helpful in bringing about a resolution but there is no obligation on any governor to become involved at this level.*
- *The advice from a Children's Services Representative will be designed to help facilitate a resolution to the problem as quickly as possible.*

***It is hoped that most problems will have been resolved by now.***

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### **Level 3 – formal complaint letter to executive headteacher**

**An issue that has not been resolved through the informal levels 1 and 2 can become an official complaint.**

**Parents, carers or guardians wishing to move to level 3 must write a formal letter of complaint to the executive headteacher. The letter will need to set out clearly the issues which have previously been discussed and why the parent, carer or guardian considers the issue to be unresolved.**

**The executive headteacher should consider the complaint and discuss a resolution with the complainant. The executive headteacher should offer a resolution to the complainant in writing within 10 school days of receipt of the letter.**

*The Nebula Partnership*

*Executive Headteacher*

*Mrs Ashley Best-White*

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### ***Guidance on level 3 - formal:***

- *An unresolved issue can now move to a formal complaint. This is a serious step to be taken. In consideration of future home/school relationships everyone concerned will need to negotiate an agreement and concentrate on finding a resolution to the issue.*

### ***Complaint heard by Chair of Governors***

- *If the complainant is not satisfied with the response of the executive headteacher or the complaint is about the executive headteacher, the complainant should write to the Chair of Governors to request that their complaint is considered further.*

### **Concerns or complaints specifically about the executive headteacher.**

**The decision that the executive headteacher has made as a result of the complaint does not become a complaint about the executive headteacher. If the complainant**

feels the complaint has not been resolved he/she should proceed to Level 4, a Governors' Complaints Panel.

If, the concern or complaint is specifically about the executive headteacher and is unable to be resolved at the informal stage, then it will be necessary for the complainant to formally complain to the Chair of Governors. The school will provide the Chair of Governor's name and the complainant should write to him or her at the school address marking the envelope 'urgent, private and confidential'. The Chair of Governors should acknowledge the complainant's letter in writing within 5 school days of receipt and contact a Governor Support Service Officer for advice.

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#### **Level 4 – formal complaint requesting a Governors' Complaints Panel.**

Complainants wishing to move to level 4 of the formal complaints procedure will need to write a letter to the Chair of Governors to request that a Governors' Complaints Panel meets to hear the complaint. This formal complaint letter must be received within 10 school days of the last meeting with the executive headteacher concerning the issue. The complainant should write to the Chair of Governors at the school address marking the envelope 'urgent and confidential'. The letter will need to set out the complaint that has previously been formally discussed with the executive headteacher and show why the matter is not resolved.

#### **Time Scales:**

<b>Receipt of complainant's letter</b>	<b>Acknowledgement within 5 school days</b>
<b>Receipt of complainant's letter</b>	<b>Governors' Panel meeting within 15 school days (unless this goes into school holidays)</b>
<b>Written documentation sent to Governors' Panel Members and complainant and headteacher</b>	<b>5 school days before meeting.</b>
<b>Governors' Panel members decision communicated to all concerned</b>	<b>As soon as possible but within 10 school days of meeting.</b>

#### **Before the meeting:**

The chair of governors should appoint a clerk to the Governors' Complaints Panel, acknowledge the complainant's letter in writing within 5 school days of receipt and arrange for a panel of governors to meet within 15 school days of receipt. It must be recognised that if the letter is received within 14 school days to the end of term it may not be possible to organise the governors' panel meeting. In this case the matter should be dealt with within 10 school days of the school reopening.

The executive headteacher should be given a copy of the complainant's letter and written documentation should be requested from the school. The clerk should send both the complainant's letter and the school documentation to the Governors' Complaints Panel members, complainant and executive headteacher

(and anyone else involved in the meeting) at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting.

The complainant and executive headteacher will be invited to attend the Governor's Complaints Panel meeting to give a verbal statement in support of their documentation. Each of them can bring someone to support them if they wish; this does not include a legal representative.

**At the meeting:**

The complainant and executive headteacher (or his/her representative) should provide all the relevant information they wish and the Governors' Complaints Panel members should clarify any points. After the complainant and headteacher (or his representative) have provided all the information they wish, the chair will ask all parties to leave except the panel members and the clerk.

**After the meeting:**

The Governors' Complaints Panel will write to all concerned within 10 school days to explain their decision and suggest a resolution to the problem, if appropriate. The decision of the Governor's Complaints Panel is final.

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The decision of the Governors' Complaints Panel will not be investigated. If, however, the complainant feels that the School and Governors have not followed the school's complaints procedure correctly, he/she can contact a Children's Services Officer for assistance. In this case he/she should ring Customer Services on 0844 800 8020 who will arrange for an officer to get back to him/her.

Chapter 3, paragraph 14 of a Guide to the Law for School Governors states: under the Education Act 1996, paragraphs 496 and 497, anyone can complain to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he or she believes that a governing body is acting "unreasonably" or is failing to carry out its statutory duties properly. However, intervention can only occur if the governing body or the Local Authority has failed to carry out a legal duty or has acted "unreasonably" in the performance of a duty. Intervention would have to be expedient in the sense that there would have to be something that the Secretary of State for Education and Skills could instruct either party to do to put matters right.

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**Guidance on level 4 - formal:**

**Before the meeting:**

- *The formal complaints letter should be passed to the vice-chair if the chair will be unable to receive the letter within 5 days.*

- *Members of the Governors' Complaints Panel should have no prior knowledge of the complaint and it is, therefore, unlikely that staff governors will be members of the panel.*
- *To ensure governors on the panel have no prior knowledge of the complaint governors from other schools within the Nebula partnership may be members of the panel*

### **At the meeting:**

- *The Complaints Panel must be made up of at least three members and a clerk.*
- *Although this is a formal meeting, every effort should be made to make it as informal as possible for all concerned.*
- *Everyone attending should be in the room at the same time*
- *Consideration may need to be given to the seating arrangements to make everyone feel equal and comfortable.*
- *The clerk should take notes of the meeting, listing who is present: Governors, stating who is the Chair of the Governors' Complaints Panel Executive Headteacher (or his/her representative) and any other members of school staff, Parents and anyone accompanying them e.g. friend and Clerk*
- *The chair of the Governors' Complaints Panel should open the meeting stating the purpose and the format of the meeting to clarify this to all in attendance.*
- *People present should introduce themselves stating their reason for being at the meeting.*
- *The chair of the Governors' Complaints Panel should request a verbal statement from the complainant in support of his or her written letter of complaint and why s/he feels the issue has not been resolved. The Governors' Complaints Panel members can ask questions to make sure they understand the issue from the parent's point of view.*
- *Each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions*
- *The chair of the Governors' Complaints Panel should request a verbal statement from the executive headteacher (or his/her representative) in support of his/her written account of the complaint and the steps taken to resolve the issue. The Governors' Complaints Panel members can ask questions to make sure they understand the issue from the executive headteacher's point of view.*
- *The members of the Governors' Complaints Panel should make sure they fully understand the issues and ask any further questions to clarify any points that are still not clear to them.*
- *The chair of the Governors' Complaints Panel must ask the complainant and the executive headteacher (or his/her representative) if they are satisfied that they have provided all the information they wanted or if there is something they wish to add and if they feel they have had a fair hearing.*
- *When the Governors' Complaints Panel members understand all the issues, the chair will ask all parties to leave except the panel members and the clerk.*

### **After the meeting:**

- *The Governors' Complaints Panel members then discuss the issues in private and the clerk remains to record the decision.*
- *The Panel members will need to consider the information, come to a decision and suggest a way to resolve the issue taking into account the best interests of the child or children.*



- *When the Panel have reached a decision the Clerk will inform everyone concerned in writing as soon as possible, but in any event, within 10 school days of the panel meeting.*

*The decision of the Governor's Complaints Panel is final.*

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**Once a Governor's Complaints Panel has heard a complaint, and it is clear that correct procedures have been followed, that specific complaint cannot be reopened. If a request is received in this respect, the chair of governors should inform the complainant that the matter is closed.**

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**Any complaints concerning the conduct of school staff will be handled in accordance with the schools internal disciplinary procedures. The details of such an investigation will remain confidential. The complainant is entitled to be informed that action is being taken and the eventual outcome of any such action.**

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**Some complaints regarding admissions, the curriculum or special educational needs are covered by statutory regulations. The executive headteacher or executive deputy headteacher can give information about these issues or advice can be sought from the Customer Service Centre on 0844 800 8020 or e-mail: [information@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:information@norfolk.gov.uk)**

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**Extended Schools: the governing body should ensure that any third party provider offering activities and services through the extended schools programme has their own complaints procedure in place. Governors would need to have a discussion around, and make a decision about, what happens when the third party provider's complaints process is exhausted and the matter is not resolved and whether it should then be referred to a Governors' Complaints Panel. This would ensure that the Governors are kept aware of complaints about provision.**

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***Vexatious Complainants:*** *it is important to distinguish between people who make a number of complaints because they really think things have gone wrong, and people who are being difficult. Complainants can be frustrated and aggrieved and it is therefore important to consider the merits of the case rather than their attitude. Even though someone has made vexatious complaints in the past, it cannot be assumed that the next complaint is also vexatious. Each complaint must be considered as to whether it is vexatious or genuine. There is no way of avoiding evaluating each complaint.*

*If properly followed, a good complaints procedure will limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the chair of the GB is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed. If the complainant writes again on the same issue, then the correspondence may be recognised as vexatious and there will be no obligation on the part of the school to respond.*



*It is important to note however that, should a complainant raise an entirely new, separate complaint, it must be responded to in accordance with the complaints procedure. It is not the complainant who is vexatious; it is the correspondence.*

### **Time Limits**

*Complaints need to be considered and resolved, as quickly, and efficiently as possible. An effective complaints procedure will have realistic time limits for each action within each stage. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set. The complainant should be sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.*

### **Cut-off Limits**

*A complaint must be lodged within 6 months of the incident. The school refuses to consider complaints lodged after 6 months of the incident.*

*(It is arguably reasonable to expect parents to make a complaint as soon as possible after an incident arises but there may be good reasons why a parent has not made a complaint earlier (e.g. they were gathering further information to support their complaint or they were not fully aware of the implications of an incident until a later date). In light of this, schools should ensure that if they have a general cut-off policy that they are willing to consider exceptions. Schools should not have blanket policies of refusing to consider any complaints not lodged within the stated period).*

**Please see the next page for a copy of the information required for a formal complaint and the following page for the flowchart.**

## **Formal Complaint**

**In your written correspondence, please include the following information;**

**Your name:**

**Pupil's name (if relevant):**

**Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):**

**Address:**

**Postcode:**

**Day time telephone number:**

**Evening telephone number:**

**Please give details of your complaint, including date of the incident.**

**What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint. (Who did you speak to and what was the response)?**

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

**Are you attaching any additional paperwork? If so, please give details.**

**Signature.**

**Date.**

**Flowchart of procedure for handling concerns and complaints:**

