Complaints Policy

Reviewed	October 2026	**Leader of Policy Review**	Mr. S. Budgen

1. Introduction

Hawarden High School is committed to effectively handling all complaints. We aim to clarify any concerns and, where necessary, rectify any mistakes. We are dedicated to learning from these experiences to improve our practices.

Our definition of a complaint is:
"An expression of dissatisfaction regarding the school, a member of staff or the governing body that requires a response."

We ensure that all complaints are dealt with in an open, fair, and timely manner. This policy applies to anyone with an interest in the school and provides the confidence that their concerns will be heard and addressed appropriately.

This policy is available to all parents, carers, pupils, staff, governors, and the wider school community. Information about the procedure is also made available to pupils through assemblies, the school council, and leaflets, ensuring they are aware of how to raise concerns.

2. Commitment to Respectful Relationships

We promote respectful relationships between learners, parents, staff, and governors, and maintain a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment. Complaints regarding bullying, harassment, or discrimination will be handled with the utmost seriousness, including incidents related to:

- Race, religion, or culture
- Homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia
- Sexism or sexual harassment
- Disability and Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

We also recognise that pupils under 16 can raise complaints, and parental involvement will normally be sought unless the pupil explicitly requests otherwise. Advocacy support (such as MEIC) is available for young people.

3. Handling Complaints Fairly and Impartially

Complaints will be dealt with fairly and without bias. Any prior knowledge of the complaint or individuals involved will not influence decision-making. If any staff or governors have been involved in the issue to an extent whereby they could be seen to influence an outcome, they will be excluded from the process to maintain impartiality. There will be exceptions to this where they are required to provide information to assist the handling of the complaint and, as such, will be treated as a witness.

If a conflict of interest arises, substitute governors may be appointed, or joint committees with other governing bodies may be formed.

A designated Complaints Officer may be appointed by the school to oversee the complaints process and act as the primary contact for complainants.

4. When to use this procedure

We encourage resolving concerns informally by speaking directly with the relevant staff member. If the issue cannot be resolved this way, the formal complaints procedure should be followed. This procedure applies to complaints about the school, its staff and the governing body.

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Complaints about other matters that are dealt with under statutory processes — such as staff disciplinary or grievance procedures, child protection/safeguarding, admissions, exclusions, curriculum content, or Additional Learning Needs (ALN) — are excluded from this policy. The complainant will be advised of the appropriate procedure in these cases.

5. What we expect from complainants

We believe that all complainants have a right to be heard, understood and respected. School staff and governors have the same right. We expect you to be polite and courteous.

We will not tolerate aggressive, abusive or unreasonable behaviour nor will we tolerate unreasonable demands or unreasonable persistence or vexatious complaining. We have a separate policy to manage situations where we find that someone's actions are unacceptable, specifically the 'Managing Unacceptable Actions by Complainants' Policy.

Complainants are expected to raise concerns promptly and to provide sufficient and specific information to enable the school to understand and consider the complaint. A formal complaint should explain what is alleged to have happened, when the complainant first became aware of the matter, and what the complainant believes should be done to put matters right.

Where more than three months have passed since the complainant first became aware of the matter, the complainant will be asked to explain why the complaint was not made earlier.

Normally, the school will not consider a complaint made more than six months after the complainant first became aware of the event or matter concerned, unless there are exceptional circumstances which justify considering it. In deciding whether to accept a late complaint, the school will take account of the reasons for the delay, the nature and seriousness of the matter, whether relevant evidence remains available and whether the complaint can still be considered fairly and effectively. The decision and reasons will be communicated to the complainant in writing. These time limits will not prevent the school from taking appropriate action where information raises a safeguarding or child-protection concern, or where another statutory duty or procedure applies.

Formal complaints at Stage B must normally be submitted using the school's electronic Formal Complaint Form, available through the school website. The form is designed to ensure that the complaint, its impact, any previous attempts to resolve it and the outcome sought are set out clearly and concisely.

At the point of submission, complainants should submit only the completed form. Additional narrative statements, copies of correspondence, screenshots or supporting documents should not be submitted unless specifically requested by the school. The form allows a complainant to identify any documents which they believe are essential to consideration of the complaint. The school will request copies of any supporting information it considers necessary as part of its consideration or investigation.

Where a complainant is unable reasonably to use the electronic form, the school will provide appropriate assistance or arrange an alternative means of recording the same information. This may include a member of staff completing the form with or on behalf of the complainant and confirming that it accurately records their complaint.

6. Our approach to answering your concern or complaint

We will consider all your concerns and complaints in an open and fair way. At all times the school will respect the rights and feelings of those involved and make every effort to protect confidential information.

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Some types of concern or complaint may raise issues that have to be dealt with in another way (other than this complaints policy), in which case we will explain why this is so, and will tell you what steps will be taken.

Complaints that are made anonymously will be recorded but investigation will be at the discretion of the school depending on the nature of the complaint.

7. Stages of the Complaints Procedure

Stage A: Early Resolution
Most concerns can be resolved informally. You should raise the issue as soon as possible, normally within 10 school days of the incident. The school aims to respond to concerns within 10 school days. If it cannot be resolved informally, you may proceed to Stage B

Stage B: Written Formal Complaint

If the issue is not resolved at Stage A, a formal complaint should be submitted using the school's electronic Formal Complaint Form. The form is available on the school website. The complaint should identify clearly the matters complained of, provide sufficient information for them to be considered and explain what the complainant believes should be done to put matters right. Where any of these matters are unclear, the school may seek clarification from the complainant before completing its investigation. The school will consider the outcome sought but is not bound by it; any remedy must be lawful, reasonable and within the powers of the school or governing body. You are encouraged to submit this within five school days of receiving the informal response.

The completed electronic form will constitute the complainant's formal Stage B complaint. Complainants should not submit additional written accounts or supporting material with the form unless the school has specifically requested them. Where further information or evidence is required, the investigating officer will ask for it.

Correspondence sent by email or letter which seeks to commence a Stage B complaint will normally be acknowledged and the complainant directed to complete the electronic Formal Complaint Form. Stage B will normally commence when the completed form has been received. Where the complainant requires assistance or a reasonable adjustment, the school will assist them to record the complaint in the same format.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, the completed Formal Complaint Form will be referred to the Chair of Governors for consideration.

The school will aim to respond to the complaint in writing within 10 school days. Where this is not possible, the complainant will be informed of the reasons and given a revised timescale.

Stage C: Governing Body Review
It is rare that a complaint will progress any further. However, if you still feel that your complaint has not been dealt with fairly, you should write, through the school's address, to the Chair of Governors. You should identify the aspects of the Stage B response which you consider remain unresolved, explain why you are asking the Governing Body's Complaints Committee to consider the complaint, and state what further outcome you are seeking. You do not need to repeat the details of your whole complaint.

The Stage C request should relate only to the complaint already considered at Stage B. The complainant should not resubmit the original complaint or send additional documentation unless asked to do so. The Complaints Committee will have access to the Stage B complaint and the school's response and will advise the complainant if any further information is required. Issues which are clearly different from those considered at Stages A and B will

not normally be introduced for the first time at Stage C and may instead need to be considered separately under the appropriate stage or procedure.

Your complaint at Stage C will be referred to the Governing Body's Complaints Committee by the Chair of Governors. A meeting will be arranged within 15 school days to review the case. The complainant will be offered an opportunity to attend any hearing and the Committee's decision will be communicated in writing within 10 school days of the meeting.

The complainant will normally be given at least one week's notice of the Stage C hearing. The school will seek to arrange the hearing at a reasonable time and will consider any reasonable request to change the date. However, complaints should be concluded without unnecessary delay and convening a Complaints Committee requires the availability of a number of governors and other participants. The Committee will therefore normally reschedule a hearing at the complainant's request no more than once.

If the complainant requests a further postponement, or does not attend an arranged hearing without providing a good reason, the Committee may proceed in their absence and determine the complaint on the basis of the written information available to it.

Stage C hearings, where conducted, will normally be organised so that the complainant and the school's management representatives are heard separately by the same Complaints Committee. This arrangement is intended to support a calm, orderly and non-confrontational process and to enable each party to explain its position fully.
The complainant will normally be heard first and will be invited to summarise the outstanding issues, explain the outcome sought and answer any questions from the Committee before withdrawing. The Committee will then hear the school's management response to the same outstanding issues and may ask questions of those representing the school. Neither party will normally be present while the other is being heard.
If any new material point arises during either part of the hearing which may affect the Committee's decision and on which the other party has not previously had an opportunity to comment, the Chair will ensure that a fair opportunity to respond is provided before a decision is reached.
Once both parties have been heard, the Committee will deliberate in private and reach its findings on the balance of probabilities, including whether each aspect of the complaint is upheld, partly upheld or not upheld and whether any proportionate action or learning point is required. The Chair may vary these arrangements where necessary to ensure fairness or to enable effective participation by those involved.

The governing body's complaints committee is the final arbiter of complaints. Once Stage C has concluded, the school will not reconsider the same complaint. Clearly different new issues may be considered under the appropriate procedure. A complainant who believes that the complaints procedure was not followed correctly may ask the Local Authority to review the **handling of the complaint, but not the substantive decision reached by the Complaints Committee**.

8. Meetings and Communication

Meetings should be scheduled at reasonable times and held on school premises unless there are exceptional circumstances. Video conferencing may be used if all parties agree. The format of a Stage C hearing, including whether participants are heard together or separately, will be determined in accordance with the Stage C arrangements set out above.

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9. Record-Keeping and Monitoring

Detailed records of complaints and their outcomes will be kept to ensure transparency and accountability. These records will be retained in accordance with the school's retention schedule and reviewed after seven years to determine whether there is a continuing need for them to be retained. They will also be used to monitor recurring issues or trends.

The Headteacher will report on complaints to the Governing Body to help review and improve school procedures.

10. Dealing with Vexatious or Persistent Complaints

The school will not tolerate aggressive, abusive, or unreasonable behaviour during the complaints process. Vexatious or repetitive complaints will be managed according to local authority guidelines and / or in line with the school's Managing Unacceptable Actions of Complainants Policy.

11. Special circumstances

If the complaint involves members of the governing body or the headteacher, the procedure will be adjusted accordingly to ensure impartiality. Independent investigations may be arranged if required.

12. Our commitment to you

We take all complaints seriously and are dedicated to learning from our mistakes. If you require assistance, we will provide the support you need. Young people can access additional advocacy services, such as MEIC, for further support.

Administration Use	
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