



Complaints Policy

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Aims

Grimsdyke school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Grimsdyke School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint.

- A **concern** may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.
- A **complaint** may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

Examples of Concerns

Concerns might include (but are not limited to):

- You notice your child seems unhappy at school and want to discuss why.
- You are worried your child is struggling with their reading or homework.

- You feel your child is not being given enough challenge or support in lessons.
- You want clarification about how a behaviour policy or homework rule works.
- You are unsure about how your child's teacher has handled a minor classroom incident.

Examples of Complaints

Complaints might include (but are not limited to):

- You believe the school has failed to follow its own policy (e.g., safeguarding, behaviour, SEND).
- You think your child has been treated unfairly or discriminated against.
- You are unhappy with how a serious bullying issue has been handled.
- You disagree with how a disciplinary matter was managed.
- You have raised a concern previously, but the school has not responded or resolved it satisfactorily.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Grimsdyke School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, Grimsdyke School will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the school will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Grimsdyke School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to Raise a Concern

A concern may be defined as an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought. A concern can be made in person, by email or by telephone.

Concerns should be raised with either:

- The class teacher
- A member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)
- The Headteacher (HT)

A concern can be made via email to:

- Year group emails
- School Office – office@grimsdyke.harrow.sch.uk

- Headteacher – headteacher@grimsdyke.harrow.sch.uk
- Chair of Governors (CoG) – chairofgovernors@grimsdyke.harrow.sch.uk

A concern should only be raised with the Chair of Governors if it relates directly about the Headteacher, or if the issue cannot reasonably be addressed through the normal school channels (class teacher, SLT, or HT). The Chair of Governors should not be contacted for day-to-day concerns about pupils, teaching, or school operations.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a **formal complaint**.

How to Raise a Complaint

If a concern cannot be resolved informally and the issue meets the definition of a complaint, it should be raised as a formal complaint. This can be done verbally or in writing. Where a verbal concern appears to meet the threshold of a complaint, the member of staff receiving it will ensure it is logged with sufficient detail to enable appropriate follow-up. While the school will take steps to identify and record complaints made verbally, responsibility for clarifying that a formal complaint is being made lies with the complainant. This will ensure that no formal complaint is overlooked or remains unrecorded. Complainants are encouraged to confirm their complaint in writing using the school's Complaint Form (Appendix A) where possible.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Head Teacher and Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

You 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 consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Grimsdyke School other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of • Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals 	<p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Harrow Council.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). You can contact the Harrow Golden Number on 020 8901 2690.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/schooldiscipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of Behaviour (as per the Schools Behaviour Policy) can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: Contact the Department for Education (DfE) - GOV.UK.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school’s internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Curriculum - content 	<p>Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus</p>

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, Local Authority (LA), safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Grimsdyke School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Grimsdyke School wants to endeavor to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, 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 we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- a regular review of complaints data to identify patterns and areas for improvement. Outcomes from complaints will inform school improvement planning and policy development.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Stage 1 – Formal Complaint

Submitting a Complaint

A formal complaint should be submitted using the complaint form (Appendix A) and completed forms should be sent to one of the following:

- **School Office** – office@grimsdyke.harrow.sch.uk
- **Headteacher** – headteacher@grimsdyke.harrow.sch.uk (all complaints except those about the Headteacher)
- **Chair of Governors (CoG)** – chairofgovernors@grimsdyke.harrow.sch.uk (complaints about the Headteacher)
- **London Governance** – hello@ldngov.co.uk (complaints about the CoG, governing body or individual governors)

Handwritten complaint forms will also be accepted and may be submitted via the school office, clearly marked Private and Confidential.

However, the school will also accept a complaint that is not submitted using the Complaint Form, for example by email or in handwritten form. Where this occurs, the information will be transferred onto the Complaint Form during the initial complaint meeting, with the complainant's agreement and approval.

Receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged in writing (by letter or email) within 2 school days.

The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the senior leadership team, but will retain responsibility for the final decision.

The investigator will:

- Clarify the nature of the complaint, what remains unresolved, and the outcome the complainant seeks.
- Consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of gathering further information.
- If necessary, interview those involved, if necessary, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.
- Keep a written record of all meetings and interviews.

A formal written response will be provided within 5 school days of completing the investigation.

If it is not possible to meet this deadline, the complainant will be sent an update with a revised response date. Further updates will be issued at least every 5 school days until the investigation is concluded.

The response will:

- Outline the actions taken to investigate the complaint.
- Provide a full explanation of the decision reached, with reasons.
- Where appropriate, state any actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.
- Explain how the complainant may escalate their complaint if they remain dissatisfied.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher or a governor (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor or the London Governance Clerk will be appointed to carry out Stage 1.

Complaints about the Headteacher or governors should be sent directly to the London Governance Clerk.

If the complaint concerns:

- Both the Chair and Vice-Chair, or
- The entire governing body, or
- The majority of the governing body,

An independent investigator appointed by the governing body will undertake Stage 1. A formal written response will be provided at the conclusion of their investigation.

Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the board of governor's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

- A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the London Governance, the clerk, via email (hello@ldngov.co.uk), within 3 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.
- Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.
- The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

- If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.
- The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Grimsdyke School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.
- The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.
- If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

- At least 7 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:
- Confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- Request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.
- Any written material relating to the complaint will be circulated to all parties at least three school days prior to the meeting. The committee will not normally accept as evidence any electronic video or audio recordings of conversations that have been obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties involved. In addition, electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not usually permitted, unless required as a reasonable adjustment to support a complainant's disability or special educational needs.
- The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.
- The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Any consent given will be formally recorded in the minutes.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

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

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

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Grimsdyke School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Grimsdyke School.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire board of governors
- the majority of the board of governors

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent governors.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Grimsdyke School will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Duplicate or Repeated Complaints

Duplicate or repeated complaints will not normally be considered once they have been fully addressed under this procedure. In such cases, the complainant will be informed that the process has been completed. Where new and substantive information is provided, the complaint may be reconsidered. If a complainant persistently raises the same or very similar issues, or behaves in a way that is considered unreasonable (e.g. excessive correspondence, refusal to accept outcomes, or aggressive behaviour), the school may decide to:

- Cease correspondence on the matter;
- Remind the complainant that the process is complete;
- Direct the complainant to the relevant external body (e.g. DfE) if appropriate.

Such cases will be managed in line with the principles set out in the schools managing serial and unreasonable complaints policy.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes Grimsdyke school did not handle 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 after they have completed Stage 2.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Grimsdyke School. They will consider whether Grimsdyke School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education 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.

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- respect confidentiality and refrain from publicising complaints on social media during the investigation to protect all parties involved.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
- sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
- interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
- consideration of records and other relevant information
- analysing information

- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the HT or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The HT or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Coordinator

(HT / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, HT, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.
- If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so
- No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant
- We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting
- Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting
- Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.
- The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
- Where the complaint involves or is made by a student, appropriate support and involvement will be provided to ensure their voice is heard and their welfare safeguarded throughout the process
- Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.
- However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

Appendix A



Complaint Form

Complete the form and send it to the relevant emails based on the nature of the complaint:

- **School Office** – office@grimsdyke.harrow.sch.uk
- **Headteacher** – headteacher@grimsdyke.harrow.sch.uk (all complaints except those about the Headteacher)
- **Chair of Governors (CoG)** – chairofgovernors@grimsdyke.harrow.sch.uk (complaints about the Headteacher)
- **London Governance** – hello@ldngov.co.uk (complaints about the CoG, governing body or individual governors)

Handwritten complaint forms will also be accepted and may be submitted via the school office, clearly marked Private and Confidential.

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 whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

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

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

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date: