

Complaints Policy

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Equality and Inclusion Statement

Apex Specialist Education and all learning centres are committed to equality, inclusion, belonging and respect. This statement applies to every school policy and guides our work across all learning centres.

We promote equality of opportunity, value diversity and work to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation. In accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice, we provide an inclusive education that enables all pupils to participate fully, overcome barriers, develop their potential and achieve positive outcomes.

We recognise diversity as a strength to be respected, celebrated and reflected throughout school life. We strive to ensure everyone feels safe, valued, represented and that they belong. This commitment informs our governance, leadership, safeguarding, curriculum, provision and practice.

Our Commitment:

We are committed to:

- Eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
- Advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Putting our Commitment into Practice:

The Proprietor, Governing Board and Leadership Team will:

- Consider equality implications and the impact of decisions, policies and practice on people with protected characteristics.
- Embed equality, accessibility and inclusion in the development and review of curriculum, provision and policies.
- Identify and seek to reduce or remove barriers to participation, learning, attendance, wellbeing and engagement.
- Promote belonging, positive relationships and high aspirations, particularly for pupils experiencing disadvantage or additional barriers.
- Respond to prejudice-based and discriminatory behaviour, including through safeguarding procedures where relevant.
- Monitor the implementation and impact of equality and inclusion across all learning centres.

Our commitment encompasses the protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

All members of our school community share responsibility for upholding equality, inclusion, belonging and respect in their conduct, relationships and implementation of school policies.

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Appendix A: Conflict and Independence Declaration

1. Purpose and Availability

Healey Learning Centre welcomes concerns as an opportunity to resolve problems and improve provision. We will listen, investigate fairly, respond within clear timescales and explain what happens next. Raising a complaint must not disadvantage a pupil or family.

This policy provides the three-stage procedure required by Part 7, paragraph 33, of the Independent School Standards. It applies across the three centres as one school and is published on the school website. A free copy and reasonable communication adjustments are available through the school office.

School office: info@apex-specialisteducation.com; 07915 269 720. Written correspondence can be delivered to the school office marked confidential for the named role. Staff must forward a complaint about a leader to the appropriate alternative recipient without requiring that leader's permission.

2. Who Can Use this Procedure

The statutory procedure is for parents and carers of pupils at the school. A complaint started while a pupil is registered will be completed even if the pupil subsequently leaves. The school also accepts concerns from pupils, former parents, neighbours and other members of the public and will explain the appropriate route and response arrangements. It will not use a technical label to avoid addressing a valid concern.

A concern is a matter about which someone seeks reassurance; a complaint expresses dissatisfaction with an action or failure to act. No particular phrase or form is required. Pupils may speak to a trusted adult, use their usual communication method or receive help from an advocate.

We will consider anonymous information on its merits, particularly where it indicates risk to children, although anonymity may limit investigation or prevent a personal response.

Learners undertaking qualifications through Apex Specialist Education may use this procedure to complain about qualification delivery, assessment administration, examination arrangements, learner support or the conduct of staff. Learners may raise a complaint directly or with support from a parent, carer or appropriate representative. The centre will explain the applicable stages and provide reasonable communication adjustments.

Challenges to assessment decisions or examination results follow the Internal Appeals Procedure and the relevant awarding organisation's requirements.

3. Matters Requiring Another Route

Immediate safety and safeguarding concerns are handled under the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. Call 999 where there is immediate danger. Allegations or low-level concerns about staff must reach the appropriate case manager; they are not delayed until the complaints stages have finished. Robert Cochrane, Headteacher, normally manages staff allegations; Callan Glean coordinates safeguarding as whole-school DSL. Allegations about the Headteacher go to the proprietor's nominated representative, or directly to the

LADO where there is a conflict.

Statutory EHCP assessment, content or placement decisions are made by the local authority and may carry rights of mediation or appeal to the SEND Tribunal. Complaints about the school's delivery of agreed provision remain within this policy where appropriate.

Admissions and suspension decisions follow the review arrangements in those policies. Complaints about associated conduct, discrimination, process or provision are considered through the appropriate route and are not automatically excluded. The school will explain in writing how overlapping issues will be handled.

Staff grievances, disciplinary matters and whistleblowing use their separate procedures. Complainants can receive an outcome about their complaint but are not entitled to confidential employment information. Complaints about an external provider should normally go to that provider; the school still considers concerns about its commissioning, supervision or safeguarding responsibilities.

Data protection complaints and requests to exercise data rights are referred promptly to the data protection contact. Their statutory deadlines continue during school holidays and must not be replaced by the school-day timetable below. The school will coordinate linked complaints without requiring duplicate submissions.

3.1. Qualification, Assessment and Examination Matters

Complaints about teaching, qualification delivery, assessment administration, examination arrangements or learner support are considered under this Complaints Policy.

Challenges to internal assessment decisions, centre-assessed marks, qualification entry or withdrawal decisions, centre decisions concerning access arrangements or special consideration, and access to post-results services or awarding organisation appeals are handled under the Internal Appeals Procedure.

Suspected malpractice or maladministration must be referred promptly under the Malpractice and Academic Misconduct Policy. Safeguarding concerns must be referred immediately under the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Where a complaint includes more than one type of issue, the centre will coordinate the relevant procedures and explain the routes, responsibilities and deadlines in writing. A learner will not be required to submit the same information repeatedly.

The school-day timescales in this Complaints Policy must not delay an examination or assessment action or override an awarding organisation's deadline. Daniel Young, Examinations Officer, or an authorised uninvolved deputy will identify and communicate applicable qualification deadlines promptly.

Where an issue remains unresolved, the centre will explain any applicable complaint or appeal route to the relevant awarding organisation, including AQA, OCR or NCFE where appropriate. External submissions must follow that organisation's current requirements. This policy does not restrict lawful reporting to an awarding organisation, regulator or safeguarding authority.

4. Fairness and Accessibility

We will make reasonable adjustments, including help putting a complaint in writing, accessible information, interpreters, an appropriate meeting venue, remote attendance where suitable and support from a chosen companion. Staff can record an oral formal complaint and ask the complainant to check its accuracy. An inability to write or use email must not prevent access.

Investigators and panel members must be impartial and have no disqualifying involvement or conflict. Those complained about will have a fair opportunity to respond. Relevant evidence will be considered, and disputed facts distinguished from findings. Safeguarding advice may affect how evidence is obtained or shared.

We encourage respectful communication and confidentiality but do not require a promise of secrecy or a ban on lawful contact with advisers, regulators or safeguarding agencies as a condition of proceeding.

5. Timescales

A school day means a day when the school is open to pupils. Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the incident or the last in a related series. We will consider later complaints where there is a reasonable explanation, delayed discovery, vulnerability or a serious matter requiring consideration. Safeguarding concerns are not rejected because of this limit.

For ordinary complaints received during holidays, the school-day response period begins on the next school day. Urgent safeguarding and data protection matters are acted upon within their own requirements throughout the year.

If a deadline cannot be met, the coordinator will explain the reason before the deadline, give a revised date and provide updates. Delays must be justified and must not leave the complaint open indefinitely. The school will consider reasonable extensions requested by a complainant.

6. Stage 1 Informal Resolution

Raise the concern with the relevant staff member or centre leader, or the Headteacher where appropriate. The office can help identify the right person. A concern about that person must be directed to an uninvolved senior leader instead.

The school will acknowledge the concern within two school days and aim to provide a response within 20 school days, usually sooner. Staff may arrange a discussion to understand what happened and what would help resolve it. An informal meeting with the subject of the complaint will not be required where inappropriate or distressing.

The response will explain what has been established and any agreed action. If the matter remains unresolved, or informal handling is unsuitable, the complainant may request Stage 2. Informal discussion must not be used to prevent access to the formal procedure.

7. Stage 2 Formal Written Complaint

Send the complaint to the Headteacher, Robert Cochrane, through the office, marked complaint. Give the main issues, relevant dates, available evidence, previous steps and the outcome sought. Assistance is available; the school will not reject a complaint solely because a suggested form or format was not used.

The coordinator will acknowledge receipt in writing within two school days. The Headteacher, or an appropriate impartial investigator, will clarify the issues, examine evidence and speak to relevant people. A meeting may be offered, and the complainant may be accompanied.

The school will issue a reasoned written response within 20 school days of receiving the formal complaint, unless a justified extension has been explained. It will address each main issue, state the findings, explain any remedy or action and give the route and deadline for Stage 3.

Where a complaint concerns the Headteacher or a governance member, Section 9 applies. A person must not investigate or determine a complaint about their own conduct.

8. Stage 3 Panel hearing

8.1. Request and Membership

If dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response, the parent may request a panel hearing through the school office, addressed to the complaint's coordinator for the proprietor. Requests should normally be made within ten school days of the response. Explain the outstanding concerns; reasonable requests outside this period will be considered.

The coordinator will acknowledge the request within two school days. The proprietor, or someone acting on its behalf, will appoint a panel of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters complained about. At least one member must be independent of the management and running of the school. Being uninvolved in the complaint does not, by itself, make a school employee or governor independent for this purpose.

Members must declare relevant relationships and interests before appointment. The proprietor must replace anyone whose involvement or conflict prevents a fair hearing. Where internal governance is implicated, use appropriately independent external members. Keep a record of the independence checks and appointment decisions.

8.2. Arranging the Hearing

The panel hearing should take place within 20 school days of receiving the request, subject to a justified extension communicated to the complainant. Give reasonable notice, discuss availability and access needs, and provide the names and roles of members so concerns about impartiality can be raised promptly.

The parent must be allowed to attend and be accompanied if they wish. A suitable companion may be a friend, relative, adviser or advocate. Consider requests for legal

representation individually; there is no automatic requirement to obtain a lawyer. A reasonable alternative must be offered if a particular arrangement presents a genuine conflict or safety issue.

Relevant papers will normally be circulated at least five school days before the hearing. Information may be redacted where necessary to protect others or an investigation, but each party must have a fair opportunity to understand and answer the case. If substantial new evidence arises, consider an adjournment.

If a complainant cannot attend, offer reasonable alternative dates or arrangements. A hearing on written submissions may proceed where the complainant chooses this or does not attend after reasonable efforts to facilitate attendance. Record the reasons. The complainant's right to a hearing must not be frustrated by inflexible arrangements.

8.3. Hearing and Decision

The hearing is private. The chair explains the procedure, allows the parent and school representative to present their accounts and ensures questions are fair and relevant. Keep an accurate written record. Recording requests are considered for accessibility and privacy; no recording may be used or circulated beyond its agreed lawful purpose.

After hearing the evidence, the panel deliberates privately. It can uphold, partly uphold or not uphold the complaint, make findings and recommend remedies or improvements. Decisions must address the complaint rather than defend the school's earlier response automatically.

The findings and recommendations will be sent in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about within five school days of the hearing. A copy must be available for inspection on school premises by the proprietor and Headteacher. The outcome states the reasons, actions, responsibilities and timescales and explains that the school's procedure has concluded.

9. Complaints About Senior Leaders or Governance

A complaint about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, Daniel McCann, through the office. An uninvolved, suitably skilled person will conduct Stage 2 on behalf of the proprietor. Any personal or family relationship relevant to the dispute must be assessed; the position held does not establish impartiality.

Complaints about the Chair, CEO, proprietor or most or all of the governing board must be marked confidential for an independent complaints investigator to be appointed on behalf of the proprietor. The coordinator must arrange external independent handling where those available internally are implicated or conflicted. Stage 3 must have at least three uninvolved members and the required independent representation; for a complaint about the whole governing body, use a wholly independent panel.

The person complained about must not select an outcome, veto escalation or control the

investigation. The same acknowledgement, investigation and hearing timescales apply. Safeguarding allegations follow their separate LADO and case-manager routes.

10. Records and Confidentiality

Keep a written record of every complaint reaching the formal stage, whether it was resolved at Stage 2 or proceeded to a panel, the outcome, and action taken by the school as a result regardless of whether the complaint was upheld. Record informal concerns proportionately to support follow-up and identify patterns.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are confidential, except where the Secretary of State or an inspection body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access, and where other lawful disclosure is required. Safeguarding and data protection obligations remain applicable.

Store records securely with access restricted to those who need them. Retention follows the school's approved schedule and any safeguarding, litigation or regulatory preservation requirements. Access requests are considered under data protection law, including the rights of others; this independent-school policy does not create a general Freedom of Information Act disclosure right.

The proprietor must make available the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year. The coordinator will verify the actual figure annually and provide it with the published complaints information. Do not carry forward an earlier year's zero figure without checking the current register.

11. Managing Unreasonable Conduct

Persistent disagreement, criticism or escalation is not itself unreasonable. The school will distinguish the substance of a complaint from behaviour such as threats, abuse or repeated contact that seriously disrupts operations.

Where necessary, impose proportionate communication arrangements, such as a named contact or agreed contact frequency, after explaining the concern and considering disability or communication needs. Confirm the reasons, duration and review arrangements in writing. Maintain a route for urgent safeguarding information, new material concerns and access to the complaint's stages.

After a complaint has completed the process, the school may explain that it will not repeat responses on the same issues without new information. Assess new evidence and distinct complaints fairly. Campaign or duplicate correspondence may receive a coordinated response, but a parent's individual unresolved complaint retains access to this procedure. Immediate threats may require police assistance and separate site-safety measures.

12. External Routes and Learning

The Department for Education can consider information suggesting an independent school is

failing to meet the required standards. It does not act as a further appeal panel deciding the merits of every individual dispute or award compensation through this process. Current details are available at www.gov.uk/complain-about-school/private-schools.

Ofsted can receive information relevant to inspection and safeguarding but does not normally resolve individual complaints. Safeguarding concerns may be referred directly to children's social care, the LADO or police as appropriate. Data protection concerns may be raised with the Information Commissioner's Office. Statutory rights, including SEND or discrimination remedies, are not removed by this policy.

Governance reviews anonymised themes, response times and completion of actions. Share learning while preserving the independence of any future panel. Review this policy annually and after significant changes or failures in the process.

13. References

- [Independent School Standards paragraph 33](#)
- [Complaining about a private school](#)
- [ICO data protection complaints requirements June 2026](#)
- [Independent School Standards and April 2026 guidance](#)
- [Keeping children safe in education 2026](#)
- [Ofsted independent school inspection toolkit and operating guidance](#)

Appendix A Conflict and Independence Declaration

Complaint reference and proposed role:

Name and organisation:

Have you been directly involved in the matters complained about?

Describe any personal, family, employment, governance, financial or professional links with the school, complainant or people concerned:

For the independent member, explain why you are independent of the management and running of the school:

I will handle information confidentially, act fairly and disclose any new conflict immediately.

Signature and date: _____

Appointing person's decision, reasons and any replacement required:

A declaration cannot make a directly involved person eligible for the panel or remove the requirement for at least one genuinely independent member.