Abertillery
Learning Community



COMPLAINTS POLICY

Policy:	Complaints
Age Range:	3-16
Type:	Statutory
Sub Committee:	Finance, Site, Health & Safety
Governing Body Approval:	
Review Date:	September 2027
Staff Lead:	Headteacher / Governing Body

Version Control

Version	Key Changes	Sub Committee Approval (Date)	Full GB Approval (Date)	Review Date
1.0	• Reviewed and updated in line with current Welsh Government model complaints procedure and school complaints guidance. • Wording revised and various sections added. • Managing Unacceptable Behaviour of Parent-Carer-Visitor Policy link added. • Appendix B and Source and governance note added, with links.			September 2027

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Review

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness.

Adjustments will be made based on feedback from staff, pupils and parents, as well as the latest educational research and inspectorate feedback.

Headteacher:

Chair of Governors:

Date:

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1. Introduction and purpose

Abertillery Learning Community (ALC), referred to in this policy as 'the school', is committed to dealing effectively, fairly and promptly with concerns and complaints. We aim to clarify issues, put right mistakes where possible, apologise where appropriate, and learn from complaints so that our practice and provision continue to improve.

The school has a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment and promotes respectful relationships between learners, parents and carers, staff and governors.

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction in relation to the school, a member of its staff or the governing body that requires a response from the school.

This procedure enables anyone with an interest in the school to raise a concern with confidence that it will be heard and, where well-founded, addressed appropriately and in a timely way.

2. Status of this policy

This policy is based on the Welsh Government model complaints procedure in Annex 1 of the School complaints procedures guidance. The Governing Body has also included local procedural detail to support consistent, transparent and proportionate complaint handling at ALC.

Important distinction

The Welsh Government model procedure provides the core three-stage process. Additional ALC provisions in this policy - for example, clarifying the scope of a Stage B investigation, handling new issues, evidence management and investigation records - are local procedural safeguards intended to support fair and consistent implementation. They do not replace or restrict the Welsh Government model procedure.

3. When to use this procedure

When a concern or complaint is raised, the school will normally respond using this procedure. Some matters are decided by another body, or are subject to a different statutory, legal or school procedure. Where this applies, the school will explain the appropriate route and, where relevant, what steps will be taken.

Examples may include safeguarding matters, staff disciplinary or capability procedures, admissions, exclusions, statutory additional learning needs processes, data protection requests, whistleblowing, or matters subject to a separate appeal or review mechanism.

Where a complaint concerns another body as well as the school, for example the local authority, the school will work with the relevant body to determine how the matter should be handled.

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4. Resolving concerns early

Most concerns can be resolved quickly by speaking to the relevant member of staff. A person approaching the school for the first time should normally give the school an opportunity to respond before progressing to a formal complaint.

5. What we expect from complainants

Complainants have the right to be heard, understood and respected. Staff and governors have the same right. Communication should therefore be polite and courteous. The school will not tolerate aggressive, abusive or unreasonable behaviour, unreasonable demands, unreasonable persistence or vexatious complaining.

Where a person's actions become unacceptable, the school will manage this in accordance with the ALC Managing Unacceptable Behaviour of Parent-Carer-Visitor Policy. Any restriction will be proportionate, recorded and communicated in writing. Persistence alone will not make a complaint vexatious, and legitimate new concerns will not be disregarded simply because a person has complained previously.

6. Our approach

- We will consider concerns and complaints openly, fairly and without bias.
- Those handling a complaint must be impartial and should not investigate or determine matters where prior involvement or another conflict of interest could reasonably compromise that impartiality.
- We will respect the rights and feelings of everyone involved and protect confidential information as far as possible.
- Timescales for dealing with your concerns or complaints may need to be extended following discussion with you.
- We will consider complaints on the basis of relevant information and facts.
- We may seek advice from the local authority or other appropriate professional advisers.
- Where a stated timescale cannot reasonably be met, the complainant will be informed as soon as practicable of the reason and the revised anticipated timescale.
- We will make reasonable adjustments where required to enable a person to participate effectively in the process.

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Reasons for extending a timescale may include school closure periods, the availability of relevant individuals, the volume or complexity of information, the need to seek advice, or other exceptional circumstances.

7. Confidentiality, information and records

Complaints will be handled confidentially as far as possible. Information will be shared only where this is necessary to investigate or address the matter, or where there is another lawful reason to do so.

The Governing Body will ensure that appropriate records of complaints and investigations are retained in accordance with the school's records management arrangements and applicable legal requirements. The current ALC procedure has historically specified a minimum retention period of seven years; the Governing Body should confirm the final retention period against the school's current retention schedule before approval of this revised policy.

Anonymous complaints will be recorded. Whether they are investigated will be determined according to the nature and seriousness of the information provided, including any safeguarding or other legal considerations.

8. Support, representation and reasonable adjustments

A complainant may bring a relative, friend, advocate or other companion for support. The complainant will normally be expected to speak for themselves unless they are a pupil, require special assistance or a reasonable adjustment, or there is another appropriate reason agreed by the person managing the complaint.

The school should be told in advance, where reasonably possible, who will attend a meeting and of any communication, accessibility or other reasonable adjustment required. Attendance by additional individuals will be considered in light of their relevance to the complaint and the need to protect confidentiality and personal information.

9. The three-stage complaints procedure

There are up to three stages: Stage A, Stage B and Stage C. Most concerns and complaints should be capable of resolution at Stage A or Stage B.

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10. Stage A - informal concern

A concern can often be resolved quickly by speaking to an appropriate member of staff. In the Lower School this will normally be the class teacher or another appropriate designated member of staff. In the Upper School this will normally be the form tutor, Head of Year, relevant curriculum leader or another appropriate designated member of staff.

Concerns should be raised as soon as possible. Normally, the school would expect a concern to be raised within 10 school days of the incident. Delay can make it harder to establish what happened.

Learners may raise concerns with a trusted member of staff, their form tutor, Head of Year, pupil representative or another person designated by the school. Raising a concern informally does not prevent a learner from making a complaint later if they believe the matter has not been dealt with properly.

The school will normally aim to explain what it has done or is doing within 10 school days. If this is not possible, the person managing the concern will explain why and provide a revised timescale.

11. Stage B - formal investigation

If the concern has not been resolved appropriately at Stage A, the complainant should normally put the complaint in writing to the Headteacher. The school will provide support to put a complaint in writing where needed.

The complainant should normally aim to do this within five school days of receiving the Stage A response. The complaint form at Appendix A may be used. Where the complaint is about the Headteacher, it should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, through the school.

A written complaint should be acknowledged promptly. The Headteacher will consider who is suitably senior and impartial to manage and, where appropriate, investigate the complaint. This may be the Headteacher or another designated person. A person should not investigate a complaint about their own actions or a matter where their prior involvement creates a conflict of interest.

11.1 Clarifying the scope

At the outset of Stage B, the designated person will identify the substantive matters to be investigated. Where appropriate, these will be confirmed with the complainant before, or at the beginning of, the Stage B meeting.

- the specific complaint, allegation or issue to be considered;
- the relevant events, decisions or actions;

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- the individuals or areas of school practice concerned;
- the outcome or resolution sought by the complainant; and
- any matters that fall outside the scope of this procedure, have already been concluded, or require another procedure.

Clarifying scope is intended to ensure that the complainant and the school understand what is being investigated. It must not be used to prevent a complainant from providing relevant evidence or explaining the substance of their complaint.

11.2 New matters raised during Stage B

If a substantially new and separate issue is raised during the investigation, the designated person will decide whether it can reasonably be considered within the existing Stage B investigation or should be treated as a new concern or complaint. The complainant will be told the decision and the reason. Relevant new information or evidence about an issue already within scope will not be excluded merely because it is provided after the complaint was submitted.

11.3 Stage B meeting

The designated person will normally invite the complainant to a meeting within 10 school days of receiving the written complaint. The invitation should explain the purpose of the meeting, who will attend, the time and place, any information requested in advance, the complainant's right to be accompanied, and any arrangements for reasonable adjustments.

The purpose of the meeting is to understand the complaint, allow the complainant to explain relevant concerns and information, clarify the outcome sought and identify any further reasonable lines of enquiry. It is a fact-finding meeting and is not a disciplinary hearing.

11.4 Evidence and information

The designated person will determine what information is reasonably necessary and relevant to investigate the complaint fairly and proportionately. This may include correspondence, school records, policies, meeting records, statements or accounts from relevant individuals and other material relevant to the matters within scope.

- The school will not create records retrospectively to suggest that they existed at the relevant time.
- Where a relevant record cannot be located or does not exist, and that fact is material to the complaint, this should be recorded in the investigation.

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• Information will be disclosed only where appropriate and lawful. Personal information about learners, staff or third parties may need to be withheld or redacted.

• A request for a document through the complaints process does not automatically create a right to disclosure. Where appropriate, the complainant may be directed to another lawful information-access route.

11.5 Governing Body and committee records

Where Governing Body or committee records are relevant to a complaint, the designated person will establish whether relevant records exist and will consider them where appropriate. Any disclosure will be subject to confidentiality, data protection and other applicable legal requirements. Where the existence or absence of a relevant record is material to the complaint, this should be recorded in the investigation findings.

11.6 Investigation record

The Stage B investigation record should, as appropriate, include:

- the original complaint and any agreed clarification of scope;
- the acknowledgement and key correspondence;
- a chronology of relevant events;
- the Stage B meeting record;
- the information and evidence considered;
- records of relevant enquiries or interviews;
- findings in relation to each substantive element of the complaint;
- any actions, recommendations or organisational learning; and
- the final written response and information about Stage C.

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11.7 Stage B findings and outcome

The designated person will reach a conclusion on each substantive element of the complaint on the basis of the information reasonably available. ALC will normally use the following descriptors to make outcomes clear and consistent:

Outcome	Meaning
Upheld	The available information supports the substance of the complaint.
Partially upheld	The available information supports some, but not all, of the complaint.
Not upheld	The available information does not support the complaint.
Unable to determine	There is insufficient reliable information to reach a fair conclusion.

These descriptors are an ALC procedural convention rather than terminology required by the Welsh Government model policy.

The designated person will normally provide the Stage B outcome in writing within 10 school days of completing the investigation. The response should explain the conclusions reached and, where appropriate, any action or learning arising.

Recommendations are intended to address identified issues, reduce the likelihood of recurrence and support organisational learning. A recommendation does not necessarily mean that every aspect of a complaint has been upheld. Where action relates to an individual member of staff, confidential employment information will not normally be disclosed.

12. Stage C - Governing Body complaints committee

If the complainant believes the complaint has not been dealt with fairly at Stage B, they may write through the school's address to the Chair of Governors, setting out the reasons for asking the Governing Body's complaints committee to consider the complaint. They do not need to repeat the whole complaint.

The complainant would normally be expected to request Stage C within five school days of receiving the Stage B response. Where assistance is needed, the school will support the complainant to record the request.

The complaints committee will normally aim to meet within 15 school days of receiving the Stage C request. The invitation will explain the arrangements, who will attend, the deadline for documentation, and the complainant's right to be accompanied.

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Everyone involved will receive the documentation to be considered before the meeting, subject to the protection of privacy, confidentiality and personal information. The committee will consider the complaint impartially and without conflicts of interest.

The meeting may be rearranged where reasonably necessary. Normally, to avoid unnecessary delay, the committee will not reschedule more than once at the complainant's request. If a person does not attend without a good reason, the committee may decide the complaint on the information available.

The Governing Body will normally aim to write to the complainant within 10 school days of the meeting explaining the outcome.

The Governing Body's complaints committee is the final arbiter of complaints under this school procedure.

13. Special circumstances

Complaint about a governor or group of governors

The complaint will be referred to the Chair of Governors for investigation, or the Chair may delegate the investigation to another impartial governor. Stage B onwards will apply.

Complaint about the Chair of Governors, or the Headteacher and Chair together

The Vice Chair will be informed and will investigate, or may delegate the investigation to another impartial governor. Stage B onwards will apply.

Complaint about both the Chair and Vice Chair

The complaint will be referred to the Clerk to the Governing Body, who will inform the Chair of the complaints committee. Stage C will then apply.

Complaint about the whole Governing Body

The complaint will be referred to the Clerk, who will inform the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, local authority and, where appropriate, the diocesan authority. Arrangements should be agreed for independent investigation and consideration of the complaint.

Complaint about the Headteacher

The complaint will be referred to the Chair of Governors, who will investigate or may delegate the investigation to another impartial governor. Stage B onwards will apply.

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In all special circumstances, the school and Governing Body will take steps to ensure that the complaint is dealt with openly, fairly and without bias. No person implicated in a complaint should investigate it or determine its outcome.

14. Complaints from or involving learners

Learners will be supported to raise concerns in an accessible and age-appropriate way. If a learner under 16 wishes to make a complaint, the school will normally seek their permission before involving a parent or carer, subject to safeguarding and other legal considerations.

If a learner under 16 is involved in a complaint in another capacity, the school may ask a parent or carer to become involved and attend a discussion or interview.

Where a young person needs independent advice or advocacy, the school may signpost them to MEIC or the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

15. Learning from complaints

ALC will use complaints as a source of organisational learning. Themes, actions and lessons may be reviewed by senior leaders and the Governing Body in an appropriately anonymised form to identify improvements in policy, practice, communication or provision.

16. Our commitment to you

We will take concerns and complaints seriously. Where mistakes have been made, we will seek to put matters right where possible, apologise where appropriate and learn from what has happened. We will provide reasonable assistance to anyone who needs help to make their concern known.

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17. Appendix A: Model Complaint Form

The person who experienced the problem should normally fill in this form. If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone else please fill in Section B also. Please note that before taking forward the complaint we will need to be satisfied that you have the authority to act on behalf of the person concerned. If you are a pupil the school will help you complete this form, will explain it to you and will give you a copy of it when it is completed.

Your details

Surname	
Forename(s)	
Title: Mr/Mrs/Ms/other	
Address and postcode	
Daytime phone number	
Mobile phone number	
E-mail address	

How would you prefer us to contact you? _____

If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone else what are their details?

Their name in full _____

Address and postcode _____

_____

What is your relationship to them? _____

Why are you making a complaint on their behalf?

_____

_____

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About your complaint (continue your answers on separate sheets of paper if necessary)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Name of the school and campus you are complaining about.

_____

What do you think they did wrong or did not do?

_____
_____

Describe how you have been affected.

_____
_____

When did you first become aware of the problem?

_____

If it is more than three months since you first became aware of the problem, please give the reason why you have not complained before.

_____
_____

What do you think should be done to put matters right?

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Have you already put your complaint to a member of staff? If so, please give brief details about how and when you did so.

_____

_____

_____

Signature of complainant: Date:

Signature if you are making a complaint on behalf of someone else

Signature: Date:

Please return this form and any documents to support your complaint to the school.

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Appendix B - Stage B investigation checklist (internal use)

☐ Complaint acknowledged promptly in writing.

☐ Investigator/designated person is suitably senior and impartial; conflicts checked.

☐ Stage A completed or reason recorded for proceeding directly to Stage B.

☐ Complaint broken down into clear substantive elements.

☐ Scope and outcome sought clarified with complainant where appropriate.

☐ Any issues outside scope or requiring another procedure identified and explained.

☐ Meeting invitation confirms purpose, attendees, support/representation and reasonable adjustments.

☐ Chronology created.

☐ Relevant records and evidence identified; absence of material records noted where relevant.

☐ Relevant individuals spoken to fairly and without leading questions.

☐ New evidence distinguished from substantially new complaints.

☐ Each complaint element has a reasoned finding.

☐ Actions/recommendations are proportionate and linked to findings or organisational learning.

☐ Confidential staff/learner information protected.

☐ Outcome letter includes Stage C route and expected timescale.

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Source and governance note

Primary source: Welsh Government, School complaints procedures: guidance (first published 1 December 2022; updated 14 March 2023) and Annex 1: Model policy. The Governing Body should seek local authority advice before adoption where any local procedural requirement or retention schedule differs.

Welsh Government model policy: https://www.gov.wales/annex-1-model-policy-html

Welsh Government school complaints guidance: https://www.gov.wales/school-complaints-procedures-guidance-html