



Dereham Neatherd High School

Norwich Road, Dereham, Norfolk. NR20 3AX

Headteacher: Jaime Mallett

office@neatherd.org

+44 (0)1362 697981

neatherd.org

14th December 2023

Dear Parent/Carer,

Update to our complaints procedure

I am writing to update you on our complaints procedure following recent changes that have now been approved by the school's governing body. Our new complaints policy follows official Department for Education (DfE) guidance.

At Neatherd, we aim to have the highest standards around our pupils' safety, wellbeing and behaviour, and to ensure that every one of them is able to make excellent academic and social progress. Our members of staff go through rigorous recruitment and selection procedures and they have high levels of training to enable them to do their jobs well.

However, as a large organisation, with nearly 1,200 pupils and over 150 members of staff and volunteers, and working with more than 3,600 parents and other named family contacts, there will inevitably be times when concerns arise and you feel you need more information. There will also be times when we make mistakes. These might be when communication could have been better, when decisions have been made that need further investigation, when one of our policies has not been followed correctly, or – in very rare cases – perhaps major errors of judgment which require more significant action.

Our aim is to work closely with families to resolve any concerns you have as quickly as possible. In nearly all cases, this can – and should – be resolved at an informal level, through direct communication with the member of staff at the centre of your concern, or with your child's form tutor for more general concerns. Such concerns can sometimes arise due to miscommunication between school and home and can be resolved quickly via a phone call, email exchange or brief meeting.

If you are unsure how to contact a particular member of staff, you can email the school office (office@neatherd.org) or you can phone the school (01362 697981) and speak to one of our receptionists. Please note that our receptionists' role in this is to signpost you to the right member of staff and to pass on a brief message asking them to make contact with you. They are unable to deal at length with individual concerns and complaints. There is also a risk of further miscommunication when passing lengthy messages through any middle party.

Sometimes, after speaking directly to a member of staff, you might still be concerned, or you might not feel comfortable bringing up the matter directly with the original member of staff. In such cases, we ask that you speak to that person's line manager to attempt to address the matter. Again, the school office and the reception team can tell you who this is and ask them to contact you.

For the most serious matters – and only where you have first tried all reasonable steps to resolve the issue at the informal stage – you may need to refer to Stage 2 (formal resolution) of our complaints procedure.



Enrich Learning Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales with company number 07725111. The registered office is at 1 Norwich Business Park, Whiting Road, Norwich, Norfolk, NR4 6DJ.

Information about this can be found in section 4 of our policy on the school website:

https://neatherd.org/docs/policies/Complaints_Policy_December_2023.pdf

You can also request a hard copy of this policy via the school office.

When making a formal complaint, it is important that you complete the official complaints form. Alternatively, you can ask to speak to Mrs Da Silva, the complaints coordinator, and she will assist you with completing the form. The reason for asking you to do this is so that we have all of the information we need to provide you with a full, fair and timely investigation and response to your complaint. It is especially important to state what you feel would be a fair and reasonable outcome as this is more likely to lead to a response that you find satisfactory.

As per official DfE guidance, there are then two further steps, should you remain dissatisfied after a Stage 2 complaint. The first is a governors' complaint review panel, which will re-examine the investigation and decide whether or not to uphold the decision made at Stage 2. Finally, you can make a formal complaint to the Education Skills and Funding Agency. Details of all of this can be found in the policy.

As the parent of high school aged children myself, I know that concerns around your child's education and wellbeing can cause a great deal of anxiety for parents and that they may lead to an emotional response. Whilst this is understandable, please remember that we are here to support your child (which of course at times may mean making some unpopular decisions – as we all know as parents) and to work with you. With this in mind, I would be grateful if you would note the following important points:

- Initially, concerns should always be addressed directly with the member of staff in question.
- In line with DfE guidance, our complaints procedure follows a stepped approach. To move to the next level, it is essential that you make all reasonable attempts to have your concern resolved at the previous level.
- We ask that you discuss concerns directly with us. More and more, we find that concerns are posted in the first instance on social media. This can lead to the spread of false information about the school, its individual members of staff and individual pupils. This is not about trying to restrict your freedom of speech in any way – clearly I cannot do that and nor would I wish to! Freedom of speech is a vital part of living in a democratic society. However, we can only resolve matters quickly if they are brought to our direct attention and dealt with through the correct channels. The increasing use of social media is making this issue more complicated and combative than it needs to be.
- Occasionally, a parent will state that they are going to 'report the school to Ofsted.' As with the previous point, it is your right to do so. However, please be aware that Ofsted will first want to know that you have followed the school's complaints procedures fully.
- Whilst we accept that these matters may cause emotions to run high on occasions, we ask that you remain polite and respectful towards members of staff at all times. It is never acceptable to shout or swear at a member of staff, or to send them repeated emails and phone calls on the same subject. In particular, please note the information about vexatious complaints and complaints pursued in an unreasonable manner in Part 3 of the policy. Again, this is taken from the DfE's model complaints procedure.

Thank you for the support you give us as we seek to work with you for your child's benefit and to give them the best education and life chances possible. Where we fall short of your expectations, we will always aim to put matters right, apologise and learn lessons.

Yours sincerely,



Mr J. Mallett
Headteacher

Summary of our Complaints Procedure for Parents & Carers

Stage 1: Informal Resolution	Parent brings concern to attention of member of staff
	Issue to be resolved (guide: within 15 school days)
	Where no satisfactory solution has been found, parent to be advised that they should proceed to Stage 2
Stage 2: Formal Written Complaint	Parent to put complaint in writing using Complaint Form within 15 school days
	Complaint to be acknowledged within five school days
	Meeting with parents within 10 school days (where appropriate)
	Response to the complaint sent within 15 school days
Stage 3: Referral to Complaints Committee	Parent to request hearing within 15 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of Stage 2
	Request to be acknowledged within five school days
	Hearing to take place within 20 school days of receipt of request
	Notification of date, time and place of the hearing and details of the committee members present sent at least five school days before the hearing
	School representative and parents to submit evidence in support of their case to Clerk of the trustees at least 3 school days before the hearing
	Complaints Committee decision sent not more than five school days after the hearing
Stage 4: ESFA	Parent to lodge formal complaint with the Education Skills and Funding Agency