

Complaints Policy

Last reviewed: July 2021
Review next: July 2022
Reviewed by: D.Speakman

1. Principles

We believe that learning from feedback is a powerful way of helping to develop The London Acorn School, improve our services and increase trust amongst the people who use our services.

We treat a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, from a user of or partner to The London Acorn School. All complaints or concerns will be listened to and dealt with fairly and in a timely manner. The London Acorn School values the partnership with our parents and guardians. Informal discussions at an early stage are always encouraged.

Our policy covers feedback about:

- a) The standard of service we provide
- b) The behaviour of our staff, and
- c) Any action or lack of action by The London Acorn School

Our policy covers feedback received from:

- a) Enrolled learners
- b) Applicants
- c) Parents/carers
- d) Employers or other users of Schools services and facilities
- e) Members of the public

Our policy does not cover:

- a) Comments about our policies or policy decisions;
- b) Dissatisfaction with our policies or decisions about individual cases or grants or requests for legal assistance;
- c) Matters that have already been fully investigated through this complaints procedure;
- d) Complaints raised by students, or their parents/sponsors where fees have not been paid in full or an instalment plan not complied with although we do have provision for those experiencing genuine hardship;
- e) Anonymous complaints, although we may investigate;
- f) Abusive and/or overly persistent complainant behaviour containing, for example, offensive language which we will not progress or take seriously and reserve the right to take action against the perpetrator(s);
- g) Staff complaints, as there are more appropriate HR procedures to use;

- h) Complaints made outside the response time limit of 12 months since the issue originally occurred;
- i) Complaints that have been disposed of in court or tribunal proceedings bought by the complainant or under settlement agreement between the complainant and the School;

2. Aims

This policy recognises that when things go wrong, our aim is to resolve concerns as quickly and effectively as possible. We aim to:

- Resolve concerns through informal discussion at the earliest stage
- Be speedy with well defined timescales, and with named contacts

We will:

- Focus on resolution and review rather than blame
- Promote confidentiality, discretion and equal opportunity
- Ensure that investigative processes are fair and transparent for all concerned

We want parents and guardians to feel confident that staff will respond to complaints in a sensitive, non-defensive and sympathetic manner. We treat all complaints seriously provided that they are not made abusively or offensively and comply with the guidance as laid out here. You will be treated with courtesy and fairness at all times. We would hope, too, that you will be courteous and fair in your dealings with us at all times. We will treat your complaint in confidence within the School and we will deal with your complaint promptly.

We will not treat you less favourably than anyone else because of your: sex or marital status: this includes family status, responsibility for dependants, and gender (including gender reassignment, whether proposed, commenced or completed) sexual orientation colour or race: this includes ethnic or national origin or nationality, disability, religious or political beliefs, trade union affiliation, or other unjustifiable factors, for example language difficulties or age.

3. Confidentiality

All complaints received will be dealt with confidentially and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018.

Complaints Procedure

The stages of the complaints procedure

We have a three-stage complaints procedure. At each stage it will help us to resolve your complaint quickly if you can give us as much clear detail as possible, including any supporting documents and correspondence and stating that you are making a complaint in line with our procedure.

It is anticipated that the majority of complaints will be resolved satisfactorily and on an informal basis and close to their point of origin. Informal resolution is taken seriously by the School; all staff have a responsibility for ensuring that complaints are dealt with in a supportive and courteous manner. Before moving to formal

investigation, the School will look at the means by which an informal resolution was attempted.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

The vast majority of concerns or complaints can be resolved informally. There are many occasions where concerns can be resolved straight away through the class teacher or Head, depending on whom the parent/guardian first approaches.

The London Acorn School places a great emphasis on this informal approach, to achieve a satisfactory resolution for all parties at the earliest opportunity.

1. Parents are encouraged to speak informally with the appropriate or designated member of staff as soon as they have a concern. The school procedure is to contact the child's class teacher in the first instance for any matters relating to the child's education.
2. If the concern is about the Head, we encourage preliminary discussions between the parent/guardian and the Head as in most instances, the issue can still be resolved informally.
3. Most concerns dealt with informally are resolved to everyone's satisfaction. If this is not the case, formal complaints procedures may be followed.

Stage 2:

All formal complaints must be presented in writing and will be logged by the designated School Complaints Lead before being acknowledged. In the first instance, it will be forwarded to the Head or Chair of Governors (as appropriate) to investigate and resolve.

A record of any actions /correspondence/supporting evidence and outcome must be copied to the designated School Complaints Lead, filed and entered onto the Log.

Following any meeting with the complainant, the School will summarise the main points in a follow-up letter. This is to prevent misunderstandings and ensure all parties have a clear record of progress or agreements.

This is the first opportunity for us to resolve your dissatisfaction formally.

- Acknowledgement within 5 working days
- Full response within 20 working days

Stage 3:

If you are dissatisfied with this response you may request a review. To begin Stage 3 of the procedure, we require a written request made to the School Complaint Lead within five working days of you receiving your Stage 2 response. Such a request will usually only be considered after the procedures at Stages 1 and 2 have been completed.

Stage 3 will be a panel hearing, request for a panel hearing should include the following information provided by the complainant:

- Nature of the original complaint and the outcome desired;
- Steps taken by the designated member of staff to deal with the matter and the Stage 1 and 2 responses;
- Reasons for pursuing the complaint beyond Stages 1 and 2.

A panel will be convened chaired by a member of the school team or Governing body with no previous involvement in the case to review the complaint.

Following any meeting with the complainant, the School will summarise the main points in a follow-up letter. This is to prevent misunderstandings and ensure all parties have a clear record of progress or agreements.

A written response, detailing the findings of this investigation, will be sent to you along with a decision as to whether your complaint has been upheld. Please note that this decision is final and marks the end of our complaints process, there is no further right of appeal within the School process.

- Acknowledgement within 5 working days
- Full response within 20 working days

Extending time limits

We aim to complete all complaints within the timescales above; however, if a complaint is very complex, or is received during a holiday period, it may be necessary to extend the time limit. If this is the case, we will keep you informed of progress with the investigation, the reasons for the delay, and inform you of the new deadline.

If having followed the stages of our complaints procedure you still remain dissatisfied, you can ask to have your complaint reviewed externally by an agency with no direct link to the School. You would be advised by us of who this would be, which in most cases, will be the Department for Education or OFSTED.

Following any stage of the procedure, a complainant has a maximum of five days from the date of the final response to request that their complaint be progressed to the next stage.

Remedies to complaints

When we get things wrong we will act to:

- a) Accept responsibility;
- b) Explain what went wrong and why, and;
- c) Put things right by making any changes required. The action we take to put matters right (i.e., redress) in response to a complaint, can include any combination of the remedies set out in the list below. The general principle we follow is that a complainant should, so far as possible, be put in the position they would have been in, had things not gone wrong.

The remedy we choose will be proportionate and appropriate to the failure in service, and take into account what people are looking for when they complain. An apology is normally appropriate, but other action may also be necessary.

- A sincere and meaningful apology (explaining what happened and/or what went wrong) – an apology is not an acceptance of liability under Section 2 of the Compensation Act 2006;
- Remedial action, which may include reviewing or changing a decision on the service given to an individual complainant;
- Provide service desired by complainant (immediately, if appropriate);
- Putting things right (for example change of procedures to prevent future difficulties of a similar kind, either for the complainant or others);
- Training or supervising staff; or any combination of these.

Recording and monitoring complaints

We will log the complaints we receive so that we can monitor the types of problems, the best way to sort them out and how long we are taking to deal with them. This also helps us to take a closer look at how we can improve our own service delivery. We will analyse the following information on complainants (where available) to identify differences between groups. They will also report on the numbers and categories of complaints we receive to the Governing Body on an annual basis.

Contacting us

All complaints and requests for review under our complaints policy and procedures should be sent to either Claire Scopas (Head Teacher) or Emily Maskell (School Business Manager).

This policy is in line with the Education Act 2002 Section 29.

The policy will be published and referred to on the school website.