



FIRST BRIDGE EDUCATION

Complaints Policy

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1. Aims

The aim of this policy is to provide a Complaints Policy and Procedure framework, within which any Parent of the School who has experienced dissatisfaction with school services, can raise their concerns and the framework within which staff should deal with complaints from Parents.

2. Definitions

“The school”, “First Bridge School” and “First Bridge Centre” are represented by First Bridge Education and will be referred to as either First Bridge School or the School or the Centre, throughout this policy.

“Parents” includes the parents, guardians, or carers of a pupil.

“The Complaints Officer” is the person appointed to formally respond and oversee all complaints, including the drafting of responses to the Complainant, during Stage One and Stage Two of the Complaints Process. The person appointed to this position will change over time, but at present is the Chief Operating Officer, Tracey Allen.

“The Complainant” is the person, who has submitted the complaint.

“The Complainee” is the person who is being complained about.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all pupils and their parents at First Bridge School.

Parents are made aware of this policy and its procedures for complaints as a part of their initial parent meeting (which usually takes place either before the pupils first day of admission, or on the day of admission), by the General Manager. The policy can also be accessed at any time on the school website.

This policy is closely linked to the school’s Safeguarding Policy and Allegations Against Staff Policy. These policies can also be found on the school website.

4. Legislation and Guidance

This policy meets the requirement set out in the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Part 7, which states that the school must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.

When constructing this procedure, consideration has been given to the guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE) ‘Best practice guidance for school complaints procedure’, 2020.

This policy and its procedures apply to complaints made by parents of current pupils. It does not apply to complaints from former parents (including where a pupil has left or been excluded), unless the complaint was initiated while the pupil was on roll. The school may, at its discretion, review correspondence from former parents, visitors or members of the public outside of this procedure, particularly where safeguarding or data-protection concerns are raised.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Role of The Clinical Supervisor

The Clinical Supervisor is responsible for:

- Acknowledging the initial concern or complaint from the parent, as soon as possible, and or at a minimum of within 24 hours
- Logging the initial concern onto the Complaints, Concerns and Satisfaction (CCS) Log with all necessary information
- Providing a formal response to the concern or complaint within 2 school days and conducting investigations where necessary as a part of this process.
- Working together with the parent to resolve the concern at the informal stage

5.2 Role of The General Manager

The General Manager is responsible for:

- Supporting the Clinical Supervisor, where required, with the handling and management of the concern or informal complaint, including investigations and meetings.
- Leading on and handling the correspondence with the complainant if it escalates to 'Stage Two – Informal Complaint' and passing all relevant information and prior communication at the informal stage, to the Clinical Lead and updating the CCS Log with relevant correspondence and outcomes.

5.3 Role of The Clinical Lead

The Clinical Lead is responsible for:

- Leading on and handling the correspondence with the Complainant if it escalates to 'Stage Three – Informal Complaint Escalation' and passing all relevant information and prior communication at this stage, to the Complaints Officer and updating the CCS Log with relevant correspondence and outcomes.

5.4 Role of The Complaints Officer

The Complaints Officer is responsible for:

- Reviewing the Complaints Log on a termly basis, to identify patterns in concerns and complaints raised and identify areas of improvements in the complaints handling process.
- Yearly update of the Complaints Policy and Procedures in line with recommendations, guidance, and legislation from the Department of Education.
- Overseeing 'Stage Four – Formal complaint', including all further investigations, conducting meetings with the Complainant and staff members where required and the drafting of formal correspondence to the Complainant.
- Updating the Complaints Log with all relevant information, documents, and outcomes.
- Handling the correspondence with the Complainant throughout 'Stage Four – formal complaint' and supporting the Principal with the handling of the complaint into 'Stage Five – Formal Review Hearing' where required,

5.5 Role of The Principal

The Principal is responsible for:

- Reviewing all correspondence in relation to the complaint, from Stages One through Three, to ensure they have full and thorough knowledge of all prior correspondence, actions taken to date, and the complaint.
- Assisting the Complaints Officer in 'Stage Four – Formal Complaint', including attending any formal meetings with the Complaints Officer and the Complainant.
- Overseeing 'Stage Five – Formal Review Hearing', including liaising with the Complainant about the details and schedule of the hearing, chairing the hearing and taking notes, and providing the Complainant with the outcomes of the Formal Review.

5.6 Role of The Board of Directors

The Board of Directors are responsible for:

- Reviewing all formal complaints received, along with their outcomes and actions, and Board meetings, and providing feedback and advice where appropriate
- Ensuring that the guidance and legislation referred to throughout this policy is up-to-date and that this policy is effective in the management of complaints.

5.7 Role of The 'Independent Person'

The 'Independent Person' is responsible for:

- Assisting the school and complainant as a part of the Stage Five process by acting as a neutral, but experienced person who can objectively and impartially reviewing the complaint, its content, and help draw a conclusion and resolution for all parties.

6. Compliments and Suggestions Process

We welcome any suggestions from parents/carers or members of the public on how we can improve our services. If a parent/carer or member of the public would like to make a suggestion on how we can improve, they can submit their suggestion directly to headteacher.iw@firstbridgecentre.com

It is the responsibility of all First Bridge School staff to record verbal or written compliments in the Central Record of Compliments. Managers are responsible for ensuring that staff named within a compliment are informed and thanked. Feedback on compliments will be shared with the whole school staff team at regular intervals (Quarterly).

7. Timelines for Raising a Concern

If a parent/carer or member of the public wishes to raise a complaint, they may do so in accordance with this policy and within three months of the date of the incident. Any complaints received outside of the three-month complaint window, will not be considered.

Complaints received during scheduled school holidays will be considered as being received on the first day back at school, during term time.

Any concerns will be dealt with professionally and timely so that any issues arising can be handled efficiently to ensure the continued welfare of all pupils, to enable ongoing cooperative partnership with parents/carers and to continually improve the quality of the school. All concerns raised with staff will be reported to the Principal.

This policy does not relate to situations where First Bridge School employees have a complaint or grievance. In these circumstances, individuals should follow the grievance procedure as outlined in the staff handbook.

This policy outlines First Bridge School's formal procedure for dealing with complaints where concerns cannot be resolved. Where any concern or complaint relates to child protection, we follow our Safeguarding/Child Protection Policy.

8. Five-Stage Complaints Procedure

There are three stages to First Bridge School's complaints procedure. First Bridge School endeavours to find resolution with the Complainant throughout this process and ideally, at Stage One. Should resolution not be found, Stage 4 of the procedure should be followed.

- Stage One – Raising a Concern
- Stage Two – Informal Complaint
- Stage Three – Informal Complaint Escalation
- Stage Four – Making a Formal Complaint
- Stage Five – Formal Review Hearing

8.1. Stage One –Raising a Concern

- If any parent/carer or member of the public should have cause for concern or any queries regarding the care, education or therapy provided by the school, they should in the first instance report their concern with the pupil's key person, the Clinical Supervisor, either in person, via email or telephone so that they can resolve the matter as quickly as possible. If at any point you are unaware of who to contact, please email Centre.Manager.IW@firstbridgecentre.com or call +44 (0) 20 3026 0095 (Ext 3)
- The Clinical Supervisor will take your concern seriously, acknowledging your concern or complaint within two school days, and investigate and provide a response to you within ten school days. At this stage, information will be shared with (but not directly handled by) the General Manager to ensure it is dealt with in a timely and efficient manner. Most concerns can be addressed and resolved at this stage.

8.2. Stage Two – Informal Complaint

- If you feel that your concern remains unresolved, or that you have received an unsatisfactory response to your concern, please put your ongoing concern in writing, and send via email to Centre.Manager.IW@firstbridgecentre.com.
- The General Manager will acknowledge your email within two school days and ascertain why resolution was not reached at Stage One. The General Manager will further investigate your complaint, gathering any additional information that may be needed from your initial concern, and from how your concern was handled in Stage One and provide a written response to you within ten school days. As a part of Stage Two the General Manager may organise a meeting with you, and the Clinical Team to further discuss your concerns, and reach resolution.

8.3. Stage Three – Informal Complaint Escalation

- If you feel that your concern remains unresolved, or that you have received an unsatisfactory response to your informal complaint, please put your ongoing informal complaint in writing, detailing the specific reasons for your escalation, why you remain unsatisfied with the resolution attempts to date, and what could aid us in finding resolution to your informal complaint in Stage Three. This written response must be provided to the General Manager, following receipt of your informal complaint response, within three school days and sent via email to Centre.Manager.IW@firstbridgecentre.com.
- The General Manager will escalate your informal complaint to the Clinical Lead, by sharing your written response within two school days, and will also inform the Complaints Officer at this stage of the ongoing inability to reach a resolution.
- The Clinical Lead will acknowledge your email within two school days (note this may be four school days following receipt of your written response sent to the General Manager) and ascertain why resolution was not reached at Stage Two. The Clinical Lead will further investigate your complaint, gathering any additional information that may be needed from your initial concern, and from how your concern was handled in Stage One and Two and provide a written response to you within ten school days. As a part of Stage Three the Clinical Lead may organise a meeting with you, and the Centre/School Team to further discuss your concerns and reach resolution.

8.4. Stage Four – Formal Complaint

- If the complaint remains unresolved or the Complainant feels they have received an unsatisfactory outcome, then they must present their concerns in writing, either by letter or email, as a Formal Complaint to the Complaints Officer via the headteacher.iw@firstbridgecentre.com email address, within three school days of receipt of the written Informal Complaint Escalation conclusion.
- The Formal Complaint should contain sufficient information for the Complaints Officer to further investigate, such as relevant dates, times, names of any witnesses of events and copies of any relevant correspondence or documents or evidence they feel would support the investigation and help with finding an appropriate resolution to the complaint. At this stage, the Complaints Officer may call a meeting with the Complainant, to clarify their concerns, in line with their written complaint.
- The Complaints Officer, along with The Principal will then investigate the complaint further and report back to the Complainant, in writing, within fifteen school days. The written response will confirm the outcome of the investigation and any actions that have/will be taken. The Complaints Officer will document the complaint fully and any actions taken in relation to the complaint, in the Complaint's Logbook.
- The Principal will be kept informed of the complaint at all stages and after the investigation is concluded, will be sent a copy of the decision.

8.5. Stage Five – Formal Review Hearing

If the Complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the Formal Complaint investigation, they may request a Formal Review Hearing of the investigation. The Complainant must request this in writing, directly to the Principal, within three working days following receipt of

the written decision. The purpose of the Formal Review Hearing is to reach reconciliation and to put things right, that may have gone wrong.

8.5.1. Acquiring a Panel for the Formal Review Hearing

- The Principal will organise and hold a Formal Review Hearing with at least three individuals, who have not been directly involved in the subject or the handling of the complaint. At least one 'Independent Person', will be appointed by the Proprietor, Principal or Complaints Officer, to act as a source of scrutiny throughout the Formal Review Hearing. This person will have access to all existing documentation and should ideally have relative knowledge or experience in the handling of complaints. Individuals chosen to sit on the panel and conduct the hearing, will not have a financial interest in the school or company, and should have the ability to remain impartial, to reduce risk of bias.
- To protect the neutrality of the Formal Review Hearing, and the appropriate sharing of documents and information relating to the complaint, the identities of the panel members will not be shared, to either the Complainant or the complainee, until the day of the hearing. The hearing may be held face-to-face, if location permits, or via an online platform, such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom.
- If the complaint should relate directly to the CEO/Proprietor, then the Principal (if not compromised by the complaint) and the remaining Board of Directors, alongside the appointed 'Independent Person' will be responsible for holding the Formal Review Hearing.
- If the complaint should relate directly to all Directors of the company, a panel, comprised of an entirely independent panel, alongside the Principal of the school will be responsible for holding the Formal Review Hearing.

8.5.2. Scheduling the Formal Review Hearing

- The Complainant can choose to attend the Formal Review Hearing if they so wish to give an oral submission of their ongoing complaint to the panel and Independent Person. If the Complainant does not wish to attend the hearing, a written submission will be accepted. The written submission should detail only information relating to the outstanding complaint, and not any new, or un-investigated complaints.
- The Complainant will be informed of the Formal Review Hearing date at least ten working days prior, to give them ample time to arrange their schedules, should they wish to attend or submit a written submission. The Complainant may be accompanied to the meeting by one other appropriate person if there is no conflict of interests. Whether there is a conflict of interest at play, will be decided by the panel. Neither party should enlist the attendance of a legal representative at this stage, as this process is not a form of legal proceedings.
- The school will attempt to schedule a suitable date for the Formal Review Hearing, for all parties. The Principal will attempt to find a date that suits both the Panel members, and the Complainant, with 3 offer dates. If the Principal is unable to find a date that is suitable from these 3 offered dates, the Formal Review Hearing will be held with the Panel members, in accordance with their availability, in the absence of the Complainant.

8.5.3. The Formal Review Hearing

- The time allocated to Formal Review Hearings will vary, however time allocated will reflect the complexity of the complaint. Formal Review Hearings will last no longer than 3 hours.
- If the Complainant wishes to attend the hearing, either in person or virtually, they will be allocated a 30-minute slot, which will take place 1 hour following the start of the Formal Review Hearing. The first hour of the Formal Review Hearing is protected for the panel to familiarise themselves with the complaint and related documents.
- Following any oral or written submission given by the Complainant, the panel members and Independent Person will review all the evidence and make findings and recommendations to draw a final conclusion.

8.5.4. Following the Formal Review Hearing

- The Principal will make a record of the finding and recommendations, outline the panel's final decision following review. This record may be taken in video and transcription form if held virtually. All parties present at the meeting will review the accuracy of the record and be asked to sign/verbally agree in a recording and will receive a copy. The Complainant and, where relevant, the complainee will receive a copy of the findings and recommendations.
- The Principal will send written confirmation of the conclusions made and minutes during the Formal Review process, in writing, to the Complainant and Complainee, within fifteen school days. The conclusion of the Formal Review is final.
- This will signify the conclusion of the procedure.

8.6. Data Sharing for the Purpose of the Formal Review Hearing

To progress a complaint to Stage Five – Formal Review Hearing, the school will be required to share all relevant details about the complaint, with the Formal Review Hearing Panel Members. This may be in paper or electronic copy. The data will only be shared for the purpose of the Hearing and will not be distributed or shared with any parties, outside of those responsible for review and hearing the complaint at the Formal Review Hearing.

To progress your complaint to Stage Five – Formal Review Hearing, please print, sign a copy of the Data Sharing Consent Form, attached to the bottom of this policy, and return to the Complaints Officer, along with your written request to further your complaint from Stage Four to Stage Five.

9. Managing Serial and Persistent Complaints

First Bridge School are committed to doing our utmost to find a reach resolution with a Complainant, at the earliest stage possible. However, we also acknowledge there will be times when this may not be possible. We will not normally limit the contact Complainant's have without school, however we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive, or threatening. For more information on First Bridge Education's approach to harassment, see the Anti-Harassment Policy.

First Bridge School defines 'unreasonable behaviour' as that which hinders out consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the Complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the Complainant:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- Uses threats to intimidate
- Uses abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language or violence
- Knowingly provides falsified information
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email, or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Principal or Board of Directors will discuss any concerns with the Complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Principal will write to the Complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For Complainant's who excessively contact the school, causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from First Bridge School

10. Recording

A record of formal complaints received will be kept in the school's Complaints Logbook. The record will include the name of the complainant, the nature of the complaint, date, and time the complaint was received, action(s) taken, result of any investigations and any information given to the Complainant including a dated response.

Copies of the complaint and all relevant documentation will be kept on record, confidentially and in accordance with GDPR guidelines. Complaints will be only accessible by the parties involved, except where the Secretary of State and/or Ofsted inspectors conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act require access to them.

11. Contact Details

11.1. Department for Education

If you would like to make a complaint about First Bridge School and have reason to believe and evidence to support that First Bridge School are not meeting their legal requirements as outlined in the Independent School Standards, please follow this link to contact the DfE directly, to log your complaint.

https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact_the_Department_for_Education

12. Version History

This is version four of First Bridge School's Complaints and Procedures Policy. This policy will be reviewed annually by the Complaints Officer.

13. Links to Legislation and Guidance

Document	Location
Best practice guidance for academies and complaints procedures	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/setting-up-an-academies-complaints-procedure/best-practice-guidance-for-academies-complaints-procedures
Independent School Standards	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5cd3fc2fe5274a3fd6ee74b0/Independent_School_Standards-Guidance_070519.pdf

14. Related Policies

Safeguarding Policy
Allegations Against Staff Policy
Anti-Harassment Policy

Formal complaints received to date: 3



Information Sharing Consent Form

I _____ of _____
hereby give my permission for First Bridge Education to share personal information with other service providers in connection with my complaint, including accessing and sharing my complaints, and if applicable, relevant historical communication records. I agree to mine and my child's information to be shared with acquired Independent Person, to assist in the resolution of my complaint. I understand that First Bridge Education may hold information gathered about me from the various agencies and as such my rights under the Data Protection Act will not be affected.

Statement of Consent:

- I understand that personal information is held about me and my child.
- I have had the opportunity to discuss the implications of sharing or not sharing information about me.
- **I agree that personal information about me may be shared and gathered from the following agencies:**
 - NHS and other Health Services, including my GP practice
 - Early Intervention Service including the police
 - Mental Health Services
 - Education Support Services
 - Social Care

Are there any agencies you do not want us to share or gather additional information with? Please list them here:

☐

I agree to my information being shared and gathered between services

Your consent to share personal information is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw your consent at any time. Should you have any questions about this process or wish to withdraw your consent please contact: [.....](#)

Name

Address

Post code Date of Birth



Signature

Date

Signature of professional

Print name