FRANCIS BARBER

Francis Barber School

Complaints Procedure 2025-2026

Reviewed March 2026

Next Review: March 2027

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Francis Barber about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as ‘an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought’. A complaint may be defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action’.

It is in everyone’s interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Francis Barber takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, Francis Barber Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Francis Barber will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in writing. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, Key Worker or Headteacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 4 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of the Management Board, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of the Management Board, any individual governor or the whole management board should be addressed to the Clerk to the Management Board via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the headteacher or the Chair of the Management Board, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents.

Local Authorities are not part of the formal statutory process for school complaints, however Francis Barber PRU works closely with Wandsworth Local Authority and governors believe there can be value in using a mediation process for some complaints. Therefore, if both parties are in agreement, the Governing Board of Francis Barber PRU has agreed to offer Local Authority mediation at a stage before a complaint is escalated to the Secretary of State for Education.

Mediation is an effort to bring the two parties together; it does not formally reinvestigate and Wandsworth LA mediation service cannot impose a resolution to a complaint. Wandsworth's involvement in mediation shall be time limited to no more than six weeks and school term times will need to be taken into consideration. Should a resolution fail to be reached within this time period, you will be advised of your right to escalate your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Francis Barber other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

- **Admissions to schools; Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs; School re-organisation proposals:** Concerns should be raised with Wandsworth LA.
- **Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation:** Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). (Email: Lado@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk / MASH: 020 8871 7899).
- **Exclusion of children from school:** Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. (*Complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.*)
- **Whistleblowing:** We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.
- **Staff grievances:** Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
- **Staff conduct:** Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.

- **Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities:** Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
- **National Curriculum - content:** Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Francis Barber in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Francis Barber wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld (in whole or in part) or not upheld (in whole or in part). In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Objective: To resolve dissatisfaction quickly, therapeutically, and closest to the source of the issue, prioritising open dialogue and relationship repair.

1. **Raising a Concern:** Concerns can be raised verbally (in person or phone), via email, or in writing, to the relevant member of staff (e.g., Key Worker, subject teacher, or Assistant Head). FBP will log all concerns internally, regardless of medium.
2. **The Response:** The designated staff member (or an alternative impartial SLT member/Key Worker, if necessary) will respond within **5 school days**. The response may include a meeting, a phone call, or a written clarification.
3. **Resolution:** The aim of this stage is to reach an outcome that satisfies the complainant or clearly explains the rationale for the school's actions, focusing on empathy and shared understanding.

If the issue remains unresolved after this informal engagement, the complainant may request to move to Stage 2.

Stage 2: Formal Investigation

Objective: To formally investigate issues that could not be resolved informally, resulting in a documented finding and formal response.

Formal complaints must be made to the headteacher (unless they are about the headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form).

1. **Acknowledgement:** The headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within **5 school days**. Within this response, the headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see.
2. **Investigation:** The headteacher (or a designated member of the senior leadership team) will investigate. During the investigation, they will:
    - if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
    - keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.
3. **Outcome:** At the conclusion of their investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within **10 school days** of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.
4. **Response:** The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint to Stage 3 should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome.

Note on Complaints regarding the Headteacher or Governors:

- If the complaint is about the headteacher, or a member of the management board (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.
- Complaints about the headteacher or member of the management board must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.
- If the complaint is about the Chair, the entire management board, or the majority of the management board, Stage 2 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the management board.

Stage 3: Request for Review

Objective: To establish measurable criteria for escalation, ensuring the Governor Panel reviews the process and findings, not merely re-hears the original complaint.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the Headteacher's formal finding (Stage 2), they may request a review by the Management Board Complaints Committee (Stage 4). This request must be submitted in writing (via the Clerk) within **10 school days** of receiving the Stage 2 outcome and **must be based on specific grounds for review**.

The Management Board will only proceed to Stage 4 if the complainant can clearly identify one or more of the following grounds:

1. **Procedural Flaw:** The school's formal Complaints Procedure (Stages 1 or 2) was not adhered to (e.g., missed deadlines, failure to interview a critical witness, or a conflict of interest was ignored).
2. **Factual Inaccuracy:** Specific, material facts within the Headteacher's Stage 2 Findings Report are claimed to be demonstrably inaccurate, and this inaccuracy directly impacts the decision.
3. **New Evidence:** Significant, relevant evidence has emerged since the conclusion of the Stage 2 investigation, and this evidence could not reasonably have been provided earlier.
4. **Policy/Legal Breach:** The outcome or recommendations of the Stage 2 decision are believed to be unlawful, discriminatory, or in direct contradiction of a specific, named school policy.

*If the request fails to specify one of the four grounds for review, the Clerk will write back to the complainant within **5 school days** asking them to clarify the grounds before the request can be processed.*

Stage 4: Management Board Review

Objective: To provide a final, impartial review of the formal process and decision.

If the criteria for a Stage 3 review are met, the Clerk will convene a meeting of the Complaints Committee.

- **Timeline:** The Clerk will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the valid Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.
- **Composition:** The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If necessary, independent governors may be sourced from other local schools.
- **Attendance:** The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations. If the complainant is invited to attend, they may bring someone along to provide support (relative or friend).
- **Evidence:** At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will notify all parties of the date/time. Written material will be circulated at least 5 school days before the meeting. The committee will not normally accept recordings obtained covertly.

The Hearing: The committee's function is to **review the Headteacher's handling and findings at Stage 2**, restricted to the specific Grounds for Review submitted by the complainant. They will not normally re-investigate the original issue.

Outcome: The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and the school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within **10 school days**. The letter will include details of how to contact the Department for Education.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 3.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Francis Barber. They will consider whether Francis Barber has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to: Department for Education Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD.

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
    - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
    - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
    - consideration of records and other relevant information
    - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

Complaints Co-ordinator The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding sharing third party information and additional support needs
- keep records.

Clerk to the Management Board The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint and send it to the parties in advance
- record the proceedings and circulate the minutes
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair The committee's chair should ensure that:

- both parties are asked to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that everyone is treated with respect
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease (particularly if the complainant is a child/young person)
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity
- the issues are addressed and key findings of fact are made.