



Author: NCP (amended HCC template)
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Review Frequency- every four years

Birchwood High School Complaints Policy & Procedure (Parents Guide) DRAFT

How to comment or complain - we care about what you think

Each day this school makes many decisions and tries hard to do the best for all students. Your comments - either positive or negative - are helpful for future planning.

You may want to talk to us about a particular aspect of this school, though not actually make a complaint - you just want to get something 'off your chest'.

If you are dissatisfied about the way your child is being treated, or any actions or lack of action by us, please feel free to contact us using the details listed below.

Birchwood High School, Parsonage Lane, Bishop's
Stortford,
CM23 5BD
Telephone: 01279 655936
Website: www.birchwoodonline.co.uk
Email: admin@birchwood.herts.sch.uk

Our aims:

- Your complaint will be dealt with honestly, politely and in confidence.
- Your complaint will be looked into thoroughly and fairly.
- If your complaint is urgent we will deal with it more quickly.
- We will keep you up to date with progress at each stage.
- You will get an apology if we have made a mistake.
- You will be told what we are going to do to put things right.
- If dissatisfied with the informal response, you have the option to progress to a formal complaint.
- You will get a full and clear written reply to formal complaints within 28 school days (5½ weeks).

Our Mission

At Birchwood we are part of something special, something outstanding,
welcoming all, supporting all and encouraging all.

Enjoying together the exploration of ideas, the excitement of learning
and the celebration of our achievements, in a school where we feel safe.

Our future matters to us.

Your dreams, your future, our challenge

A written record will be kept of all complaints and actions taken as a result, along with details of the stage which they were resolved. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting and inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

How to make a complaint

In the first instance – informal stage

If you have a concern about anything we do, or if you wish to make a complaint, you can do this by telephone, in person or in writing (by letter or email). We hope that most complaints can be settled quickly and informally, either by putting matters right or by giving you an explanation. If there is something you are not happy about, or you don't understand why we are doing something in a particular way, please come in and discuss it with the class teacher or another appropriate member of staff, such as the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) if it is about Special Needs.

We know that it can feel uncomfortable to question or challenge something, but if you don't tell us what is worrying you we cannot explain what we are doing or try to put it right. If the member of staff you speak to in the first instance is unable to attempt to resolve the matter, you should make an appointment with the Principal. You should be able to sort out your worries but sometimes this is not possible. In this case there is a next step.

First - formal stage

Request a meeting with the Principal who will investigate your complaint and aim to inform you of the outcome **within 10 school days (2 weeks)**.

If your first contact is with individual Governors, they will advise you to take up your concerns with the appropriate member of staff or Principal. A Governor should not be made aware of a potential complaint as they may be required to sit on a Panel in the event of a formal hearing (Stage Two) and should be impartial.

If your complaint is about the Principal, you should **write to the Chair of Governors**. If your child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) you might find it helpful to talk to our Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) or your child's named Special Needs Officer at the Local Authority. The SEND Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS – formerly Parent Partnership) may also be able to help you.

Second - formal stage

If you remain dissatisfied following Stage 1 and wish to take your complaint further, you will be asked to complete a form or write a letter addressed to the Chair of Governors. In the letter you should:

- Make it clear why you are complaining.
- Say who you have spoken to already.
- Explain what you want to happen as a result of your complaint.

The Chair of Governors will arrange for your complaint to be investigated and considered by a Complaints Panel at a hearing which the complainant and the respondent are invited to attend. The Panel should consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, two of whom will be governors and one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the Academy.

If the Chair of Governors or another Governor has been involved in discussions to help settle the matter at Stage 1, s/he should arrange for another Governor to take charge of the situation. Neither the Chair of Governors nor the Governor in charge should sit on the Panel themselves and they should instead ensure that a Panel is convened in line with the timeframes and guidance set out in the school's complaints procedure. The Governor in charge of investigating the complaint may ask to meet you to discuss your concerns. It is not advisable for a Panel to investigate and conclude matters without giving the Complainant and Respondent the opportunity to respond. Therefore a formal hearing with all in attendance is most preferable.

You should make sure that the Complaint Panel is provided with any written information or evidence you intend to use in a formal hearing. You may bring a friend, representative or interpreter to any meeting if you wish. The Chair of the Panel may invite any person who may help establish the facts of the complaint. The Chair should tell you who this person is before the meeting. If any member of staff is required by the Governing Body to attend a meeting they will have the opportunity to be accompanied or represented as they wish. A member of staff named in a complaint may also choose to attend a meeting, even if not required to do so by the Governors. They may be represented. If this happens, we will inform you in advance.

When the Panel has fully investigated your complaint, the Chair of the Panel or the Governor in charge of the investigation will write to you to tell you the findings. These findings will be reported to the Governing Body. The Chair of Governors will then write to you confirming the outcome of your complaint and any agreed actions to be taken. Our Governing Body will aim to deal with your complaint **within 28 school days (5½ weeks)**.

Documentation detailing the findings and recommendations of the panel will be available for inspection on the school premises by both the complainant and the Principal.

Further recourse

Most complaints are resolved by this process. Should your complaint not be resolved, your further options are as follows:

You can complain to the **Secretary of State at the Department for Education**:

The Secretary of State, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT

Website: www.education.gov.uk

Telephone: 0370 000 2288

In the case of complaints about **Special Educational Needs provision**, you may complain further to the Local Authority. This should be done by writing to the Children's Services Complaints Manager.

It should be noted however that if you wish to pursue this route, you must do so within **20 working days (4 weeks)** of receiving the written outcome of the hearing into your complaint. After **20 working days (4 weeks)**, neither the school nor the Local Authority is under any obligation to investigate or progress your complaint any further.

Useful contacts

Advisory Centre for Education POhWER

Education Advice & Training Hertlands House
72 Durnsford Road Primett Road
London Stevenage
N11 2EJ SG1 3EE

Web: www.ace-ed.org.uk Web: www.pohwer.net

Phone: **0300 0115 142** Phone: **0300 456 2370**

Children's Legal Centre National Youth Advocacy Service

Riverside Office Centre (NYAS)
Century House North Egerton House
North Station Road Tower Road
Colchester Birkenhead
Essex Wirral
CO1 1RE CH41 1FN

Web: www.childrenslegalcentre.com Web: www.nyas.net

Phone: **0345 345 4345** Phone: **0345 345 4345**

Special Educational Needs & Disability Information Advice Support Service (SENDIASS)

Web: www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/sendias

Email: SENDIASS@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Phone: **01992 555847**

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

This policy will be reviewed by the Personnel Committee every four years.

