



EMERGE SCHOOL

Complaints Policy

2025 - 2026

☀️ Our Vision: *A culture rooted in safety, where people feel seen, heard, included, and connected through authentic relationships.*

🎯 Our Mission: *To create a safe and nurturing environment where everyone feels a sense of belonging, is empowered in their growth and learning, and is encouraged to embrace who they are and who they aspire to become.*

❤️ Our Values: *At Emerge School, our values are the foundation of who we are, how we work, and what we believe in. They shape how we support young people and how we support each other.*

We are proud to uphold these four core values:



Voice: *empowering every voice to speak, shape and be heard*



Connection: *rooted in relationships, thriving through authenticity*



Growth: *evolving with purpose, innovating with heart*



Inclusion: *where every story begins, and every person matters*

Excel & Emerge Care was created to give children and young people with complex needs a safe, supportive place to grow and heal. Through residential care, education, and therapeutic support, we build stability, trust, and a future where children and young people can truly flourish

Summary

This policy and related procedure are for all staff and the Out of Hours service.

Emerge Education promotes an environment in which young people, staff and external agencies feel enabled to comment on the procedures and conduct carried out within our school.

Views and opinions of young people enrolled at Emerge School, the staff working with them, parents and carers, external agencies and people within the community are valued and encouraged.

Emerge are always seeking ways in which they can improve the care they give to young people and have a “what can we do better” attitude, which can only be achieved through feedback.

CONTENTS

1. Who can Make a Complaint?
2. The Difference Between a Concern and Complaint
3. How to Raise a Concern or Make a Complaint
4. Anonymous Complaints
5. Time Scales
6. Complaints Received Outside of Term Time
7. External Complaints Procedure
8. Independent Investigation of Complaints
9. Scope
10. Resolving of Complaints
11. Withdrawal of a Complaint
12. Stage 1
13. Stage 2
14. Stage 3
15. Next Steps
16. Appeals Procedure
17. Young Person’s Complaints Procedure
18. Roles and Responsibilities
19. Important Contacts
20. Complaint Form

1. WHO CAN MAKE A COMPLAINT?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at Emerge. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to the school 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.

2. 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 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 complaint's procedure. Emerge School 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, the 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, Emerge School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaint's procedure.

3. HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN OR MAKE A COMPLAINT

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

Concerns should be raised with the class teacher in the first instance, which will be escalated to a member of the Senior Management Team if necessary. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher. 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 a member of SMT. 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.

4. ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or the Chairman of the Proprietary bodies, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

5. 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. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

6. 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.

7. EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

All complaints made by someone external to the school are managed by the Headteacher and over-seen by the Chairman of the Proprietary Body. The complaint will be fully responded to within 28 days of it being received and all relevant agencies notified of the complaint and the outcomes and actions taken.

8. INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINTS

To ensure transparency in practice, Emerge may also use an independent person to undertake independent investigations if required, e.g. if a complaint was made regarding the Headteacher or Chairman of the Proprietor body or if an individual making the complaint felt that the investigation needed to be undertaken by an external professional.

9. SCOPE

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

Exceptions	Who to Contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Admissions to schools' Statutory assessments of Special Educational NeedsSchool reorganisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school reorganisation proposals should be raised with Stoke-on-Trent Council.

Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Safeguarding and Child Protection 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 legal responsibility for safeguarding or the MultiAgency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). http://www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk/ccm/content/safeguardingchildren/education/procedures.en ;jsessionid=assVs0-WZPoa http://www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/professionals/multiagencysafeguarding-hub/
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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 . Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain directly to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
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 directly.
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 Emerge School 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.

10. RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

At each stage in the procedure, Emerge School wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is 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.

11. WITHDRAWAL OF A COMPLAINT

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

12. STAGE 1

If a carer / parent / social worker (i.e. person with parental responsibility) is unhappy with the care or quality of education a young person is receiving, or a member of the public has a concern relating to the school, they are encouraged in the first instance to talk to the class teacher immediately or as soon as is possible, with the aim of resolving the matter informally, through face to face, class dojo or email.

If the complainant is satisfied with the way their concern or complaint has been addressed, and agrees with the decisions reached, they are asked to confirm this in writing (email is acceptable) to the Headteacher, and the complaint procedure stops at this point.

13. STAGE 2

If following Stage 1 the complainant remains unsatisfied with the outcome, they can make a complaint to the Headteacher via class writing/email. The Headteacher will try and resolve the complaint through discussions with the complainant. If the complainant is happy with the way their concern or complaint has been addressed, and agrees with the decisions reached, they are asked to confirm this in writing (email is acceptable) to the Headteacher, and the complaint procedure stops at this point.

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher, please see additional flow chart). This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by telephone.

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 Head Teacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see.

The Headteacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's Senior Management Team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Headteacher (or investigator) 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.

The Headteacher will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The Head Teacher can:

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

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the Headteacher will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

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 Head Teacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date. 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 Emerge School will take to resolve the complaint.

The Head Teacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

If the complaint is about the Head Teacher, a suitably skilled Chairman of the Proprietary Board will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2. Complaints about the Headteacher must be made to the Chairman of the Proprietary Board.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaint's procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

14. STAGE 3

If after the initial formal routes have been exhausted, the person with concerns remains unhappy with the outcome, they can make a further complaint to the Chairman of the Proprietary Board. This complaint must be made in writing and dated, stating the nature of the complaint and how the school has handled matters so far and include as much detail as possible. The Chairman of the Proprietary Board must consider and acknowledge all written complaints within 21 days of receipt and arrange a meeting to discuss the complaint with the complainant. The meeting will be chaired by the Chairman of the Proprietary Board along with two other Members of the leadership team and an impartial Independent Panel Member outside of the school's workforce who is not involved in the management or running of the school.

After hearing all the evidence and conferring with the other two members of the leadership team present at the meeting, the Chairman of the Proprietary Board makes a decision and informs the complainant of the outcome in writing. If the complainant is happy with the way their concern or complaint has been addressed, and agrees with the decisions reached, they are asked to confirm this in writing (email is acceptable) to the Chairman of the Proprietary Board and the complaint procedure stops at this point.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend, generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

15. 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 Emerge School. They will consider whether Emerge School 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.

16. APPEALS PROCEDURE

If the complainant has followed Stage 1, 2, and 3 of this complaints procedure yet remains dissatisfied with the outcome or the manner in which it has been addressed, they have the right to appeal within 5 working days of the stage 3 decision being communicated to them. The complainant must include all evidence to support the grounds for their appeal. On receipt of the appeal letter, the owner shall make arrangements for an external consultant to hear the appeal at an appeal meeting to which the complainant is invited. The complainant is advised to make every effort to attend the appeal meeting. Following the meeting, the Head Teacher will endeavour to respond to the appeal as soon as possible and, in any case, within five working days of the appeal hearing.

17. 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.
- cooperate 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, children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint with 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.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting.
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal.
- be mindful of the timescales to respond.
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Headteacher or Chairman of the Proprietary Board that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The Headteacher or Chairman of the Proprietary Board will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

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, responsible Individual and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaint's procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - o sharing third party information.
 - o additional support, this may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person.
 - o keeping of records.

The Complaint Coordinator should be aware that:

- The meeting must be independent and impartial and should be seen to be so. No staff member may sit in on the complaint meeting if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- Many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting.
 - Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.
 - The co-ordinator should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

- If the child/young person is the complainant, the co-ordinator should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint.
- Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the co-ordinator should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend. However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the co-ordinator considers is not in the child/young person's best interest
- The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

18. IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Dame Rachel de Souza Children's Commissioner for England

The Office of the Children's Commissioner

Sanctuary Buildings

20 Great Smith Street

London

SW1P 3BT

Tel: 020 7783 8330

Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

cco.communications@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 1231

19. COMPLAINT FORM

Please complete and return to the Headteacher who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address:
Postcode:
Day time telephone number:
Evening telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature:
Date:
Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Date:

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Reviewed By	Danielle Clowes & Andy Gould
Next Review	February 2027
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Approved by:



Headteacher:

Date:06.01.2026