

Underhill School and Children's Centre



Complaints Policy

Updated: September 2022
Ratified:
Review: Annually

- **Statement of intent**

Underhill School and Children's Centre aims to resolve all complaints at the earliest possible stage and is dedicated to continuing to provide the highest quality of education possible throughout the procedure.

The Complaints Procedures Policy has been created to deal with any complaint against a member of staff or the school as a whole, relating to any aspects of the school or the provision of facilities or services.

Any person, including a member of the public, is able to make a complaint about the provision of facilities or services that Underhill School and Children's Centre provides. This policy outlines the procedure that the complainant and school must follow.

Once a complaint has been made, it can be resolved or withdrawn at any stage.

Please also refer to our Vexatious Complaints Policy.

At Underhill School and Children's Centre, the Co-Headteachers will be the first point of contact when following the complaints procedure.

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to statutory legislation, including, but not limited to, the following:

- The Education Act 2002
- The Data Protection Act 1998
- The Freedom of Information Act 2000
- The Immigration Act 2016
- The Equality Act 2010

This policy also has due regard to guidance including, but not limited to the following:

- DfE 'Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2016' 2016
- HM Government 'Code of practice on the English language requirement for public sector workers' 2016

2. Definition

- 2.1. For the purpose of this policy, a "complaint" can be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction' which can be regarding actions taken or a perceived lack of action.
- 2.2. Complaints can be resolved formally or informally depending on the complainant's choice.
- 2.3. A concern can be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt' for which reassurance is sought.
- 2.4. Any complaint or concern will be taken seriously, whether formally or informally, and the appropriate procedures shall be taken.

NB For the purpose of this policy, "concerns" will be classed and addressed as complaints. Any further references to "complaints" will include "concerns".

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1. The Complainant will:

- Cooperate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint.
- Express the complaint and their concerns in full at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Promptly respond to any requests for information or meetings.
- Ask for assistance as needed.
- Treat any person(s) involved in the complaint with respect.

3.2. The Complaints co-ordinator will:

- Ensure that all parties involved in the complaint are fully updated throughout each stage of the procedure.
- Guarantee that all parties involved in the procedure are aware of any relevant legislation, including the Equality Act 2010, Data Protection Act 1998 and Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- Keep up-to-date records throughout the procedure.
- Liaise with all parties involved to ensure the complaints procedure runs smoothly, including the Co-Headteachers, Clerk and Chair of Governors.

- Be aware of issues in regards to sharing third party information.
- Understand the complainant's need for additional support, including interpretation support, and will be aware of any issues concerning this.

3.3. The Investigator is involved in stages one and two of the procedure. Their role includes:

- Providing a sensitive and thorough interviewing process of the complainant in order to establish what has happened and who is involved.
- Considering all records, evidence and relevant information provided.
- Interviewing all parties that are involved in the complaint, including staff and children.
- Analysing all information in a comprehensive and fair manner.
- Liaising with the Complainant and Complaints Coordinator to clarify an appropriate resolution to the problem.
- Identifying and recommending solutions and courses of actions to take.
- Being mindful of timescales and ensuring all parties involved are aware of these timescales.
- Responding to the complainant in a clear and understandable manner.

3.4. The Panel Chair will:

- Explain the remit of the panel to the Complainant.
- Ensure that all issues are addressed and that outcomes are reached based on facts and evidence.
- Confirm that no member of the panel has previously been involved in the earlier stages of the procedure or has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings.
- Provide copies of any written material or evidence to everyone in attendance of the meeting, ensuring that everyone has seen the necessary material.
- Continuously liaise with the clerk and complaints coordinator to ensure the procedure runs smoothly.

3.5. All Panel Members will be aware that:

- The review panel hearing is independent and impartial.
- No individual with prior involvement in the complaint, or the circumstances surrounding it, is permitted to sit on the panel.

3.6. The Panel Clerk will:

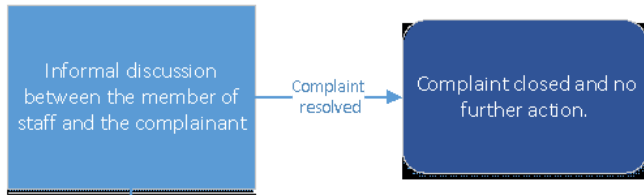
- Continuously liaise with the complaints co-ordinator.
- Minute meetings of the panel
- Keep up-to-date records of all proceedings throughout the procedure.
- Collate all written material or evidence involved and send it to the parties involved in timely advance of the hearing.
- Notify the relevant parties of the panel's decision and any other actions to be taken.

4. Making a complaint

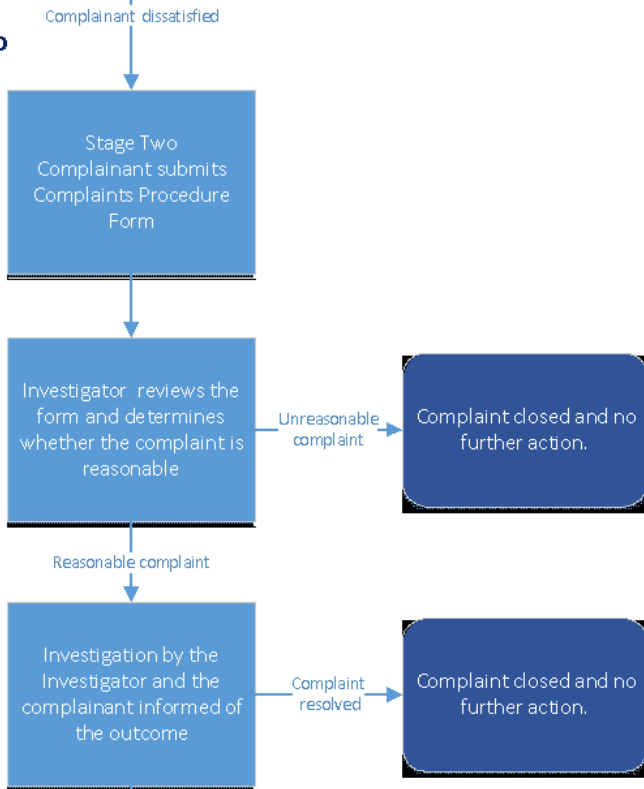
- 3.7. Underhill School and Children's Centre will ensure that all aspects of the complaints procedure are:
- Easily accessible and publicised.
 - Simple to understand and put into practice.
 - Impartial and fair to all parties involved.
 - Respectful of confidentiality duties.
 - Fairly investigated, by an independent person when necessary.
 - Used to address all issues in order to provide appropriate and effective responses where necessary.
- 3.8. Complaints are expected to be made as soon as possible after an incident arises in order to amend the issue in an appropriate timescale.
- 3.9. Underhill School and Children's Centre upholds a three-month time limit in which a complaint can be lodged regarding an incident.
- 3.10. Complaints made outside this time limit will not be automatically refused and exceptions will be considered.
- 3.11. In the case of any timescales changing, all parties involved will be informed of the changes in a timely manner.
- 3.12. Complaints should be made using the appropriate channels of communication, including the use of the Complaints Procedure Form.
- All complaints shall be considered whether made in person, by telephone, in writing or electronically via email.
- 3.13. A complaint can progress to the next stage of the procedure even if it is not viewed as "justified". All complainants are given the opportunity to fully complete the complaints procedure.
- 3.14. Any complaint made against the Co-Headteachers shall be initially dealt with by the Chair of Governors.
- 3.15. Any complaint made against the Chair of Governors or any other member of the governing body should be made in writing to the clerk to the governing body.

2. Complaints Procedure

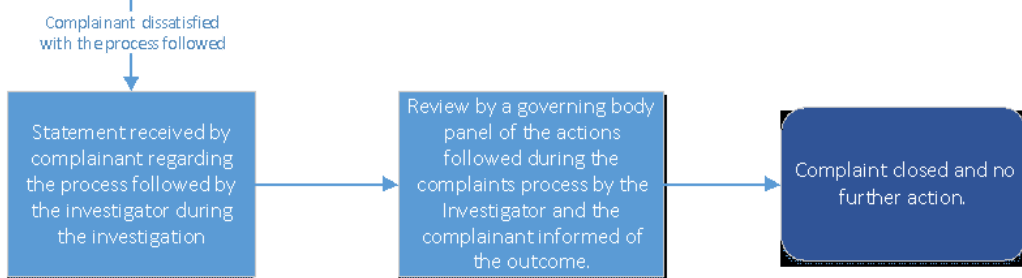
Stage One



Stage Two



Stage Three



3.16. Complaining about the actions of a member of staff other than the Co-Headteachers

2.1.1. Stage One – Informal Stage

- The member of staff can discuss the complaint with the Co-Headteachers or Complaints Co-ordinator in order to seek support.
- In case a complaint is made initially to a governor, the Complainant should be referred to the appropriate person. The governor in question should not act alone on a complaint outside the procedure; if they do, they cannot be involved if the complaint is subject to a hearing at a later stage of the procedure.
- The Complainant and the relevant member of staff should discuss the issue in a respectful and informal manner to seek a mutual resolution.
- If an appropriate resolution cannot be sought at this level, or if the Complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome following the initial discussions, the Complainant may wish to proceed to the next level of the procedure (Stage Two).

2.1.2. Stage Two – Formal Stage

- Stage two of the process will be completed within 15 school days. Where the situation is recognised as complex, and it is deemed to be unable to be resolved within this timescale, the Co-Headteachers will contact the Complainant to inform them of the revised target date via a written notification.
- If the complaint is judged to be unreasonable (see definition below), then the Complainant will be informed that their complaint will not be accepted and will not be investigated.
- An appointment with the Co-Headteachers should be made, as soon as reasonably practicable, in order to avoid any possible worsening of the situation.
- In terms of a complaint being made against a member of staff, the Co-Headteachers will discuss the issue with the staff member in question. Where necessary, the Co-Headteachers will conduct interviews with any relevant parties, including witnesses and children, and take statements from those involved.
- All discussions shall be recorded by the Co-Headteachers and findings and resolutions will be communicated to the Complainant either verbally or in writing.
- Once all facts are established, the Co-Headteachers shall contact the Complainant in writing with an explanation of the decision. The Complainant will not be informed of any disciplinary/capability action. The Complainant will be told that consideration of their complaint by the Co-Headteachers is now concluded.
- There are a number of possible outcomes for this investigation and these are:
 - that the concern was substantiated in part or in full and some details may then be given of action the School is taking;
 - that there is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld;
 - that the concern is not substantiated by the evidence;

- that the complaint appears to be unreasonable.
 - For those who wish to pursue the complaint further, there are two bases for this:
- first, that the conclusion of the Co-Headteachers is perverse or unreasonable;
- second, that the process followed by the Co-Headteachers in handling the complaint was flawed.
 - If the Complainant considers that the decision of the Co-Headteachers is perverse, or that the Co-Headteachers have acted unreasonably in considering the complaint, then the Complainant may bring a complaint against the Co-Headteachers under 5.2 below of this procedure **in writing within two weeks** of receiving the outcome.

3.17. Complaining about the actions of the Co-Headteachers

2.1.3. Stage One – Informal Stage

- The Complaints Co-ordinator should be informed and will need to handle the complaint. The Complainant can then be referred to the Chair of the governing body.
- In case a complaint is made initially to a governor, the Complainant should be referred to the appropriate person. The governor in question should not act alone on a complaint outside the procedure; if they do, they cannot be involved if the complaint is subject to a hearing at a later stage of the procedure.
- The Complainant and the Chair of Governors should discuss the issue in a respectful and informal manner to seek a mutual resolution.
- If an appropriate resolution cannot be sought at this level, or if the Complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome following the initial discussions, the Complainant may wish to proceed to the next level of the procedure.

2.1.4. Stage Two – Formal Stage

- Stage two of the process will be completed **within 15 school days**. Where the situation is recognised as complex, and it is deemed to be unable to be resolved within this timescale, the Chair of Governors will contact the Complainant to inform them of the revised target date via a written notification.
- The Complainant will initially need to write, in confidence, to the Chair of the governing body.
- If the complaint is judged to be unreasonable (see definition below), then the Complainant will be informed that their complaint will not be accepted and will not be investigated.
- The Chair of Governors will discuss the issue with the Co-Headteachers. Where necessary, the Chair of Governors will conduct interviews with any relevant parties, including witnesses and children, and take statements from those involved.
- All discussions shall be recorded by the Chair of Governors and findings and resolutions will be communicated to the Complainant either verbally or in writing.
- Once all facts are established, the Chair of Governors shall contact the Complainant in writing with an explanation of the decision. The Complainant

will not be informed of any disciplinary/capability action. The Complainant will be told that consideration of their complaint by the Co-Headteachers is now concluded.

- There are a number of possible outcomes for this investigation and these are:
 - that the concern was substantiated in part or in full and some details may then be given of action the School is taking;
 - that there is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld;
 - that the concern is not substantiated by the evidence;
 - that the complaint appears to be unreasonable.

- For those who wish to pursue the complaint further, there are two bases for this:
 - first, that the conclusion of the Chair is perverse or unreasonable;
 - second, that the process followed by the Chair in handling the complaint was flawed.
 - If the Complainant is not satisfied with the manner in which the process has been followed, or considers that the decision of the Chair of Governors is perverse, or that the Chair of Governors has acted unreasonably in considering the complaint, then the Complainant may request that the Governing Body review the Chair's decision.
 - If the Complainant is not satisfied with the manner in which the process has been followed, the Complainant may request that the Governing Body review the process followed by the Chair in handling the complaint. Requests made on this basis must include a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow the procedure.
 - Requests made on either basis must be made **in writing within 2 weeks** of receiving notice of the outcome from the Chair at which point the process will continue to Stage Three (section 5.3).

3.18. Stage Three – Governing Body Review Process

- Written acknowledgement of the complaint will be made within three school days. This will inform the Complainant that a governing body panel will review the process followed by the Co-Headteachers or Chair **within 20 school days**. Where the situation is recognised as complex, and it is deemed to be unable to be resolved within this timescale, the Complaints Co-ordinator will contact the Complainant to inform them of the revised target date via a written notification.
- The Chair of governors, or other nominated governor, will convene a governing body panel comprising three members of the governing body, or members of other governing bodies, or independent individuals as appropriate (in some cases this may be one independent reviewer). Members of the panel will have had no prior involvement in the complaint.
- The Panel will review the statement provided by the complainant, will invite the Co-Headteachers or the Chair, as appropriate, to respond and will have access to the records kept of the process followed.
- The Complainant will receive a written response explaining the final outcome **within 15 school days** of the review. This letter will also explain whether there are any further rights of appeal and to whom they need to be addressed.

3. Interviewing witnesses

When interviewing children in order to gather information regarding a complaint, the interview should be conducted in the presence of another member of staff or, in the case of serious complaints, e.g. where the possibility of criminal investigation exists, in the presence of their parents/carers.

Underhill School and Children's Centre will ensure that the conduction of interviews does not prejudice an LA designated officer's (LADO), or police, investigation.

The school understands the importance of ensuring a friendly and relaxed area which is free from intimidation.

All children interviewed will be made fully aware of what the interview concerns and their right to have someone with them.

Staff are allowed a colleague to support them at their interview. The colleague must not be anyone likely to be interviewed themselves, including their line manager.

The interviewer will not express opinions in words or attitude, so as to not influence the interviewee.

The interviewee will sign a copy of the transcription of the interview.

4. Recording a complaint

A record shall be kept of any complaint made, whether via phone, in person or in writing, detailing the main issues raised, ready to discuss at a later date.

Underhill School and Children's Centre holds the right to use recording devices, where appropriate, to ensure all parties involved are able to review the discussions at a later date.

Where there are communication difficulties or disabilities, the school may provide recording devices to ensure the complainant is able to access and review the discussions at a later point

Details of any complaint made shall not be shared with the entire governing body unless completely necessary, in case an independent panel is needed to hear the complaint.

The progress and the final outcome of a complaint will be recorded and kept up-to-date by the Co-Headteachers.

Underhill School and Children's Centre will hold all records of complaints centrally.

Complainants have a right to access copies of these records under the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts.

5. Complaints not covered by this procedure

Complaints regarding the following topics should be directed to the LA:

- Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- School re-organisation proposals
- Matters which may require a Child Protection Investigation
- Admissions to schools

Complaints concerning admissions will be directed to the appropriate admissions authority.

Complaints about children being excluded from the school should be dealt with by following the process explained at:

- <https://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions>

Underhill School and Children's Centre has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all employees and voluntary staff. Complaints of this nature should not be addressed using this complaints procedure. These concerns can be directed to Ofsted by telephone on: 0300 123 3155 or via email at: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk

Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures will be dealt with using Underhill School and Children's Centre's internal grievance procedure. In these cases, complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any investigations.

This complaints procedure is not to be used when addressing any complaints made about services provided by a third party who may use the school premises or facilities. All complaints concerning this should be directed to the service provider.

6. Exceptional circumstances

If the complaint suggests that a child has been at risk of significant harm through violence, emotional abuse, sexual harassment or neglect, it may be referred without further notice to the children's social care and/or to the LA.

If a social services authority decides to investigate a situation, the Co-Headteachers or governing body may postpone the complaints procedure.

Where a matter can be resolved through a legal appeal, it will not be considered as a formal complaint. The key areas are: admissions decisions, certain decisions relating to formal assessment of special educational needs, and decisions to permanently exclude a child.

7. Serial and persistent Complainants

The school will act in a manner they believe to be appropriate when dealing with an individual who consistently makes the same complaints or who continuously asks the school to reconsider their position.

If a complainant attempts to re-open an issue which has previously fully completed the complaints procedure, the Chair of the governing body will inform the complainant that the matter is now closed.

If the complainant contacts the school regarding the same issue again, the complaint may be classed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the school does not have an obligation to respond. The school must ensure that a complaint is not classed as 'serial' before they have fully completed the complaints procedure.

Underhill School and Children's Centre will not take the decision to stop responding to an individual lightly. The school will ensure that:

They have previously taken every reasonable step to address the problem.
They have provided the complainant with a statement of their position.
The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly with the same complaint.

If the school believes that the complainant is continuously contacting the school to cause disruption or inconvenience, or if the complainant is being abusive or threatening, the school has the right to not respond to the correspondent.

Once Underhill School and Children's Centre decides to no longer respond to a complainant, the individual will be informed of this decision in writing.

If the school finds it difficult to deal with a complainant due to their unreasonable behaviour, then their complaint can be directed to the LA.

The complainant has the right to a third party representative, such as the Citizens' Advice Bureau, throughout the complaints procedure.

Any new complaint made by a 'serial' complainant will be responded to.

Complainants hold the right to refer their complaint to their local MP. This would not make the individual a 'serial' or 'persistent' complainant.

Underhill School and Children's Centre will not deny any individual access to information that they have a right to under The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2005.

8. Barring from the premises

School premises are private property and therefore any individual can be barred from entering the premises.

If a parent's/carer's behaviour is cause for concern, a school can ask the individual to leave the premises.

The Co-Headteachers or the LA will notify the parties involved via writing, explaining that their implied licence for access to the premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the individual may wish to make.

The individual involved will be given the opportunity to formally express their views regarding the decision to bar them.

This decision to bar will be reviewed, taking into account any discussions following the incident.

If the decision is made to continue the bar, the individual will be contacted in writing, informing them of how long the bar will be in place.

Anyone wishing to make a complaint regarding a barring order can do so in writing, including email, to the Co-Headteachers or chair of governors.

Once the school's complaints procedure is completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts.

9. Standard of fluency complaints

As members of a public authority, all staff are subject to the fluency duty imposed by the Immigration Act 2016, which requires staff members to have an appropriate level of fluency in English in order to teach pupils.

The school is free to determine the level of spoken communication necessary in order for staff members to develop effective performance, but it will be matched to the demands of the role in question.

The school will be satisfied that an individual has the necessary level of fluency appropriate for the role they will be undertaking, whether this is an existing or potential new member of staff.

If a member of the school community feels that a staff member has insufficient proficiency in spoken English for the performance of their role, they are required to follow the complaints procedure outlined in [section 5](#) of this policy.

For the purpose of this policy, a "legitimate complaint" is one which is about the standard of spoken English of a member of staff; complaints regarding an individual's accent, dialect, manner or tone of communication are not considered legitimate complaints.

All legitimate complaints regarding the fluency duty will be handled in line with the processes outlined in this policy.

In addition to the processes outlined in this policy, the school will assess the merits of a legitimate complaint against the necessary standard of spoken English fluency required for the role in question.

To assess the merits, the school will undertake an objective assessment against clear criteria set out in the role specification or, against the level of fluency descriptors relevant to the role in question.

If the complaint is upheld, the school will consider what action is necessary to meet the fluency duty; this may include:

- Specific training
- Specific re-training
- Assessment
- Re-deployment
- Dismissal

Appropriate support will be provided to staff to ensure that they are protected from unreasonable complaints and are not subjected to unnecessary fluency testing.

Records of complaints regarding fluency will be kept in accordance with the processes outlined in section 7 of this policy.

10. Role of the school complaints unit (SCU)

If a complainant remains dissatisfied once the complaints procedure has been completed, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State will only intervene when they believe that the governing body has acted unlawfully or unreasonably.

The SCU will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint except in exceptional circumstances, such as the school acting unlawfully.

When making a final decision about a complaint, the school reserves the right to seek advice from the SCU on whether they are acting reasonably and lawfully; however, they will not be able to advise on how to resolve the complaint.

11. Reviewing the procedure

The complaints procedure will be reviewed every two years, taking into account the latest guidance issued by the DfE.

Responsibility for reviewing the procedure belongs to the Governing Body.

All projected review dates will be adhered to.

Information gathered through reviewing the complaints procedure will be used to continuously improve and develop the process.

The monitoring and reviewing of complaints will be used to help evaluate the school's performance.

- **Notes**

- **Unreasonable Complaints**

Underhill School and Children's Centre is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the 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. Please refer to our Vexatious Complaints policy for further guidance.

Underhill School and Children's Centre defines unreasonable complainants as 'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- 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 while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or 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 complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the DfE.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:

- Maliciously
- Aggressively
- Using threats, intimidation or violence
- Using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language
- Knowing it to be false

- Using falsified information
- Publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers

Complainants should limit the number of communications with a school while a 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 Co-Headteachers or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Co-Headteachers will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Underhill School and Children's Centre causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from Underhill School and Children's Centre premises.

- **Complaints Procedure Form**

If you have tried unsuccessfully to resolve your complaint and wish to take the matter further, please complete this form and send it to the Co-Headteachers. (If your complaint is against the Co-Headteachers, you will need to send the form to the Chair of the Governing body)

Name:	Address:
Pupil's name:	
Pupil's date of birth:	
Daytime telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
Email:	Postcode:
What is your complaint concerning, and what action would you like the Headteacher/Chair of Governors to take?	
When did you discuss your concern/complaint with the appropriate member of staff?	
What was the result of the discussion?	
Signed:	Date:

School Use	
Date Form Received:	
Received By:	
Date Acknowledgement Sent:	
Acknowledgement Sent By:	
Complaint Referred To:	
Date Referred:	