COMPLAINTS POLICY

Listening carefully. Responding fairly.
Resolving concerns together.

RIVERSIDE BRIDGE SCHOOL

INSPIRE, EMPOWER, ACHIEVE

This policy forms part of the Riverside Bridge School Policy Framework
and should be read alongside any related policies, procedures and guidance.

RIVERSIDE BRIDGE SCHOOL
INSPIRE, EMPOWER, ACHIEVE

OUR COMMITMENT

At Riverside Bridge School, every policy reflects our commitment to creating a safe, inclusive and ambitious school community in which every pupil is valued, every voice matters and every family is respected and supported.

Our policies translate our values into consistent practice. They support high expectations, clear responsibilities, effective partnership and informed decision-making, ensuring that the needs, rights, wellbeing and future outcomes of our pupils remain at the heart of our work.

We work collaboratively, act with integrity and continually reflect upon and improve our practice to achieve the best possible outcomes for every pupil.

POLICY PRINCIPLES

Our Policy Principles underpin how we work together and guide the decisions and actions we take to support every pupil and their families.

POLICY PURPOSE & FRAMEWORK

Riverside Bridge School policies set out the expectations, responsibilities and approaches that support safe, consistent and high-quality practice across the school. They translate our values, statutory responsibilities and professional expectations into clear guidance for everyday decision-making and practice.

Each policy forms part of the Riverside Bridge School Policy Framework and should be read alongside any related policies, procedures, statutory guidance and school frameworks referenced within the document.

Policies apply to the members of the school community identified within each document, including staff, governors, parents and carers, volunteers, contractors and other professionals where relevant. Everyone is expected to understand and apply the requirements appropriate to their role and to seek further guidance where clarification is required.

CURRICULUM DRIVERS

Our Drivers provide a shared golden thread across curriculum, school life, policy and leadership, helping ensure that our decisions and practice remain focused on the experiences and futures we want for every pupil.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

This policy sets out Riverside Bridge School's approach to concerns and complaints. It explains how parents, carers and other members of the school community can raise concerns, how these will be considered and responded to, and the formal stages available where a concern cannot be resolved informally.

At Riverside Bridge School, we are committed to providing a safe, inclusive and ambitious education in which pupils and their families are treated with dignity, respect and fairness. We recognise that effective partnership with families is fundamental to understanding our pupils, meeting their individual needs and securing the best possible outcomes.

We aim to build positive and trusting relationships with families through open communication, professional dialogue and a willingness to listen. However, we recognise that there may be occasions when a parent, carer or other person is concerned about an aspect of the school's provision, decisions or practice. When this happens, concerns should be taken seriously and addressed fairly, respectfully and as promptly as reasonably possible.

Our preference is to resolve concerns at the earliest appropriate stage through constructive discussion. Many issues can be addressed successfully when they are raised promptly with the member of staff or leader best placed to respond. Informal resolution does not mean that a concern is regarded as unimportant; it provides an opportunity to understand what has happened, clarify misunderstandings and identify appropriate solutions without unnecessarily escalating the matter.

Where a concern cannot be resolved informally, or where a complainant wishes to make a formal complaint, Riverside Bridge School will follow the formal stages set out within this policy. Complaints will be considered objectively and without pre-judgement. Complainants will be given an appropriate opportunity to explain their concerns and the outcome they are seeking, and relevant information will be considered before decisions are reached.

We recognise that families at Riverside Bridge School may have different communication needs, experiences and circumstances. The complaints process must therefore be accessible. Reasonable adjustments will be considered where required, including support to raise a concern, alternative communication formats, accessible meetings or other appropriate arrangements.

The school also recognises the importance of maintaining appropriate confidentiality throughout the complaints process. Information will be shared only where necessary to consider, investigate or respond to a complaint or where there is a legal, safeguarding or other professional requirement to do so.

Where a concern relates to safeguarding, statutory assessment, admissions, staff employment matters or another issue governed by a separate statutory or school procedure, it will be considered through the appropriate route rather than through this Complaints Policy. The complainant will be advised where another procedure applies. This reflects the exclusions established within the Trust procedure.

Complaints provide an important source of feedback. Where a complaint identifies an area in which school practice, communication, systems or procedures could be strengthened, Riverside Bridge School will consider

what can be learned and what appropriate action should follow. A complaint may therefore contribute to improvement even where every aspect of it is not upheld.

This policy follows the Partnership Learning Trust Complaints Policy and Procedure and maintains the stages, decision-making arrangements and procedural requirements established by the Trust. The school will also have regard to relevant Department for Education requirements and guidance.

Our responsibility to pupils, families and the school community

Riverside Bridge School has a responsibility to ensure that concerns and complaints are received respectfully and managed through a process that is accessible, fair, proportionate and transparent.

In fulfilling this responsibility, we will:

- encourage concerns to be raised at the earliest appropriate opportunity;
- listen carefully and seek to understand the nature of the concern;
- seek constructive informal resolution wherever this is appropriate;
- provide a clear route for formal complaints where concerns remain unresolved;
- ensure complaints are considered objectively and without pre-judgement;
- communicate the relevant stages, decisions and available next steps clearly;
- make reasonable adjustments to support access to the complaints process;
- maintain appropriate confidentiality and data protection;
- distinguish complaints from matters that must be addressed through another statutory or school procedure;
- maintain appropriate records of complaints and their outcomes;
- identify learning arising from complaints and use this to strengthen practice where appropriate;
- ensure that raising a genuine concern or complaint does not adversely affect the education, care or support provided to a pupil.

Through these commitments, we aim to maintain positive partnerships with families and ensure that concerns are addressed constructively, complaints are considered fairly and opportunities to strengthen Riverside Bridge School's provision are recognised and acted upon.

Before using this procedure, parents are encouraged to read the 'Parent guide to school complaints' published by Parentkind, the Department for Education, Ofsted and the Improving Education Together board, which provides helpful guidance on how to provide feedback, resolve concerns and raise complaints. A copy of this guide is available at

https://www.parentkind.org.uk/assets/parents-resources/Parent-Guide-to-School-Complaints.pdf

RIVERSIDE BRIDGE SCHOOL
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APPROVED BY: Governing Board

APPROVED ON: September 2026

REVIEWED DUE ON: September 2027

Section 01

SCOPE

Clarifying application. Directing concerns appropriately.

This policy relates to complaints against Riverside Bridge School, its employees and governors. It establishes the procedure for managing complaints fairly, consistently and in accordance with statutory requirements and Trust expectations. The school is committed to resolving concerns at the earliest appropriate opportunity and encourages open, respectful dialogue wherever possible before a matter progresses to the formal stages of this procedure. This policy does not cover complaints that are dealt with under other procedures, statutory or otherwise, including those listed below:

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to schools	Complaints about admissions are handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the relevant local authority.
Statutory assessments of special educational needs	Complaints about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with local authorities.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under the schools' child protection and safeguarding policies and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. A complainant with serious concerns may wish to contact the relevant local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding.
Exclusion of children from school	Further information about raising complaints about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.
Staff grievances	Complaints from school employees will be dealt with under internal grievance procedures.
Whistleblowing	The school has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all its employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education, for whistleblowers who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.
Complaints about home to school transport	Home to school transport is the responsibility of the Local Authority and complaints should be raised directly with the Local Authority
Complaints about services provided by other suppliers who may use the school premises or facilities	Complaints should be raised directly with the external provider, and should use their complaints procedure

If other bodies are investigating aspects of a complaint - for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals - or aspects of a complaint have become subject to the school's internal Staff Disciplinary Procedures, this may impact on the school's ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until these investigations or procedures have been completed. If this happens, the complainant will be informed of a proposed new timescale.

Section 02

Who can make a complaint?

Providing access. Listening to concerns.

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children who are registered at the school.

Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that are provided by the school.

Section 03

How to raise an issue or make a complaint

Making contact clear. Supporting accessible communication.

Riverside Bridge School encourages concerns to be raised at the earliest opportunity so that they can be resolved promptly, fairly and collaboratively. Many concerns can be addressed quickly through discussion with the appropriate member of staff, avoiding the need for a formal complaint.

Issues may be raised informally, or formal complaints submitted, in person, by telephone, by email or in writing. Complaints may also be made through a third party where appropriate consent has been provided by the complainant. Any communications should be marked as Private and Confidential.

For issues or complaints about:	Submit the issue/complaint to the school office, for the attention of	Decision-Maker
School staff (except the Headteacher) or school services	the Headteacher	Headteacher
Headteacher or Governor	the Chair of Governors	Chair of Governors
Chair of Governors	the Clerk to the Governors	A Panel of Governors (led by Vice Chair)
Whole Governing Board	the Clerk to the Governors	Panel formed from governors of other schools, or persons with suitable expertise, chaired by one of its number, informed by an Independent Investigator

School office contact details

Email: bridge@riversidebridge.com

Postal Address: 40 Thames Road, Barking, IG11 0HZ

Tel: 0203 946 5809

Accessibility

Riverside Bridge School is committed to ensuring that this complaints procedure is accessible to everyone. Where required, reasonable adjustments will be made to enable individuals to access and participate in the complaints process.

This may include:

- providing information in alternative formats;
- arranging interpreters or translation support where appropriate;
- offering assistance to complete complaint documentation;

- arranging meetings in accessible locations; and
- considering other reasonable adjustments to meet individual needs.

If assistance is required at any stage of the complaints process, please contact the school office, who will be pleased to help.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this document, although complaints can be submitted in any format. If help is required in completing the form, the school office may be contacted for assistance. A third-party organisation such as Citizens Advice may also be able to provide assistance.

Individual Governors should not be approached to raise issues or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure if this is necessary.

Section 04

Procedure for resolving issues or complaints

Resolving early. Responding formally. Escalating fairly.

Possible outcomes

At each stage in the procedure, the school will endeavour to resolve the issue or complaint to the satisfaction of the person raising it.

Potential outcomes at each stage of the procedure include:

- upholding of the issue raised or complaint made, in whole or in part, in which case the school 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 the school 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.
- dismissal of the issue or complaint in whole or in part, with an explanation of why the school feels that this is the appropriate outcome.

Note - An issue raised or complaint made about a member of school staff may involve their actions being dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures. If this is the case, the person raising the issue or making the complaint will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member. However, they may, if appropriate, be notified that the matter is being addressed under the school's disciplinary procedures, as part of the notification of outcome of an issue or complaint.

Records

A written record will be kept of all issues raised or complaints made, and of whether they are resolved at Stages 1 or 2 or proceed to a Complaint Panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual issues raised or complaints made will be held in accordance with the principles of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and Data Protection legislation and kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State for Education or a body conducting a statutory inspection requests access to them.

Withdrawal from the process

If a person raising an issue or making a complaint decides to withdraw from the process, the school will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Pre-complaint resolution

The school is committed to resolving concerns at the earliest possible stage.

Where appropriate, before entering Stage 1 of the complaints process, those with a concern are encouraged to take advantage of an informal problem-solving discussion with a senior school leader.

This may include:

- clarification of concerns;
- agreement of next steps and actions.

This reflects the school's commitment to working in partnership with families and resolving concerns in a timely and collaborative way.

Stage 1 - Informal stage

It is in everyone's interest that issues are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of this complaints procedure. The school takes issues raised about its staff and services seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter informally as quickly as possible. Issues should be raised with the relevant member of school staff or Headteacher if about school staff (except the Headteacher) or school services; with the Chair of Governors if about the Headteacher or an individual Governor; or with the Clerk to Governors if the issue is about the Chair of Governors or the whole Governing Board. The appropriate decision-maker will endeavour to provide a response within 15 working days of the date of the issue being raised. Where circumstances result in timescales being unable to be met the school will keep the complainant informed of any changes and the reasons for them. If the person raising the issue considers the matter to remain unresolved, the next step would be to make a formal complaint.

Stage 2 - Formal stage

Formal complaints must be made to the appropriate person, as outlined in Paragraph 3 above, via the school office, preferably by completing, and submitting to the appropriate person, the Complaint Form provided below. However, formal complaints can also be made in person, in writing (by letter or email) or by telephone. Whichever method is used, complainants should make clear that they wish to make a formal complaint. The recipient of the complaint (the Headteacher/Chair of Governors/Clerk to the Governors as appropriate) will write to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the complaint within 5 working days of the date that the complaint was received.

The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy and will confirm the expected date for providing a response to the complainant. Within this initial response, the Headteacher/Chair of Governors/Clerk to the Governors (as appropriate) will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. A face-to-face meeting may be offered as the most appropriate and effective way of clarifying these matters.

Note - The Headteacher/Chair of Governors/Governor Panel as Decision Maker may delegate any investigation and/or the management of the complaints process to another suitable person but not the decision to be taken and any potential actions to follow.

During the investigation, the Headteacher/Chair of Governors/Governor Panel as appropriate (or appointed 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.

Following the investigation of the complaint, the Headteacher/Chair of Governors/Governor Panel (as appropriate) will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 15 working days of the date that the complaint was received (with a copy to the Headteacher). If this time limit cannot be met, the appropriate person will write to the Complainant within 10 working days of the date that the complaint was received, explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

The response to the complainant 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 any actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

It will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

Stage 3 - Complaint panel (See details in 'Appendix - Complaints panel arrangements')

If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 2, they may write to the Clerk to the Governors requesting the complaint be heard before a Complaint Panel.

Requests must be received within 15 working days of the complainant receiving confirmation of the outcome of their Stage 2 complaint. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Complaint Panel will consist of three members. None of the three members of the Complaint Panel will have been involved in the incidents or events which led to the complaint, or have been involved in dealing with the complaint in the previous stages, or have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint.
One of the Complaint Panel members will be independent of the management and running of the school. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will not be a Governor or employee of the school but could be a Governor from another school or another suitable independent person.
The Complaint Panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The Complaint Panel 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 Complaint Panel may:

- decide on any 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.

The Chair of the Complaint Panel will provide the complainant and the school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 working days of the Complaints Panel Hearing. If this time limit cannot be met, the Chair of the Complaints Panel will write to the Complainant explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date. Where appropriate, the response will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint and any recommended changes to systems or procedures.

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, after the completion of Stage 3, contact the DfE.
The DfE will not normally re-investigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. The DfE may be contacted via the online enquiry form ticking the 'complaint' box
at https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact_the_Department_for_Education
Using the online enquiry form is the most effective way to contact the DfE, but the Department can also be contacted at the following address: Department for Education, School Complaints Compliance Unit, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD

Section 05

Timescale for raising issues or making complaints

Raising concerns promptly. Considering exceptional circumstances.

Issues must be raised, or complaints made, within three months of the relevant incident or cause of concern, or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents.

The school will consider issues raised or complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply, at the discretion of the Headteacher or Chair of Governors as appropriate.

Section 06

Anonymous complaints

Considering information. Applying professional judgement.

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints about its staff or services. However, the appropriate decision-maker will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation despite the complainant's anonymity.

Section 07

Vexatious complaints or complaints being pursued in an unreasonable manner

Maintaining fairness. Managing unreasonable conduct. Protecting effective resolution.

The school will endeavour to follow its complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible. The school will take every reasonable step to address the complaint, and give a clear statement of its position and the complainant's options. The school will maintain its role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when meeting with individuals.

However, in rare cases the school may not follow the usual procedure. This includes where a complaint is classified as vexatious or pursued in an unreasonable manner.

The decision to classify a complaint in this way will be made by the appropriate decision-maker, as listed in Section 03 above.

Complaints which fall under one or more of the following categories may be considered as 'vexatious':

- complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious, insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
- complaints which are designed purely to cause disruption or annoyance;
- demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value;

The behaviour of a complainant may be deemed 'unreasonable' if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint clearly 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;
- contacts the school repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time;
- contacts the school via letters, emails, or telephone calls which are often or always abusive, offensive, discriminatory, violent or aggressive;
- makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff;
- 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 and/or immediately answered, or answered to their own timescales;

- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and/or seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds ;
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email or by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;
- knowingly provides falsified information;
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums;
- uses artificial intelligence (AI) tools to draft complaints or to cite laws, regulations or guidance, where the AI-generated content is inaccurate, misleading or makes the complaint more complex than necessary.

Note - the above lists are not intended to be exhaustive and are for guidance purposes only.

Steps the school will take in the case of vexatious complaints or unreasonable behaviour on the part of a complainant:

- The school will endeavour to discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before deeming a complaint as 'vexatious' or a complainant's behaviour 'unreasonable'.
- If the behaviour continues, the school will write to the complainant explaining formally how their behaviour is unreasonable/vexatious, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it.
- If the behaviour still continues, the school may pause the complaint process until the unreasonable behaviour stops and/or refuse to consider the complaint any further and direct the complainant to the Department for Education.
- If the complaint has reached Stage 3, consider the complaint at the Complaints Panel based on written documents only, with no in-person representation.

Further possible school responses

Where a complainant continues to send correspondence raising matters that are the same as, or broadly similar to, issues that are already being considered under this procedure:

- The school may decide not to review or respond to such further correspondence until the existing complaint has been fully considered and responded to at the stage of this procedure already underway. The school will write to let the complainant know if it decides to do this. Any matters that are genuinely distinct from an existing complaint should be raised separately and will be considered on their own merits.
- The school may also restrict a complainant's access to the school, its staff or governors, e.g. requesting contact in a particular form (for example, in writing only), requiring contact to take place

with a named person only or limited to a particular email address, restricting telephone calls to specified days and times or number of contacts, or banning a complainant from the school's premises. Any decision to cease responding to correspondence or to decline to consider a complaint further will be communicated to the complainant in writing, with reasons for the decision.

- Where behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the safety and welfare of staff or governors the school will consider other options, for example, reporting the matter to the police, or taking legal action. In such cases, prior warning may not be given.

Section 08

Complaint Campaigns

Responding proportionately. Managing repeated concerns.

On occasion, the school may become the focus of a campaign and receive large volumes of complaints that are all based on the same subject and/or are from complainants unconnected with the school.

In such exceptional circumstances, the school may decide to send a template response to all complainants and/or publish a single response on the school's website. This will depend upon the nature of the issue and all the prevailing circumstances at the time.

Section 09

Information on the limitations and risks of using AI tools

Supporting accuracy. Protecting information. Keeping concerns clear.

Complainants should be aware of the following limitations and risks if considering the use of AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini and similar large language model applications):

- AI tools do not know what happened - they can only work with the information that is given to them, and they may fill gaps with invented details that sound convincing but are untrue (this is sometimes called 'hallucination');
- AI tools may generate references to laws, regulations, policies or legal rights that do not exist, are out of date, or do not apply to the specific situation;
- AI tools may produce language that is overly formal, legalistic or aggressive, which may not reflect a complainant's genuine concern and may make it harder for the school to resolve the matter constructively;
- Any personal data inputted by the complainant (including names, dates of birth, or other identifying information about their child, other children, staff or other individuals) that is entered into an AI tool may be stored, processed or used by the AI provider in ways that are outside their control and may breach data protection law;
- AI-generated complaints that do not accurately reflect the complainant's experience may cause delays in resolving the complaint, as the school may need to spend time clarifying what actually happened;
- AI tools work by predicting the most likely answer based on the information they have been trained on. They do not check whether their output is accurate or relevant to the particular situation, and the most likely-sounding answer is not always the correct one. AI tools are also designed to make the user feel helped and understood, which means they may agree with their point of view, use an overly sympathetic tone, or present their complaint in a one-sided way rather than giving a balanced account of what happened. This can wrongly reinforce a complainant's point of view and make them more fixed in their position, which may make it harder for the school to work with them to resolve the matter.

Section 10

RELATED POLICIES & FRAMEWORKS

Connecting practice. Strengthening consistency.

This policy should be read alongside the following Riverside Bridge School policies and procedures where relevant:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Admissions Policy
- SEND Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Disciplinary Policy
- Grievance Resolution Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Equality, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy
- Data Protection Policy

APPENDICES

Complaints Panel Arrangements

Requests for a complaints panel hearing

A Complaints Panel Hearing is a hearing to consider those elements of the Stage 2 response to the complaint with which the complainant remains dissatisfied. The Complaint Panel is not obliged to consider any new complaints which have not been previously raised.

Requests must be received in writing within 10 working days of the complainant receiving confirmation of the outcome of their Stage 2 complaint. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

If assistance with the request is required, for example because of a disability, please inform the Clerk to the Governors who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

The request should include:

- a copy of any relevant documents and full contact details of the complainant;
- details of all the grounds of the complaint about which the complainant remains dissatisfied and the outcome desired;
- whether the complainant proposes to be accompanied to the Complaints Panel Hearing

The Clerk to the Governors will record the date the request is received and acknowledge receipt of the request in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 working days.

Complainants may withdraw their request for a Complaints Panel Hearing at any point up to and including the intended date of the Hearing. Such requests must be made in writing.

Arrangements for the complaints panel hearing

The Clerk to the Governors will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the Complaint Panel Hearing. They will aim to convene a Hearing within 30 working days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk to the Governors will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

At least 15 working days before the Hearing, the Clerk to the Governors will:

- confirm and notify the complainant and Complaints Panel members of the date, time and venue of the Hearing, ensuring that the date is convenient to all parties* and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- request, of the complainant and Stage 2 decision-maker, copies of any further written material - to be submitted to the Clerk to the Governors in time for distribution to the Complaints Panel at least

5 working days before the Hearing.

*If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Chair of the Complaints Panel will decide when to hold the Hearing. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The Clerk to the Governors will endeavour to circulate a copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the Complaint Panel to all parties at least 5 working days prior to the Complaints Panel Hearing. The bundle of documents will include all records held in the complaint file following Stage 1 and 2, together with any correspondence and documents received from the complainant or Stage 2 decision-maker following notification of the formal response at Stage 2.

Attendees

The complainant may bring someone along to the Complaints Panel Hearing to provide support. This can be a relative or friend.

The Complaints Panel may be advised by an appropriate HR or governance professional.

The Complaints Panel Hearing is an internal process, not legal proceedings. Generally, therefore, neither party is encouraged to bring legal representatives to the Complaint Panel Hearing. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a Complaint Panel Hearing, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

If the complainant wishes to be accompanied by a relative or friend who is legally qualified, the complainant is required to notify the Clerk to the Governors in the initial request for a Complaints Panel Hearing. The complainant should note that the Complaint Panel will wish to speak to that person directly prior to the Complaints Panel Hearing, and they will not be permitted to act as an advocate or address the Complaint Panel at the Complaints Panel Hearing unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Complaint Panel.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

Composition of the complaints panel

The Complaint Panel will comprise three individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint. One member of the panel will be independent of the management and running of the school (i.e. the independent Complaint Panel member will not be a Governor or employee of the school but could be a Governor from another school or another suitable independent person). The remaining two members may be school Governors of that school or other suitable individuals.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors or
- the entire Governing Board or
- the majority of the Governing Board,

- all three members of the Complaint Panel will be independent of the management and running of the school.

The Clerk to the Governors will inform the complainant of those who have been appointed to sit on the Complaint Panel when confirming the date and time of the Complaint Panel Hearing. Fair consideration will be given to any reasonable objection to a particular member of the panel.

Complaint Panel members will appoint one of their number to be the Chair of the Complaint Panel throughout the proceedings.

An appropriate person will be appointed by the school to take minutes of the Complaint Panel Hearing.

Role of the complaint panel

The role of the Complaint Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaint/s that have been made by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties;
- any representations made by the parties

and to review the decision reached at Stage 2 and to consider, on a balance of probabilities, as to whether or not to uphold each aspect of the complaint.

The complaints panel hearing

Unless prior to the commencement of the Complaints Panel Hearing, a complainant confirms they are satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, the Complaints Panel Hearing will proceed notwithstanding that the complainant may decide not to attend. In these circumstances, the Complaint Panel will consider the complaint in their absence and issue its findings on the substance of the complaint.

The Complaint Panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The Complaint Panel will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The Hearing will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior consent to any recording must be sought from all parties attending before any recording of meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The Complaint Panel will usually hear representations from the Stage 2 decision-maker and the complainant.

During the Complaint Panel Hearing, the parties shall have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments relevant to the complaint in an appropriate manner. However, all questions must be directed through the Chair of the Complaints Panel and not asked directly to the other party or their representatives. This procedure ensures that the hearing remains orderly and professional. Direct cross-examination

between the parties is not permitted, and the Complaints Panel reserves the right to rephrase, decline, or limit any questions that are deemed irrelevant, repetitive, or otherwise unsuitable for the proceedings.

The Complaints Panel Hearing is not a legal process and the Complaint Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.

All statements made at the Complaints Panel Hearing will be unsworn.

All those present during the Complaints Panel Hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the Complaints Panel Hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the Complaints Panel Hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and their comment will be minuted.

The Chair may, at their discretion, adjourn the Complaints Panel Hearing if they consider it appropriate to do so. This may include an adjournment for welfare reasons, to enable additional information to be obtained and/or considered or for the parties to take advice on a specific issue arising.

A Complaints Panel Hearing is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media (including social media).

Complaints panel outcome

When the Chair of the Complaint Panel is satisfied that sufficient consideration has been given to the documentation provided and any representations made by the parties, they will conclude the Complaints Panel Hearing.

The Complaint Panel will, and may also make recommendations for actions.

The Complaint Panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The Complaint Panel can make findings about each aspect of the complaint on the balance of probabilities and:

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

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the Complaint Panel may

- decide on any 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.

It is not within the powers of the Complaint Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on Governors or staff.

The minutes of the Complaints Panel Hearing, together with the Complaint Panel's decision and the reason(s) for it, and any recommendations, will be provided in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, within 15 working days of the Complaints Panel Hearing.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education (DfE) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school.

The Complaint Panel's findings and any recommendations will also be made available for inspection on the school's premises by the Chair of Governors and the Headteacher.

The decision of the Complaints Panel is final. There will be no further opportunity within the school for consideration of the complaint. The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the school's complaints procedure.

If a duplicate complaint is received by a new complainant following completion of the Stage 3 procedure, the school will inform the new complainant that the matter is closed.

Complaint Form

Complaints against Riverside Bridge School ('the school'), including its staff and its Governing Board.

This form should be used for complaints against Riverside Bridge School including its staff and its Governing Board.

Please complete and return this form to the school office for the attention of the Headteacher/ Chair of Governors/Clerk to the Governors as appropriate (see table below) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

For complaints about	Submit your complaint to the school office for the attention of
School staff (except the Headteacher) or school services	Headteacher
Headteacher or Governor	Chair of Governors
Chair of Governors	Clerk to the Governors
Whole Board of Governors	Clerk to the Governors

How to contact the school office:
Email: bridge@riversidebridge.com
Postal Address: 40 Thames Road, Barking, IG11 0HZ
Tel: 0203 946 5809

Your name:	
Address including postcode:	
Telephone number:	
Email address:	
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have already communicated with anybody at the school about it.	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
Signature:	
Date:	
Official use	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By whom:	
Complaint referred to:	

RIVERSIDE BRIDGE SCHOOL
INSPIRE, EMPOWER, ACHIEVE

Process for Concerns and Complaints

A FAIR, RESPECTFUL AND SUPPORTIVE APPROACH

We encourage concerns to be raised at the earliest opportunity so they can be resolved quickly and collaboratively. Many concerns can be resolved informally.

OUR STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. **Share your concern**
   Talk to the class teacher or relevant staff member where possible.
2. **Informal discussion**
   If the concern is not resolved, speak to a senior leader (e.g. Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher).
3. **Formal complaint**
   If the concern remains unresolved, you can make a formal complaint. Please make clear that you wish the matter to be treated as a formal complaint.
4. **Investigation**
   We will investigate your complaint thoroughly and impartially.
5. **Outcome**
   We will write to you with the outcome of our investigation.
6. **Complaint Panel**
   If you are not satisfied with the outcome, you may request a Complaints Panel Hearing.
7. **Department for Education**
   After Stage 3, if you believe the school has not followed its complaints procedure or relevant education law, you can contact the Department for Education.

WHAT HAPPENS?

- Many concerns are resolved quickly through open and respectful dialogue.
- We will listen carefully and work with you to understand the concern and try to find a solution.
- We will acknowledge your complaint within 5 working days and explain the next steps in the process.
- Information is gathered, considered and shared as part of the investigation.
- Our aim is to provide a full written response within 15 working days.
- The panel will review the evidence and make a decision, which will be communicated in writing.
- The DfE may consider whether the school followed its published procedure and relevant education law.

IMPORTANT TO KNOW

- We will treat all concerns and complaints fairly, respectfully and confidentially.
- We will keep you informed at every stage of the process.
- No one will be treated unfairly for raising a concern or complaint.
- We use feedback and complaints to learn and improve our school for everyone.

HOW TO CONTACT US

Email
bridge@riversidebridge.com

Telephone
0203 946 5809

Postal Address
Riverside Bridge School
40 Thames Road
Barking
IG11 0HZ

ACCESSIBILITY

We are committed to making our complaints process accessible to everyone.

If you need adjustments or support, please contact the school office and we will be happy to help. This may include alternative formats, interpreters or additional assistance.

OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU

- We listen and care
- We work together
- We treat everyone with respect
- We act fairly and impartially
- We learn and continually improve

Inspiring communication, empowering independence, achieving brighter futures.

Inspiring communication, empowering independence, achieving brighter futures.