

An amazing place to learn!

from nursery to Year 6!

'When I visited Captain Shaw's, it just lifted me off my feet and nourished my heart. The students, young as they are, are sharp, inquisitive, familiar with current issues, full of optimism and keen to engage and make a difference. Thanks for a truly visionary, encouraging and informative visit.'

Pushpanath Krishnamurthy
International campaigner for Fairtrade and Climate Justice

'Oh my goodness! I am still buzzing from the amazing day we had with you and your wonderful school! I love the way you have designed your curriculum so that every lesson has a purpose and is part of an immersive experience, rather than just learning things in isolation.'

Gaye Holmes - Senior Presenter, Imoves



'The conduct of pupils at this school is exemplary. They demonstrate warmth and kindness towards each other. Pupils enjoy respectful relationships with the adults at school who care deeply for them.'

'Pupils respond well to the high aspirations that the school has of their achievement.'

'Pupils demonstrate a high level of motivation towards their learning. They work exceptionally well together. They are well prepared for each stage of their education.'

Ofsted 2023



Captain Shaw's C of E Primary School

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

2026/27

Our approach

At Captain Shaw's, we want concerns to be heard, understood and resolved fairly and as early as possible. Our vision of Serving the Common Good means treating complainants, pupils, staff and governors with dignity, respect and impartiality, particularly when an issue is difficult or emotions are high. We will listen carefully, establish the relevant facts, explain our decisions clearly, put matters right where appropriate and use complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve. Raising a genuine concern or complaint will not adversely affect a pupil or family's relationship with the school.

Policy owner	Headteacher / Governing Board
Policy period	1 September 2026 – 31 August 2027
Approved by	Full Governing Board
Approval / ratification	Autumn Term 2026
Last reviewed	August 2026
Next review due	Summer Term 2027
School office	01229 718279 admin@capt-shaws.cumbria.sch.uk
Status	Statutory procedure – maintained school



Serving the Common Good:

Seek what is best for everyone, beginning with the last, the least, the lost,
the most vulnerable and the most forgotten.

1. Purpose and legal framework

This policy sets out how Captain Shaw's C of E Primary School handles concerns and complaints about the school and about any community facilities or services it provides where no separate statutory procedure applies. The Governing Board has established and publishes this procedure in accordance with section 29 of the Education Act 2002.

The procedure has been reviewed against the Department for Education (DfE) model complaints procedure and best-practice guidance for maintained schools, and against Cumberland Council's current approach to school complaints. Cumberland Council directs complaints about schools to the school in the first instance; the school's own published procedure therefore remains the route for complaints about Captain Shaw's.

2. Who can make a complaint?

This procedure is not limited to parents or carers of pupils registered at the school. Any person, including a pupil, former parent/carer or member of the public, may complain about provision, facilities or services provided by the school, unless the matter is dealt with under a separate statutory procedure.

3. Concern or complaint?

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt about an issue for which reassurance is sought. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about action taken or a lack of action.

It is in everyone's interests to resolve concerns at the earliest possible stage. Many matters can be resolved informally and the school will make every reasonable effort to do so. A complainant does not have to complete an informal stage before making a formal complaint where they wish the matter to be considered formally.

Our aim

Resolve early where possible; investigate fairly where necessary; communicate clearly; put things right where appropriate; and learn from what happened.

4. How to raise a concern or complaint

A concern or complaint may be made in person, in writing, by email or by telephone. A third party may act on behalf of a complainant where appropriate consent has been provided.

- Concerns should normally be raised with the class teacher or Headteacher.
- Formal complaints about a member of staff, other than the Headteacher, should be addressed to the Headteacher via the school office and marked Private and Confidential.
- A complaint that involves or is about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors via the school office and marked Private and Confidential.
- A complaint about the Chair of Governors, an individual governor, or the Governing Board should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Board via the school office and marked Private and Confidential.

Complainants should not approach individual governors about a complaint. Governors have no power to act on an individual basis and prior involvement may prevent a governor from serving impartially at Stage 2.

The complaint form at Appendix 1 may be used, but its use is not compulsory. The school office can assist a complainant to set out a complaint. Reasonable adjustments will be considered under the Equality Act 2010, including alternative formats, communication support, interpretation or accessible meeting arrangements.

5. Time limits

Complaints should be raised within three months of the incident or, where there is a series of related incidents, within three months of the most recent incident. The school may consider a complaint outside this period where exceptional circumstances apply.

A complaint received outside term time will normally be treated as received on the first school day after the holiday period. "School day" in this procedure means a day when the school is open to pupils.

6. Anonymous complaints

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. The Headteacher or Chair of Governors, as appropriate, will decide whether the nature or seriousness of the matter warrants investigation, including where safeguarding or other significant risk may be involved.

7. Matters outside this procedure

Some matters have separate statutory or specialist routes and are not determined through this complaints procedure:

Matter	Appropriate route
School admissions	Follow the statutory admissions / admissions appeal route. Where Cumberland Council is the admission authority or administers the relevant process, contact Cumberland Council.
EHC needs assessments and EHC plans	Concerns about statutory assessment or EHC plan decisions should be raised with Cumberland Council and, where applicable, through the statutory mediation/appeal arrangements. Complaints about the school's own SEND provision may fall within this procedure.
Suspension and permanent exclusion	Use the statutory suspension/permanent exclusion representations and review arrangements. A complaint about how the school applied its Behaviour Policy may fall within this procedure where no separate statutory route applies.
Child protection / safeguarding matters	Handled under the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and relevant statutory/local safeguarding arrangements. Allegations about adults working with children may require referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).
Staff grievances	Handled under the school's staff grievance procedure.
Staff conduct / disciplinary matters	The complaint may lead to consideration under staff disciplinary procedures. Confidential employment outcomes will not be disclosed to the complainant.
Whistleblowing by employees	Handled under the school/Cumberland Council whistleblowing arrangements as applicable.
Services provided by another organisation using school premises	The provider's own complaints procedure normally applies.
National Curriculum content / government policy	These are matters for the Department for Education rather than the school's complaints procedure.
Freedom of Information, Environmental Information or Subject Access matters	Use the applicable information-rights procedure and any right of review or complaint to the Information Commissioner.

If another body, such as the police, a safeguarding service, tribunal or court, is considering an aspect of the same matter, the school may need to pause or adjust its investigation. The school will explain this and resume the procedure when it is appropriate and lawful to do so.

8. Resolving complaints

At every stage, the school will seek a fair resolution. A complaint may be upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. Where appropriate, the school may provide:

- an explanation;
- an acknowledgement that something could have been handled differently or better;
- an apology;
- an assurance about future practice;
- specific action to remedy an issue;
- an explanation of changes to systems, procedures or policy; or
- a timescale for agreed actions.

If a complainant wishes to withdraw a formal complaint, the school will ask for confirmation in writing where practicable.

9. Stage 1 – formal complaint

A formal complaint should be made to the Headteacher via the school office unless the complaint is about the Headteacher. It may be made in person, by telephone, email or in writing. The Headteacher will record the date of receipt and acknowledge the complaint in writing within 2 school days.

The acknowledgement will, where necessary, clarify the complaint, what remains unresolved and the outcome the complainant is seeking. A meeting may be offered where this would help. The Headteacher may delegate fact-finding to an appropriate person but retains responsibility for the Stage 1 decision unless the complaint concerns the Headteacher.

The investigation may include reviewing records and relevant policies, interviewing people involved, and keeping written records of meetings or interviews. Pupils will be involved only where necessary and in an age-appropriate, sensitive way, with their welfare paramount.

The school will normally provide the Stage 1 written response within 5 school days of receipt. If this is not reasonably possible because of complexity, absence, safeguarding processes or another justified reason, the complainant will be told why and given a revised response date.

The response will explain the investigation undertaken, the decision and reasons, any action to be taken where appropriate, and how to request Stage 2 if the complainant remains dissatisfied.

10. Complaints involving the Headteacher or governors

A complaint about the Headteacher, or about an individual governor including the Chair or Vice-Chair, will be handled at Stage 1 by a suitably skilled and impartial governor. It should be sent to the Clerk via the school office.

Where a complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice-Chair, the entire Governing Board, or the majority of the Governing Board, Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Governing Board. The school may seek support from Cumberland Council Governor Services, another maintained school, the Diocese or another suitably independent source.

11. Stage 2 – Governing Board complaints committee

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 1, they may request Stage 2. The request must be sent to the Clerk via the school office within 5 school days of receiving the Stage 1 response and should explain which aspects remain unresolved and the outcome sought. Requests outside this period will be considered where exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will acknowledge the Stage 2 request within 2 school days and will aim to convene the complaints committee within 10 school days of receipt. If that is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

The committee will consist of at least three impartial governors who have had no prior involvement or knowledge that would compromise their independence. If fewer than three suitable Captain Shaw's governors are available, independent governors may be sourced through another school or Cumberland Council Governor Services; an entirely independent committee may be convened where appropriate.

The committee may consider the complaint at a meeting or, where appropriate and fair, through written representations. If a meeting is held, the complainant may bring a relative or friend for support. Legal representation is not normally necessary, although the committee will consider exceptional circumstances. Media representatives are not permitted.

12. Stage 2 papers and meeting arrangements

- The Clerk will normally give at least 5 school days' notice of the date, time and arrangements for the meeting.
- Any further written material should normally be submitted at least 3 school days before the meeting.
- The Clerk will circulate the papers to the parties and committee at least 2 school days before the meeting, subject to confidentiality and data-protection requirements.
- The committee will not normally consider new, unrelated complaints at Stage 2; these should begin at Stage 1.
- The meeting will be private, accessible and non-adversarial. The Chair will ensure both parties can explain their position and seek clarification.

- Covert recordings will not normally be accepted as evidence. Audio or video recording of the meeting is not normally permitted unless a reasonable adjustment or other exceptional need makes it appropriate and all necessary arrangements and consents have been agreed in advance.

If the complainant rejects three reasonable proposed meeting dates without good reason, the Clerk may set a date and the committee may proceed in the complainant's absence using the written evidence available.

13. Stage 2 decision

The committee will consider the complaint and the evidence impartially. It may uphold the complaint in whole, uphold it in part, or not uphold it. Where a complaint is upheld in whole or in part, it may decide appropriate action and recommend changes to systems or procedures to reduce the risk of recurrence.

The Chair of the committee will normally provide the complainant and school with the committee's written decision and reasons within 5 school days of the meeting. The response will explain any appropriate actions and the next step available to the complainant. Stage 2 is the final stage of the school's complaints procedure.

Where the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice-Chair, the entire Governing Board or the majority of the Governing Board, Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent governors.

14. After the school procedure – Department for Education

If the complainant believes that the school has not handled the complaint in accordance with its published procedure, or has acted unlawfully or unreasonably in exercising duties under education law, they may ask the Department for Education to consider the matter after the school procedure has been completed.

The DfE does not normally reinvestigate the substance of a complaint or replace the Governing Board's decision. Its role is principally to consider whether the school has followed education law and its published procedure and has acted reasonably.

The current route is the GOV.UK service "Complain about a school to the Department for Education". Complainants should retain copies of the original complaint, school responses and relevant correspondence as the DfE may ask for evidence that the school procedure has been completed.

15. Complaints about school matters and Cumberland Council

Captain Shaw's is a local-authority-maintained voluntary controlled school. Cumberland Council's public complaints information states that complaints about schools should be raised with the school directly in the first instance.

Complaints about the school are excluded from the Council's general corporate complaints procedure because schools have their own governing-board complaints arrangements.

Cumberland Council remains the appropriate body for matters for which it has the statutory function, including relevant school admissions arrangements, EHC needs assessments/EHC plans and local safeguarding functions. Where a complainant has used the wrong route, the school will signpost the appropriate service where it can do so.

16. Reasonable adjustments and inclusive access

The school will make reasonable adjustments so that disability, communication need, literacy, language, anxiety or another barrier does not prevent a person from using this procedure. Adjustments may include help to put a complaint in writing, alternative formats, a different communication method, interpretation, additional processing time or an accessible meeting arrangement.

Children and young people who make or contribute to a complaint will be supported to express their views in a way appropriate to their age, development and communication. Their welfare is paramount.

17. Confidentiality and data protection

Complaints will be handled as confidentially as possible while allowing a fair investigation. Information will be shared only with those who need it for the purpose of considering the complaint or meeting another legal duty. Complaint records will be handled in accordance with UK data-protection law, the school's Data Protection Policy and retention arrangements.

Complainants should respect the confidentiality and privacy of pupils, families and staff. The school will not disclose confidential staff disciplinary information or third-party personal information simply because it relates to a complaint.

18. Serial, persistent and unreasonable complaints

The school distinguishes between a persistent complainant and a persistent complaint. A person may pursue a complaint persistently because they genuinely believe it has not been resolved. The school will allow a complainant to complete this procedure unless there is a compelling lawful reason not to do so.

Once the school procedure has been completed, repeated contact about the same matter may be treated as serial where no materially new issue or evidence is raised. The school may also take proportionate steps where the frequency, nature or manner of contact becomes unreasonable and interferes with the school's ability to carry out its functions or affects the welfare of staff or pupils.

- Examples may include excessive repetition of the same points after they have been answered;
- unreasonably frequent or lengthy contact that places a disproportionate demand on school resources;
- refusing to identify the issues to be investigated while demanding a response;
- changing the basis of the complaint as the process proceeds without good reason;
- seeking outcomes that are outside the school's lawful powers;
- abusive, threatening, discriminatory or intimidating communication; or
- persistently contacting multiple people about the same closed complaint.

Before restricting contact, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, as appropriate, will normally explain the concern, ask the complainant to modify their behaviour and set out any proposed communication arrangements. Any restriction will be proportionate, time-limited where appropriate, recorded and reviewed. It will not prevent a complainant raising a genuinely new complaint, a safeguarding concern or another matter that requires action.

Where behaviour presents an immediate safety risk or may constitute a criminal offence, the school may take protective action or contact the police without first following the steps above.

19. Roles and responsibilities

The complainant

- explain the complaint as fully and as early as possible;
- co-operate with reasonable requests for information or meetings;
- identify what remains unresolved and what outcome is sought;
- ask for assistance or adjustments where needed; and
- treat those involved with respect and protect confidentiality.

The investigator

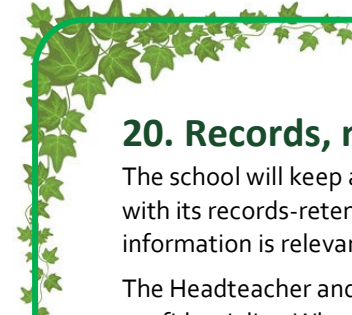
The investigator establishes relevant facts through fair, open-minded consideration of evidence. They keep appropriate notes, distinguish fact from opinion, consider relevant records and viewpoints, and provide findings to the person or committee responsible for the decision.

The Clerk / complaints co-ordinator

The Clerk or person providing administrative support coordinates correspondence, timescales, papers, meeting arrangements and records; supports procedural fairness; and ensures the committee has the information needed to make an independent decision.

The committee Chair and members

The Chair ensures a fair, accessible and non-adversarial process. Committee members must be independent and impartial, consider the evidence with an open mind, make findings of fact where necessary and determine the complaint within the committee's remit.



20. Records, monitoring and learning

The school will keep a record of formal complaints, the stage reached, the outcome and actions arising, in accordance with its records-retention arrangements. Records are kept securely and separately from pupil educational records unless information is relevant to the pupil's education or another lawful purpose requires it.

The Headteacher and Governing Board will consider themes and learning from complaints without compromising confidentiality. Where a complaint identifies a weakness in policy, communication, training or practice, improvement action will be followed through.

21. Review of this policy

The Governing Board will review this policy at least annually and sooner if legislation, DfE guidance, Cumberland Council arrangements or school governance arrangements change materially.

Appendix 1 – Complaint Form

You do not have to use this form. It is provided to help you give the information needed to consider a formal complaint. Return it to the school office, marked Private and Confidential. The school will acknowledge receipt and explain the next step.

Your name	
Pupil's name, if relevant	
Your relationship to the pupil, if relevant	
Address / preferred contact details	
Telephone / email	
What is your complaint? Please include relevant dates and say who you have already spoken to.	
What remains unresolved?	
What outcome or action would help to resolve the matter?	
Documents attached, if any	
Signature / name	
Date	

For school use

Date received	
Date acknowledged	
Complaint allocated to	
Stage	
Response due	
Response sent / outcome	

Appendix 2 – At-a-glance route

Stage	Who considers it?	Target timescale
Informal concern	Class teacher / Headteacher / appropriate member of staff	As soon as reasonably possible
Stage 1 formal	Headteacher, or impartial governor where required	Acknowledge within 2 school days; response normally within 5 school days
Stage 2 final	Three-person impartial Governing Board complaints committee	Request within 5 school days; acknowledge within 2; meeting aimed within 10; decision normally within 5 school days
After Stage 2	Department for Education, where its remit applies	Use current GOV.UK school complaints service

Important

Where a separate statutory route applies — for example admissions, EHC statutory decisions, suspension/permanent exclusion or safeguarding — that route takes precedence over this procedure.