

Compliments and Complaints Policy & Procedure

1. Purpose

This policy explains how we encourage, respond to, monitor, and act on complaints, concerns and compliments received from the children and young people we support, their parents/carers, their representatives and other partners.

The policy outlines the procedures we expect colleagues to follow to resolve complaints as quickly as possible and meet the regulatory requirements Ambitious about Autism must adhere to.

Ambitious about Autism has a single Compliments and Complaints Policy covering all its activities and services, across Ambitious about Autism (the charity) and Ambitious about Autism Schools Trust (the Trust), together referred to in the policy as AaA.

This is a must-read policy. All staff are responsible for ensuring that the children and young people we support, their parents/carers, representatives and others have the confidence and information to raise concerns, make complaints and pay compliments.

Not following this policy may lead to a loss in confidence in the organisation and/or lead to a reputational risk. Ambitious about Autism might also get into trouble with our regulators or other officials. Some managers and staff may get in trouble with our regulators personally.

2. The statutory guidance

The policy has been developed with reference to the following statutory guidance:

- Charity Commission guidance on complaints <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity>
- Department for Education guidance on complaints <https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe>
- CQC guidance on complaints <https://www.cqc.org.uk/contact-us/how-complain/complain-about-service-or-provider>

3. Policy statement

AaA strives to operate to the highest standards. We welcome feedback from individuals and organisations that we work with, including pupils and learners, parents and carers, partners and our local communities. Feedback is invaluable in helping us to evaluate and improve our work.

Information is available for the children and young people we support, their parents/carers, their representatives and others so that they can see how we will respond to their concern, complaint or compliment. This information is also available in different formats.

The overall objectives of this policy and procedure are to:

- Provide an accessible, simple framework for listening and responding to all feedback and complaints;
- Ensure that everyone feels able to give both positive and critical feedback in a safe, non-judgmental environment knowing it will be heard and responded to;
- Ensure that complaints are dealt with consistently, fairly and within clear timeframes;
- Ensure that feedback is monitored and used to improve our services and celebrate success;
- Create a sense of community and belonging, protecting our pupils, learners, parents/carers, staff and others from serial, persistent, unsolicited criticism and complaints.

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This policy covers all complaints other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
Matters likely to require a Child or Vulnerable Adult Protection Investigation	<p>Complaints about child or adult protection matters are handled under our child or adult protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns that you have reported, that you feel have not been properly or appropriately addressed, you must contact the Director of Education, Head of Safeguarding or the Chief Executive, or the local authority designated officer (LADO) or Alerting Officer for adults who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).</p>
Whistleblowing	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>People can raise a whistleblowing concern regarding care services with the Care Quality Commission. www.cqc.org.uk/contact-us</p> <p>Whistleblowing concerns can also be raised with the Charity Commission. https://forms.charitycommission.gov.uk/Raising-Concerns/</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about us should complain through this complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the internal grievance policy and procedures.
Staff conduct	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>

Ambitious about Autism reminds people of how to make a complaint or compliment in several ways:

- at the premises of our services;
- as part of our newsletters;
- as part of our external surveys;
- pupil/learner and parents/carer meetings;
- on our website www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk.

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4. Key Principles

4.1 Compliments and complaints aims

AaA aims to:

- Provide a high-quality service to our children and young people, their parents/carers and representatives, partners, funders and our wider community. We recognise that feedback of all kinds helps us to learn and improve what we do. We value all the feedback we receive.
- Treat all concerns and complaints seriously and confidentially. Ambitious about Autism uses the information to learn and improve support.
- Encourage resolution of concerns by informal means where appropriate, in the spirit of partnership;
- Keep individuals informed of progress;
- Be impartial and non-adversarial;
- Ensure that, where appropriate, a full and fair investigation of the issue is undertaken;
- Ensure that no-one is penalised for making a complaint in good faith;
- Keep a written record, for at least three years, of all formal complaints, the action taken (regardless of whether the complaint was upheld) and at what stage they were resolved;
- Respect confidentiality and data protection of individual complainants or givers of compliments, except where a regulator or other official body requests rightful access to this;
- In relation to our residential care services, we support the principles of the NHS England 'Ask Listen Do' project. The project supports organisations to learn from and improve the experiences of autistic people and people with a learning disability, and their families and carers, when giving feedback, raising a concern or making a complaint. We have reflected the principles throughout this policy, our easy read information, and other associated documents.
- Make reasonable adjustments to support anyone raising a compliment, concern or complaint, which includes making our policy and procedures available in accessible formats.
- Provide information regularly to the Executive Leadership Team, the Board and Governing Bodies on at least an annual basis, so that services can be improved.

4.2 Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to children and young people or parents or carers of children in receipt of our services. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Ambitious about Autism. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (see section 3), we will use this complaints procedure.

4.3 The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Ambitious about Autism takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Manager/Head of the Service will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if a member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Manager/Head of Service will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more

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senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Ambitious about Autism will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

If the same concern is raised twice, this would be considered a complaint.

4.4 Complaints Procedure - raising a concern and/or making a complaint

4.4.1 How to raise a concern or make a complaint

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

Individuals wishing to raise concerns or make a complaint should act at the earliest opportunity (see timescales below). You can make a complaint or raise a concern:

- in person
- through a team member
- through an advocate or representative
- by telephone either to the Head of Service or the complaints telephone line: 020 8078 0846.
- by letter to the Head of Service or Head of Governance and Compliance, Ambitious about Autism, Woodside Avenue, Muswell Hill, London, N10 3JA.
- by email to the Head of Service or to the organisation's complaints email address: by emailing feedback@ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk
- You can also make a complaint via our website: www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk

We will always consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this process. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible ways.

Ambitious about Autism will support people to appoint an advocate. Examples of national advocacy agencies include:

- The Advocacy People <https://www.theadvocacypeople.org.uk/> Tel: 0330 440 9000
- PoHWER – contact details: <https://www.pohwer.net/> Tel: 0300 456 2370

Ambitious about Autism will support people to get unbiased advice from local Healthwatch or Citizens Advice bureaux.

We hope our confidentiality measures encourage complainants to be open about their identity. We are only able to investigate anonymous complaints if sufficient evidence exists to merit investigation.

4.4.2 Who is involved?

The Head of Governance and Compliance is the complaints officer for the organisation.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher/leader, manager, Head of Service or Executive Leadership Team (ELT) member. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual trustees or governors to raise concerns 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.

Complaints about staff (except the Head of Service), AaA activity or a service, should be made in the

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first instance to the relevant Head of Service or Executive Leadership Team member. If in writing, please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about a Head of Service should be addressed to the Head of Governance and Compliance. If in writing, please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole body, or any of the Trustees, should be addressed to the Head of Governance and Compliance. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees, via the Head of Governance and Compliance.

Complaints about the Chair of Trustees should be addressed to the Vice Chair of Trustees via the Head of Governance and Compliance.

Complaints about the Head of Governance and Compliance should be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer.

4.4.3 Timescales

Complaints should be made at the earliest opportunity and no later than twelve months (excluding school or college holidays) of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this timeframe if exceptional circumstances apply.

For complaints relating to education settings (TreeHouse School, The Rise School, Spring School, St John's College and Ambitious College), we will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school/college day after the holiday period.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Timescales for each stage of the process are set out below.

4.4.4 Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, AaA wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole, in part, or not upheld. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help
- assurance that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made;
- an undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint;
- an apology.

4.4.5 Withdrawal of a complaint

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

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4.4.6 Stage 1 – Raising a Concern or Informal Complaint

It is hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis, as AaA values openness and honest feedback.

The majority of concerns can and should be raised with the class teacher/leader, manager, or Head of Service. Those raising a concern should not approach individual governors about the issues, as 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 a concern cannot be dealt with immediately, it would typically become an informal complaint which requires some form of review and written response.

At the conclusion of any review of the complaint, the appropriate person will provide an informal written response within 10 working/school/college days (or school/college days if the complaint is related to an education setting) of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the issue remains unresolved, a formal complaint can be made within 10 working/school/college days of the conclusion of stage 1. If an appeal is not submitted in this timescale, we will consider the matter closed.

If a complainant alerts us to possible abuse, neglect, or any other criminal offence, we will tell the local authority's child/adult safeguarding team and the police, as appropriate, in line with our safeguarding policy. The safeguarding team/police will decide how to investigate and monitor outcomes.

If a complainant involves more than our organisation in their complaint (AaA and a local authority for example), we will work with that organisation to provide a single response to the complainant where possible.

If an apology to the complainant is appropriate, AaA will consider if this falls under the HSCA Duty of Candour. See Duty of Candour (being open and honest) policy.

The Head of Service will be informed by staff of all Stage 1 concerns or complaints and maintain a log.

4.4.7 Stage 2 – Formal Complaints

Formal complaints must be made to the Head of Service (unless they are about the Head of Service, see 4.4.2 for who is involved). This may be done in person or in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), within 10 working/school/college days of the conclusion of stage 1.

The Head of Service will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 working/school/college days.

Within this response, the Head of Service will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Head of Service can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this, though these points should ordinarily be followed up in writing.

The Head of Service may delegate the investigation to another member of the management team, but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Head of Service or the appointed investigator will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them

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- to be accompanied if they wish; and
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Head of Service will provide a formal written response within 20 working/school/college days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Head of Service is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions AaA will take to resolve the complaint.

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

If the complaint is about the Head of Service, or a member of local governance (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled officer, independent of the service/activity, will be appointed by AaA to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

If the complaint relates to our residential homes, the complainant will also be informed of their right to contact the Housing or Local Government Social Care Ombudsman if they are unhappy with the outcome of their complaint appeal.

A log will be held centrally by the Head of Governance and Compliance of all Stage 2 and 3 complaints.

4.4.8 Stage 3 – Panel hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a panel hearing consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the service. A Chair of the panel should be selected. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Head of Governance and Compliance, via mail to feedback@ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk, within 10 working/school/college days of receipt of the Stage 2 response. If an appeal is not submitted in this timescale, the complaint will be deemed as concluded.

The Head of Governance and Compliance will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 10 working/school/college days. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Head of Governance and Compliance will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 working/school/college days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, they will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Head of Governance and Compliance will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

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- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body; or
- the entire local governing body; or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 3 will be heard by the trustees and an independent panel member.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting.

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

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend and AaA reserves the right to deny attendance to a person accompanying a complainant where there is any potential conflict of interest relating to that individual.

At least 10 working/school/college days before the meeting, the Head of Governance and Compliance will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 7 working/school/college days before the meeting. Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 working/school/college days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The 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 this policy.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations by the complainant are not normally permitted unless this is agreed to be a necessary reasonable adjustment. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought by the complainant before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. AaA reserves the right to record any and all hearings to support accurate record keeping. Recording will only be used for this purpose and deleted following distribution of these records.

The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The 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 panel will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- and where appropriate, recommend changes to service/AaA systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Panel will provide the complainant and AaA with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 20 working/school/college days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to seek escalation to the Secretary of State if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled.

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The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it.

Where appropriate, it will include details of actions AaA will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the AaA premises by the proprietor and the Head of Service.

A record will be kept by Head of Governance and Compliance, of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing.

4.4.9 Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a Trustee

As per section 4.4.2, complaints about the CEO or Trustees should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees via the Head of Governance and Compliance. Complaints about the Chair should be addressed to the Vice Chair via the Head of Governance and Compliance.

The Chair/Vice Chair or their appointed representative will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 5 working/school/college days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

Following the investigation, the Chair/Vice Chair will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 20 working/school/college days of the date that the complaint was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the Chair/Vice Chair will write to the complainant explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

If the complaint concerns the CEO, any complaint investigation should be undertaken by the Chair of the Board of Trustees, though they may commission someone independent to undertake this on their behalf. The CEO has the option to provide factual accuracy in a response to a complainant as part of the stage 2 process, though the complainant has the right to request that their complaint is investigated as a stage 2 complaint.

If the complaint concerns the Trustees any complaint investigation should be undertaken by the Chair of the Board, though they may commission someone independent to undertake this on their behalf.

Where the Chair of the Board has investigated the complaint or commissioned an independent individual to undertake this, the Chair will write the letter of outcome to the complainant and provide a copy to the CEO.

If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Head of Governance and Compliance within 10 school days asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel. The Head of Governance and Compliance will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 10 working/school/college days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Head of Governance and Compliance will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 working/school/college days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Head of Governance and Compliance will provide an

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anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Head of Governance and Compliance will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The same processes shall apply to convening of the panel as outlined in section 4.4.8 on the panel hearing.

However, if the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair;
- or the entire trust board;
- or the majority of the trust board

this will be heard by an independent panel. Membership will be sourced by the Head of Governance and Compliance.

4.4.10 Barring from AaA premises

On occasion, concerns about an individual's behaviour may mean we take the difficult decision to bar that person from AaA premises and withdraw online access in line with Section 547 Education Act 1996.

The most senior leader involved will notify the individual in writing, explaining that their access to premises and online services has been temporarily revoked and the reasons for this, 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 this decision and may appeal the decision to AaA within 20 working/school/college days.

This decision to bar may be reviewed by AaA, who may convene a committee of up to 3 governors or Senior Leaders to review the decision, taking into account any discussions following the incident. Any review meeting should normally take place within 20 working/school/college days of the request to review being submitted.

If the decision is made to continue the ban, the individual will be contacted in writing, informing them of how long this will be in place and/or when the decision will be reviewed.

Anyone wishing to make a complaint regarding a barring order can do so in writing, including email to the Head of Service or the Head of Governance and Compliance, in line with this policy.

If the barred individual has already sought to appeal the ban (as outlined above), then a complaint about the ban will automatically commence at the Stage 3 level.

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

4.5 Role of Central Government

Note that the AaA Whistleblowing policy should be referred to before any reports are made to Central Government, as this may contain more relevant guidance.

For complaints about our education settings:

- If a complainant remains dissatisfied once the complaint procedure has been completed, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State (see [https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact the Department for Education](https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact%20the%20Department%20for%20Education)). If a complainant wishes to escalate a complaint of bias, the DfE will require evidence to be

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submitted with the complaint. The Secretary of State will only intervene when they believe that the Trust has acted unlawfully or unreasonably. The DfE will not overturn a decision by AaA about a complaint except in exceptional circumstances, such as AaA acting unlawfully. When making a final decision about a complaint, AaA reserves the right to seek advice from the DfE on whether they are acting reasonably and lawfully; however, they will not be able to advise on how to resolve the complaint.

- Parents/carers and pupils/learners of AaA schools and colleges may also take their concerns or complaints to Ofsted:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/complaints-procedure>

- Alternatively, you may contact the local authority, usually the one in which the education provision is situated:
 - Hounslow Children’s Services, Civic Centre, 88 Lampton Road, Hounslow, TW3 4DN
 - Haringey Children’s Services, Civic Centre, 255 High Road, Wood Green, N22 8LE
 - Kingston local authority/Achieving for children, 2 High St, Kingston upon Thames, KT1 1EU
 - Brighton and Hove Children’s Services, Council Chamber, Hove Town Hall, Norton Road, Hove, BN3 3BQ

For complaints about our residential care homes:

- The Ombudsmen can support complainants who are not happy with the appeal outcome. In England, this is the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO). Note: The LG&SCO will not investigate a complaint until the organisation has concluded their complaint process.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman:

Website: <https://www.lgo.org.uk/>

Tel: 0300 061 0614

Complaint appeal page: <https://complaints.lgo.org.uk>

- Complainants may also contact:
 - Care Quality Commission Website: <https://www.cqc.org.uk/> Tel: 0300 061 6161 Email: enquiries@cqc.org.uk Address: CQC Citygate Gallowgate Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4PA or CQC 2 Redman Place London E20 1JQ

For concerns from members of the public about charities, please contact the Charity Commission:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-charities>

For concerns about our information rights practices (for example data protection or Freedom of Information), please contact the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO): <https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/>

4.6 Managing serial and unreasonable complaints

AaA 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 us. 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.

AaA defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant’s contact with AaA, such as, if the complainant:

- 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;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints policy;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints policy or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and

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commented on;

- 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 complaint policy has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education or other relevant statutory bodies;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on AaA time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;
- uses threats to intimidate;
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence;
- knowingly provides falsified information; or
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complaints can be managed more effectively if the complainant puts all information related to the complaint into one piece correspondence. 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 Head of Service, Chief Executive Officer or Chair of Trustees will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the unreasonable behaviour continues, the Head of Service, Chief Executive Officer or Chair of Trustees will write to the complainant requesting that this behaviour ceases. For complainants who excessively contact AaA causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from premises.

4.7 Complaints campaigns

For the purposes of this policy, "complaints campaigns" are when AaA receives large volumes of complaints that are all based on the same subject.

When AaA becomes the subject of a complaints campaign from complainants who are not connected with AaA, a standard, single response will be published on the website.

If AaA receives a large number of complaints about the same subject from complainants who are connected to AaA (e.g. parents), each complainant will receive an individual response.

Social media should not be used to make or progress a complaint. Complaints should be made through the channels outlined above to ensure that information is recorded safely and securely, and to be sure that the complaint can be progressed in a timely way and in accordance with a set of clear procedures.

In the case of social media being used to express a negative opinion about AaA, the following four steps will be taken by the charity:

- Gather evidence: When the charity becomes aware of a negative opinion being expressed through social media channels (Facebook, X etc) about any aspect of its work and/or its staff,

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evidence will be gathered to establish what has been posted on social media and by whom. Staff will not respond to any postings deemed to be negative. The person (most likely to be a staff member) who identifies the post(s) will inform the Senior Communications Manager or Deputy Director of External Affairs, as soon as possible.

- Reassure staff: The content of negative posts may upset staff members. The Chief Executive Officer, Head of Service or other appropriate senior staff member should reassure staff and offer support through whole staff emails, meetings and individual discussions.
- Report offending material and removal: The Communications team will remove content if it breaches the terms and conditions of the platform. If the content does not breach the terms and conditions of the platform, then the team will hide the post and/or review our settings relating to posting to our pages, posting about us, tagging.
- Legal advice: In cases of malicious allegations, AaA may seek legal advice. In some cases, this may result in a letter from a solicitor being sent to individuals warning that the allegations could result in legal action.

5. Roles and responsibilities

For guidance about responsibilities regarding responding to complaints, see section 4.4.2 above.

The Director of Finance and Planning is responsible for maintaining this policy, with support from the Head of Governance and Compliance.

The Education and Care Committee is responsible for reviewing the policy, and the Joint Group Board Committee is responsible for approving the policy.

All members of AaA staff, and volunteers, are responsible for reading the policy and applying the guidance set out therein.

6. Other Key Policies

This policy should be read alongside the following other policies, which can be found on AaA website <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/about-us/organisation-policies-and-reports> :

- Serious incident reporting
- Whistleblowing

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Appendix 1 – Complaints Form

Please complete and return to the complaints officer (Head of Governance and Compliance) feedback@ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk (or an appropriate person as per section 4.4.2 above) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

This form can also be completed online via the AaA website:

<https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/compliments-complaints>

Your name:	
If about school/college - Pupil/learner's name:	
If about school/college - your relationship to the pupil/learner:	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Day time telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
Please give details of your complaint: (continue on a separate page if necessary)	

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What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint. (e.g. Who did you speak to and what was the response?)

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

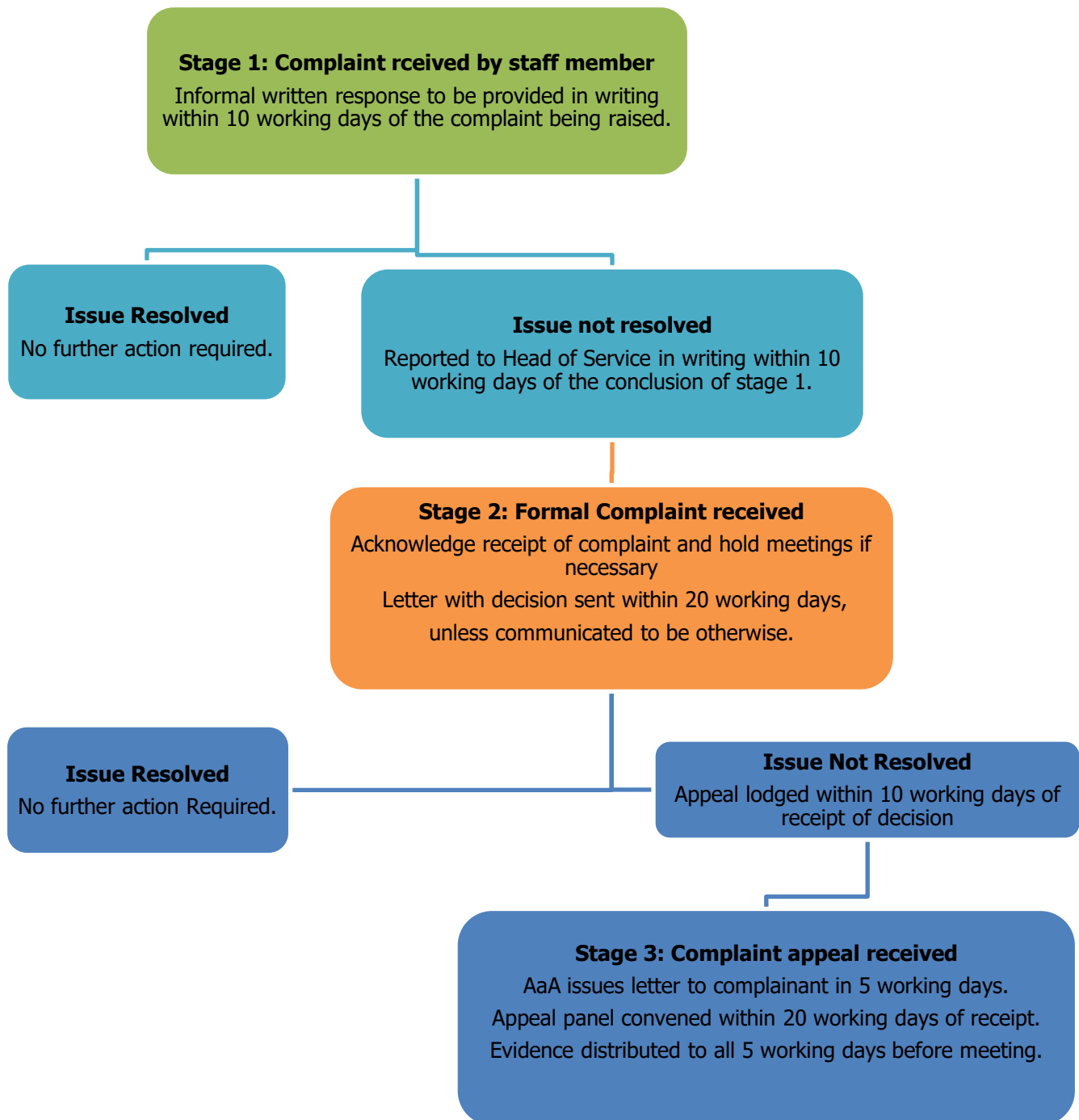
Signature:

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Date:	
Official use:	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By whom:	
Complaint referred to:	
Date:	

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Appendix 2 – Complaints Procedure



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