The New Walk School *Bespoke support. Brighter futures.*

Complaints Policy and Procedure

The New Walk School policy framework

Policy	Complaints Policy and Procedure	**Version**	V1
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Policy owner	Headteacher	**Approved by**	Directors of The New Walk School Ltd

1. About The New Walk School

The New Walk School is an independent specialist day school for pupils aged 7 to 19 who have Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, autism spectrum conditions, learning difficulties and communication difficulties. The school is located on New Walk in Leicester — a setting with a long-standing association with academic life — and is operated by The New Walk School Ltd, a Company Limited by Guarantee.

The majority of our pupils hold an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and many have experienced previous educational placements that did not meet their needs. Our offer combines a broad academic curriculum with an in-built therapeutic provision rooted in the PACE model — Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy — developed by Dr Dan Hughes. PACE is a relational approach designed to build trust, regulate distress and create the safety from which learning can take place. It informs how every adult in the school speaks to, listens to and works with our pupils.

2. The PACE therapeutic model in practice

How a school responds to a complaint is itself a measure of its values. PACE shapes our complaints handling: we are accepting that the family is upset, curious about what has gone wrong, and empathic with the underlying experience even as we work through the facts:

- Playfulness — staff use a light, warm tone to reduce shame and de-escalate distress, using humour appropriate to the pupil and the moment.
- Acceptance — pupils' feelings and inner experiences are accepted unconditionally, even where specific behaviours are not. Acceptance is communicated before any limit is set.
- Curiosity — staff seek to understand the meaning behind a pupil's behaviour rather than reacting to its surface, asking 'what is this telling me?'
- Empathy — staff name and stay with the pupil's emotional experience, communicating that the pupil is not alone with what they feel.

PACE is not a behaviour-management tool layered on top of practice; it is the relational foundation from which all other aspects of the school operate.

3. Statutory framework

This policy is in line with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (Part 7) and the Education Act 2002. It is published on the school's website.

4. Scope

This policy covers complaints from parents/carers of registered pupils. Complaints about admissions, exclusions, child protection allegations, and statutory assessments under the Children and Families Act 2014 are dealt with under separate procedures.

5. The three stages

Stage 1 — Informal

Concerns should be raised informally in the first instance with the most appropriate member of staff (usually the class teacher or the Headteacher). The school will respond within five school days. Many concerns are resolved at this stage by clarification, action or both.

Stage 2 — Formal written complaint to the Headteacher

Where the concern is not resolved informally, the parent/carer makes a formal written complaint to the Headteacher. The Headteacher will: acknowledge within five school days; investigate; meet with the family; and provide a written response within twenty school days, including findings and any actions agreed.

Stage 3 — Independent panel hearing

Where the complaint is not resolved at Stage 2, the parent/carer may request a panel hearing. The panel comprises at least three people not directly involved in the matters of the complaint, at least one of whom is independent of the management and running of the school. The panel hearing takes place within twenty school days of the request, allowing the parent/carer to attend and be accompanied. The panel produces written findings and recommendations within ten school days; copies are provided to the family, the Headteacher, the Directors and (where relevant) the staff member complained about. Records are kept for at least seven years.

6. Records

A confidential central record of complaints is maintained by the Headteacher. The record states whether the complaint was resolved at preliminary stage or required a panel hearing, and any action taken by the school as a result. The record is made available to inspectors on request.

7. Vexatious or repeated complaints

Where a complaint has been considered through all stages and a complainant continues to raise the same matter, the Chair of the Directors may write to the complainant explaining that the matter is closed.

Vexatious or unreasonable complaints will be managed with reference to the school's Acceptable Behaviour by Visitors guidance, while continuing to safeguard pupils.

8. Confidentiality

Correspondence, statements and records related to complaints are kept confidential except where disclosure is required by the Secretary of State, by inspectors during an inspection, or under any other legal obligation.

9. Complaints involving children

The pupil concerned is informed in age-appropriate terms about the process and is given the opportunity to express their views, in line with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Monitoring and review

This policy is reviewed annually by the Headteacher in consultation with the senior leadership team and the Directors of The New Walk School Ltd. It will be reviewed earlier where there is a material change in legislation, statutory guidance or the operational needs of the school. The most recent version is held on the school's policy register and is made available to parents, carers and staff on request.

Linked policies and documents

This policy should be read alongside the school's wider policy suite, including: Safeguarding and Child Protection; SEND; Behaviour and Relationships; Anti-Bullying; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Health and Safety; Curriculum; and Complaints.