

# Compliments and Complaints Policy

## Purpose and scope

- 1.0** Ambitious about Autism strives to operate to the highest standards. We welcome feedback from individuals and organisations that we work with, including parents and carers of children and young people at TreeHouse School and Ambitious College, those that use our other services, and from our neighbours in the local community. Such feedback is invaluable in helping us to evaluate and improve our work.
- 1.1** Ambitious about Autism has a single Compliments and Complaints Policy covering all of its activities and services, including TreeHouse School and Ambitious College.
- 1.2** This policy does not relate to situations where Ambitious about Autism employees have a complaint or grievance. In these circumstances individuals should follow the internal grievance procedure as outlined in the staff handbook.
- 1.3** Trustees and Governors who wish to make a complaint are expected to follow the procedure outlined in this policy.
- 1.4** The overall objectives of the Compliments and Complaints Policy are to:
- ensure everyone knows how to provide feedback and specifically how a complaint will be handled;
  - 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 successes.
- 1.5** The Compliments and Complaints Policy will:
- encourage resolution of concerns by informal means where appropriate;
  - be easily accessible and publicised;
  - be simple to understand and use;
  - be impartial and non-adversarial;
  - allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of progress;
  - respect confidentiality and data protection;
  - provide information to Ambitious about Autism’s Trustee Board, Governing

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Bodies and Executive Leadership Team so that services can be improved.

### Who is involved in the process?

- 2.0 The Director of Fundraising, External Affairs & Strategy is the designated Complaints Officer and is responsible for ensuring that this policy is followed and information is recorded properly. The Complaints Officer may nominate a substitute, for example a member of TreeHouse School's or Ambitious College's Senior Leadership Team, to investigate a complaint if there are appropriate reasons for doing so. In the absence of the Director of External Affairs, the Chief Executive will nominate an alternative Complaints Officer.
- 2.1 If a complaint concerns the Director of Fundraising, External Affairs & Strategy, the Chief Executive will nominate an alternative Complaints Officer.
- 2.2 If a complaint concerns the Chief Executive or a Trustee, the Chair of the Board of Trustees will manage the complaints process.
- 2.3 If a complaint concerns a Chair of the Board of Trustees, the Deputy Chair of the Board of Trustees will manage the complaints process.
- 2.4 If the complaint concerns a School or Ambitious College Governor, the Chair of the Governing Body will manage the complaints process.
- 2.5 Compliments and complaints received anonymously will be recorded and considered, but action may be limited if further information is required to ensure a full and fair investigation. All anonymous complaints will be directed to the Complaints Officer.

### Compliments Process

- 3.0 It is the responsibility of all Ambitious about Autism staff to record verbal or written compliments in the Central Record of Compliments. Managers are responsible for ensuring that staff named within a compliment are informed and thanked. Feedback on compliments will be shared with the Staff Council and staff at regular intervals.

### Complaints Process

- 4.0 Individuals wishing to make a complaint should contact the person who provided the service at the earliest opportunity. Alternatively they can contact Ambitious about Autism by emailing [feedback@AmbitiousAboutAutism.org.uk](mailto:feedback@AmbitiousAboutAutism.org.uk) or writing to the Director of Fundraising, External Affairs & Strategy, Ambitious about Autism, Woodside Avenue, Muswell Hill, London, N10 3JA.
- 4.1 If the complaint involves financial loss or the risk of compensation, the matter may be passed to Ambitious about Autism's insurers who may communicate directly with the complainant.
- 4.2 There are four stages to Ambitious about Autism's complaints policy:

- **Stage One** Raising a concern

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- **Stage Two** Making a formal complaint
- **Stage Three** Appealing the outcome of a formal complaint
- **Stage Four** Requesting an independent review

### 4.3 The use of social media

Social media should not be used to make or progress a complaint.

Complaints should be made through the channels that ensure 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. Complaints should be made through a personal meeting, by letter, telephone call and/or email.

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

#### 4.3.1 Gather evidence

When the charity becomes aware of a negative opinion being expressed through social media channels (facebook, twitter, etc) about any aspect of its work and/or its staff, 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 Head of Digital, Media and Marketing as soon as possible.

#### 4.3.2 Reassure staff

The content of negative posts may upset staff members. The CEO, Head Teacher or other appropriate senior staff member should reassure staff and offer support through whole staff emails, meetings and individual discussions.

If a complaint or allegation refers to a specific member of staff, the Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedure will be followed. We take all allegations relating to the safeguarding of children and young people very seriously.

#### 4.3.3 Report offending material and removal

The communications team will be approached to 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 including around posting to our page, posting about us, tagging.

#### 4.3.4 Legal advice

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In cases of malicious allegations, Ambitious about Autism 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.

### **Stage One – Raising a concern**

- 5.0** Ambitious about Autism aims to resolve concerns quickly and satisfactorily. In some instances it may be possible to resolve these informally by way of an apology or explanation or by simply providing the service or information requested.
- 5.1** Where appropriate, Ambitious about Autism will ask the person raising a concern if they are content for the matter to be dealt with informally, or whether they wish to make a formal complaint and the matter to be referred to the Complaints Officer for a formal investigation as described in Stage Two.
- 5.2** Where it is appropriate to deal with a concern informally, it is important that the relevant member of staff concerned has the first opportunity to resolve the matter as quickly. In TreeHouse School or Ambitious College this would typically be the classroom based staff or members of the support team. It is their responsibility to inform the person who raised a concern of the action taken. Trustees, School and College Governors and other Ambitious about Autism staff will not become involved in the matter at this stage as it may compromise their role if the concern proceeds to a formal complaint.
- 5.3** Any concern regarding safeguarding or learner welfare must be immediately reported to the Child Protection Officers who are the Head Teacher for TreeHouse School, the Principal of Ambitious College, and the Chief Executive for all other Ambitious about Autism activities.
- 5.4** All staff are expected to keep a record of concerns raised and action taken.
- 5.5** Where a concern can not be resolved informally, or when it would be inappropriate to pursue an informal route, the member of staff should inform the Complaints Officer who will instigate the formal complaints process.

### **Stage Two – Making a formal complaint**

- 6.0** This stage deals with matters that could not be resolved informally or where it would be inappropriate to seek to resolve an issue through informal means.
- 6.1** The Complaints Officer is responsible for this stage of the complaints process but may nominate a substitute, for example a member of the School or College Leadership Team, to investigate a complaint if there are appropriate reasons for doing so.
- 6.2** The Complaints Officer will immediately inform the Child Protection Officer of any complaint regarding safeguarding and pupil or learner welfare.
- 6.3** The formal complaints process starts when there is sufficient information to begin an investigation and would normally only commence after the complainant has made a complaint in writing. Clearly there are some circumstances where it would be

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inappropriate to wait for a complaint to be received in writing and decision to proceed to an investigation is a matter for the Complaints Officer.

- 6.4 On receipt of a formal complaint, the Complaints Officer will log the complaint on the Central Record of Complaints and issue a Unique Reference Number.
- 6.5 Where the formal complaint process is triggered by a verbal complaint the Complaints Officer will capture the nature of the complaint and ensure this is recorded on the Central Record of Complaints.
- 6.6 All formal complaints will be acknowledged by the Complaints Officer within three working days, wherever possible.
- 6.7 The Complaints Officer is responsible for investigating the formal complaint and will ensure that all information and evidence is captured on the “Complaints Sheet” and that this is logged within the Central Record of Complaints.
- 6.8 Following an investigation, the Complaints Officer will provide a written response to the complainant within 15 working days. The written response will confirm the outcome of the investigation and what action is being proposed as a result. If the complaint relates to TreeHouse School or Ambitious College, a copy of this response will be copied to the Head Teacher or College Principal and Chair of the Governing Body.
- 6.9 The Complaints Officer will advise the complainant that if they are not satisfied with the response to their complaint, and the action that is being proposed, they may appeal and progress to Stage Three – Appeal.

### **Stage Three – Appealing the outcome of a formal complaint**

- 7.0 If the complainant wishes to appeal the outcome of the investigation led by the Complaints Officer, they must write to the Chief Executive of Ambitious about Autism within 15 working days of receiving the Complaints Officer’s written response.
- 7.1 The Chief Executive is responsible for Stage Three of the complaints process. They will review the Stage Two investigation led by the Complaints Officer and will confirm in writing, within 15 days, one of the following actions:
  - that no further action is taken by Ambitious about Autism; or
  - specify changes to the Stage Two written response and actions.
- 7.2 In accordance with the latest statutory regulations covering Non Maintained Special Schools, the Chief Executive will ensure that any appeal of an investigation relating to TreeHouse School will be undertaken by an independent person who never served as a School Governor or a member of TreeHouse School staff.

### **Stage Four – Requesting an independent review**

- 8.0 The Chair of the Board of Trustees is responsible for this stage of the complaints process.

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- 8.1** If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the appeal they may request an independent review which is the final stage of the Ambitious about Autism Complaints Policy. Any request must be made in writing to the Chair of the Board of Trustees within 15 working days of the Chief Executive reporting on the outcome of an appeal.
- 8.2** It is the discretion of the Chair of the Board of Trustees whether to instigate an independent review. If it is decided that a complaint, or the process by which it has been investigated, warrants further examination, the Chair of the Board of Trustees can establish an Independent Review Panel which will take place at the earliest possible opportunity.
- 8.3** The composition of the Independent Review Panel will depend on the nature of the complaint. If the complaint relates to TreeHouse School, the Chair of the School Governing Body will arrange for a panel of Governors to act as the Independent Review Panel. If the complaint relates to Ambitious College, the Chair of the College Governing Body will arrange for a panel of Governors to act as the Independent Review Panel. Equally, if the complaint relates to the activity of the wider charity, it may be more appropriate for the Chair of the Board of Trustees to appoint a number of Trustees to act as the Independent Review Panel.
- 8.4** The Independent Review Panel may review all documentation, receive written submissions or, in exceptional circumstances and at its absolute discretion, take direct evidence.
- 8.6** The Independent Review Panel will confirm in writing one of the following actions:
- no further action is required and the matter is deemed to be closed;
  - overturn the appeal (Stage Three) and recommend specific actions;
  - recommend changes to internal systems and processes to reduce the possibility of similar complaints in the future.
- 8.5** The decision of the Independent Review Panel will be communicated to the complainant in writing within five working days of a decision being made. The decision is final and absolute.

**Internal reporting of Compliments and Complaints**

- 9.0** Compliments and complaints information will be considered on a regular basis by the Executive Leadership Team and yearly reports will be provided to the Trustee Board and College/School Governing Bodies.

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## Stage One Diagram – Raising a concern

**SITUATION:** A member of staff is made aware of a concern.

**ACTION:**

- The member of staff will clarify if the matter to be dealt with informally or whether the person raising the concern wishes to make a formal complaint, in which case the matter will be referred to the Complaints Officer for investigation as described in Stage Two.
- If the concern relates to safeguarding or pupil or learner welfare it will be immediately reported to the Child Protection Officers who are the Head Teacher for TreeHouse School, the Principal of Ambitious College, and the Chief Executive for all other Ambitious about Autism activities.
- Where a concern is of such severity that it would be inappropriate to pursue an informal route it should be reported to the Complaints Officer who will instigate the formal complaints process as described in Stage Two.



**SITUATION:** It is appropriate for the matter to be dealt with informally.

**ACTION:**

- The member of staff concerned will seek to resolve the matter as quickly as possible and inform the person who raised a concern of the action taken.
- The member of staff will keep a record of concern and action taken.



**SITUATION:** The complainant is not satisfied with the response to their complaint, and the action that is being proposed as a result.

**ACTION:**

- The member of staff concerned should provide the complainant with a copy of the Compliments and Complaints Policy and advise them to make a formal complaint to the Complaints Officer.



**MOVE TO STAGE TWO – MAKING A FORMAL COMPLAINT**

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## **Stage Two Diagram – Making a formal complaint**

**SITUATION:** A concern could not be resolved informally or an individual wishes to make a formal complaint.

**ACTION:**

- The Complaints Officer is responsible for this stage of the complaints process but may nominate a substitute, for example a member of the School Leadership Team, to investigate a complaint if there are appropriate reasons for doing so.
- The Complaints Officer will immediately inform the Child Protection Officer of any complaint regarding safeguarding and pupil welfare.
- The formal complaints process will start when there is sufficient information to begin an investigation – usually only after the complainant has registered the complaint in writing.
- On receipt of a formal complaint, the Complaints Officer will log the complaint on the Central Record of Complaints and issue a Unique Reference Number.



**SITUATION:** A formal complaint has been received and logged on the Central Record of Complaints.

**ACTION:**

- The Complaints Officer will acknowledge the complaint in writing within three working days.
- The Complaints Officer will investigate the complaint and provide a written response within 15 working days. The written response will confirm the outcome of the investigation and what action is being proposed as a result. If the complaint relates to TreeHouse School, a copy of the written response will also be sent to the Head Teacher and Chair of the Governing Body. Likewise for Ambitious College, it will be copied to the Principal and Chair of the Governing Body.



**SITUATION:** The complainant is not satisfied with the response to their complaint, and the action that is being proposed as a result.

**ACTION:**

- The complainant may appeal the outcome of the investigation.



**MOVE TO STAGE THREE  
APPEALING THE OUTCOME OF A FORMAL COMPLAINT**

**Stage Three Diagram – Appealing the outcome of a formal complaint**

**SITUATION:** A complaint has been investigated but the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome and actions proposed by the Complaints Officer.

**ACTION:**

- The complainant must write to the Chief Executive of Ambitious about Autism within 15 working days of receiving the Complaints Officer’s written response.



**SITUATION:** The Chief Executive will review the Stage Two investigation led by the Complaints Officer. Where the appeal relates to a complaint about TreeHouse School or Ambitious College, the Chief Executive will ensure that any review is undertaken by an independent person who never served as a Governor or a member of staff.

**ACTION:**

- Within 15 days, the Chief Executive will confirm in writing one of the following actions:
  - that no further action is taken by Ambitious about Autism; or
  - specify changes to the Stage Two written response and actions.



**SITUATION:** The complainant remains unsatisfied with the outcome of the appeal.

**ACTION:**

- The complainant may request an Independent Review.



**MOVE TO STAGE FOUR – REQUESTING AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW**

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## **Stage Four Diagram – Requesting an independent review**

**SITUATION:** A formal complaint has been investigated, the outcome communicated to the complainant and an appeal conducted by the Chief Executive. The complainant remains unsatisfied and requests an independent review.

**ACTION:**

- The complainant must write to the Chair of the Board of Trustees within 15 working days of the Chief Executive reporting on the outcome of that appeal.
- It is the discretion of the Chair of the Board of Trustees whether to instigate an independent review. If it is decided that a complaint, or the process by which it has been investigated, warrants further examination, the Chair of the Board of Trustees can establish an Independent Review Panel which will take place at the earliest possible opportunity.
- If the Chair of the Board of Trustees decides there are insufficient grounds to warrant an independent review, the matter is deemed to be closed.



**SITUATION:** The Chair of Board of Trustees has agreed to an independent review.

**ACTION:**

- The composition of the Independent Review Panel will depend on the nature of the complaint and is ultimately a matter for the Chair of the Board of Trustees
- The Independent Review Panel may review all documentation, receive written submissions or, in exceptional circumstances and at its absolute discretion, take direct evidence.
- The panel will confirm in writing one of the following actions:
  - no further action is required and the matter is deemed to be closed;
  - overturn the appeal (Stage Three) and recommend specific actions;
  - recommend changes to internal systems and processes to reduce the possibility of similar complaints in the future.
- The decision of the Independent Review Panel will be communicated to the complainant in writing within five working days of a decision being made. The decision is final and absolute.



**END OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

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