**Strides Mentoring Ltd - Complaints Procedures Policy**

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| **This policy has been adopted by the Management Team on:** |  **August 2025** |
| **Signed:** | **Alex Breeze & Sian Breeze**  |
| **Next review due:** |  **August 2026** |

## **Who can make a complaint?**

* This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at Strides Mentoring Ltd.
* Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Strides about any provision of facilities or services that we provide.
* Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

## **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.
* Strides 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, Strides will refer you to another staff member.
* Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, Strides will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more 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, Strides will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

## **How to raise a concern or make a complaint**

* A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone.
* They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.
* Complaints against school staff (except the head teacher) should be made in the first instance, to Alex Breeze or Sian Breeze via the school office/reception***.*** Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
* Complaints that involve or are about Alex Breeze or Sian Breeze should be addressed to Andrew Dorman(Gloucestershire County Council), via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
* For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office/reception. You can also ask a third-party organisation for example like the Citizens Advice to help you.
* In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

## **Anonymous complaints**

* We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, Alex Breeze or Sian Breeze, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

## **Time scales**

* You must raise the complaint within three months 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 time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

## **Complaints received outside of term time**

* We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

## **Scope of this complaint procedure**

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Strides, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

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| **Exceptions** | **Who to contact** |
| * Admissions to Strides
 | Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority. |
| * Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation
 | Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Parents, carers and members of the public are advised to contact the MASH/Front Door directly through Children's Helpdesk either via email at childhelp@gloucestershire.gov.uk or on 01452 426565, or to contact the safeguarding lead in their child's education setting. |
| * Exclusion of children from Strides
 | Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: [www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions](http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions). *\*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school’s complaints procedure.*  |
| * Whistleblowing
 | We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus).Volunteer staff who have concerns about Strides should complain through the school’s 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. |
| * Staff grievances
 | Complaints from staff will be dealt with under Strides’ internal grievance procedures.  |
| * Staff conduct
 | Complaints about staff will be dealt with under Strides’ internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.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. |

* If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) 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 against Strides in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

## **Resolving complaints**

At each stage in the procedure, Strides wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. 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 ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
* an undertaking to review our policies in light of the complaint
* an apology.

## **Withdrawal of a complaint**

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

## **Stage 1 – Informal complaints**

* It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.
* Concerns should be raised with either the member of staff or Sian Breeze or Alex Breeze.
* Complainants should not approach individual directors/members of the management team 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.
* At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide an informal written response **within 2 school days** of the date of receipt of the complaint.
* If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

## **Stage 2 – Formal complaints**

* Formal complaints must be made to Alex Breeze/Sian Breeze (unless they are about the Alex Breeze/Sian Breeze), via the school office/reception. This may be done in person or in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form).
* Alex Breeze/Sian Breeze will record the date the complaint is received and **will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email)** **within 2 school days.**
* Within this response, Alex Breeze/Sian Breeze will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. Alex Breeze/Sian Breeze can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

During the investigation, Alex Breeze/Sian Breeze (or investigator) will:

* if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
* keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

**At the conclusion of their investigation, Alex Breeze or Sian Breeze will provide a formal written response within 5 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.**

* If Alex Breeze/Sian Breeze 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 Strides will take to resolve the complaint.
* Alex Breeze/Sian Breeze 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 Alex Breeze/Sian Breeze, a suitably skilled member of the Local Authority will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about Alex Breeze or Sian Breeze must be made via the Strides office/reception.

If the complaint is:

* about Sian Breeze or Alex Breeze
* both Sian Breeze and Alex Breeze

Stage 2 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Local Authority.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

## **Stage 3 – Local Authority**

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Andrew Dorman or Ellis Webb at Gloucestershire County Council.

Email: Andrew.Dorman@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Telephone: 01452 427104

Email: Ellis.Webb@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Telephone: 01452 426769

## **Complaint Form**

Please complete and return to Alex Breeze or Sian Breeze who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

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| **Your name:** |
| **Pupil’s name (if relevant):** |
| **Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):** |
| **Address:** **Postcode:****Day time telephone number:****Evening telephone number:****Email address:** |
| **Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.** |
| **What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?** |
| **Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.** |
| **Signature:****Date:** |
| **Official use** |
| **Date acknowledgement sent:** |
| **By who:**  |
| **Complaint referred to:** |
| **Action taken:**  |
| **Date:**  |

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## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Complainant**

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

* explain the complaint in full as early as possible
* co-operate with Strides in seeking a solution to the complaint
* respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
* ask for assistance as needed
* treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
* refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

### **Investigator**

The investigator’s role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

* providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
	+ sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
	+ interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
	+ consideration of records and other relevant information
	+ analysing information
* liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

* conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
* keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
* ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
* be mindful of the timescales to respond
* prepare a comprehensive report for the head teacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
* The head teacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

### **Complaints Co-ordinator**

#### (this could be the head teacher / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)

#### The complaints co-ordinator should:

* ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
* liaise with staff members, head teacher, directors and to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
* be aware of issues regarding:
	+ sharing third party information
	+ additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
* keep records.

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### **Clerk to the Governing Body / Trust Board**

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

* ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
* set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
* collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
* record the proceedings
* circulate the minutes of the meeting
* notify all parties of the committee’s decision.

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### **Committee Chair**

The committee’s chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

* both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
* the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
* complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
* the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
* written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual’s rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

* both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
* the issues are addressed
* key findings of fact are made
* the committee is open-minded and acts independently
* no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
* the meeting is minuted
* they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

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### **Committee Member**

Committee members should be aware that:

* the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so

No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

* the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

* many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting

Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.

* extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person’s parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person’s best interests.

the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.