



## Template letters for handling a complaint

(Produced by Stone King January 2022)

*This is a set of template letters designed to assist the National Autistic Society Academies Trust and individuals involved in the management of complaints.*

*These are the letters that are most often drafted when handling a complaint but others may be required depending on the circumstances. The letters will need to be amended to incorporate the specifics of the complaint. It is not a substitute for legal advice and advice may need to be sought (and the letters amended accordingly) in relation to the specific circumstances of a complaint.*

**Note: The accompanying footnotes will need to be deleted prior to letters being finalised and sent to the complainant(s).**

### 1. Stage 3: Letter to the complainant informing them that their complaint will be dealt with under Stage 3

Dear [NAME OF PARENT(S)]

I write further to your letter of [DATE] which I received on [DATE].

I write to confirm that I will review your concerns under Stage 3 of the Complaints Policy, a copy of which is enclosed, and review the relevant correspondence and speak to those involved.

[I would also like to arrange a time to speak with you before [DATE]<sup>1</sup> to discuss your concerns. As such, please could you contact [NAME AND CONTACT DETAILS], to arrange a convenient time.<sup>2</sup>

In accordance with the Complaints Policy, I will endeavour to make my decision within [28 school days of receipt of your letter **OR** within 15 school days of speaking with you<sup>3</sup>.]

Yours sincerely

NAME

POSITION<sup>4</sup>

Enc. Complaints Policy

---

<sup>1</sup> This should correspond with the Complaints Policy. The Policy provides if a meeting is to take place, whenever reasonably possible, this will take place within 15 school days of the written complaint being received.

<sup>2</sup> This should be included if the investigator wishes to speak with the parents.

<sup>3</sup> The timeframes stipulated here should correspond with the Complaints Policy. The Complaints Policy provides that if a meeting takes place with parents, a decision will be made (where reasonably possible) within 15 days of speaking with the parents. Otherwise, if no meeting, a decision will be made within 25 school days of the written complaint being received under Stage 2. **Please omit accordingly.**

<sup>4</sup> This should correspond with the Complaints Policy. Ordinarily the Principal would undertake Stage 2 but it may be someone else e.g. if the complaint concerns the Principal.



## 2. Stage 2: Letter to the complainant with the findings of the Stage 3 investigation

Dear [NAME OF PARENT(S)]

As you are aware I have investigated your complaint under Stage 3 of the Complaints Policy. I write to inform you of my decision.

### **The complaint**

[Set out the parents' complaint. You may quote directly from the parents' letter of complaint if helpful. This will ensure all the complaints that have been considered under Stage 3 are set out in one place.]

### **My investigation**

I have considered all of the related documentation and held meetings with relevant individuals to understand their views. As such, I [met/spoke with] [set out names of School staff etc]. [I also [met/spoke with] with you on [DATE] where you were given an opportunity to explain your concerns to me.]

I have spent a significant amount of time interviewing parties, reviewing all of the documents and considering your complaint prior to drawing my conclusions and making my decision.

### **Conclusions**

[Set out findings in relation to each aspect of the complaint(s). Be clear as to why conclusions were reached e.g. what was found from the investigation process. Set out if each aspect of the complaint is upheld or dismissed, in whole or in part.]

### **[Recommendations]**

[Insert any recommendations, if appropriate.]

This letter concludes Stage 3 of the Complaints Policy. If you are not satisfied with this decision, you may invoke Stage 4 of the Complaints Policy by putting your complaint in writing within [10]<sup>5</sup> school days of the date of this letter, addressed to [The Head of Governance, NAS Head Office, 393 City Road, London, EC1V 1NG<sup>6</sup>]. In accordance with the Complaints Policy, you should set out why you remain dissatisfied and what remedies you are seeking. I do hope, however, that this letter has addressed your concerns.

Yours sincerely,

[NAME]

---

<sup>5</sup> This timeframe should correspond with the timeframe stipulated within the Complaints policy. Under the Policy, parents are required to make their Stage 3 Complaints Panel meeting request within 10 school days of the date of this Stage 2 letter.

<sup>6</sup> This should reflect the individual nominated by the School to receive complaints under Stage 3 of the Complaints Policy.



[POSITION<sup>7</sup>]

---

<sup>7</sup> This should correspond with the Complaints Policy. Ordinarily the Principal would undertake Stage 2 but it may be someone else e.g. if the complaint concerns the Principal.

### 3. Stage 4: Letter to the complainant convening the Stage 4 Complaints Panel meeting

Dear [NAME OF PARENT(S)]

I write in response to your letter<sup>8</sup> dated [DATE] requesting a Stage 4 Complaints Panel meeting.

I have been appointed to convene the Complaints Panel meeting and I write to provide you with further information in relation to the meeting.

#### **The Complaints Panel**

We have identified [DATE(S)] [at TIME(S)] as the next available date[s] when we are able to convene the Complaints Panel meeting [, taking account of school holidays and the need to extend the timescales set out in the Complaints Procedure owing to [INSERT e.g. staff absence due to the current Covid-19 pandemic<sup>9</sup>]. This will take place at the [School<sup>10</sup>]. Please would you kindly confirm [that you are able to attend at this date and time **OR** which date and time is convenient for you.]

The Complaints Panel will consist of persons not directly involved in the detail of your complaint[s]. The Complaints Panel members will be<sup>11</sup>:

1. [NAME] (Chair of the Complaints Panel);
2. [NAME] ([POSITION]); and
3. [NAME] ([POSITION]), [NAME] is independent of the management and running of the School).

#### **Attendance**

You may be accompanied to the Complaints Panel meeting if you wish by one other person, such as a relative, teacher, friend or colleague. If you do wish to bring someone, please could you let me know their name and occupation as soon as possible [and by no later than DATE<sup>12</sup>]. As the Complaints Panel meeting is an internal private process rather than a legal forum, your companion should not be a formal legal representative (as per the Complaints Policy).

#### **Supporting documents**

Prior to the Complaints Panel meeting, both you and the School can prepare submissions for the Complaints Panel, setting out your position and enclosing any relevant supporting documents. Submissions should be as concise as possible.

I have already identified some documents as relevant to the Complaints Panel meeting, namely:

<sup>8</sup> This is the letter from the parent(s) indicating they wish to proceed to a Stage 3 Complaints Panel meeting.

<sup>9</sup> The wording in square brackets should be included where the Complaints Policy allows for different timescales e.g. if the letter is received just before a school holiday, or further investigations are required so will take place later than it ordinarily would and/or where Covid means that timescales need to be extended due to Covid. Where the timeframes will differ from those set out in the Complaints Policy (e.g. owing to school holidays), you should make clear what the new timescales will be. Any new timeframe must be reasonable.

<sup>10</sup> There may be times when it is appropriate to meet at a neutral location, rather than at the School, such as where the parents are particularly acrimonious and/or averse to meeting at School. The School is not legally obliged to meet off site however; it is a matter of discretion depending on the circumstances of each case.

<sup>11</sup> If the School is yet to confirm those will sit as Complaints Panel members, this can be followed up at a later date.

<sup>12</sup> You can set a date for confirmation of a companion if you wish, which could be set according to when the meeting will take place. For example, 3 days before the Complaints Panel meeting.

- [INSERT e.g. Email dated XXX from you to XXX in which you raise your initial complaint regarding XXX; letter to you detailing the conclusion of the Stage 3 investigation; your letter requesting a Complaints Panel meeting; the Complaints Policy].

Should you prepare submissions, and/or have any other documents which you would like to be included in the pack for the Complaints Panel, please do send them to me as soon as possible and no later than [DATE<sup>13</sup>] so that I can include them before circulating the pack to the relevant parties.

**Meeting Structure<sup>14</sup> [NOTE: only include this section if a decision has been made on the meeting structure]**

It is the Complaints Panel's responsibility to ensure that each party has the opportunity to state their case without undue interruption.

[OPTION 1] The Complaints Panel will determine the process for the meeting and will hold the meeting with all parties in attendance. In summary, you will be invited to present your complaint to the Complaints Panel, answer any questions that they may have, and raise points on the documents which have been presented to the Complaints Panel. The School will also be afforded this opportunity. You will then be invited to add any final points in conclusion that you may have, and to respond to any further points from the Complaints Panel arising from the School's evidence.

**OR**

[OPTION 2] The Complaints Panel will determine the process for the meeting and will hold the meeting sequentially. This means that you will be invited to present your complaint to the Complaints Panel, answer any questions they may have, and raise points on the documents without the School representatives being present. The School will be called to explain their position and answer any questions the Complaints Panel may have without you being present. You will then be invited back before the Complaints Panel to add any final points in conclusion that you may have, and to respond to any further points from the Complaints Panel arising from the School's evidence.

**The Complaints Panel's decision**

The Complaints Panel will consider all the evidence in light of your complaint[s] and, after due consideration of all factors they consider relevant, will reach a decision. The Complaints Panel will aim to formulate its decision as soon as reasonably practicable, and, where possible, within [28]<sup>15</sup> school days of the Complaints Panel meeting.

The Complaints Panel can:

---

<sup>13</sup> This date should correspond with any timescales stipulated within the Complaints Policy. The Policy provides that they should be submitted no later than 5 school days before the Complaints Panel meeting.

<sup>14</sup> If the Complaints Panel has already decided on the structure for the meeting, please select Option 1 or Option 2 accordingly. (As drafted, the Complaints Policy allows for flexibility in the approach of the Complaints Panel. The Complaints Panel may choose to proceed in the traditional route, where all parties are present (Option 1) or alternatively, they may decide that the Complaints Panel meeting should take place sequentially (Option 2).) If the Complaints Panel has yet to decide on how the meeting will proceed, this detail can be omitted and followed up at a later date.

<sup>15</sup> This timeframe should correspond with the timeframe stipulated within the Complaints policy. The Policy provides that the Complaints Panel will write to parents with its decision as soon as reasonably practicable, and ideally, within 28 school days of the Complaints Panel meeting.



- uphold the complaints in whole or in part;
- dismiss the complaints in whole or in part; and/or
- make any recommendations to the School.

*In accordance with the Complaints Policy, the Complaints Panel will ensure that their findings and recommendations (if any) are provided to you [and] the Principal [and NAME OF PERSON COMPLAINED ABOUT]. These will be sent in writing within [28<sup>16</sup>] school days of the Complaints Panel meeting taking place.*

*The Stage 4 Complaints Panel meeting is the final stage of the Complaints Policy and marks the conclusion of the School's internal procedure. The decision of the Complaints Panel will be final.*

*I hope that this clarifies the procedure and I will be in touch in due course.*

*Yours sincerely*

**[NAME]**

**[POSITION<sup>17</sup>]**

***On behalf of the Complaints Panel***

---

<sup>16</sup> The timeframe here should correspond with the timeframe set out in the Complaints Policy. The Policy provides that within 28 school days, a copy of the Complaints Panel's findings, and any recommendations, will be sent by electronic mail, or otherwise given to the parents (and, where relevant, the person complained about as well as the Chair of Trustees and the Principal).

<sup>17</sup> This should correspond with the Complaints Policy.