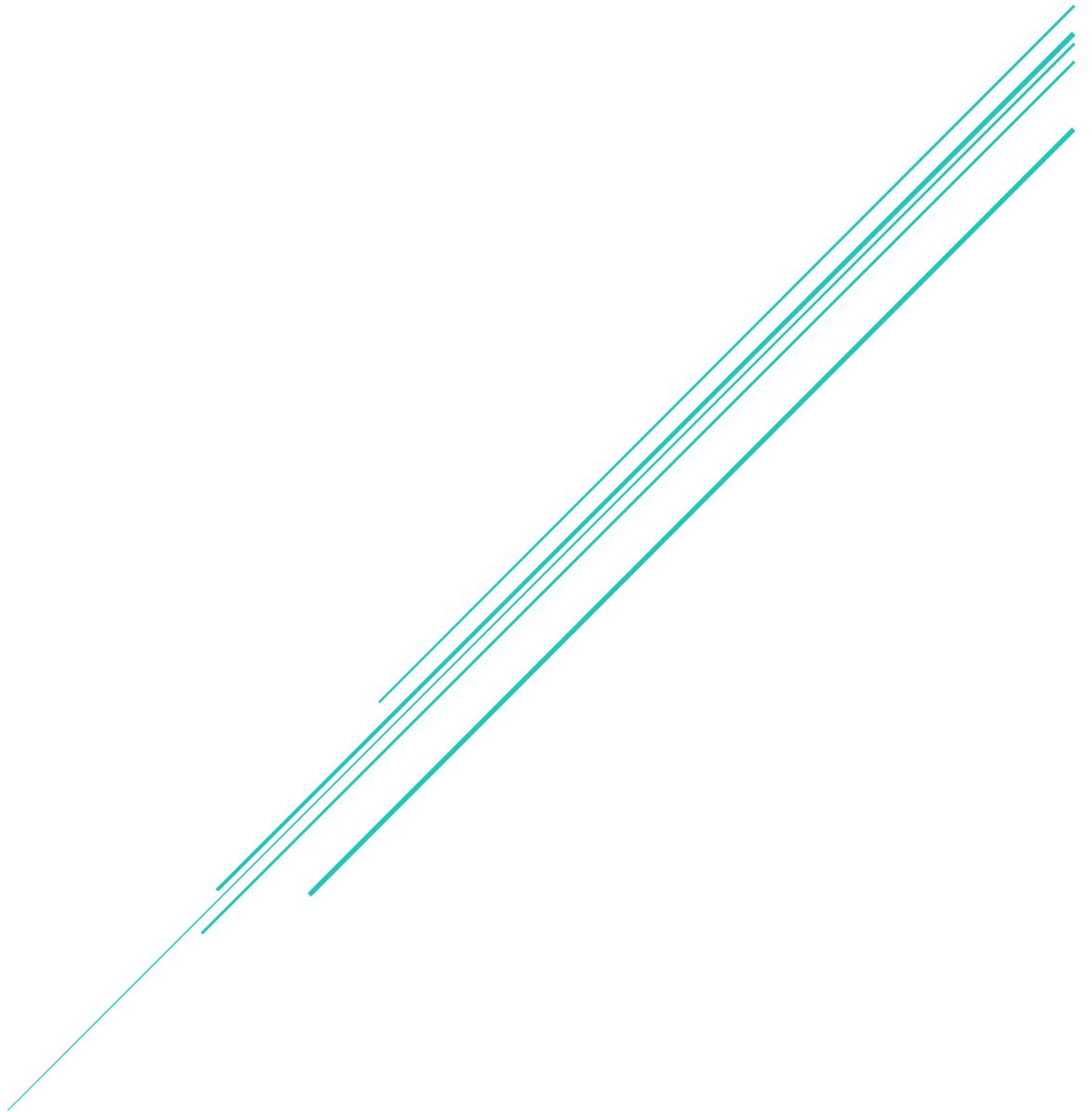


COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS &



Comments, Compliments & Complaints Policy

Forward

Acorn Digital Learning is an Online School for children and young people who are: on roll at a school but not currently able to attend, or are not currently on roll at a school but *are/are due to be* settling into a new social care setting.

We are therefore recognised as an alternative provider. All students accessing our school also have a Designated Safeguarding Lead or Social Worker connected to them.

Our students are based nationwide and access their educational material from their home or school base.

Our Head teacher is our designated safeguarding lead and all of our staff are NSPCC trained in Child Protection. In the event of a concern, our staff will follow our reporting protocol, separate policy.

We take all safeguarding matters seriously and will ensure that we report them accordingly. If the concern relates to any of our staff, an online interaction with another student accessing the online classroom or an event that has occurred during our lessons – these matters will be reported to the Head teacher of Acorn Digital Learning, **in the first instance.**

In the event of a matter that puts a child at significant and immediate risk we will report our concern directly to the LADO of the Local Authority where the child is based or to the Police.

In all circumstances all matters will also be forwarded to the relevant DSL and/or social worker connected to the child/ren involved.

Policy

We endeavour to provide the best service to our students and in turn those we work in partnership with (parents, referring officers, schools, social workers and local authorities).

We take the stance that our practice is ever evolving to reflect updates in educational pedagogy, research and the changing complexities of our students. We invite comments on our service as a means to further improve and adapt our approach.

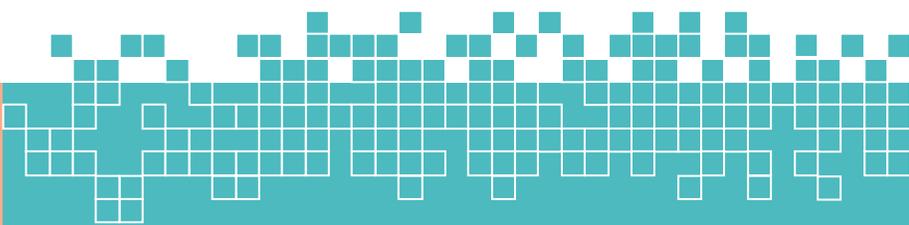
There a range of ways to contact us and we aim to work with you to find the most effective means of communication for your circumstances.

Comments

Our general email inbox is : acorndigitallearning@nfa.co.uk This is a shared inbox and so we ask if your comment is intended for a specific member of staff you detail this within the subject line.

We treat our students as young adult s and design our sessions around maximum engagement. Therefore, if the student that you are connected to has a comment to make we would ask that they are encouraged to raise these in the session via the private chat function or via the internal Canvas email system, where appropriate.

We aim to acknowledge receipt of your comment within 24 hours of receipt, however there are exceptions to this relating to term dates and weekends. There will be circumstances where a more detailed response is required therefore you may receive an additional response within one week of receipt. If no acknowledgement of your message is received please contact us again, if preferred we have our general number that can be used. Again this is a shared number so please be specific if leaving a voice message: 07770 042747



Compliments

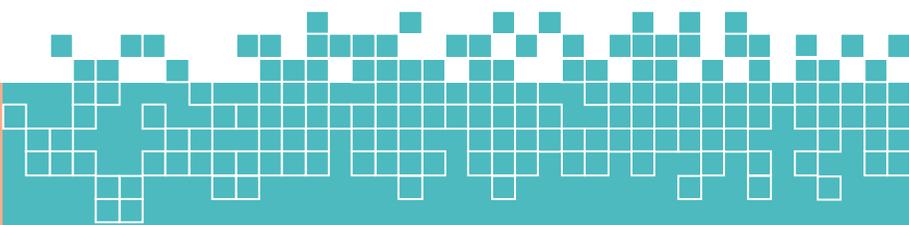
It's great to receive feedback when something has worked well. It means we can further incorporate what is successful in our approach across our provision. It also allows us to give recognition to the student/s or member/s of staff involved.

We have a recognition system in place. It is usually the staff that inform us of a successful lesson or outstanding work produced by a student. However, we welcome others contributing to this and celebrating success with us. Please see the process described within the 'comments' section. All we ask is that you entitle any email or voice message with the term 'compliment'. If you do not receive a response, please contact us again. We anticipate further developing our recognition systems, particularly within our website.

Concerns and complaints

On occasion things don't deliver in the way we would hope. This saddens us and we will do our utmost to improve the learning experience on our platform. It is always easier to deal with difficult situations proactively and where we anticipate there may be difficulties our intention is to put measures in place to minimise impact. It is best to contact us as soon as you notice a difficulty so we can work together to find a solution. Similarly, we will contact you if we notice something. Please see the process described within the 'comments' section. All we ask is that you entitle any email or voice message with the term 'concern'. If you do not receive a response, please contact us again.

Useful terms to reference when considering a complaint:



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 generally defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally (Stage 1), without the need to invoke formal procedures (Stages 2 & 3).

We take all concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve any matter raised, as quickly as possible.

Who can make a complaint?

Any person, including members of the general public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services provided, unless separate statutory procedures apply (such as exclusions or admissions).

The complaints procedure does not apply to prospective pupils who have no right of complaint.

Complaints from Parents/Carers

The procedures set out below only relate to complaints from parents of pupils, i.e. persons for whom education is being provided at the school. The process set out below does not cover complaints from parents of pupils who have left (except in cases where the complaints process was started when the pupil was still being educated at the school).

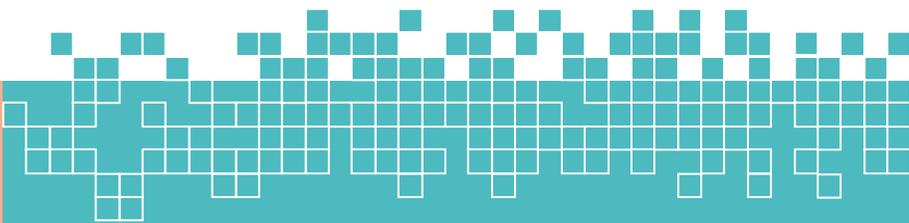
Complaints (Informal and Formal)

If you are not satisfied with the manner in which your concern has been handled, then there is a means of escalating your concern to a complaint.

Please note you should follow the processes as described above within 'concerns' section in the first instance, unless you feel the situation is significantly more serious and a student has been put at risk.

Stage 1 (informal)

At this stage of a complaint, dialogue about the situation is to be addressed directly to the



Head teacher of Acorn Digital Learning; Carole Austin.

You will be given both her direct dial number and email, however please appreciate as a Head teacher within a large organisation she may not always be able to respond immediately. Responses will be timely; acknowledgement of receipt within 24 hours and a more detailed response within 10 working days (there will be some exceptions to these timescales relating to weekends and term dates). The phone will only be in operation during office hours, calls outside of office hours will go straight to voice mail.

The Head teacher aims to listen and consider the points raised. She will also ask what would be your ideal outcome. The ideal outcome may not always be possible but it will help to understand the direction of thought and potential solutions.

Stage 2 (formal)

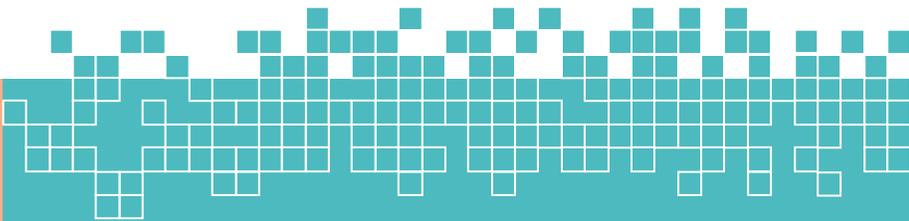
If the complainant is not satisfied with the response at Stage 1 they should write formally to the Head teacher addressing the letter to Bolton Office:

Carole Austin

Head teacher - Acorn Digital Learning
OFG Outcomes First Group | 1 Merchants Place |
River Street | Bolton | BL2 1BX

The Head teacher will conduct further investigation based on any additional detail included within the formal letter received. Acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint will be issued in writing to the postal address detailed. If it is felt that timescales surrounding this investigation will exceed 10 working days, then the letter will detail this.

If the complaint is against the Head teacher, then the complaint should be addressed to the Assistant Director responsible for Acorn Digital Learning: Craig Ribbons, who will investigate and respond within 20 days of receipt.



Stage 3 (formal)

If the complainant remains unsatisfied with the responses given at Stage 2. They should inform the Assistant Director Craig Ribbons, in writing via Bolton Office.

The Assistant Director will then arrange a panel hearing. The panel will comprise of three people not directly involved in the matters detailed within the complaint. At least one member of the panel will be independent of the running and management of the school.

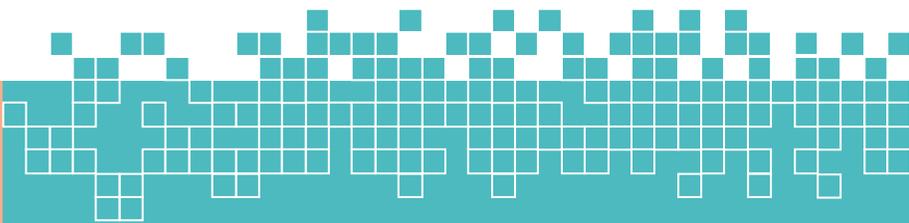
The date of the panel meeting will take into account the availability of the complainant as well as the panel members but will take place within a 30 working day timeframe.

As the school operates nationwide, there may not be a suitable geographical location to host the panel meeting. In this circumstance the panel and complainant will convene within an online platform with fully operating webcams and microphones (replicating the manner in which the school operates).

A preference would be that a geographical location can be sought being considerate of the complainant and ideally within a 30-mile radius of their home address.

The complainant will be invited to bring with them another person to support them at the panel hearing if they wish (this should not be a legal representative).

The panel will hear the complaint and will hear the outcome of the school's investigations and its response to these. The panel will then make findings and recommendations which will be communicated in writing within 10 working days of the conclusion of the hearing to the



Proprietor, Assistant Director, Head teacher, the complainant and where applicable and appropriate, the person complained about.

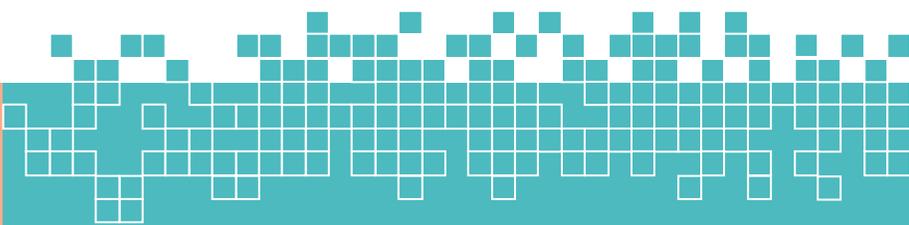
If a complainant does not exercise the right to attend, the panel will meet in line with this policy. The school's arrangements for the panel hearing will be reasonable in order to facilitate the complainant exercising the right of attendance.

A written record of all complaints and their resolution, whether they proceeded to a panel hearing or not, will be kept by the Head teacher (Equality Act 2010) and will be made available to the Proprietor and Ofsted Inspectors on request. The school will record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. These records and any correspondence relating to a complaint will remain confidential, except where the Secretary of State or an official body conducting an inspection, requests access to the records.

The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding academic year will be published on the school website.

This complaints procedure, as required by law in paragraph 33 (Part 7 of the Independent School Standards) and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year will be made available on the school's website.

Date received	Stage escalated to	Date resolution sought	How was this communicated	Nature of complaint	Person dealing with complaint



Unreasonable, vexatious or malicious complaints:

Acorn Digital Learning takes all complaints seriously and actively looks for appropriate solutions that put learners' best interests at the heart of their approach. The school is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially. We are focused on providing a high quality service and will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school, however we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behavior and will take action to protect staff from that behavior, including that which is abusive, offensive and threatening.

On occasion a complaint may be considered unreasonable, vexatious or malicious. If a complaint falls into the categories of malicious or slanderous, actions will be taken against the complainant as a means of protecting our learners' best interests. Where a complainant hinders our operational practice due to the frequency and nature of their contact, this is also considered unreasonable. Complainants should limit further communication about the complaint whilst it is being progressed. It is not helpful to the situation and could delay an outcome being reached.

The Head teacher (or Assistant Director) will make contact to raise their concern prior to categorising the complainant's approach as 'unreasonable', giving the complainant an opportunity to make necessary adaptations. If these actions are not taken and levels of disruption continue, a communication plan will be issued with specifics about number of and means of making contact. This communication plan will stay in place for up to 6 months before being reviewed.

Where necessary this will be escalated to the police especially where contact is aggressive or violent.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

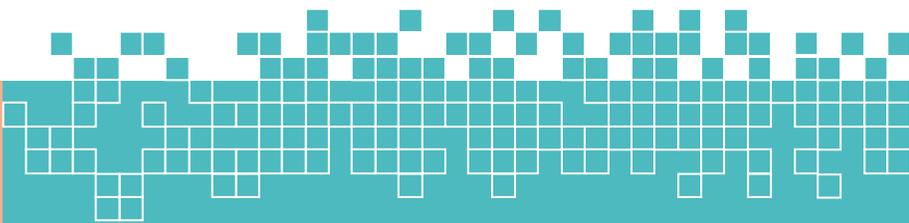
- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or 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 school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:

- maliciously;
- aggressively;
- using threats, intimidation or violence;
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- knowing it to be false;
- using falsified information;
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

Complaints from Students

Complaints from students are not included within the process above as they may require involvement of additional specialist agencies such as Children's services. Student's welfare is paramount to our practice and student voice is key to our approach. This is covered in other policies however please see OFG guidance below for a general overview. Within this guidance please note that the term 'pupils' is used whereas in our setting we use the term 'students'.



Complaints from Pupils

The procedures below will be followed in the event of a pupil making a complaint against a member of staff, a fellow pupil or any other person or situation either in school or outside.

Pupils may wish to talk to an adult they trust about a situation relating to school or to a situation outside school.

Pupils are reminded that, although they may speak to any member of staff, there may be occasions where information will have to be referred to other agencies such as Children’s Services.

Within school, pupils may talk to any member of Education Staff.

A pupil may merely need a trusted adult to talk a situation through with and may not be making a formal complaint. However, all actual complaints made by pupils will be recorded by the member of staff in the Complaints Log. The school response to the complaint will also be recorded. If the complaint is serious the pupil’s parents/carers will be informed of both the complaint and the outcome. Some complaints will be referred to other agencies or to the Local Authority. If necessary, a meeting will be called to discuss the issues further.

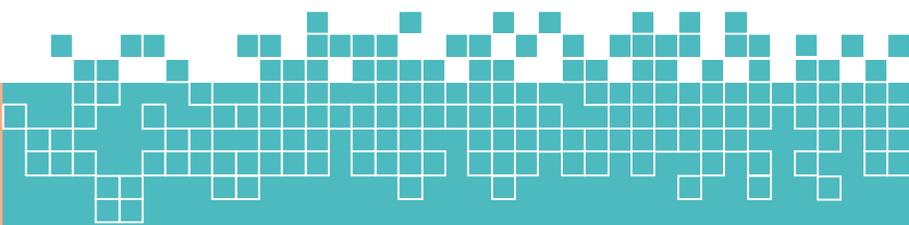
A pupil may ask to speak to an adult from an outside agency. The school will, wherever possible, put the pupil in contact with a representative of the appropriate agency. The referral will be noted in the pupil’s file.

If the complaint is an allegation against a member of staff then the school’s safeguarding policy must be followed in addition to recording the complaint. Failure to follow this process may result in disciplinary action.

We will provide a copy of this policy on request and have a copy available on our website. Any requests for amendments/additions to the policy must be put in writing for the attention of the Head teacher of Acorn Digital Learning:
acorndigitallearning@nfa.co.uk

Complaints Outcome Form

School / IFA / Residential Setting		Date of Complaint		Manager	
Date Complaint Resolved					



Brief Outline of Complaint

Action Taken to Resolve Complaint

