

## Complaints Policy (1 year review)

April 2026

The Paddock is a calm and nurturing alternative provision in Shropshire, offering personalised, research-informed support for young people who need a smaller, more flexible approach to learning. We specialise in helping academically capable students who currently find mainstream environments overwhelming, providing a peaceful space where they can re-engage, rebuild confidence, and thrive.

We recognise that there may be times when other stakeholders do not feel that our efforts meet their expectations. We have therefore produced this policy in order to make the process for complaints, and how they will be handled, clear, transparent and as easy to follow as possible in order to ensure the best possible support for our young people.

### Overview of the complaints procedure

At any stage of the process, a complaint may be resolved, and the following stages may not be required.

Complaints at **The Paddock** will be handled through the following stages:

**Initial concern:** A staff member will attempt to resolve the issue informally where possible.

**Stage One – Informal:** If the concern cannot be resolved at the initial stage, the complaint will be heard by a senior member of staff who is not the subject of the complaint.

**Stage Two – Formal:** If the informal process does not lead to a satisfactory outcome, the complaint should be formalised in writing. Support will be provided for anyone unable to do this themselves. The complaints co-ordinator will acknowledge receipt and refer the matter to a hearing with the Principal or another senior leader who has not previously been involved.

**Stage Three – Principal Review:** If the complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage Two, the escalation will be acknowledged by the complaints co-ordinator and the complaint will be reviewed by the Principal.

**Stage Four – Advisory Board Panel / External Review:** If the complaint is still not resolved following Stage Three, it will be referred to the Chair of the Advisory Board, who will convene a Complaints Panel. If the complainant believes the complaint has not been handled correctly after all stages have been completed.

**Flexibility:** In some cases, additional steps may be appropriate, such as further meetings between the complainant and relevant staff, additional investigation, or the involvement of an external agency to provide an independent review.

Each complaint will be treated individually unless it forms part of a pattern within a 12-month period.

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

You can make a complaint if you are:

- A parent or carer of a current young person partner
- A parent or carer of a young person partner (within six months of them leaving)
- Anyone who has received a service or support from The Paddock

### **What this policy *doesn't* cover**

Some issues follow different legal processes, so this complaints procedure does **not** apply to:

- Admissions
- Exclusions
- Safeguarding or child protection concerns

Please see our separate policies for these issues.

### **What counts as a concern or a complaint?**

- **Concern:** An informal worry or issue you raise with a member of staff.
- **Complaint:** A formal statement that The Paddock has done something wrong or failed to act.

We encourage parents to raise concerns informally first, so we can resolve issues quickly and to ensure that the young people get the very best support moving forward.

### **Safeguarding and serious concerns**

If your complaint suggests that a child may be at risk of harm (including physical, emotional or sexual abuse, or neglect), The Paddock must immediately refer the matter to:

- Children's or Adults' Social Care
- The police
- Or another appropriate agency

This may pause or replace the usual complaints process.

If the concern involves a member of staff, the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) will be informed and the correct safeguarding procedures will be followed.

### **What this policy aims to do**

Our complaints process is designed to make sure that any worries or concerns you have are handled **fairly, quickly and respectfully**. We aim to:

- **Resolve issues informally whenever possible**, so problems can be sorted out quickly and calmly
- **Make the process easy to find and understand**, so parents know what to do and who to speak to
- **Keep the process simple and straightforward**

- **Remain impartial**, ensuring everyone is treated fairly
- **Handle complaints promptly**, following clear steps and keeping you updated
- **Avoid conflict**, focusing on solutions rather than blame
- **Set clear timeframes**, so you know when to expect a response
- **Carry out a full and fair investigation**, including using an independent person if needed
- **Respect confidentiality**, sharing information only with those who need to know
- **Address all the issues raised**, offering a clear response and taking action where needed
- **Learn from complaints**, using feedback to improve our services and practice

We ask all parents to engage respectfully with the process and avoid using social media to raise or escalate concerns.

When a complaint is investigated, the person handling it will:

- Find out what has happened so far and who has been involved
- Make sure they fully understand the complaint and what is still unresolved
- Speak with you if they need more information or clarification
- Ask what you feel would help put things right
- Talk to anyone involved, including staff, and allow them to bring someone with them if they wish
- Approach the investigation with an open mind
- Keep clear notes of all meetings and conversations

The aim is always to understand the situation properly and fairly.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, including those resolved informally, and these records will show whether the complaint progressed to a panel hearing. All complaint records will remain confidential and will only be shared when the Paddock is legally required to disclose information.

### **Vexatious Complaints**

At The Paddock, we do everything we can to resolve complaints fairly and quickly. Most concerns are settled through the normal stages of the complaints process. However, there may be rare occasions when:

- All stages of the complaints procedure have been completed, **but the complainant is still not satisfied**, or
- The same issue is repeatedly raised even after a full investigation and response.

When this happens, and the complaint has already been fully dealt with, the **Chair of the Advisory Board** may write to the complainant to explain that:

- The complaints procedure has been followed correctly
- The matter is now closed
- The Paddock will not reopen the same issue again

The Paddock also follows national guidance (see Office for National Statistics) when deciding whether a complaint may be **vexatious or malicious**—meaning it is being made repeatedly without new evidence, or with the intention of causing disruption rather than resolving a genuine concern.

Directors will review all complaints to ensure that statutory duties are consistently met and that any needs for staff training and / or conduct are met.

## **Informal Complaints Stage**

### **Stage one**

At The Paddock, we want to resolve concerns as early as possible. Often, a quick conversation with the right member of staff can sort things out before they become a formal complaint.

### **Raising a Concern**

- Staff will help decide whether your concern needs to be dealt with informally or as a formal complaint.
- If the issue cannot be resolved at the first stage, you can complete a complaints form (staff can help you with this if needed).
- The complaint will then be passed to the Paddock's complaints co-ordinator.

### **If You Prefer Not to Speak to a Particular Staff Member**

- We will respect your wishes and arrange for someone else to handle your concern.
- If your complaint is about the Principal, it will be passed directly to the Director(s) or Chair of the Advisory Board.

### **If a Staff Member Feels Unable to Handle a Complaint**

- They may ask a more senior colleague to take over, to ensure the process is fair and impartial.

### **If You Speak to an Advisor First**

- They will direct you to the correct person and explain the complaints procedure.
- Advisors will not deal with complaints themselves, as they may need to be part of a panel later in the process.

### **Each Complaint Is Treated Separately**

- Every complaint is handled on its own, unless several issues arise within the same 12-month period.

## **Formal Complaints Stage**

### **Stage 2 – Senior Leader Review**

If you're not satisfied with how your concern was handled at Stage 1, you can move to Stage 2.

- You will need to put your complaint in writing (staff can help you if needed).
- A senior leader or the Principal will gather information and decide what needs to happen next.

- You will receive an acknowledgement within **48 school working hours**.
- The school will investigate your complaint within **5 school working days**.
- Once the investigation is complete, you will receive a written response.
- If you are still unhappy, you can move to Stage 3 by writing to the Principal.

### Stage 3 – Principal Review

If your complaint reaches this stage:

- You will receive an acknowledgement within **5 school working days**.
- The Principal will investigate the complaint within **15 school working days**.
- You will then receive a formal written response explaining the outcome.
- If you remain dissatisfied, you can request a meeting with the Director(s) or Chair of the Advisory Board.

### Stage 4 – Advisory Board Panel

If your complaint reaches the final stage:

- You will need to write to the Director(s) with details of your complaint.
- The complaints co-ordinator will arrange a meeting with an **Appeal Panel**.
- The panel will include **three to five people**, including at least **one independent member**.
- The panel may:
  - Hear your appeal
  - Review how the complaint was handled
  - Make recommendations for improvements

The panel will choose its own chair and follow the Paddock’s formal procedures for hearing complaints. The Panel will then write to the complainant within 5 working days with their decision. The outcome of the Panel will be one of the following...

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- up hold the complaint in whole or in part
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes to the school’s systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not reoccur.

Policy	Complaints Policy
Date created	April 2026
Date reviewed	
Date of Next review	April 2027
Signed	
Luke Baker	L. Baker

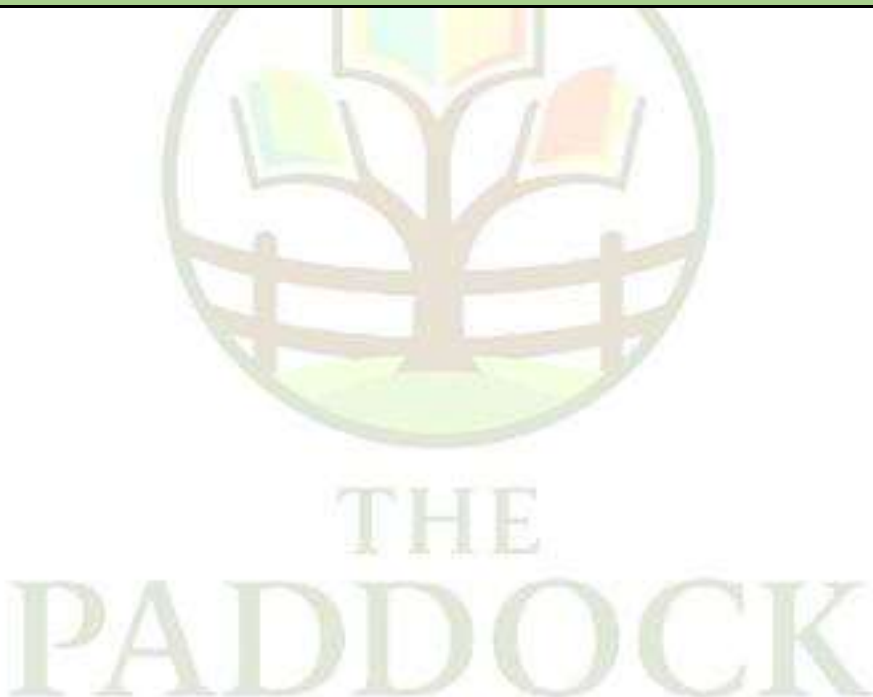
## Complaints form



THE  
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Your name:	
Young person's name:	
Your relationship to the young person:	
Address:	
Telephone:	

Please give details of your complaint below:



What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint. (Who did you speak to and what was the response)?

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? YES/NO

If so, please give the details:

Signature:

Date:

**OFFICIAL USE**

Date acknowledgement sent

By who

Complaint referred to

Date

**AGREED OUTCOMES**



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