



Introduction

It is to be hoped that any concerns expressed by students/parents/carers can be dealt with without the need for the formal complaints procedure.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the New Reflexions Complaints Policy.

General Principles

- All complaints will be dealt with as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- All complaints received will be recorded in the school's complaints record. The outcome of the complaint will also be recorded, together with the reasons for the decision.
- All records of complaints and details of any investigations will be kept confidential.
- All complaints will be investigated fully, fairly and carefully and complainants will be kept informed of progress.
- The school will always seek to resolve issues in the most amicable way possible.

Stage 1a – Informal Resolution – timescale 48 hours

Parents, carers or guardians should, in the first instance, make an appointment to speak to the relevant teacher about the concern. It is best to resolve issues at this point.

Guidance on informal level 1a:

- *Concerns should initially be handled informally in a manner that offers the best way of resolving issues.*
- *A teacher should offer an appointment to discuss the issue as quickly as possible, as this will give both parties time to talk about it calmly and politely without being interrupted. It will also show a commitment to resolving issues.*
- *It is important for parents/carers to recognise that schools are busy organisations and that it may not be possible to offer an appointment straight away.*
- *The parties involved should be encouraged to offer their view of what would be a realistic resolution to the problem.*

Stage 1b – Informal Resolution – timescale 72 hours

Parents, carers or guardians dissatisfied with the result of the discussions with the teacher should ask for an appointment to meet with the head teacher



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If a resolution to the issue is proving difficult to find, the head teacher can speak to the Directors about the issue who may be willing to offer informal intervention.

Guidance on informal level 1b:

- *It is always best to resolve issues informally at the earliest possible time but if the person is not satisfied with the result of the talk with the teacher then he/she can ask for an appointment to meet with the head teacher*
- *It is in everyone's interest, particularly the child or children, for concerns and complaints to be sorted out quickly and smoothly.*
- *The aim should be that discussions end on a positive note with no bad feeling.*
- *It is good practice for head teachers to write a letter to parents summarising what has been agreed regarding the issue.*
- *The head teacher, may feel that a particular Director's input would be helpful in bringing about a resolution.*

It is hoped that most problems will have been resolved by now.

Stage 2 – formal complaint letter to head teacher – timescale 5 school days

An issue that has not been resolved through the informal stages can become an official complaint.

Parents, carers or guardians wishing to move to stage 2 must write a formal letter of complaint to the head teacher. The letter will need to set out clearly the issues which have previously been discussed and why the parent, carer or guardian considers the issue to be unresolved.

Head teachers should consider the complaint and discuss a resolution with the complainant. The head teacher should offer a resolution to the complainant in writing within 10 school days of receipt of the letter.

Guidance on stage 2 – formal complaint:

- *An unresolved issue can now move to a formal complaint. This is a serious step to be taken. In consideration of future home/school relationships everyone concerned will need to negotiate an agreement and concentrate on finding a resolution to the issue.*
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Concerns or complaints specifically about the head teacher.

The decision that the head teacher has made as a result of the complaint does not become a complaint about the head teacher. If the complainant feels the complaint has not been resolved he/she should proceed to Stage 3, a Complaints Panel.

If, the concern or complaint is specifically about the head teacher and is unable to be resolved at the informal stage, then it will be necessary for the complainant to formally complain to the Company Directors. The school will provide the Director's name and the complainant should write to him or her at the school address marking the envelope 'urgent, private and confidential'. The Directors should acknowledge the complainant's letter in writing within 5 school days of receipt.

Stage 3 – formal complaint requesting a Proprietors' Complaints Panel – convened within 15 working days.

Time Scales:

Receipt of complainant's letter	Acknowledgement within 5 school days
Receipt of complainant's letter	Complaints Panel meeting within 15 school days (unless this goes into school holidays)
Written documentation sent to Complaints Panel Members and complainant and head teacher	5 school days before meeting.
Complaints Panel members decision communicated to all concerned	As soon as possible but within 10 school days of meeting.

Complainants wishing to move to Stage 3 of the formal complaints procedure will need to write a letter to the Directors to request that a Complaints Panel meets to hear the complaint. This formal complaint letter must be received within 10 school days of the last meeting with the head teacher concerning the issue. The complainant should write to the Directors at the school address marking the envelope 'urgent and confidential'. The letter will need to set out the complaint that has previously been formally discussed with the head teacher and show why the matter is not resolved.

Before the meeting:

The Directors should appoint a clerk to the Complaints Panel, acknowledge the complainant's letter in writing within 5 school days of receipt and arrange for a panel of 3 people, one of whom will be independent of the school and the company, to meet within 15 school days of receipt. It must be recognised that if the letter is received within 14 school days to the end of term it may not be possible to organise

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the complaints panel meeting. In this case the matter should be dealt with within 10 school days of the school reopening.

The head teacher should be given a copy of the complainant's letter and written documentation should be requested from the school. The clerk should send both the complainant's letter and the school documentation to the Complaints Panel members, complainant and head teacher (and anyone else involved in the meeting) at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting.

The complainant and head teacher will be invited to attend the Complaints Panel meeting to give a verbal statement in support of their documentation. Each of them can bring someone to support them if they wish.

At the meeting:

The complainant and head teacher (or his/her representative) should provide all the relevant information they wish and the Complaints Panel members should clarify any points. After the complainant and head teacher (or his/her representative) have provided all the information they wish, the chair will ask all parties to leave except the panel members and the clerk.

After the meeting:

The Complaints Panel will write to all concerned within 10 school days to explain their decision and suggest a resolution to the problem, if appropriate. The decision of the Complaints Panel is final.

Anyone can complain to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he or she believes that a School or Proprietor is acting "unreasonably" or is failing to carry out its statutory duties properly.

Guidance on stage 3 - formal:

Before the meeting:

- *The formal complaints letter should be passed to the vice-chair if the chair will be unable to receive the letter within 5 days.*
- *Members of the Proprietors' Complaints Panel should have no prior knowledge of the complaint and it is, therefore, unlikely that staff Proprietors will be members of the panel.*

At the meeting:

- *The Complaints Panel must be made up of at least three members and a clerk.*
- *Although this is a formal meeting, every effort should be made to make it as informal as possible for all concerned.*
- *Everyone attending should be in the room at the same time*



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- Consideration may need to be given to the seating arrangements to make everyone feel equal and comfortable.
- The clerk should take notes of the meeting, listing who is present:
 - Proprietors, stating who is the Chair of the Proprietors' Complaints Panel
 - Head teacher (or his/her representative) and any other members of school staff
 - Parents and anyone accompanying them e.g. friend
 - Clerk
- The chair of the Proprietors' Complaints Panel should open the meeting stating the purpose and the format of the meeting to clarify this to all in attendance.
- People present should introduce themselves stating their reason for being at the meeting.
- The chair of the Proprietors' Complaints Panel should request a verbal statement from the complainant in support of his or her written letter of complaint and why s/he feels the issue has not been resolved. The Proprietors' Complaints Panel members can ask questions to make sure they understand the issue from the parent's point of view.
- The chair of the Proprietors' Complaints Panel should request a verbal statement from the head teacher (or his/her representative) in support of his/her written account of the complaint and the steps taken to resolve the issue. The Proprietors' Complaints Panel members can ask questions to make sure they understand the issue from the head teacher's point of view.
- The members of the Proprietors' Complaints Panel should make sure they fully understand the issues and ask any further questions to clarify any points that are still not clear to them.
- The chair of the Proprietors' Complaints Panel must ask the complainant and the head teacher (or his/her representative) if they are satisfied that they have provided all the information they wanted or if there is something they wish to add and if they feel they have had a fair hearing.
- When the Proprietors' Complaints Panel members understand all the issues, the chair will ask all parties to leave except the panel members and the clerk.

After the meeting:

- The Proprietors' Complaints Panel members then discuss the issues in private and the clerk remains to record the decision.
- The Panel members will need to consider the information, come to a decision and suggest a way to resolve the issue taking into account the best interests of the child or children.
- When the Panel have reached a decision the Clerk will inform everyone concerned in writing as soon as possible, but in any event, within 10 school days of the panel meeting.

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The decision of the Proprietor's Complaints Panel is final.

Once a Proprietor's Complaints Panel has heard a complaint, and it is clear that correct procedures have been followed, that specific complaint cannot be reopened. If a request is received in this respect, the Proprietors should inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

Any complaints concerning the conduct of school staff will be handled in accordance with the school's internal disciplinary procedures. The details of such an investigation will remain confidential.

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