



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS

This policy is available for parents of prospective and current pupils, but only applies to parents of current pupils of the school and past pupils if a complaint was raised when the pupil was still registered, but does not cover exclusions (please refer to the Behaviour policy) The Complaints Procedure is publicly available on the school website and, on request, a copy (which can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required) may be obtained from the School Office.

- **Monitoring and Review:** This procedure is subject to continuous monitoring, refinement and audit by the Head to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. The Head logs all complaints (formal and informal) received by the school and records at which stage and how they were resolved. The record includes, at least: the person making the complaint, the date of the complaint, the nature of the complaint, any action taken and the outcome of the complaint. The logging of complaints for management purposes enables patterns of concern to be monitored.
- The Head will undertake a full annual review of this procedure, inclusive of its implementation and the efficiency with which the related duties have been discharged. Any deficiencies or weaknesses will be remedied immediately and without delay. They also retain details of the number of complaints, registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

Signed: Mr J Forster

January 2023

Review: January 2024

This policy will be reviewed no later than January 2024, or earlier if changes in legislation, regulatory requirements or best practice guidelines.

Timescales

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. The complaint will normally be resolved within twenty eight (28) days of the lodging of the complaint to its resolution whenever possible. Written complaints about the EYFS provision will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days. Allowable exceptions to this rule are for instances when persons involved in the complaint are unavailable during holiday periods. In this case the parents will be kept informed. However, as far as possible, the meeting should not be delayed if the referral comes at the end of term, especially at the end of the Summer Term. Since the aim of the procedure is to resolve the issue and effect reconciliation if necessary, it will be best if the matter can come to the Panel as quickly as possible, especially if the parents will already have been engaged over a longer period in attempts to put things right.

Introduction

Riddlesworth Hall School will ensure that the quality of teaching and pastoral care offered to pupils will be of the highest order. However, if parents have a complaint they can expect it to be treated by the school in accordance with this procedure. We are always willing to listen to concerns and anxieties, parental and pupil concerns being of particular importance. We aim for the closest co-operation between parents and the teachers to whom our pupils are entrusted. Dealing with parental concerns is a vital part of the ethos and mission of Riddlesworth Hall School. We aim to be open about the decisions we make and the actions we take and will always explain our rationale.

A complaint is likely to arise when there are issues of physical or emotional wellbeing and security at stake, or when the school's stated aims or values are being ignored. A breach of the law will always constitute a complaint. If parents of pupils at the school do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the school in accordance with this procedure. We use the term "complainant" to refer to the individual or individuals making the complaint. Complaints will be resolved either to the complainant's satisfaction, or with an otherwise appropriate outcome which balances the rights and duties of pupils. At every stage of the procedure, the handling of the complaint will be swift (using the agreed time frame), fair and necessarily confidential. Throughout the process, Riddlesworth Hall School will be willing to: listen, learn, admit mistakes, apologise if appropriate, address any issues raised and change practices and procedures if appropriate. In situations concerning alleged abuse, the Child Protection Procedures take precedence over the following complaints procedure. For any complaint that involves a potential child protection issue, this must be reported immediately to the Head or the Deputy DSL (See our Child Protection Policy for details of the procedure). Separate procedures will also apply if the Head excludes or requires the removal of a child from the School and the parents seek a review of that decision.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution *(References to the number of working days refer to term-time only)*

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally if parents feel able to voice them as soon as they arise. Obviously, the more information the School gives to parents the less scope there is for misunderstanding. Parents will be encouraged to give feedback, preferably to the person concerned. In most cases, discussion, explanation, further information or an apology, if appropriate, will resolve any issues. Every effort will be made to allay concerns at this stage and with the least possible formality. Our ideal is that no concern should ever become a formal complaint, as through open dialogue, a resolution should always be accomplished.
- If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their child's Form Tutor. In most cases the matter will be resolved straight away by this means to the parent's satisfaction. If the person contacted cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary to consult the Head.
- The member of staff dealing with the matter will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date they were received. A written record is to be kept of the date a resolution was reached and the agreed nature of this.
- Should the matter not be resolved within five (5) school days, or in the event that Riddlesworth Hall School and the parents fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure. A written record is to be kept of the date a resolution was reached and the agreed nature of this. The parents will then be informed in writing.
- Although a written complaint is considered to be formal, this does not mean that the formal stage is automatically triggered whenever a concern is expressed in writing, for example, by email. These complaints will be treated at first in the informal resolution stage.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution *(References to the number of working days refer to term-time only)*

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head who will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head will speak to the parents concerned, normally on the day of receiving the complaint, so as to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- The Head will:

Riddlesworth Hall School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of our pupils and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. It is our aim that all pupils fulfil their potential.

- o establish what has happened so far and who has been involved; clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- o meet with the complainant or contact them clarifying what the complainant feels would resolve the issue;
- o interview those involved, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish and
- o conduct each interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in questioning and keep notes of each interview.
- Within five (5) school days of receiving the complaint, the Head will complete the investigation and contact the complainant to arrange a meeting. At any point in the process the Head may decide or agree to commission a further investigation. If this occurs, the timescale may be extended by a further five (5) school days and the complainant will be informed in writing of the extension and the reason for it.
- When the investigation is complete, the Head will meet the complainant to try to resolve the complaint. Any of the following may be appropriate at this point:
 - o an acknowledgement that the complaint is valid in whole or in part; an apology; an explanation; clarification of any misunderstanding; an admission that the situation could have been handled better or differently;
 - o an assurance that the event complained of will not recur; an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure it will not be repeated and
 - o an undertaking to review school Policies in light of the complaint.
- Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head will give reasons for the decision. A written record will also be kept of when a final outcome was reached.
- The Head will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Should a parent or guardian have a complaint about the Head it must be put in writing to the Chair of the Advisory Board, who investigates in the same way as with any other complaint
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure

Stage 3 – Complaints Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution of this procedure) they will be referred to the Panel Convenor who has been appointed by the Head to call hearings of the Complaints Panel. This should be in writing and include the nature of the complaint and how the school has handled it so far. The Head is obliged to investigate the matter and will do everything possible to resolve the issue through a dialogue with the school. The contact details for the Panel Convenor are: Mrs Verity White v.white@riddlesworthhall.co.uk
- The Panel will consist of at least three people not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. The Department for Education has given the following guidance on the identity of an independent panel member. *“Our general view is that people who have held a position of responsibility and are used to scrutinising evidence and putting forward balanced arguments would be suitable. Examples of persons likely to be suitable are serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background and retired members of the Police Force might be considered.”* Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Head.
- The Panel Convenor, on behalf of the Panel, should agree with all parties the date of the Appeal Meeting within five (5) school days of receipt of the written referral of the complaint. The meeting itself should be held within fifteen (15) school days of the receipt of the referral. If the complainant or Head wishes to submit information in writing to the Panel this should be sent to the Panel Convenor at least five (5) days before the date of the hearing.
- If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than five (5) working days prior to the hearing.
- The complainant, who could be parents or guardians, may be accompanied at the panel hearing by a friend or relative. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.

- Where further investigation is required, the Complaints Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Complaints Panel will reach a decision and may make findings and recommendations, which it shall complete normally within five (5) working days of the Hearing.
- A copy of the Panel's findings, and/or any recommendation and the reasons for them will be:
 - sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about;
 - available for inspection on the school premises by the Head.

Role of the Panel Convenor is:

- to confirm to all parties in writing the date, time and venue of the hearing; to receive and distribute any documentation to be read before the hearing; to meet and welcome all parties as they arrive at the hearing; to record the proceedings and
- to notify all parties of the Panel's decision. The wording of any letters will be agreed with the Chair of the Panel.

The role of the Chair of the Panel is to ensure that:

- procedure is properly followed;
- the procedure for the hearing of the complaint is explained to all parties and that they have the opportunity to put their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed; all parties are put at ease, especially those who are unfamiliar with such a hearing;
- proceedings are kept as informal as possible and that everyone treats each other with respect and courtesy;
- the Panel operates in an open-minded and independent way and time is given for all parties to consider 'new' evidence.

Options open to the Panel: The Panel may:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part; dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on an appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint or recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not re-occur.

After the Hearing: The Chair of the Panel agrees with the Convenor the wording of the letter to be sent to both parties. The Convenor will:

- ensure that the letter is sent out in accordance with the agreed time scales and procedure as stated in Stage 3 of this policy;
- write up the notes of the meeting and gives a copy to the Chair of the Panel and
- ensure that any recommendation to change school policies or procedures is put on the agenda for the next meeting of the Board of Directors.

Confidentiality: Parents and Guardians can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Such correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except:

- where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 162A of the 2002 Act requests access to them; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

Record keeping for the Whole School: A written record of all complaints and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage, or proceed to a panel hearing, is kept by the Head for a minimum of three years. The record includes, at least: the person making the complaint, the date of the complaint, the nature of the complaint, any action taken and the outcome of the complaint. A written record will also be kept of when a final outcome was reached. The Head will examine this written record on an annual basis. The School will provide, on request to Ofsted, a written record of all complaints made during a specified period and the action that was taken as a result of each complaint. The number of formal complaints, received in an academic year, is made available to parents.

Complaints relating to boarding provision

The School's written record of complaints identifies those complaints relating to boarding provision separately from complaints relating to School practice, and any action taken by the School as a result of those complaints.

Legal Status: This policy incorporates the manner in which complaints are to be managed in accordance with Part 7, paragraph 33 (a) to (k) inclusive of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations currently in force along with the provision of information being made available in Part 6 Paragraph 32 (3) (f) of the Regulatory Requirements.

Complaints Procedure for Boarding Students

There is a separate complaints procedure for students' parents. A student's parents may wish to invoke the procedure available to them if they feel that the School has not dealt adequately with a complaint made by their child in accordance with the procedure described above.

There were no formal complaints in the year 2017-18.

There were no formal complaints in the year 2018-19.

There were no formal complaints in the year 2019-20.