

Complaints Policy

2023-2024

Approved by the Board of Governors

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Policy Contact: Mr William Yates, Deputy Head

Complaints Policy

Introduction

1. Seaford College aims to provide high quality teaching and pastoral care to its pupils. Occasionally, however, parents may wish to make a complaint, and this will be dealt with by the College in accordance with the following Complaints Procedure, which forms part of the College's system for quality control. Where appropriate the outcome of a complaint may be used to facilitate improvements in the service and facilities provided to members of the College community.
2. Any complaints that include allegations of possible child abuse should be made direct to the Head Master, in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy, which is on the College's website. Copies can be provided on request to anyone who would prefer a hard copy.
3. This procedure aims to:
 - a. Encourage the resolution of problems within the School community by informal means wherever possible.
 - b. Ensure that concerns are dealt with quickly, fully and fairly within clearly defined limits.
 - c. Provide effective responses and appropriate redress.
 - d. Maintain good working relationships between all members of the school community.
4. The College makes its Complaints Procedure available to all parents of pupils and of prospective pupils on the College's website and in the College's office during the school day, and the College will ensure that parents of pupils and of prospective pupils who request it are made aware that this document is available and of the form in which it is available, and of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year. In accordance with paragraph 32(1) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the College will also make available, on request, to Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE) or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), details of this Complaints Procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.
5. Although this Procedure is made available to parents of prospective pupils, it is not available for use by them; it may only be used by parents of current pupils.
6. Complaints by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil to which the complaint relates was still registered as a pupil at the College. The only exception to this is if the complaint is a review of a decision taken by the Head Master to exclude or require the removal of a pupil under clause [7] of the College's Terms and Conditions in which case such a review must be requested by no later than five working days from the date of the decision to exclude or require the removal of a pupil.

7. "Parent(s)" means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for a pupil about whom the complaint relates.

What Constitutes a Complaint?

8. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the College as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the College is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the College has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly.
9. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The College is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you raise in good faith.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

10. It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
11. If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their son or daughter's Tutor. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult the relevant Deputy Head.
12. A written and dated record of any concern or complaint will be made by the Tutor. A copy will be lodged with the Head Master. The complaint will be acknowledged. Should the matter not be resolved, or in the event that Tutor and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure. Informal resolution of a complaint should normally be completed within 10 working days.
13. If a complaint is against the Head Master, it should be made in the first instance to the Chairman of Governors whose contact details are available from the College on request.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

14. If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis then parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head Master. This letter should state that they want to deal with the matter under Formal Procedures. The Head Master will acknowledge the complaint in writing and will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate member of the Senior Management Team to investigate and take forward the complaint.

15. The Headmaster (or the nominated member of the Senior Management Team) will meet/speak to the parent(s) concerned, normally within 5 working days of receiving the complaint. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
16. It may be necessary for the Head Master (or the nominated member of the Senior Management Team) to carry out further investigations.
17. The Head Master will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relations to the complaint. These will be provided to the Panel in the event of a Stage 3 Panel Hearing being invoked.
18. Once the Head Master (or the nominated member of the Senior Management Team) 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. Reasons will be given as to why this decision has been reached. A decision regarding a formal complaint will normally be given, in writing, within 15 working days of the Head Master receiving the complaint.
19. If parents are still not satisfied with this decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.
20. In the event of a complaint about the Head Master the complaint should be made to the Chairman of Governors. The Chairman of Governors, or their nominee, will call for a full report from the Headmaster and for all the relevant documents. The Chairman of Governors or their nominee may also call for a briefing from members of staff, and will in most cases, speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the Chair of Governors or their nominee is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing. The Chair of Governors or their nominee will give reasons for his/her decision.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

21. If parents are still not satisfied they may write to the Chairman of Governors setting out their grounds of appeal within ten days of receiving the decision at Stage 2. It is not possible to move to this stage without having completed Stage 2 of this Procedure. Any supporting evidence which the parents wish to rely on should also be provided with their grounds of appeal.
22. The Chairman of Governors will acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days, in writing, and will then refer the appeal to the Complaints Panel for consideration and schedule a hearing to take place within 20 working days of receipt of the complaint.
23. The Complaints Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the College. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Board of Governors.

24. 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 or further investigation be carried out. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than 5 working days prior to the hearing.
25. The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative or friend. Legal representation will not be appropriate. The Panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend.
26. The remit of the Panel shall be at the discretion of the Chair of Governors and the manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel.
27. If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint without the need for further investigation.
28. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.
29. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and decide whether to:
 - dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part; or
 - uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and
 - make recommendations.
30. The Panel will send by electronic mail or give to the parents in writing its findings and the reasons for them, usually within 5 working days of the hearing (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following the hearing). The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will be sent in writing to the Head Master, the Chairman of Governors and, where relevant, the person complained of. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will also be available for inspection on the College premises by the Chairman of Governors and the Head.
31. Any complaint about a decision taken by the Head Master to exclude or require the removal of the pupil under clause [7] of the College's Terms and Conditions will be governed by this Stage 3 of the College's Complaints Procedure. In such circumstances, the Panel may only uphold the complaint and ask the Head to reconsider his decision if they consider, having regard to the process followed by the Head, that the Head's decision to exclude / require the removal of the pupil was not a reasonable decision for the Head to have taken.

Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

32. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially.

33. It is in everyone's interests to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible. The College's target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 25 working days. Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing will usually be completed within a further 25 working days.
34. Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, "working days" refers to weekday (Monday to Friday) during the term time only, excluding bank holidays and half term. This means that during school holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint and a complaint may not be investigated until the school term resumes. It may also take longer to resolve a complaint during periods of significant disruption to College life or as a consequence of unavoidable staff absence, however deviation from the normal timescale for resolving a complaint during term time will only occur on an exceptional basis, although the College will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay.
35. Where a complaint is lodged and the College needs to request additional information from the parents in order to investigate the complaint, parents should provide that additional information in a timely manner. In addition, where parents are invited to a meeting to discuss their complaint, the College requests that they respond to the meeting request in a timely manner. Where the requested information is not provided within a reasonable timeframe, or where the College does not receive a response from parents to a meeting invitation, the College will consider the complaint to be closed. Where parents request the re-opening of a complaint which is deemed closed in this way, the College will re-open the complaint if it is reasonable to do so. Any complaints that are re-opened may not progress onto the next stage of the Complaints Procedure until the completion of the stage at which the complaint was deemed closed.

Recording Complaints and Use of Personal Data

36. A written record will be kept of all complaints and whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or at a Panel hearing, and any action taken by the College as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld).
37. The College processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice. When dealing with complaints the College (including any Panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:
- Date when the issue was raised
 - Name of parent
 - Name of pupil
 - Description of the issue
 - Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
 - Witness statements (if appropriate)
 - Name and contact details of member(s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
 - Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
 - Notes/minutes of the hearing, and
 - The Panel's written decision

38. This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the College's Privacy Notice, but potentially including, for instance, information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the College's Data Protection Policy.
39. The College will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Notice, Data Protection Policy and Retention of Records Policy.
40. Please note that the number of formal complaints registered during the preceding school year is available from the College upon request.