



The Stables Independent School

School Complaints Policy

This policy is based on advice from the Department for Education (DfE) on:

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations, and refers to good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE).

This policy links directly to the listed Stables Policies

Exclusions Policy
Admissions Policy
Staff Code of Conduct
Anti-Bullying Policy
Safeguarding Policy
Health and Safety Policy
Whistleblowing Policy

This policy was reviewed and approved by the Proprietors in Summer 2023.

It will be reviewed annually and approved by the Proprietors.

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process



- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on request.

Definitions and Scope

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint.

A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”.

The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.

A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”.

The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage and as quickly and effectively as possible.

This policy will set out exactly what will happen with a complaint and how long the process will take.

The procedure will be used to deal with complaints relating to the school and any community facilities or services that the school provides.

We value all comments about our school and we will endeavour to address your concerns at the earliest stage possible.

The formal procedures will need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes the matter to be heard by the Proprietors of The Stables Independent School.

In the first instance complaints should be directed to a member of staff who will refer the issue to the most appropriate person. If the complaint concerns the Headteacher, the complainant should contact the Proprietors of The Stables in writing via the school.

When making a complaint it is important that the complainant identifies their desired outcome, that is what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage.

Pupils, parents or carers can make a complaint to the school about most aspects of its function including:



- Attitude/ behaviour of staff
- Teaching and learning
- Application of behaviour management systems
- Bullying
- Provision of extra-curricular activities
- The curriculum

The same complaint could be made jointly by a number of persons, in this case it is expected that a nominee/representative speak on behalf of all complainants, otherwise, all complaints will be dealt with on an individual basis.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Legal, safeguarding or disciplinary proceedings take precedence over complaints procedures and timescales.

The Proprietors of The Stables will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary.

Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

We also intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits will be set for each action within each stage.

Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set, and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline with an explanation for the delay.

The school expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and no later than 3 months afterwards. We will consider exceptions to



this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

Complaints Procedure – Stage 1

Stage One: Complaint Heard by Staff Member

The vast majority of concerns can be resolved informally. There are many occasions where the class teacher, office staff, or the Headteacher, resolve concerns straight away. It is in everyone's best interests that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Complainants must feel able to raise concerns with members of staff without any formality, either in person, by telephone or in writing. This allows staff to establish whether a person is asking a question, expressing an opinion or making a complaint.

The member of staff first contacted should clarify the nature of the concern and reassure the complainant that the school wants to hear about it. Once a complaint has been received by a member of staff they should determine whether they are the best person to resolve the complaint. The Headteacher should be informed of the complaint. The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 5 working days, and investigate and provide a response within 10 working days.

If the concern involves any child protection issue, the Designated Safeguarding Lead will inform the relevant Local Authority social care team or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the Headteacher may take on responsibility for investigating the complaint or consider referring the complainant to the Proprietors of The Stables.

Once the complaint has been investigated, the outcome should be communicated to the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator. The complaint will be responded to within 10 school days either verbally or in writing. The complainant must also be informed of what to do next if they remain dissatisfied with the response.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation into their complaint they should write to the Headteacher within 10 school days asking for their complaint to be investigated at stage 2.

Complaints Procedure – Stage 2

Stage Two: Complaint Heard by the Headteacher

Parents and pupils should be advised of their right to make complaints. Complaints should be made either in writing or by arrangement of an appointment with the Headteacher. The complainant may choose to use the attached complaints form



(see appendix 1). If the complaint is about the Headteacher the Proprietors of The Stables should deal with the matter using this procedure.

The Headteacher should contact the complainant and provide an opportunity for the complainant to discuss their concerns and find solutions. This could be by phone or in a meeting. It should be made clear that the complainant may bring a friend, family member or advocate to any meeting if they wish. Interpreting services should be made available where necessary. The Headteacher should have another member of staff present to observe and record the meeting and promote staff safety. If it is necessary to interview pupils as part of the investigation, this should be done in the presence of another member of staff, or in the case of serious complaints e.g. where the possibility of criminal investigation exists, in the presence of their parents or carers.

Written notes should be kept of all communications with regard to the complaint and its investigation.

The complaint will be investigated and a written response will be provided within 10 working days, unless the complaint is complicated and, to allow for a full investigation to be carried out, an extension of 10 working days may be granted.

The complainant must be informed of the right to take the complaint to stage 3 if they remain dissatisfied.

Complaints Procedure – Stage 3

Stage Three: Complaint Heard by the Proprietors of The Stables and Complaints Panel

Where a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint at stage two they should write to the Proprietors of The Stables within 10 school days of receipt of the decision of the stage two investigation. The Proprietors should first ensure that the complaint has been dealt with at stage two, and the complaint is covered by the school's complaints procedure not other procedures e.g. personnel or child protection.

Upon receipt of a letter notifying the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of a stage two investigation, the Proprietors should write acknowledging that the complaint has been received. At this point the Proprietors may offer mediation as a means of resolving the complaint. If the matter cannot be resolved through mediation the Proprietors should arrange to undertake an investigation into the complaint. A letter should be sent to explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further documents or information relevant to the complaint. A deadline for submission of these documents should be given, which should be at least 5 working days before any meeting.

The complaint will be heard by a panel comprising: the Proprietors and, if felt necessary, the Quality Assurance Manager (for Clover Childcare Services). An independent person (e.g. a Norfolk County Council representative) will also be present at stage 3 meetings as part of the panel assembled to hear the complaint.



This panel will also have access to the response from the Headteacher at stage two of this process. They will set a timetable for the resolution of the complaint which should be no more than 20 working days after the complaint was escalated to stage 3. The complainant will be notified of their right to have a friend, family member, advocate or interpreter present at the complaint meeting if they wish. They will also be advised that this supporter may not be a Solicitor or Barrister. The Proprietors should ensure that minutes are taken at the complaints meeting.

The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it may sometimes only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations that satisfy the complainant that their concern has been taken seriously.

The decision of the panel must be final.

The meeting should be held in private. Any witnesses (other than the complainant and the Headteacher) should only attend for the part of the hearing in which they give evidence. Good practice would be that at no point should the Headteacher or the complainant be left with the school proprietors without the other being present.

The panel should remember that the complainants may not be familiar with the conduct of formal meetings and may feel inhibited in addressing them. It is recommended the proceedings are as informal as possible. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child.

If either party wishes to introduce new information at the meeting, this should be allowed. The meeting should then be adjourned for a short period to allow other parties to review and respond to this information.

The meeting should allow for:

- The complainant to explain their complaint and the Headteacher to explain the school's response
- Witnesses to be brought by the complainant or the Headteacher
- The Headteacher and the complainant to ask questions of each other and any witnesses
- The panel to ask questions of the complainant, Headteacher and any witnesses
- The complainant and the Headteacher to summarise their position

The panel should thank the complainant and Headteacher for their attendance and request they leave the meeting while they consider their decision.

They should then decide: whether to dismiss the complaint in whole or part; to uphold the complaint in whole or part; to approve any appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.

A written response detailing the decisions, recommendations and the basis on which these have been made should be sent to the complainant and the Headteacher within 5 school days of the meeting.



The school should retain a copy of all correspondence and records of meetings in line with current retention guidelines.

If the complaint remains unresolved and the complainant feels that the school has behaved unreasonably about their concerns, they can write to the Secretary of State for Education at:

The Secretary of State Department for Education,
Sanctuary Buildings,
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Ofsted will also consider a complaint if it is felt it affects the school as a whole. For example: the school is not providing a good enough education; the pupils are not achieving as much as they should, or their different needs are not being met ;the school is not well led and managed, or is wasting money; the pupils' personal development and wellbeing are being neglected.

Ofsted can be contacted on 0300 123 1231 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Record-keeping

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept for 5 years.

Dealing with unreasonable complaints

If properly followed, a good complaints procedure will limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied.

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



- Repeatedly makes the same complaint and refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome
- Has a history of making unreasonable complaints
- Makes frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint

A complaint will be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so:

- Maliciously
- Aggressively
- Using threats, intimidation or violence
- Using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language
- Knowing it to be false
- Anonymously



Appendix 1

The Stables Independent School

School Complaints Form

Please fill in and return to the Headteacher who will acknowledge receipt and advise you on the next stage of procedure.

Surname _____ **First Name** _____ **Title** _____

Address

Home Tel No. _____

Mobile No _____

Pupil's Name (if relevant)

Your relationship with pupil (if relevant)

1. Please give details of your complaint.



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

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

4. Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

After completion please send to The Headteacher, The Stables Independent School,
The Old Rectory, Old Rectory Road, Brumstead, Norwich, Norfolk, NR12 9EU

OFFICIAL USE

Date Acknowledgement Sent: _____

Acknowledgement Sent by who: _____

Complaint Referred to: _____

Date: _____