



**COMPLAINTS AND CONCERNS POLICY AND PROCEDURE
FEBRUARY 2019**

Reviewed by: Isla Lunan
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Next review: February 2020
Related Policies: Code of Conduct for all adults

Endorsement

Full endorsement is given to this policy by:

Name: Joel Chalfen
Position: Cambridge Steiner School Trustee
Signed:

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joel Chalfen".

Date: February 2019

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1. AIMS

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

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
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- 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 the school website.

This procedure is intended to help sustain a positive ethos within our school so that problems can be listened to appropriately and resolved wherever possible. Our core purpose is to offer high quality Steiner Waldorf education for all our children and, in order to improve our work, we seek to learn from our mistakes and correct them whenever this is possible

2. LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

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).

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the [Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework](#) with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

3. 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.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

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.

Arrangements for handling concerns or complaints from parents of children with SEN about the school's support are within the scope of this policy. Such concerns or complaints should first be made to the class teacher/special educational needs co-ordinator. They will then be referred to this complaints policy. Additionally, all parents of children with SEN or disabilities have the legal right to seek redress from the First Tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability) if they believe that their son or daughter has been discriminated against.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

4. 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 about our fulfilment of early years requirements

We will investigate all written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint (see section 9) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the school is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by calling 0300 123 4234 or 0300 123 4666, or by emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. An online contact form is also available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>.

Complaints regarding SEND provision

The process for raising and investigating concerns or complaints in regard to SEND support and provision is the same as that outlined below. However, it is mostly likely that in such instances, the SENDCo will also be engaged from the first stages

We will notify parents and carers if we become aware that the school is to be inspected by Ofsted. We will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

5. STAGES OF COMPLAINT (NOT COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP OR TRUSTEES)

Stage 1: informal

The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue. The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the Early Years Coordinator, Lower School Coordinator or Resource Coordinator for all non-educational concerns as appropriate, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school office.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 3 working days and investigate and provide a response within 15 working days. Before the formal processes are invoked every effort should be made to resolve matters informally. This is in line with complaints policies nationally. Most issues are likely to be best resolved through discussion with the class teacher, in some cases, though, a person may feel the need to escalate the matter to the department coordinator. Initially class teachers will seek to resolve matters through provision of information and clarification. Where it is clear that there is a significant level of challenge, staff will refer the matter to the department coordinator as a cause for concern. The department coordinator will then seek to resolve the matter through discussion with those expressing concerns. Whether attempts to resolve concerns at an informal stage are by telephone conversation or through meetings, school staff should take a note of any agreed action points and summarise these at the end of the conversation. The notes should be circulated promptly to those involved in the discussion. The formal Complaints Procedure will not normally be accessed unless the department coordinator has first been given the opportunity to discuss the matter with the complainant, either by telephone or, preferably, in person. If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

Stage 2: formal

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint to the Resource Coordinator or where they have been involved at the informal stage, to another member of the School Coordination Team and/or the subject of the complaint:

- In a letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on their behalf

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office.

The designated member of the senior leadership team will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 28 days.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the board of trustees in writing within 5 days.

Stage 3: review panel

Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal, stage.

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the board of trustees and must consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school. The panel cannot be made up solely of trustees, as they are not independent of the management and running of the school.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 9).

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel; however, the review panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting. The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel must then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the board of trustees.

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 28 days.

6. COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE SENIOR MANAGEMENT, A TRUSTEE OR THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES.

Complaints made against the senior management should be directed to the chair of trustees.

In the absence of a Clerk to the Trustees, where a complaint is against the chair of trustees, any member of the board of trustees, or the entire board of trustees, it should be made in writing to the board of trustees in the first instance.

- complaints against the chair of trustees or any individual trustee can be heard by a suitably skilled and impartial member of the board of trustees (stage 1) and then a committee of members of the trustees (stage 2)
- complaints against the entire board of trustees or complaints involving both the chair and vice chair may be brought to an extraordinary meeting of the Association, which may be requisitioned by any two or more members of the association as detailed in the Articles of Association.

7. REFERRING COMPLAINTS ON COMPLETION OF THE SCHOOL'S PROCEDURE

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure and the complaint is regarding the school not meeting standards set by the DfE in any of the following areas, the complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE:

- Education
- Pupil welfare and health and safety
- School premises
- Staff suitability
- Making information available to parents
- The spiritual, moral, social or cultural development of pupils

The DfE will consider reports of a major failure to meet the standards. Where appropriate, it can arrange an emergency inspection to look at pupil welfare and health and safety, and make sure that the school deals with serious failings.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

8. PERSISTENT COMPLAINTS

Where a complainant tries to re-open the issue with the school after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the chair of trustees (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any), *and*
- The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The school will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, *and/or*
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, *and/or*
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint.

Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The school will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the school acts reasonably.

Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website

- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

9. 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 through a subject access request 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 securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole board of trustees in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the board of trustees is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the board of trustees, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

10. LEARNING LESSONS

The board of trustees will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the senior leadership team or appropriate staff member, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

11. MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS

The board of trustees will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The board of trustees will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 10.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the resources coordinator.

This policy will be reviewed by the resources coordinator every year.

At each review, the policy will be approved by the chair of trustees.