

## **Complaints Policy & Procedure**

### **Policy Statement**

My Online Schooling is committed to providing a high quality service for our pupils, parents, carers and families. To continually improve the quality of our school, we aim to listen and respond to feedback provided by the members of our school community. This policy does not pertain to complaints brought by staff members and grievance procedures should be followed in the event of staff complaints.

This policy will seek to ensure that feedback and complaints are dealt with fairly and comprehensively. We will aim to:

- Handle complaints and feedback promptly, politely, respectfully and confidentially
- Respond to complaints appropriately, with explanations and/or apologies where appropriate
- Learn from feedback and complaints and use them to improve the overall quality of the service provided by our school

An informal approach is appropriate when it can be achieved. If, however, concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally, the formal complaints procedure should be followed.

Parents and carers can bring their concerns to the attention of their Parent Liaison Coordinator. The contact details of the Parent Liaison Coordinators are readily available on the school website, as well as in the school prospectus and handbooks.

Unless it is explicitly stated that a complaint is being made, communications that express dissatisfaction with a process within the school will be accepted as feedback. The contents of the feedback will be investigated and addressed internally, and any learnings from later reflection will be used to further improve our school.

### **Stage 1: Complaint Heard by Relevant Team**

1. If a parent or carer wishes to raise a complaint, they will be asked to complete a Complaints Form. The Complaints Form is used for logging and tracking purposes, and all submissions are stored confidentially
  - a. Complaints must be made within 3 months of the event. Complaints after this period will not be considered

2. The relevant team will review the details of the complaint
3. The team responding to the complaint will investigate the contents of the complaint and respond to the parent or carer within 10 working days
4. If no further communication is received from the complainant within 10 working days of receiving the school's response, it is assumed that the complaint has been resolved and should end

### **Education Investigation Procedure**

In the event that a complaint involves an incident in a lesson, support session or extra-curricular club, or an aspect of the teaching and learning within the school, the Education Team will investigate this complaint in the procedure outlined below.

*Any complaint involving an incident during a lesson must include the date and time of the lesson so the recording can be investigated.*

1. The person handling the complaint will ensure that a written acknowledgement is provided to the complainant within 5 working days of receiving a complaint
  - a. Letter template in iSAMS
2. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the Education Team may investigate the lesson recording, the class page, and/or the relevant pupil records
3. Refer to whole-school guidance documents and policies to determine if the complaint is fair
4. If the complaint is does not contravene school policy and does fall below the expectations set out by the school, the Education Team will contact the complainant to inform them of the specific reasons why this conclusion has been determined and will not progress to further investigation
5. If the complaint does contravene school policy and does fall below the expectations set out by the school, the Education Team will notify the teacher(s) in question and request additional context. Additional information pertaining to the complaint may need to be sought from the complainant
6. Either the Head of Juniors/Secondary or the Deputy Head of Juniors/Secondary will respond to the parent or carer to offer an explanation and/or apology. The complainant will be reassured that there

will not be a recurrence of the event in question and what steps will be taken to ensure this

7. The Education Team will provide feedback to the staff member(s) involved in the complaint in a supportive manner, with suggested interventions or strategies, where appropriate
8. Any complaint for feedback will be reflected upon to determine if school policies should be reviewed to alter or improve school procedures

### **Stage 2: Complaint Heard by Director**

1. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at stage one they may go to Stage 2 and have the Director hear the complaint. The Director may delegate the task of collating the information to another staff member but not the decision on the action to be taken
2. If the complaint is about the Director then at Stage 2 the complaint will be heard by the complaints panel consisting of 2 people who were not previously involved in the complaint and a person independent of the management team

### **Stage 3: Complaint Heard by Complaints Panel**

The complainant must write to the designated Chair of the Complaints Panel as instructed by the Director giving details of the complaint. The Complaints Panel is the last stage of the complaints process, and is not convened to merely rubber stamp previous decisions.

1. The designated Chair of the Complaints Panel (or delegated Officer) should write to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the written request for the complaint to be heard. This acknowledgement must be sent within 5 working days and should inform the complainant of the arrangements for hearing the complaint within 20 working days of receiving it. The letter should explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further documents relevant to the complaint. These must be received within 5 working days of the date of the hearing to allow adequate time for the documents to be circulated

### **Complaints Panel Composition**

- At least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint
- At least one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school

## The Remit of the Complaints Panel

1. The panel can:
  - a. dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
  - b. uphold the complaint in whole or in part
  - c. decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
  - d. recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur
  
2. There are several points which any governor sitting on a complaints panel needs to remember:
  - a. It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so
  - b. The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it must be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously
  - c. An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The designated panel Chairperson will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible
  
3. The school will write and inform the complainant and any witnesses, the panel etc. of the date and location of the meeting 5 working days in advance. The notification to the complainant should also inform him/her of the right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend/interpreter. The letter should explain how the meeting will be conducted and the complainant's right to submit further written evidence to the panel. The Director has the right to bring representation if so desired
  
4. Intervention of parallel investigations relevant to the complaint by the Police or social services may cause variation to these time scales. Any such variation will be notified to the complainant

## **Hearing the Complaint at the Meeting**

The aim of the meeting will be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the School and the complainant. In the interest of natural justice, the introduction of previously undisclosed evidence or witnesses would be a reason to adjourn the meeting so that the other side has time to consider and respond to the new evidence.

In advance of the panel meeting, a Chairperson will be appointed by the members of the panel.

The recommended conduct of the meeting is as follows:

1. The Chairperson of the panel will welcome the complainant, introduce the panel members and explain the procedure
2. The Chairperson of the panel will invite the complainant to explain the complaint
3. The panel members may question the complainant about the complaint and the reasons why it has been made
4. The Director will be invited by the Chairperson of the panel to question the complainant about the complaint and why it has been made
5. The Chairperson of the panel will invite the Director to make a statement in response to the complaint. At the discretion of the Chairperson of the panel the Director may invite members of staff directly involved in the complaint to supplement their response
6. The panel members may question the Director and/or members of staff about the response to the complaint
7. The Chairperson will allow the complainant to question the Director and/or members of staff about the response to the complaint
8. Any party has the right to call witnesses, subject to the approval of the Chairperson
9. The panel, the Director and the complainant have the right to question any such witness
10. The Director will be invited by the Chairperson of the panel to make a final statement

11. The complainant will be invited by the Chairperson of the panel to make a final statement
12. The Chairperson will explain to the complainant and the Director that the decision of the panel will now be considered and a written decision will be sent to both parties within 15 working days. The Chairperson will then ask all parties to leave except for members of the panel
  - a. Copies of the written decision will be stored confidentially for future reference
13. The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and:
  - a. Reach a decision on the complaint and the reasons for it
  - b. Decide upon the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
  - c. The panel members need to be aware of the complaints procedure before the meeting

**- END OF POLICY -**