

Title: Complaints Policy		Policy Lead: FTH	Pages: [5]
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COMPLAINTS POLICY FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

Introduction

This policy applies to all pupils at Stoke College (the School), including those in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage One.

This policy is not intended to be utilised by a parent, legal guardian or pupil (hereafter the Complainant) to challenge the Head's decision to exclude a pupil, whether permanently or on an interim basis for reasons of breach of the School's behaviour policy or to request removal of a pupil as a result of a breach of the School's terms and conditions in operation from time to time and in respect of which, the School's Exclusion Policy and Appeals Procedure must be adhered to.

This policy is for the use of current parents, guardians and pupils of the school only.

Complaints should be made within a reasonable timeframe, which will normally be within the term during which the matter arose or within 10 working days of the following term for matters arising in the last week of term.

A copy of the School's Exclusion Policy and Appeals Procedure is available on the School's website and can be provided to parents or legal guardians on request.

Background

The School prides itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils at all levels, from EYFS to Senior School and including Boarding. On occasions, some issues between Complaints and staff may raise concern but not constitute a complaint. Most issues causing concern between Complainants and staff can be settled through informal approach and discussion with the appropriate member of staff and the School will endeavour to address any concerns raised in this manner accordingly.

However, if a Complainant does have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School with care and in accordance with this procedure. The School takes all complaints seriously and will use its reasonable endeavours to investigate and resolve a complaint expeditiously.

The Governing Body has ultimate responsibility for meeting all the School's regulatory arrangements, which they can delegate to the Head from time to time, who is supported by the Senior Leadership Team. In line with good practice and as part of the Governors' due diligence, the Board of Governors reviews this policy annually.

The School's Complaints Policy is published on its website and can be sent to Complainants on request.

The School recognises the importance of dealing with complaints in a timely, efficient and fair manner.

A complaint may be made about the School, as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff using this procedure, including the Head.

Complainants can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially, subject to any statutory reporting requirements imposed on the School in law, and that the child in respect of whom the complaint relates will not be penalised for making a complaint, which is raised and pursued by a Complainant in good faith.

Procedure and Timescales

The complaints procedure is made up of three extant stages. The School aims to resolve any concerns and complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant sections. When referring to 'school days' we mean Monday to Friday, when school is open during term time. Reference to School Days excludes days which fall within the School holiday periods. Complainants should note that any complaint received prior to and during holiday periods may take longer to resolve owing to unavailability of personnel. The dates of terms are published on the School's website.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally.
- Complainants should refer any concerns or complaint, in the first instance, to their child's Class Teacher (Prep School) or Form Tutor (Senior School), or if the matter relates to boarding, to the Head of Boarding. In this way, the matter should be resolved.
- Complaints against the Head should be referred to the Chair of Governors.
- Complaints against the Chair of Governors or any individual Governor should be made in writing to the Clerk of the Governing Body.
- If the member of staff appointed at Stage 1 cannot satisfactorily resolve the complaint through investigation, discussion with the member of staff concerned and discussion or meeting with the Complainant, they will consult with the relevant key stage Assistant Head.

- Complaints made directly to Assistant Heads will usually be dealt with by them, after consultation with the relevant Form Tutor or Class Teacher or Head of Boarding.
- Any matters regarding the safety of pupils will be reported immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead in accordance with the School's safeguarding procedures.
- The party dealing with the complaint will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received and a copy will be stored on the pupil's personal file. A copy will also be passed to the Head for review.
- As far as is reasonably practicable, a complaint received in writing will be acknowledged within 5 school days. Should the matter not be resolved within 15 School days from the date of receipt of a complaint (whether in writing or by telephone), or in the event that the investigating party and the Complainant fails to reach a satisfactory resolution, then the Complainant will be advised to proceed with their complaint to the formal stage of the policy (Stage 2) (or, in the event of a complaint against the Head – Stage 3).

Stage 2 – Formal resolution

- If the complaint is more serious, or if the Complainant does not feel that a less serious complaint has been handled satisfactorily, he or she should raise the matter with the Head in writing at the same time submitting any other relevant documents or material which the Complainant wishes to be taken into consideration in the context of the complaint. It should not be copied to the Chair of Governors whose role is defined in Stage 3.
- The Head will speak to the Complainant, either by telephone or in person, and arrange for an investigation of the issues raised to be conducted by a suitable member of the SLT. The Head will endeavour to do this within 5 working days of receiving the written complaint. If there is likely to be a delay in the investigation and outcome thereof, due to School holidays, availability of staff and the like, the Head will endeavour to advise the Complainant of this as soon as is reasonably practicable and will advise the Complainant of a revised timetable. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- The Head will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Head is satisfied, as far as is reasonably practicable, that a full investigation has been carried out and all relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and the Complainant informed of this decision in writing. The Head will also give written reasons for his/her decision. Full records will be maintained at all stages.

- If the Complainant remains dissatisfied with the decision, they will be advised by the school, in writing, to have their complaint examined at stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3 – Governors’ Panel

- If a parent seeks to invoke stage 3, a parent must refer the complaint to the Chair of Governors, in writing within 10 School days following receipt of the written reasons for the Head’s decision.
- A panel of three governors will meet within 10 school days of receiving the complaint and make a final decision about it on behalf of the Governing Body. Parents must address a complaint in this instance in writing to the Chair of Governors. Any complaints received after 10 school days from the date of the letter will be heard at the discretion of the panel and such a hearing will not be mandatory.

Stage 3 – Governors’ Panel

At this stage, upon receipt of a written request for a Stage 3 investigation, a panel as defined below, with no previous knowledge of the complaint, will be convened at a mutually convenient date to hear the complaint. The date will be set with consultation with the Complainant, who will be entitled to attend the hearing and make representations.

- The Chair of Governors, or his nominee, is responsible for appointing the Panel consisting of at least three people, at least two of whom will normally be Governors. None of the Panel members will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.
- The Chair of Governors, or his nominee, must then arrange a mutually acceptable date and time for Complainant, members of the Panel and the Head for the complaint to be heard. This hearing should take place within 20 school days.
- The Complainant and the Head will be asked to submit their own statements in writing, addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body, together with all documents on which they intend to rely by no later than 5 clear school days prior to the hearing. Any documents received after that deadline will not be considered. All material will be sent in advance of the hearing, as an appeals pack, to all parties by the Clerk to the Governing Body.
- Parties have the right to attend the Hearing. They may be accompanied by a relative or friend if they wish. No party will be entitled to legal representation at the hearing. This is a non-adversarial process.
- At the hearing, the panel will hear the issues brought by the Complainant and the Head independent and may submit questions to both the parents and the Head. The running order of the hearing is as follows;

- A) Introductions – Panel/Complainants/Head
 - B) Complainant’s Submissions
 - C) School’s Questions to Complainants
 - D) Panel’s questions to complainants
 - E) School’s Submissions
 - F) Complainant’s questions to School
 - G) Panel’s Questions to School
 - H) Closing Statement – Complainant
 - I) Closing Statement – School
- The panel will then adjourn to consider the complaint. The outcome of the hearing will be communicated to the parties in writing within 5 school days from the date of the hearing.
 - The panel can either dismiss the complaint in whole or part; and/or uphold the complaint in whole or part; and/or decide upon appropriate action to resolve the complaint; and/or recommend changes to the school’s systems or procedures.
 - The Panel’s decision is final.
 - Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and as confidentially as is possible commensurate with carrying out an appropriate investigation.
 - 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 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act, as amended, requests access to them.
 - For EYFS parents any written complaint must be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days, except in circumstances in which the normal timescales are affected by issues that delay resolution such as school holidays. Parents may make a complaint to OFSTED and/or ISI should they wish. A record of complaints will be maintained by the School and retained for three years.
 - The Board monitors the number of and type of complaints.

In 2017/2018 the School dealt with [ONE] formal complaint.