

Policy Lead: RWA	Published on Website: Yes
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Introduction

This policy applies to all pupils at Stoke College (the School).

This policy is not intended to be utilised by a parent, legal guardian or pupil (hereafter the Complainant) to challenge the Principal'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 the 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, which includes the 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. On occasions, some issues between Complainants and staff may raise concern but not constitute a formal 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 formal 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 expediently.

The Board, supported by the Advisory Council, has ultimate responsibility for meeting all the School's regulatory arrangements, which can be delegated to the Principal from time to time, who is supported by the Senior Leadership Team. In line with good practice and as part of the Board's due diligence, this policy is reviewed annually by the Advisory Council and ratified by the Board.

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 Principal. If a complaint is made in writing, it must be signed by the complainant.

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 or parent 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's 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 Form Tutor, or if the matter relates to boarding, to the Head of Boarding. In this way, the matter should be resolved.

Complaints against the Principal should be referred via the Chair of the Advisory Council to the Chairman of the Board who will attempt to resolve the complaint informally.

Complaints against the Chair of the Advisory Council or any individual member of said body should be made in writing to the Clerk to the Advisory Council (the Bursar) who will pass it to the Chairman of the Board.

Complaints against the DSL, in relation to a Safeguarding matter, should be referred to the Principal who will discuss the the Chair of the Advisory Council and/ or the LADO.

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 Deputy Head.

Complaints should not usually be sent directly to the Deputy Head or another member of SLT without first being sent to the Form Tutor or Head of Boarding. Complaints about the Form Tutor or Head of Boarding may be sent to the most relevant Deputy Head.

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 Principal 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 Principal – 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 Principal 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 the Advisory Council whose role is defined in Stage 3.

The Principal 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 Principal will endeavour to do this within five 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 Principal 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 Principal will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

Once the Principal 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 Principal 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 – Advisory Council Panel

If a parent seeks to invoke Stage 3, a parent must refer the complaint to the Chair of the Advisory Council in writing within 10 working days following receipt of the written reasons for the Principal's decision.

A panel of three members of the Advisory Council will meet on behalf of the Board within 10 working days of receiving the complaint and make a recommendation to the Board. Any complaints received after 10 working days from the date of the Principal's letter will be heard at the discretion of the panel and such a hearing will not be mandatory.

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 the Advisory Council, or his nominee, is responsible for appointing the Panel consisting of at least three people, at least two of whom will normally be members of the Advisory Council. None of the Panel members will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.

The Chair of the Advisory Council, or his nominee, must then arrange a mutually acceptable date and time for Complainant, members of the Panel and the Principal for the complaint to be heard. This hearing should take place within 20 working days and may take place by video-conference to ensure a timely hearing.

The Complainant and the Principal will be asked to submit their own statements in writing, addressed to the Clerk to the Advisory Council, together with all documents on which they intend to rely by no later than 5 clear working 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 Advisory Council.

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 Principal independent and may submit questions to both the parents and the Principal. The running order of the hearing is as follows:

Introductions – Panel/Complainants/Principal

Complainant's Submissions

School's Questions to Complainants

Panel's questions to complainants

School's Submissions

Complainant's questions to School

Panel's Questions to School

Closing Statement – Complainant

Closing Statement – School

The panel will then adjourn to consider the complaint and its recommendation to the Board. The outcome of the hearing will, under normal circumstances, be communicated to the parties in writing via a letter from the Board within 5 working days from the date of the hearing.

The panel can either recommend the Board 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 Board'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.

A written record of each complaint at Stages 2 and 3 is kept by the Principal. Each record indicates the nature of the complaint. It includes whether it relates to the day school or boarding; whether it was resolved at Stage 2 or 3, or unresolved; and the actions taken by the School in the wake of the complaint. The School reviews practice in the wake of all complaints whether or not they are upheld.

The written record of the panel's findings and recommendations will be available on the school premises for the inspection of the Advisory Council and Principal.

There have been no Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints in the last academic year.

