Complaints Policy

Aims of this policy
- To listen to our pupils and parents
- To receive complaints as a positive means of promoting pupil/parent satisfaction
- To use complaints as a means of identifying opportunities to improve services
- To seek to resolve complaints swiftly and fairly
- To have clear and published procedures for dealing with complaints

General Principles
The school’s priority is to serve the needs of pupils. We try to serve as efficiently and as courteously as possible but sometimes things can go wrong. We look on complaints and comments as an opportunity to improve the quality of services we offer.

The following general principles will apply:
- The desirability of settling differences informally
- The need for more formal mechanisms for dealing fairly and effectively with complaints which have proved impossible to settle informally
- Ensuring that pupils, parents, staff and governors are informed of the procedures

All parties dealing with complaints should seek to deal with each stage within 15 working days of receiving notification of the complaint or of the continuing dissatisfaction of the complaint.

What constitutes a complaint
A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of action by the school or their staff affecting an individual or group.

A complaint is not:
- A concern
- A request for a service;
- A request for information or explanation of school policy or practice;

Who can complain
Anyone can complain if they receive a service, seek a service or are affected by the school.

How a complaint can be made
Complaints may be made in person, by telephone or in writing. A person with a complaint will normally seek to contact the relevant member of staff responsible for the issue. All staff will seek to help a complainant even where the issue is not that individual’s area of responsibility. Care will be taken to:
- Clarify the complaint
- Clarify the outcome sought
- Check whether the complainant needs support of any kind (for example, if they have poor sight or hearing, or a language difficulty) in understanding the complaints procedure
- Respect the complainant

Procedures
STAGE 1 – Complaints about school issues should be raised, in the first instance, with relevant school staff, often the class teacher, and resolved informally whenever possible.

STAGE 2 – If issues are not resolved the complaint should then be referred to the Headteacher/Head of School, in writing.
STAGE 3 – If the Headteacher/Head of School is unable to resolve the complaint then it may be referred to the Chair of Governors for further investigation and response.

STAGE 4 - If the matter is still not resolved the complaint will then be escalated to be considered by the Governing Body Complaints Panel.

Types of Complaints

**Informal complaints:**
An informal complaint is one which can be resolved locally and quickly, which does not require an in-depth investigation, and which generally does not require to be put in writing.

A person with an informal complaint will normally seek to contact the member of staff responsible for the relevant issue.

Should the complaint not be resolved, the complainant will be referred to the Headteacher/Head of School or a Deputy Headteacher. The Head or Deputy will seek to deal with the issue informally.

Should an initial informal discussion not resolve the situation, and the complainant indicates their continuing dissatisfaction, then the Headteacher/Head of School will convene a meeting to review the issue in detail.

Informal complainants will be given information regarding follow up procedures, in the event that they are dissatisfied with the outcome of their initial complaint and wish to take the matter further.

**Formal Complaint:**
A complaint becomes formal when it is written down. This may be because:

a) the initial complaint was in writing

b) the user remains dissatisfied after making an informal complaint

c) a complaint cannot be dealt with simply and quickly and requires investigation.

Once a complaint has become formal:

- The progress of the complaint will be monitored by the Headteacher/Head of School or nominee;

- A full written response will be made within 15 working days or, where this is not possible, a reply should be sent indicating progress to date, an estimate of the time to the next milestone and an estimate of time to make a full response;

- The complainant will be advised how to proceed if not satisfied.

A complaint of serious maladministration should be progressed immediately as a formal complaint. The Chair of Governors should be the first person to approach where the matter could involve disciplinary or legal action against the Headteacher/Head of School.

Where a complaint involves an allegation of financial irregularity then both the Chair of Governors and Chief Executive Officer for the Pioneer Learning trust will be advised by the Headteacher/Head of School as appropriate.

In the case of a formal complaint stages 2-4 apply. Once a complaint has been progressed to Governing Body Complaints Panel the papers relating to the complaint will be passed to the Chair of the panel who will decide how the complaint is to be progressed.

The Chair will ensure:

- The complaint is quickly referred to the relevant committee (or to the Headteacher/Head of School if the complaints procedures at that level have not been exhausted);

- The complaint is not reported to the whole governing body until it is resolved, and then not in detail, unless the complaint cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant;

- All parties to the complaint are given a fair hearing;
The decision of the committee is given in writing to the complainant;
The complainant is told of any right of appeal if the decision is given against them.

Anonymous Complaints:
The school will not undertake to act on information received in this way.

Safeguarding Related Complaints
Wherever a complaint indicates that a child’s wellbeing or safety is at risk, the school is under a duty to report this immediately to the local authority. Any action taken will be in accordance with the school’s safeguarding policy which can be found on the school website.

Social Media Related Complaints
In order for complaints to be resolved as quickly and fairly as possible, we request the complainants do not discuss complaints publicly via social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Complaints will be dealt with confidentially for those involved, and we expect complainants to observe confidentiality also.

Complaints that result in staff capability or disciplinary
If at any formal stage of the complaint it is determined that staff disciplinary or capability proceedings are necessary in order to resolve the issue, the details of this action will remain confidential to the Headteacher/Head of School and/or the individual’s line manager. The complainant is not entitled to participate in the proceedings or receive any detail about them.

Persistent or Repeated 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. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of Governors is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

Vexatious Complaints:
In the first instance the school will communicate either in writing or verbally (confirmed with a letter) to inform the complainant that his/her behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable/unacceptable and, if it is not modified, the school will take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant’s behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:

- Inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this policy;
- Inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties;
- Inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the school should be by letter only;
- In the case of physical, or verbal aggression or other forms of intimidating behaviour, take appropriate advice and consider warning the complainant about being banned from the school site; or proceed straight to a temporary ban;
- Consider taking appropriate advice on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation;
- Consider taking advice from the HR / Legal Services about putting in place a specific procedure for dealing with complaints from the complainant, i.e. the complainant will not be able to deal directly with the Headteacher but only with a third person, to be identified by the governing body of the school, who will investigate, determine whether or not the concern/complaint is reasonable or vexatious and then advise the Headteacher accordingly.

In the event of extreme situations or events, the school may take the decision to move implementing one of the above steps immediately. In this situation, the complainant will be informed in writing.
The head and SLT will keep the Chair of Governors informed at all times.

Legitimate new complaints will still be considered, even if the person making them is, or has been, subject to the one of the actions stated above. However, the school will be advised by the HR/Legal Services the school subscribes to.

If a complainant’s persistent complaining/harassing behaviour is modified and is then resumed at a later date within a reasonable period of time, the school may resume the process identified above at an appropriate level. In these circumstances, advice may be sought from the HR/Legal Services the school subscribes to.

**External Review**

The Chief Executive Officer may act as arbiter and advise a school where a complaint has not been resolved by the staff or governors. Any parent who is unsure of the procedures, or who feels that their complaint has not been considered properly by the school, may contact the Chair of the Trust Board for further advice.

**Investigating Complaints**

The person investigating the complaint should make sure that they:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of the interview.

**Solutions**

Where a complaint is found to be justified a solution should be provided. A solution needs to be appropriate to the complaint. At each stage in the procedure school will keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.
- in some cases the solution will be the provision of a service desired by the complainant.

*This policy has been approved by the Trust Board and will be published on school websites and kept under review.*