



Exeter Steiner School *Complaints procedure*

The school aims to provide the highest quality of care for our children, offering a welcome to each individual child and family and providing a warm and caring environment within which all children can learn and develop in their time at school. Our intention is to build a strong, open and trusting community. It is therefore our aim to treat grievances with confidentiality, respect and professionalism. **We urge parents to follow this procedure to ensure the smooth and healthy functioning of the school.**

This policy and procedure applies to concerns raised or complaints made by parents and guardians in relation to the education and care of their children in the school. It also applies to concerns and complaints arising from the school's admission procedures, and the way in which applications from prospective parents are handled.

The object of the procedure is to ensure that complaints are handled effectively. This procedure distinguishes between informal and formal complaints, and the appeal stage.

Informal stage

A parent or prospective parent with a concern is encouraged first to discuss it informally with the member of staff most closely involved. Most issues can be resolved at this level. The member of staff will take a record of the meeting and of any correspondence.

If the meeting does not satisfactorily resolve the matter the person raising the concern may do so with another member of staff. At this point the complaint is still at the informal stage. In some cases the best way of resolving a complaint is for the person receiving the complaint to call a meeting between the parties. A second member of staff should be present at this meeting as a facilitator and to take notes, and the person bringing the complaint also has the right to be accompanied.

It is important that those bringing and those hearing the complaint are clear, at an early stage, of the degree of seriousness that the other attaches to the matter, so that an appropriate level of documentation is maintained.

It is the responsibility of the person hearing the concern to ensure that it is documented at this stage. Any written documentation, including notes taken at meetings, should be made available by both parties to each other, as soon as is practicable. Documentation should be passed to the Administrator to be securely filed.

Formal stage

Complaints will proceed to the formal stage in one of two ways:

1. Members of staff who become aware, through the informal stage, of complaints that have serious implications for pupils or the school, should, even if no formal complaint has yet been received, inform the Administrator so that the complaint can be recorded.

Certain complaints necessarily fall into this category, these will include:

- complaints concerning bullying;
- inappropriate behaviour by staff or pupils;
- complaints that come in the context of a family considering withdrawing their child from the school.

The Administrator will consider whether a formal complaint procedure should be commenced in such a case, even if it has not been requested by the person bringing the complaint. The reason for this is to ensure that the school responds appropriately to issues of importance even when a formal complaint is not made.

2. If the person bringing the concern does not consider that it has been satisfactorily resolved at the informal stage, they may make a formal complaint, in writing, addressed to the Chair of Trustees. Details of how to contact the Chair can be found on all school noticeboards, as well as on the School website. If in any doubt as to who to approach they should request guidance from the Administrator.

Procedure

The Administrator will respond to the complaint in the first instance, sending a letter to the person bringing the complaint within seven days setting out how the complaint is to be dealt with. The Chair will convene a Mediation Group, comprising a trustee, a member of staff, a parent and an independent member, to whom the complaint will be referred. The complaint will then be dealt with in one of two ways:

1. The Mediation Group, or nominated members thereof, will meet the parties individually to establish the issues, and/or facilitate a meeting between the parties, as appropriate. At the conclusion of the mediation process the Mediation Group will prepare a report describing the degree of resolution that has been achieved and drawing conclusions about lessons that can be learned for the future. This process will necessarily take some time, but should be completed as expediently as possible and in any case within one month of the formal complaint being received.
2. The Mediation Group may appoint one of its members to investigate the complaint directly, keeping written records of any meetings and interviews. Once satisfied that the relevant facts have been established they will decide what action is to be taken in response to the complaint and will communicate their decision to the parties, with reasons, in writing. This should normally take place within two weeks of the complaint being received. If a longer period is needed, the person bringing the complaint will be informed in writing.

Right of appeal

If the person bringing the complaint is not satisfied with the outcome of the Mediation Group investigation, they may write to the Chair of Trustees via the Administrator to request that the complaint be considered further. The Administrator will, within one week, acknowledge the request and, within a further week, the Chair will convene a hearing by a panel of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, at least one of whom will be independent of the day to day management and running of the school.

All parties concerned in the complaint will be invited to the hearing. Both the person bringing the complaint and the person complained of (when an individual) have the right to be accompanied to the hearing by another person. If the panel concludes that further information or investigation is required, it will appoint one of its own

number or any other person it deems appropriate to carry out the investigation. In all cases the results are to be circulated to the parties before a further hearing.

Following the concluding hearing, the panel will summarise in writing its findings and recommendations and circulate these to the parties to the complaint, and also to the Board of Trustees.

If the findings include a recommendation for disciplinary action to be taken against a member of staff, the disciplinary procedure set out in the Statement of Terms and Conditions of Employment will apply.

Record keeping

The Administrator will keep a record of all complaints reaching the formal stage, and will maintain a record of the subsequent process, including documentation, which will be securely filed in the administration office. The record is to be available to all parties to the complaint but will otherwise be confidential, except when statutory or other legal obligations prevail.

Parents wishing to know the number of formal complaints registered under this procedure during the preceding school year may request this information from the Administrator.