Complaints Policy

Introduction

Conifers School has long taken pride in the quality of the teaching and pastoral care that the school provides to its pupils. However, we recognise that not everything goes well for everybody all of the time. There are times when misunderstandings, confusion or genuine concerns give rise to complaints. The intention of this policy is to provide a clear and transparent process that will enable such complaints to be dealt with promptly, fairly and proportionately. If parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this Procedure.

Introduction, Guiding Principles, Stages of Complaint

At Conifers we are committed to meeting the needs of our pupils. However,

For the purposes of this policy, a 'parent' shall include a guardian, carer or any other person with parental responsibility for a child at the school. This policy applies to complaints from parents of current pupils and to parents of former pupils if the complaint was initially raised whilst the pupil was on the school roll.

This policy has been approved by the Headteacher and the Governing Body of the school and is available on the school's website or on request from the School secretary. It can be made available in large print or another more accessible format, if required. If assistance is needed with making a complaint, for example because of a disability, a parent should contact the school office who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

Separate procedures apply if the Headteacher expels or asks a pupil to leave and a parent seeks an appeal by the Governors of that decision (a copy of these procedures is available on request or can be found in the school's Exclusion Policy).

All school staff are made aware of this policy and are expected to familiarise themselves with the procedures for dealing with complaints to ensure they can be of most assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

The school's guiding principles in complaint resolution are:

To give careful and prompt consideration to all complaints

To seek to achieve a just and fair outcome, taking due account of all relevant evidence

To attempt to resolve complaints through dialogue and mutual understanding, and at as early a stage as possible.

This policy outlines three stages of complaint:

Stage 1: Informal Resolution Stage 2: Formal Resolution Stage 3: Panel Hearing

Where timescales are given in 'working days', this is defined as Monday - Friday during term time (the dates of which are available on our website). Complaints received during holiday periods will be dealt with as soon as is practicable but are likely to take longer to resolve due to the unavailability of relevant staff. Under such circumstances the complainant will be notified of any extension to the time scales and the reason(s) why an extension is necessary when the complaint is acknowledged.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns can be resolved quickly and informally. A parent with cause for concern or complaint should feel free to talk directly to a member of staff, to telephone, or write with the details of the issue that concerns them. In the first instance, it is usually best to address a concern to the class teacher, as they are often best placed to resolve the matter quickly. The parent may also refer a matter to the Headteacher E. Smyth, to the Deputy Headteacher B. Sillitoe or to the EYFS Lead J.Pearce, either directly or after an initial discussion with the class teacher.

We will acknowledge a written notification of a concern by telephone, email or by letter within two working days of receipt. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the appropriate member of staff will arrange to speak with the complainant or invite them to a meeting within five working days of acknowledgement. This meeting may prompt further investigation or wider consultation but, in any event, this stage of the complaints process should be completed within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days of acknowledgement or in the event that the parent and member of staff fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then the parent will be advised to proceed with the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2: Formal Resolution

If a complaint has not been resolved on an informal basis, then the parent should make a formal complaint to the Headteacher, E. Smyth. This must be done in writing, stating explicitly that he/she wishes to invoke the formal complaints procedure.

Formal complaints will be acknowledged in writing by the Headteacher within two days of being received. In most cases, the Headteacher will meet or speak to the parent concerned to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. It may be necessary, however, for the Headteacher to conduct an investigation. Once the Headteacher is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made, and the parent will be informed of this decision in writing, no later than 15 working days after the formal complaint was acknowledged. The Headteacher will give reasons for the decision reached.

Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept. The complainant will be informed if due to exceptional circumstances any additional time is necessary to complete the investigation.

If the parent is still not satisfied with the decision, he/she should proceed to Stage 3 of the complaints procedure.

Alternative procedure for handling formal complaints about the Headteacher

A parent wishing to make a complaint about E. Smyth (the Headteacher) may do so by writing to Daphne Hanbury, Chair of Governors (contact details available through the school office). Daphne Hanbury will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within two working days, indicating what action is being taken and the likely time scale. The procedures and time scales that apply to any other formal complaint (see above) will be followed.

If the parent is dissatisfied with the response to the complaint, the parent can request that the complaint be referred to a Complaints Panel under Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3: Panel Hearing

If the parent wishes to proceed to Stage 3 (following a failure to reach a resolution earlier in the complaints process) they should write to Daphne Hanbury (Chair of Governors) who is responsible for making the arrangements for a Panel Hearing, at the school address. In the written request for a Panel Hearing, the parent should state the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired. He/she should also send a list of all the documents that they believe to be in the school's possession that they consider relevant in the matter and that they wish the Panel to see. Copies of all such documents shall be supplied to all parties not later than five working days before the hearing.

The Governor will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days and will schedule a meeting of the Panel within 10 working days thereafter. The Panel appointed by the Chair of Governors will consist of at least three people not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. The complainant may be accompanied by a friend or relative, but legal representation is not usually appropriate.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parent's complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.

After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel will reach a decision. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations shall be confirmed in writing to the parent and, where relevant, to the person complained about within five working days of the hearing. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Headteacher and the Chair of Governors.

Record keeping and confidentiality

A written record will be kept by the Headteacher of all formal complaints, including any action(s) taken by the school as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether it is upheld), and of whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or progressed to a panel hearing.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except as required by the school by paragraph 33 (k) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014; namely, where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the Education and Skills Act

2008 requests access to them, or where any other legal obligations prevail. Records of individual complaints will be retained at least until the school's next inspection thereafter, In accordance with data protection principles and GDPR, only for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in the circumstances.

The Head teacher and governors will maintain oversight of these records in order to determine the appropriate implementation of this policy and to respond to any patterns of complaints which may be apparent.

Complaints about the fulfilment of EYFS requirements

Additional regulatory requirements apply to written complaints regarding the fulfilment of EYFS requirements. Specifically, the complainant will be notified of the outcome of any investigation by the school into their complaint within 28 days. The school's record of complaints will be made available to Ofsted on request.

In the event of dissatisfaction with the above actions, the complainant may refer the matter to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The contact details for this organisations is:

concerns@isi.ne

0207600010

The School will notify parents about an inspection, and supply to parents a copy of the final inspection report.

Monitoring and review of complaints policy and procedures

The Board of Governors will monitor the number and type of complaints received and the operation of the procedures set out in this policy. They will also review the policy at least annually to ensure it meets statutory requirements and continues to reflect best practice.

Reviewed: April 2019	Signed: E. Smyth Head Teacher Date:	Signed: D. Hanbury Chair of Governors Date:	Next review: April 2020 or sooner if needed.