



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Review frequency	Annually
Date policy approved and adopted:	January 2017
Policy agreed by:	Board of Governors
Date policy published:	January 2017
Next review date:	January 2018

ROYAL GREENWICH TRUST SCHOOL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

1. INTRODUCTION

Royal Greenwich Trust School values input from parents, and staff are always willing to explain situations more fully. The school, staff and Governors, regularly review how things are done, based on feedback from students and their families. The aim is to sort out any problems that arise as speedily and courteously as possible to the benefit and satisfaction of the student, parents and the school.

This document sets out the school's procedure for addressing complaints. It should be used only when informal attempts to resolve problems have been unsuccessful. If you have any concerns about the school or the education provided, you are encouraged to discuss the matter first with your child's Head of Year at the earliest opportunity. The school considers any concerns very seriously and most problems can be resolved at this stage.

As a guide – the school prospectus and policies outline expected standards of work, behaviour and dress code; there are consultation evenings with subject teachers and Head of Years at which senior staff are also present.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The school will give careful consideration to all complaints and deal with them fairly and honestly. We will provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed, and aim to resolve it through open dialogue and mutual understanding.

Our procedure aims to:

- Be easily accessible and publicised.
- Be simple to use and understand.
- Be impartial.
- Be non-adversarial
- Allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of progress.
- Ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary.
- Respect people's desire for confidentiality, wherever possible (some information sharing may be necessary to carry out a thorough investigation).
- Address all points of issue, providing an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary.
- Provide information to the school's senior leadership team so that services can be improved.

3. INFORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The school may be contacted by telephone or by letter. If by telephone, the office staff may be able to provide a satisfactory answer; if not the appropriate person will be contacted. If by letter, an acknowledgement will be sent within two working days.

In the first instance, parents should discuss any concerns informally with the appropriate Head of Year. If after doing this you do not feel that your concern has been properly addressed, or if your concern is about a particular teacher/member of staff, please request to discuss the matter informally with a member of the School Leadership Team. Your complaint will be fully reviewed and a response will be sent to you within 10 school working days. This response may invite you to a meeting to discuss the matter further and to try and achieve a satisfactory resolution.

If you still remain dissatisfied and wish your complaint to be considered further you should address your complaint to the Headteacher in writing. An acknowledgement will be issued within three working school days.

Upon receipt of your complaint the Headteacher will arrange for a separate investigation into the circumstances of your complaint to be completed and a response will be sent to you within 10 working school days. This response may invite you to a meeting to discuss the matter further and to try to achieve a satisfactory resolution.

If, following the above you are still not satisfied with the actions the school has taken, you can initiate a formal complaint.

4. FORMAL COMPLAINTS

A formal complaint should be addressed to the Governing body and should be sent to the school marked confidential for the attention of the Clerk of the Governors. Your formal letter of complaint should briefly set out the main circumstances and reasons for the complaint, together with the reasons you remain dissatisfied by earlier discussions and attempts to resolve the matter.

The Chair of Governors will acknowledge the letter within three working school days, and following review, will respond formally within ten working school days. The Chairman will not at this stage involve any Governors who are members of the Appeals Committee.

If the outcome is still unsatisfactory an appeal can be made to the Governors' Appeals Committee.

In all formal complaint investigations, a decision will be given in writing, even if there has been a verbal indication of the outcome.

If parents remain dissatisfied, an appeal can be made to the Local Authority about the procedural system, and to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) about the outcome of any decision.

The various stages of our complaints process are set out in more detail for ease of reference at Appendix 1.

APPENDIX 1

STAGES OF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Stage One: Complaint heard by a member of staff

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many can be resolved quickly and informally to the satisfaction of all parties and wherever possible this is what Royal Greenwich Trust School endeavours to do. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the school can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To that end, if staff are made aware of the procedure, they know what to do when they receive a complaint.

Royal Greenwich Trust School respects the views of a complainant who indicates that they would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. In these cases, a member of the leadership team can refer the complainant to another appropriate member of staff.

Where the complaint concerns a senior member of staff, the complainant will be referred to the Headteacher. Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher, the complainant will be referred to the Chair of Governors.

Similarly if a member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the complainant may be referred to another appropriate staff member. This member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial.

Where the first approach is made to a governor, the next step is to refer the complainant to a senior member of staff to consider the complaint. In normal

circumstances governors will not be involved at the early stages of complaints in case they are needed to sit on a Complaints Panel at a later stage of the procedure.

Stage Two: Complaint Heard by the Headteacher

At this point, the complainant may be dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at Stage 1 as well as pursuing their initial complaint. The complainant should be advised of their right to have the matter considered at Stage 2. The Headteacher may delegate the task of undertaking a further investigation, or of collating all the relevant information to another staff member, but not the decision on the action to be taken. Upon reference of any complaint to the Headteacher, a response will be sent to the complainant with ten school working days.

Stage Three: Complaint Heard by the Chair of Governing Body

If still dissatisfied after Stage 2, the complainant will be advised of their right to make a formal complaint by writing to the Chair of Governors at Stage 3. The letter should set out details of the complaint, together with reasons for the complainants continued dissatisfaction.

Upon receipt of a formal complaint, the Chair of Governors, or a nominated governor, will arrange for all information on the complaint to be collated and will formally respond to the complainant with ten school working days.

Stage Four: Complaint Heard by the Governing Body Complaints Appeal Panel

If the outcome of Stage Three is unsatisfactory an appeal can be made to the Governors' Appeals Committee.

The appeal must be made in writing addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body. A Governing Body Complaints Panel will be convened within 20 school working days. None of the members of the Complaints Panel will have been directly involved in any previous consideration of the complaint. One of the members of the Complaints Panel will be independent of the management and running of the school.

The appeal hearing by the Governors' Complaints Panel is the last school based stage of the complaints process and will review the earlier stages of the process, together with any additional information that is available.

Individual complaints are not heard by the whole Governing Body at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing, against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

The complainant will be invited to the appeal hearing of the Governors Complaints Panel and will be given 7 days' notice in writing of the time and venue of the hearing. Complainants will also be advised that, if they wish, they may be accompanied to the appeal hearing by an appropriate friend or advisor.

The Remit of the Complaints Appeal Panel

The Governors Complaints Panel can:

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- Recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not occur

Governors or any independent members of the Appeals Panel will keep certain points clearly in mind:

- a) It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No governor may sit on the Complaints Panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint in question or in the circumstances surrounding it. Members of the Complaints Panel who feel their independence might be compromised in this or any other way must draw this to the attention of the Chair of Governors. In deciding the make-up of the panel, governors need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of governor and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.
- b) The aim of the hearing, which will be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it is recognised the complaint might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. In some cases it may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.
- c) Extra care needs to be taken when the complaint directly concerns a student. The Complaints Panel needs to be aware of the views of the student and given them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the student's parent is the complainant, the panel will provide the parent with an opportunity to discuss which parts of the hearing, if any, it might be helpful for the student to attend.
- d) The governors sitting on the Complaints Panel need to be fully aware of this complaints procedure.

Roles and Responsibilities

The role of the Clerk to the Governors: The Clerk to the Governors is the contact point for the complainant at Stage 3 and required to:

- Set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring where possible that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- Ensure that the Complaints Panel is convened within 20 school working days of the notice of formal complaint being received unless all parties agree to any further deferral.
- Collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing.
- Meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing.
- Record the proceedings and outcomes of the hearing.
- Notify all parties in writing of the panel's decision and any recommendations within 20 school working days of the hearing.

- Ensure that copies of all the written records of the hearing are included on the Complaints Co-ordinator's confidential file and record of complaints.

The role of the Chair of the Governing Body or the Nominated Governor: The Nominated Governor/Chair of Governors is required to:

- Check that the correct procedure has been followed.
- Notify the clerk to arrange a panel if a hearing is required.

The role of the Chair of the Panel: The Chair of the Complaints Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- The remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption
- The issues are addressed
- Key findings of fact are made
- Parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease
- Any friend or advisor accompanying the parent/complainant is advised of their role and how the panel will arrange for their contribution to proceedings
- The hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy
- The panel is open minded and acting independently
- No member of the panel has a vest interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- One member of the panel is independent of the management and running of the school
- Each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions
- Written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

Notification of the Panel's Decision

The Chair of the Panel needs to ensure, via the Clerk of the Governors, that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision and any recommendations, in writing, within 20 school working days. The letter will explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.

