



Complaints Policy

September 2023



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The difference between a concern and a complaint

A 'concern' may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought. A complaint may be generally defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about action taken or a lack of action'.

Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to invoke formal procedures. Informal concerns are taken seriously and we will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

When complainants would like to raise their concerns formally this procedure should be used to facilitate due consideration.

Who can make a complaint?

Any person, including members of the general public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that a school/supported house provides, unless separate statutory procedures apply (such as exclusions or admissions).

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Complaints can be made about anyone within World.

There are certain complaints which fall outside the remit of the complaints procedure. They are shown at Appendix 1 and include:

- Matters that are the responsibility of the Local Authority
- Content of a statutory statement of Special Educational Needs
- Pupil admissions
- Pupil exclusions
- Child Protection/Safeguarding

Purpose of a Complaints Procedure

This procedure aims to reassure anyone with an interest in World that:

Where possible, complaints will be dealt with informally and at the lowest possible level in school/supported house in order to reach a resolution promptly;

Any complaint against the school/supported house will be dealt with in a fair, open and responsive way, with the aim of achieving a speedy and satisfactory resolution.

World recognises that a willingness to listen to questions and criticism and to respond positively, can lead to improvements in school/supported house practices as well as a provision.

This Complaints Procedure will:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
- be easily accessible and publicised
- be simple to understand and use
- be impartial
- be non-adversarial
- allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress
- ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary
- respect people's desire for confidentiality wherever possible
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary

Investigating Complaints

At each stage, the person investigating the complaint makes 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 investigation with an open mind and be prepared where necessary to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of any interviews held

Resolving Complaints

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At each stage in the procedure, World will keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It would be useful if complainants were encouraged to state what actions/outcome they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. It might be appropriate 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 admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence
- 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 World policies in light of the complaint

This procedure will seek to identify areas of agreement between the parties in order to create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues and clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred. We would look to have a resolution and feedback within 15 days of a complaint.

Recording Complaints

World will record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. A complaint may be made in person, by telephone or in writing (email). An example of a complaint form can be found in Appendix 2. At the end of a meeting or telephone call, World will seek to ensure that both the complainant and World have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls can be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record and where necessary saved.

Monitoring the Policy

The Director will review their Complaints Procedure regularly and monitor the number and range of complaints received, how these were dealt with and any action taken.

Staff Allegations from Pupils/Young People

Any employee who becomes aware of a possible allegation or concern of a child protection nature must take immediate steps to ensure the matter is reported to the Director. Individuals with concerns must be encouraged to report this as quickly as possible and to the most senior person available at the time. An investigation may be impeded if a concern is reported late or is communicated through several individuals before the Director, and it is important that the World establishes at this stage who the lead contact will be for liaison purposes.

In all cases, the Director, must have an immediate preliminary consultation about the allegation or concern with the LADO who will advise on further action in accordance with this procedure as appropriate. This is not the beginning of an investigation, but part of the basic information gathering process. This advice will include who should be made aware that an allegation or concern has been raised.

It is important that the member of staff reporting the concern acts quickly. Establishing whether an allegation warrants further investigation or consultation is not the same as forming a view on whether the allegation is to be believed. The Director or any other employee or governor to whom an allegation has been reported, is not expected to investigate the allegation, or interview pupils/young people, but to assess, after consultation with the LADO how the matter will proceed. Confidentiality must be maintained throughout this stage in order that any subsequent investigation is not prejudiced and that the interests of all parties are protected

Complaints about the Director

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Where it is clear that a complaint is against the Director, the matter has to be referred immediately to the Local Authority via the LADO.

At the onset, it is not always clear if the complaint is against the Director given they are responsible for all operational decisions across World even if made by other staff. In most cases complaints raise concerns around the conduct of the Director. In any event, advice from the Local Authority should be sought.

Time Limits

Complaints will be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. Where extended investigations are necessary, new time limits should be agreed and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay. ALL COMPLAINTS SHOULD BE RESOLVED WITHIN 15 WORKING DAYS.

All time limits in this procedure are set using working days.

At each stage, World will clarify who will be involved, what will happen, and how long it will take.

World hopes that a complaint is made as soon as possible after an incident but there may be good reason for a delay e.g. complainant gathering information or not aware of the impact of the incident until later. World will consider if it is reasonable to continue with a complaint after a period of time and in doing so have regard for any exceptional circumstances.

Complaints Policy

Stage 1 Informal Stage – Complaint heard by staff member

It is in everyone's best interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage and as quickly as possible. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the school can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. Therefore, if staff are aware of the policy they will know what to do should they receive a complaint.

If the member of staff involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the complaint should be referred to another staff member. The 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 complaint concerns the Director the complainant is referred to the Local Authority.

If the informal stage has been exhausted and no satisfactory solution has been found the complainant should be advised that their complaint could progress to Stage 2 of the policy to be heard by the Director.

The complainant should then be invited to put the complaint in writing to the Director using the form attached at Appendix 2 or submit the complaint clearly in writing / e-mail. This form should be sent to the Director as soon as possible.

Stage 2 – Complaint heard by Director

Where for some reason the Director has addressed the complaint at Stage 1 the matter should now progress to Stage 3 of the procedure.

Where a complaint is against the Director, Stage 2 of the procedure will be completed by the Local Authority.

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The Director should acknowledge receipt of the written complaint and provide an opportunity to meet the complainant to discuss the complaint. At this point the Director may still seek to resolve the complaint informally.

The Director will seek any necessary clarification of the concerns including contacting or meeting the complainant where this would be helpful. The Director will investigate the complaint and a written response confirming the outcome of their investigation will normally be made within 15 school days of receipt of the complaint. If this is not possible, an extension can be agreed and the complainant informed.

The written response will include reasons for the conclusions reached by the Director, what action, if any, the school/supported house proposes to take to resolve the matter and advise the complainant of the right to request an Appeal at Stage 3 of the process if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome.

The complainant will have 10 school days from receipt of the outcome letter in which to request an Appeal.

Vexatious Complaints

If properly followed, the complaints procedure will limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied.

Appendix 1

Exclusion of children from school	Further information about raising concerns about exclusions can be found at www.gov.uk/school-disciplineexclusion/exclusion
Whistleblowing	Schools have an internal whistleblowing procedure for their employees and voluntary staff. Other concerns can be raised direct with Ofsted by telephone on 0300 123 3155, via email at: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk or by writing to: WBHL, Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD The Department for Education is also a prescribed body for whistleblowing in education.
Matters the responsibility of the Local Authority	Complaints Team Children and Young People's Services County Hall Durham DH1 5UJ Telephone: 03000 265762 cascomplaints@durham.gov.uk
Conduct of school staff (except the Headteacher)	Headteacher of the School
Conduct of the Headteacher	Chair of the Management Committee c/o the School
Special Educational Needs	Placement and Provision, Children and Young People's Services County Hall Durham DH1 5UJ Telephone: 03000 265878
Admissions of Pupils County or Controlled Schools	Admissions Team Children and Young People's Services County Hall Durham County Council DH1 5UJ Telephone: 03000 265878
Admissions of Pupils Church (Aided)	Schools Governing Body of the School
Child Abuse	Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) Children and Young People's Services County Hall Durham DH1 5UJ Telephone:03000 265770

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Further Information

Useful Resources and External Organisations

National Governors Association - www.nga.org.uk

Information Commissioner's Office - ico.org.uk

Other Relevant Departmental Advice and Statutory Guidance

Section 29 of the Education Act 2002 - www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/section/29

Governors Handbook - www.gov.uk/government/publications/governance-handbook

Understanding and Dealing with Issues Relation to Parental Responsibility - www.gov.uk/government/.../dealing-with-issues-relating-to-parental-responsibility

Other Departmental Resources

How to complain about a school – Advice for complainants - www.gov.uk/complainabout-school

Parental Responsibility Guidance – non-statutory advice for schools - www.gov.uk/government/.../dealing-with-issues-relating-to-parental-responsibilities

Appendix 2



Complaint Form

Name of School:

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to the pupil:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint:

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint. (Who did you speak to and what was the response)?

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What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Appendix 3

Procedure for Hearing the Complaint

Introduction

The aim of the meeting is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the World and the complainant.

Order of Meeting

1. The Chair welcomes the complainant and asks those present to introduce themselves.
2. The Chair explains the purpose of the meeting, the procedure, and checks that all written evidence has been made available to all parties.
3. The complainant explains their complaint, calling witnesses if appropriate.
4. The Director may ask questions of the complainant and witnesses.
5. The Director is then invited to present a response to the complaint, including action taken to address the complaint at stages 1 and 2 (and 3) of the procedure, calling witnesses, if appropriate.
6. The complainant may ask questions of the Director.
7. The Director summarises World's position, highlighting evidence, including anything that has emerged in the questioning.
8. The complainant summarises their case, highlighting evidence, including anything that has emerged in the questioning.

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9. The Director checks that all parties feel that they have had a fair hearing and reminds everyone of the confidentiality of the case.

10. The Director thanks both parties for attending and gives an indication of when they can expect to hear the outcome. All parties then leave the room together.

11. The Director considers the complaint and reaches a decision.

12. Both parties will be informed of the outcome of the complaint in writing by the Director within 5 school days of the hearing.

Appendix 4

Concern or Complaint Received

STAGE 1 - INFORMAL STAGE WORLD ACTION Informal discussion with the relevant member of staff usually resulting in resolution to the issue.

If the complaint is about the Director – proceed to Stage 2 *

The person is informed of the action to be taken to resolve the issue. If they are not satisfied they should be provided with a copy of the World complaints procedure and information on how to proceed to Stage 2. If the Headteacher has addressed the complaint at this stage then the matter should progress to Stage 3.

FORMAL STAGE STAGE 2 – COMPLAINT HEARD BY DIRECTOR The complaint is submitted, either verbally or in writing, to the Director. The Director acknowledges receipt and provides a full written response within 15 working days. Information is provided to the complainant on how to progress the complaint to Stage 3.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or in light of any changes in legislation and/or guidance.

This policy document will be reviewed in September 2024.

Signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "AB Burlison", is written over a faint red circular stamp. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Andrew Burlison (Managing Director)