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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document is guidance for dealing with complaints but the underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. The requirement to have a complaints procedure need not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern informally. In most cases the class teacher or the individual delivering the service will receive the first approach. It would be helpful if staff were able to resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary

Implementation: It is the responsibility of line managers to ensure that staff members are aware of and understand this policy and any subsequent revisions.

Compliance: This policy complies with all relevant regulations and other legislation as detailed in the *Compliance with Regulations & Legislation Statement*.

2.0 PRINCIPLES

General

At Hillingdon Manor School we need to be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint.

Taking **informal concerns** seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the numbers that develop into **formal complaints**.

- The formal procedures will need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further. At this stage the person raising the concern will be encouraged, where possible, to specify their concerns in writing.
- At Hillingdon Manor School if a complaint is not resolved at a class level the procedure is to refer the complaint to the Assistant Head Teacher. If this does not result in a satisfactory outcome then the Head teacher will deal with the Complaint.

Framework of Principles

If you have a concern please discuss this in the first instance with class-based staff, or the Assistant Head teacher.

An effective Complaints Procedure will:



- Encourage resolution of problems by **informal** means wherever possible;
- Be easily **accessible** and **publicised**
- Be **simple** to understand and use;
- Allow **swift** handling with established **time-limits** for action and keeping people informed of the progress
- Respect people's desire for **confidentiality**
- Address all the points at issue and provide an **effective** response and **appropriate** redress, where necessary
- Provide **information** to the school's senior management team so that services can be improved.

The Complaints Procedure can be found on the school web-site, www.hillingdonmanorschool.org.uk . Parents of all pupils in the school will receive copies of the Complaints Procedure. A copy is available on request

If users have difficulties reading the text, please ask for clarification.

Staff will always aim to acknowledge a concern or complaint within the same working day or, if not, by the next day. An acknowledgement will include some indication of the proposed procedure and a time-frame. A contact person will also be identified at this initial stage.

Complaints should be handled within the confines of Confidentiality. Information should be shared **only** with those who 'need to know'. It is important that letters, emails and general comments are NOT addressed to 'The Senior Management Team', or 'The Directors', as this will interfere with any future process should the first response fail to resolve the complaint to the complainant's satisfaction.

It is important that all aspects of a complaint are responded to in a way that addresses the original complaint. Staff will endeavour to do this.

Complaints and concerns will be monitored in a way that supports the Senior Management Team in improving the service to local authorities, pupils and their families.

Investigating Complaints

It is suggested that at each stage, the person investigating the complaint (the complaints co-ordinator), 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 interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- Keep notes of the interview.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure schools will want to 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 (where possible) 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.

It would be useful if complainants were encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

An effective procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Vexatious Complaints

- There may be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the person making the complaint remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the directors are able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

Time-Limits

- Complaints need to be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

3.0 THE FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Stages of Complaints

Hillingdon Manor School complaints procedures have well-defined stages; a flow chart of these stages can be found in App 1.

- Stage one: complaint heard by staff member (though not the subject of the complaint);
- Stage two: complaint heard by Assistant Head
- Stage three: complaint heard by Head teacher;
- Stage four: complaint heard by Panel comprising 2 Directors and 1 member independent of the management of the school.

Parents have the right to attend and be accompanied to a panel.

4.0 MANAGING & RECORDING COMPLAINTS

Recording Complaints

Staff at Hillingdon Manor School record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing. At the end of a meeting or telephone call, a member of staff will ensure that the complainant and the school have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls will be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.



Publicising the Procedure

There is a legal requirement for the Complaints Procedures to be publicised.

Our procedures are publicised through:

1. The school prospectus;
2. The information given to new parents when their children join the school;
3. The information given to the children themselves;
4. The home-school agreement;
5. Home school bulletins and newsletters;
6. The school website

5.0 APPENDIX 1: FLOWCHART

