EF ACADEMY

International
Boarding Schools

OXFORD COMPLAINTS POLICY

Origins of policy	EF Academy Torbay and Oxford
Modified by:	Paul Ellis (Head of School), Mark Fletcher-Single (Deputy Head Pastoral), update of record of complaints May'19 Reviewed Jul.'20 Aug.'21 (Mark Fletcher-Single): developments to reflect the School's leadership restructure during academic yr. Aug.'21 to Jul.'22 and reference to "Director of Global Operations" changed to "VP Operations UK" Aug.'22 (Mark Fletcher-Single): developments to further detail & clarify complaints procedure, and reporting & recording processes Jul.'23 (Mark Fletcher-Single): developments to reflect the School's leadership restructure beginning from Sept.'23 May'24 (Mark Fletcher-Single): developed scope policy including details of exceptions to rule an issue out of scope and signpost to most appropriate policy foe management of these matters, and strengthening the policy to support managing serial or unreasonable complaints Aug. '25 (Rob Tasker) Adding reference to Deputy Head of School as well as Head of School in the processes in the policy Sept '26 RTA – Changed to reflect new SLT structure.
Related documents:	Academic Policy Anti-bullying Policy Concerns Policy E-Safety Policy Health & Safety Policy Medical Provision & Medicines Policy Safeguarding Policy The Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014 (updated Apr.'19)
Review date:	August 27

Policy Statement

EF Academy Oxford prides itself on the quality of teaching and pastoral care provided to its students. It recognises parents may, from time to time, have concerns about the progress, achievement, behaviour or welfare of their daughter or son. Parents are encouraged to make those concerns known to staff so they can be addressed in partnership with the School. The School takes all concerns and complaints seriously and will make every effort to deal with complaints informally, at an early stage, in the spirit of continued respect and partnership.

It is in everyone's interest concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaint procedure. This Policy deals with concerns or complaints from parents of current students and parents of former students provided the complaint was initially raised when the student was still registered at the School.

nb for the purpose of this policy the term "parents" refers to parents, carers and legal guardians.

Any member of the public may also raise a concern or complaint about the facilities or services provided by the School. In these rare instances, and where the matter raised falls within scope, Principal and Deputy Head of School are authorised to use this policy to investigate and respond to the complainant in writing. This is a three-stage process. In most cases, any concern or complaint, regardless of whose attention to whom it is initially brought, should be discussed informally at Stage 1, before being submitted to a formal process. Complaints concerning the Principal may proceed directly to the formal process: Stage 2 (managed by our VP Operations UK).

This procedure covers all concerns and complaints about the facilities and services provided by the School except where these are covered by separate, statutory policies as described below.

Admissions or appeals - appeals against admissions are managed under the Admissions Policy
Matters likely to require a safeguarding investigation - this procedure does not apply to safeguarding concerns regarding children and young people or allegations of abuse made against teachers, and other staff, including supply teachers and volunteers, which are managed under the School's Safeguarding Policy. If you have serious concerns you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
Staff grievances - complaints from staff will be dealt with under the EF's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct - complaints about staff will be dealt with under EF's disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified the matter is being addressed.
Subject Access Requests - please see Data Protection and GDPR Policy
Whistleblowing - the School has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the School's complaints procedure.

Complaints concerning a third party or services used by the School - please raise the matter directly with the provider.
Anonymous complaints - we will not normally respond to anonymous complaints, however, the Principal or Deputy Head of School and VP Operations UK and will determine whether an issue raised in this way needs investigating.

In addition, this policy does not cover financial concerns: these are covered by the home enrollment office of the student.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority safeguarding teams or tribunals, this may impact our ability to adhere to the timescales within this policy or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against EF Academy Oxford in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

We do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including which is abusive, offensive or threatening. The School will immediately suspend the complaint process where the behaviour of the complainant is deemed to be 'unreasonable'. Where a complaint is deemed by the School to be unreasonable or vexatious there will be no further action taken by the School.

Definitions

This policy deals with concerns or complaints from parents of current students and parents of former students, provided the complaint was initially raised when the student was still registered at the School. For the purposes of this procedure, concerns are defined as having a worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought. A complaint can be any matter about which a parent / carer is unhappy and seeks action by the School.

General

This policy makes use of the procedures set out in The Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014 (updated Apr.'19), which came into force on 5th Jan.'15.

Guidance suggests there is a difference between 'concerns' which we take to be low-level and easily dealt with informally, and 'complaints', which should be subject to a formal procedure i.e. it cannot be easily resolved by the intervention of a senior leader. However, EF Academy Oxford understands any matter about which a parent of a student is unhappy and seeks action by the School, can be considered a complaint, and thus subject to the scope of this policy.

At EF Academy Oxford, a member of the senior leadership team will be appointed as the Complaints Coordinator; this will usually be the Deputy Head of School or Deputy Head of School, but could be another member of SLT at the discretion of the Head of School, or if the complaint relates to the Deputy Head of School.

Type of Concerns & Complaints

The majority of concerns / complaints received by the School fall into the following categories:

- Academic: course programme, unsatisfactory teaching, too much / too little homework, progress in a particular subject etc.;
- Pastoral care: bullying, overall progress of the child (young person), unhappiness of the child (young person), accommodation etc.; or
- Safeguarding / child protection: allegations against staff, handling of sensitive issues.

This procedure does not apply to safeguarding concerns regarding children / young people or allegations of abuse made against teachers, and other staff, including supply teachers and volunteers, which are managed under the School's Safeguarding Policy, and is distinct from formal staff disciplinary, grievance or capability proceedings. Appeals regarding a permanent exclusion, required removal and suspension are managed in accordance with Stage 3 of this procedure.

Implementation

Complainants must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. The School will only consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply. The timescales for any complaints made outside of term time will be considered to have commenced on the first day of term. The complainant may withdraw a complaint at any stage of the process described below. Written confirmation may be requested to confirm a complaint has been withdrawn. No further action will be taken when a complaint is withdrawn.

Procedures

We aim to deal with all matters of concern raised by parents or carers promptly, fairly, openly, and without prejudice. Concerns and complaints are more likely to be resolved informally when all parties commit to working together towards a resolution in the spirit of co-operation. Informal resolutions will usually involve a meeting between the complainant and the School. Any concern or complaint should be listened to by an appropriate member of the staff team (as appropriate to the nature of the complaint). Where further information is needed, we will aim to respond in a timely and sensitive manner. It also helps to understand what a satisfactory outcome would look like to the complainant.

When managing a concern or complaint informally at Stage 1, parents may, if they are not satisfied with the response, escalate their complaint to the formal stage of this procedure. Mediation meetings may be helpful in resolving issues of concern or in mending relationships and moving forward in partnership with parents / carers, however, these sit outside the formal complaints process. The School also aims to ensure the complaints process is easy to understand, access and be readily available. Parents etc. should not be put off from making a complaint because they are not sure how to do so. This complaints procedure is available on the School website and can be made available in hard copy on request.

Complaints which come to a member of staff from other sources should be passed immediately to the Deputy Head of School, who will inform the complainant of the action they proposes to take.

There are three possible stages to the School's complaints procedure.

Stage 1 Informal Resolution

Complaints expressed by parents to any member of staff should be dealt with by that member of staff if she / he is able to do so. The member of staff will acknowledge the complaint normally within 3 working days of receipt. They will try to identify areas of agreement and clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred. They may make a written record of your concern or complaint, the date on which it was received, and then try to resolve the matter themselves, or refer you to the appropriate person. The extent to which complainants have attempted informal ways of addressing an issue may be taken into consideration when assessing the reasonableness of a complaint during the formal stages of the procedure.

If the member of staff considers the issue to be beyond her / his competence, the concern should be passed to the Deputy Head of School, who will either attempt to resolve the matter, or identify another member of the School SLT who will attempt to resolve the matter.

If a complaint cannot be resolved informally within 15 working days, or if the relevant member of staff and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then the parents should proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2.

Stage 2 Formal Procedure

If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, the complainant can choose to escalate the complaint to a formal stage. The complaint will be received by the Deputy Head of School and must be received in writing. When a written formal complaint is received, the Deputy Head of School and / or a member of the School's SLT will decide on the appropriate action and deploy a relevant member of senior staff to make appropriate investigations. The investigation lead will prepare a report that will include recommendations on whether the complaint can be resolved or should be rejected. The School will, in normal circumstances, respond to the complaint within 5 working days of receiving the written complaint. When responding to the complaint, the School must inform the complainant of her / his right of appeal to an independent panel.

A log of all correspondence in relation to the complaint will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Principles.

It may be necessary for the Principal, Deputy Head of School (or VP Operations UK) to carry out further investigation. In Investigating, the Principal or Deputy Head of School (or VP) will consider all evidence they consider relevant. This may include, but is not limited to:

- obtaining statements from the complainant and those involved with the complaint
- meeting / speaking with the complainant and those involved in the complaint
- reviewing relevant correspondence and other documents relating to the complaint

After considering all matters the Principal / Deputy Head of School / VP considers relevant, the above can decide to:

- uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it
- uphold the complaint in part (in other words find an aspect or aspects of the complaint to be valid, but not the whole complaint) direct for certain action to be taken, or
- dismiss the complaint entirely

The Principal or Deputy Head of School will inform the complainant of their decision in writing, the grounds on which it was made, and any actions taken as a result of the complaint. Wherever reasonably practicable, this will be within 20 working days (excluding those that fall in school holidays) of having issued written acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint, or within 10 working days after any meeting or speaking with the parents to discuss the Stage 2 complaint. The written notification shall also advise the complainant of their right to escalate the complaint to Stage 3 of the formal complaint's procedure if they are not satisfied with the outcome at Stage 2.

Parents may request a review at Stage 3 of the procedure within 15 working days of receipt of the Stage 2 outcome letter. If the parent does not invoke a Stage 3 review within this timeframe the School may, acting reasonably, deem the complaint closed.

Stage 3 Independent Panel Hearing

Complainants who are not satisfied by the School's decision regarding the complaint can request a hearing by a panel of three members. The request should include a summary of the complaint, why the complainant it dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2, and the outcome they are seeking. The complainant must be advised, by the Principal or Deputy Head of School in writing to the VP Operations UK, outlining the reasons for requesting the panel hearing. Notification of the request for a panel hearing must be made within 10 working days of the complainant receiving the outcome of the School's decision from Stage 2 of the process. The VP Operations UK will convene a meeting of the complaints panel and will organise the time and date of the Stage 3 review meeting, inviting all the attendees, collating all the relevant documentation and distributing this to all parties, no less than 5 working days in advance of the meeting. The panel will be appointed by the VP Operations UK and will consist of one panel member who will be independent* of the School and two other members of school staff who have not previously been involved in the complaint.

The hearing will be held within 10 working days of the VP Operations UK receiving notice of the complaint, unless the parent requests a date reasonably close to, but outside of, the ten-day period, or the parent insists upon brining legal representation, in which case the School may require sufficient time to seek legal advice itself.

The complainant must be told of her or his right to be accompanied by a friend, and where relevant, translations / interpreters must be made available for and arranged for in consultation with parents. Where the complainant, Principal, Deputy Head of School / or relevant person involved in the complaint have been invited to attend the review meeting, they are entitled to be accompanied by a family member / friend / representative as appropriate. However, legal representatives are not permitted to attend the review meeting. The parents may attend and be accompanied at the panel meeting by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not be appropriate.

The panel will hear the appeal(s), consider all the views expressed and decide the outcome. The panel can make such findings and recommendations to the VP Operations UK as it wishes. It must send its report to the VP Operations UK, the Principal or Deputy Head of School and the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, within 3 working days of the hearing. Details of the complaint and panel hearing must be available for inspection on school premises by the VP Operations UK and Principal or Deputy Head of School.

The School will ensure, in accordance with The Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014 (updated Apr.'19), a copy of the findings and recommendations made at the panel review stage are provided in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Any complaint of a decision taken by the Principal or Deputy Head of School to exclude or require the removal of the student will be governed by this stage of the School's complaints procedure. In such circumstances, the panel may only uphold the complaint and ask the Principal or Deputy Head of School to reconsider their decision if they consider, having regard to the process followed by the Principal or Deputy Head of School, their decision to exclude / require the removal of the student was not a reasonable decision for the Principal or Deputy Head of School to have taken. Stage 3 is the final stage at which the School will consider the complaint. Minutes of the review meeting will be taken and provided with the written notification of the decision taken at stage 3.

VP Operations UK Action

In general, the VP Operations UK will take one of the following courses of action:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on appropriate action to resolve the complaint; or
- recommend changes to the School's systems or procedures.

The VP Operations UK decision is final.

*It is a requirement of The Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014 (updated Apr.'19) that, where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the School.

Vexatious Complaints

There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, and where central office has agreed to investigate, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this complaints procedure, the VP Operations UK will inform parents in writing the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is now closed.

If the complainant writes again on the same issue, then the correspondence may be recognised as vexatious and there will be no obligation on the part of the School or central office to respond to any further correspondence on the same issues or a closely related issue. Whilst we understand some matters may be potentially upsetting, if the conduct of the complainant is inappropriate, threatening or abusive (either in person or in written form), the School reserves the right to regard the matter as a vexatious complaint and there will be no obligation on the part of the School to respond.

Reporting and Recording

In all cases it is important for staff to maintain accurate records so the nature of the complaint and the action taken can be recorded and traced. Supporting documents should be attached to the records. A written record will be kept of all complaints and whether they are resolved following a formal procedure or panel hearing. A record will be kept of actions taken by the School as a result of the complaint(s) whether upheld or not. All correspondence, statements and records pertaining to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where a body conducting an inspection requests access to them.

It is important those responsible for reviewing a complaint at each formal stage keep records of what the complaint was, whether it was resolved following a formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing, any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether they are upheld), any evidence considered, and the outcome. The School will ensure, in accordance with The Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014 (updated Apr.'19), copy of the findings and recommendations made at the panel review stage are provided in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about.

Any personal information recorded in regard to the complaint will be kept in accordance with the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018. When dealing with complaints the School (including any panel member appointed under the relevant stages' process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- the name of the complainant
- the date and time at which the complaint was made
- the details of the complaint
- the desired outcome of the complainant
- how the complaint is investigated (including written records of interviews held)
- findings and recommendations of investigations
- any action taken
- the complainant's response (satisfaction or further pursuit of complaint)

This may include 'special category personal data' (including sensitive data such as information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint.

A confidential written record of all complaints made in accordance with the formal stage of this procedure will be kept by the School. The written record will include whether the complaint has been resolved following a formal procedure and whether it proceeded to a panel review meeting. It will also refer to any action taken by the School, regardless of whether it has been upheld.

Note: for the purposes of the complaint's procedure, 'working days' means term time days. If a complaint is received at the end of a term, a resolution will be reached within a maximum of 10 weeks from the date of the complaint being lodged.

Monitoring the implementation of this policy

The senior leadership team is delegated the authority to monitor the implementation of this policy at school level on behalf of Ef Academy. It will review the log of complaints at timely intervals. It will review the number of complaints and whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision. It will consider any lessons learned and make recommendations for any revisions to policy.

Complaints registered in the preceding school year: 0 formal complaints were registered under the formal procedure during last academic year.