



1F Complaints Policy & Overview (for Members of the Public)

Reviewed: Principal/SMT May-June 2025 (Every 2 years)

Ratified by Board: July 2025

Next Review date: Summer Term 2027

EDI Assessment: SSET does not currently identify any EDI impact of this policy; should new information come to light, this will be considered at the next review

Introduction

The Sheiling Ringwood (TSR) respects the right of members of the public to report any concerns they may have regarding TSR's provision of services or, if they deem it necessary, to make a complaint.

If a member of the public does have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by TSR in accordance with this procedure.

The procedures outlined in this policy do not apply to complaints from parents/carers of current students at TSR for which there is a separate policy.

TSR aims to:

- Deal with complaints promptly and impartially
- Resolve a complaint by informal means, if possible
- Ensure that a thorough investigation is carried out; and
- Provide redress, where appropriate

TSR sets high standards and whilst we always strive to get things right first time, we recognise that complaints can be a valuable part of quality improvement. We will deal with complaints fairly and effectively.

Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated unless TSR considers that the complaint warrants an investigation.

TSR will make this complaints procedure available on its website. It will ensure that anyone who requests it is sent a copy of this document and the details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding academic year will be published on our website also.

TSR may make reasonable adjustments, if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. This may include providing information in alternative formats or holding meetings in accessible locations.

What is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by a member of the public. A complaint may be made about an individual member of staff, a specific department or about TSR as a whole. All complaints will be treated impartially and confidentially. Any individual involved in the complaint will not be responsible for investigating or responding to the complaint.

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought. A concern is not a complaint. If a concern is raised, then TSR will seek resolution.

Expectations of the Complainant

The complainant will:

- Inform TSR of their complaint in full as early as possible
- Co-operate with TSR staff investigating their complaint
- Seek a resolution to their complaint in collaboration with TSR and
- Treat all members of staff involved in the complaint with respect and not act unreasonably at any time

TSR will not respond to complaints made later than 1 month after the incident complained of occurred unless we consider that there are exceptional circumstances.

What will be managed pursuant to this policy

This procedure covers complaints about any provision of facilities or services by TSR other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures.

Recording Complaints

TSR will keep a written record of all complaints and at what stage of the procedure they are resolved. TSR will keep records of the following information:

- Date when the complaint was raised
- Names of member(s) of public
- Description of the complaint
- Records of all the investigations
- Witness statements
- Name of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Any action taken by TSR as a result of the complaint
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue

We will handle any information received confidentially (information will only be shared with those who need to know).

Timeline overview

TSR will acknowledge complaints within 5 working days if received during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. Complaints made outside of term time may be considered to have been received on the first term time day after the holiday period.

TSR will endeavour to resolve most complaints quickly and informally.

TSR will aim:

- to complete stage 1 of the procedure within 15 working days of receipt of the complaint and as soon as practicable during holiday periods
- to complete stage 2 within a further 20 working days of receipt if the complaint is lodged during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods

If other organisations are investigating aspects of the complaint (for example, the police or local authority) this may impact on TSR's ability to adhere to the timescales in this policy. In such cases, TSR will confirm new timescales.

If legal proceedings are initiated TSR may not process the complaint until the legal process is completed.

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing.

Stage 1 – Informal Complaint

- 1.1 If a member of the public has a complaint, they should raise this with the Principal in writing. All informal complaints raised are logged to ensure a clear record of the process followed.
- 1.2 If the complaint is against the Principal, it should be made directly to the Clerk to the Board of Trustees (via the email address trustees@thesheilingringwood.co.uk) to

appoint a trustee to investigate and resolve the complaint. This trustee will not be the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

- 1.3 The complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days if received during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.
- 1.4 TSR's aim is to complete the first stage of the procedure and send a written response within 15 working days of receipt of the complaint if the complaint is lodged during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. Otherwise, TSR will explain within 15 working days if further time is required and will confirm the date by which the complaint will be considered at Stage 1.
- 1.5 If the matter is not resolved, TSR will advise the complainant that they can progress their complaint to Stage 2 of this policy.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

- 2.1. If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, then the complainant must put their complaint in writing to the Clerk to the Board of Trustees within 5 working days of receiving the outcome of the informal complaint, stating the desired outcome and the grounds of appeal.
The Chair of the Board of Trustees will then decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
The complainant may also be referred directly to this stage if the Principal or a trustee has decided the matter is unlikely to be resolved at Stage 1.
- 2.2. The Chair of the Board of Trustees (or nominee, where, for example, there is a conflict) may meet or speak to the complainant, to discuss the matter. Every attempt will be made to reach a resolution at this stage.
- 2.3. It may be necessary for the Chair of the Board of Trustees (or nominee) to carry out further investigations.
- 2.4. The Chair of the Board of Trustees (or nominee) will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- 2.5. Once the Chair of the Board of Trustees (or nominee) is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made. The complainant will be informed of this decision in writing usually within 20 working days of the receipt of the formal complaint during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. The Chair of the Board of Trustees (or nominee) will also give reasons for their decision.
- 2.6. The Chair of the Board of Trustees (or nominee) can:
 - Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
 - Uphold the complaint in whole or in part
 - Recommend changes to the Board of Trustees to ensure that similar issues do not recur

Serial or persistent complaints

The complaint will be viewed as serial or persistent if the complainant remains dissatisfied following Stage 2 and attempts to reopen the same or similar issues.

In the event of serial or persistent complaints, the Chair of the Board of Trustees will inform the complainant in writing that all stages of the Complaints Policy have been completed and that the matter is closed. TSR will be unable to make any further response and any contact received in regard to the complaint will be disregarded.

Unreasonable Complaints

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable if:

- The complaint breaches the Code of Conduct Policy for parents, carers and members of the public
- The complaint raised is not within the scope of the TSR formal complaints procedure
- The basis and / or scope of the complaint is changed during the investigation
- More than one complaint is raised in relation to a particular circumstance that has previously been investigated as part of any other complaint and has been concluded
- The complainant chooses not to co-operate with the process, hindering the completion and / or outcome of the investigation
- The complainant dictates the intended outcome of the complaint, which is not a feasible or realistic outcome for TSR
- The complainant hinders the process by unnecessarily contacting staff members in the organisation during the process, impacting the investigation
- The complainant makes any unjustified requests, including replacement of investigators in an attempt to alter the complaint outcome
- The complainant acts maliciously, uses threatening behaviour or violence, uses discriminatory or offensive language or raises complaints they know not to be true
- The complainant makes any defamatory or derogatory statements about staff, or the provision, either verbally, or in writing, including publishing or threatening to publish the aforementioned in any press release or on any social media platforms
- The complainant makes excessive demands on TSR time by either frequent, lengthy, complicated and/or stressful contact with staff regarding their complaint
- The complainant introduces trivial or irrelevant information and expects it to be taken into account and commented on and/or
- The complainant raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions insisting they are fully answered, sometimes immediately and to their own timescales

Where, at any stage, a complaint is deemed by the Principal (or Chair of the Board of Trustees, where relevant) to be unreasonable, TSR may take any of the following actions:

- Implement a sanction pursuant to the Code of Conduct Policy for parents, carers and members of the public
- Implement a limited communication strategy
- Advise that a third-party act on the complainant's behalf; and/or
- Notify the complainant that the complaints procedure will not be implemented and that there will be no further response to their complaint.

Where aggression or abusive behaviour has been used, TSR may:

- Implement a sanction pursuant to the Code of Conduct Policy for parents, carers and members of the public
- Ask the complainant to leave TSR's premises
- Inform the police and/or
- Bar them from being on TSR's premises

Further action

If the complainant wishes to take matters further, they may refer their concerns in relation to TSR to the following government agencies:

- Care & Quality Commission (CQC), Citygate, Gallowgate, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE1 4PA

- Department for Education (the DfE), Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD. The DfE will not investigate individual complaints, but it has certain powers to intervene if it considers a school/college is not meeting standards in relation to: education; student welfare and health and safety; and school premises amongst other matters.

The DfE will only consider complaints where there is evidence that TSR:

- > does not have a complaints procedure;
 - > did not provide a copy of its complaints procedure when requested;
 - > does not have a procedure that complies with statutory regulations;
 - > has not followed its published complaints procedure; and/or
 - > has not allowed its complaints procedure to be completed.
- Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD
 - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman – Tel: 0300 061 0614

Review

The Principal will monitor the nature and frequency of formal complaints.

This policy will be evaluated by the Board of Trustees in the light of complaints made and their resolution in order to contribute to TSR improvement.

End of document.