



1H Complaints Policy For Parents and Carers of Students at The Sheiling Ringwood

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) is committed to providing a high quality of education and pastoral care for its students. If parents (including those with parental responsibility or legal guardians) of existing students do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by TSR in accordance with this procedure.

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.

This policy is consistent with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 as amended. 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 their website also.

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

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

There is a separate complaints policy for members of the public, that is anyone who is not a parent of a student at TSR, at the time of submitting the complaint.

What is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by a parent of a student at TSR. It is likely to arise if a parent believes that TSR has done something wrong or has failed to do something that it should have done or acted unfairly. A complaint may be made about an individual member of staff, a specific department or about TSR as a whole.

Parents can be assured that 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. No student will be penalised for a complaint that parents raise in good faith.

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought. If a concern is raised, then TSR will seek resolution.

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:

Timeframes

TSR will not respond to complaints made later than 3 months after the incident complained of occurred unless we consider that there are exceptional circumstances.

All complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days if received during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

TSR's aim is to complete the first stage of the procedure 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.

TSR aims to complete the second stage within a further 20 working days of receipt of the appeal if the appeal is lodged during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

TSR will endeavour to complete the third stage of the procedure within a further 30 working days of receipt of the appeal if the appeal is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

Please note that, whilst we will endeavour to respond to parental complaints within the timeframes set out above, this is dependent upon the complexity and the level of investigation which will be required to complete each stage.

In exceptional circumstances, TSR may agree to put a complaint on hold, for example where the parent suffers a period of serious ill-health. In these circumstances TSR will notify the parents in writing of a new timeframe for the complaint to progress through TSR's complaints process. Parents will be limited to a maximum period of 2 months for their complaint to be put on hold. Failure by the parent to comply with the new timeframe will result in the complaint being considered to be out of time. Parents would then be informed in writing that the complaint would not be progressed further.

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 parent wants to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing.

Recording Concerns & Complaints

TSR will keep a written record of all complaints and all communications and meetings related to the complaints, including at what stage of the procedure they are resolved.

TSR will keep records of the following information:

- Date when the concern/complaint was raised
- Names of parent/student/resident
- Description of the concern/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 concern/complaint
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual concerns/complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State for Education or a body conducting an inspection under s109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access.

Stage 1 – Informal Complaint

- 1.1 TSR will endeavour to resolve most informal complaints quickly. All informal complaints raised are logged to ensure a clear record of the process followed.
- 1.2 If parents have an informal complaint, they should normally contact their child's teacher, house manager or appropriate member of staff in the first instance. This may be in person, by telephone, by letter or email. The informal complaint will be investigated and, in the majority of cases, we hope that the matter will be resolved straightaway to the parents' satisfaction. Communications and meetings related to the investigation of the complaint will also be logged by TSR.
- 1.3 If the staff member cannot resolve the matter, it may be necessary for them to consult a relevant Head of Department. The parents will usually be informed of the outcome of the informal complaint in writing within 15 working days of receipt of their informal complaint if the complaint is lodged during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. This will set out the areas of concern addressed, any investigations conducted and the outcome. It will also set out the process for the parents to follow should they wish to progress their complaint to Stage 2 of this procedure if the matter has not been resolved to their satisfaction.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

- 2.1 If an informal complaint cannot be resolved at Stage 1 of this procedure, then parents may appeal the decision in writing to the Principal within 5 working days of receiving the written outcome of Stage 1. The Principal will decide, after considering the formal complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- 2.2 The Principal (or delegated nominee) may meet or speak to the parents to discuss the matter. Every attempt will be made to reach a resolution at this stage.
- 2.3 If the parent raises new complaints which fall outside of the scope of the original complaint at Stage 1, those complaints will be considered by TSR as a separate complaint(s).
- 2.4 It may be necessary for the Principal (or nominee) to carry out further investigations.
- 2.5 The Principal (or nominee) will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the formal complaint.
- 2.6 Once the Principal (or nominee) is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made. Parents will usually be informed of this decision in writing within 20 working days of the receipt of the formal complaint if the formal complaint is lodged during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. The Principal (or nominee) will also give reasons for their decision.
- 2.7 If the formal complaint is raised against the Principal, the Chair of the Board of Trustees will call for a full report from the Principal and for all the relevant documents. The Chair of the Board of Trustees may also call for a briefing from members of staff and may speak to, or meet with, the parents to discuss the matter further.
- 2.8 Once the Chair of the Board of Trustees is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will usually be informed of the decision in writing within 20 working days of the receipt of the formal complaint if the formal complaint is lodged during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. The Chair of the Board of Trustees will give reasons for their decision.
- 2.9 If the parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they may proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing for Formal Complaint

- 3.1 If parents seek to invoke Stage 3, they will be referred to the Clerk to the Board of Trustees. Parents must make a request in writing (via the email address trustees@thesheilingringwood.co.uk) within 5 working days of receipt of the Stage 2 decision, stating the desired outcome and the grounds of the complaint.
- 3.2 If the parent raises new complaints which fall outside of the scope of the original complaint at Stage 1 and Stage 2 of this procedure, those complaints will be considered by TSR as a separate complaint(s).
- 3.3 The Clerk will refer the matter to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the formal complaint and one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of TSR.
- 3.4 The Clerk to the Panel, on behalf of the Panel, will acknowledge the formal complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable. The hearing date will be dependent upon the amount of information which will need to be considered by the members of the Panel to ensure they have sufficient time to assess all related matters.
- 3.5 If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the formal complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of information related to the complaint shall be supplied to all parties normally not later than 5 working days prior to the hearing. The Panel will not review any new complaints nor allow information unrelated to the original complaint to be included at this stage. The Panel will not normally accept as evidence recordings of any conversations that were obtained covertly.
- 3.6 The hearing will be held in private. Electronic recordings are not normally permitted unless a parent's disability requires it and the consent of all parties must be obtained. The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, friend or advocate. TSR will inform you if requested whether we are aware of any advocacy services but, if the parents seek to use them, it will not be at any cost to TSR. Legal representation at the Stage 3 hearing is not deemed to be appropriate. Media representatives are not permitted to attend. The parents must confirm to the Clerk to the Panel who will be attending at least 5 working days before the hearing.
- 3.7 If possible, the Panel will resolve the Stage 3 formal complaint without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.
- 3.8 After due consideration of all the facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings and may make recommendations.
- 3.9 The Panel may either dismiss the formal complaint in whole or in part if the Panel considers the complaint is not made out; or uphold the formal complaint in whole or in part if the Panel considers the complaint is made out
- 3.10 A written record will be kept of all formal complaints made, whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a Panel hearing and of any action taken by the TSR as a result of these formal complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).
- 3.11 The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, normally within 5 working days of the hearing but this will be dependent upon Panel availability and the complexity of the complaint. A copy of the Panel's findings will also be sent, where relevant, to the person complained about, and shall be available for inspection at TSR. It is our aim that Stage 3 will be concluded within 30 working days of receipt of the Stage 2 appeal if the appeal is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

3.12 It is not within the powers of the Panel to make any financial reward, nor to impose sanctions on staff, students or parents. The Panel may make recommendations to the full Board of Trustees.

Serial or persistent complaints

The complaint will be viewed as serial or persistent, if the parents remain dissatisfied following Stage 3 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 parents 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 complainant breaches the Code of Conduct Policy for parents and carers
- 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 and carers
- Implement a limited communications strategy
- Advise that a third-party act on the complainant's behalf and/or
- Notify the complainant that the complaint 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 and carers

- Ask the complainant to leave TSR's premises
- Inform the police and/or
- Bar them from being on TSR's premises.

Further Action

If parents wish to take matters further, they may refer their concerns to their child's placing local authority.

Parents may also direct a complaint 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.

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