



Complaints Policy (including EYFS)

Ref: **LP-MW-023**

Version: **1.8**

Date: **31st August 2024**

Document Owner: **Jacky Shackel (Head of Prep School) & Emma Parsons (Deputy Head – Senior School)**

Description: This policy outlines the School's approach to handling complaints.

OUR SCHOOL AIMS

- ❖ *To be a safe and trusted foundation for our pupils to achieve their individual academic, social and creative potential.*
- ❖ *To cultivate the skills, knowledge, self-awareness and academic credentials our pupils will need to confidently meet the challenges of our rapidly changing world.*
- ❖ *To instil and nurture a strong sense of social responsibility, integrity and environmental awareness so our pupils positively contribute to a sustainable and just society.*
- ❖ *To guide each pupil in the discovery, delight and development of their individual gifts, talents and character.*
- ❖ *To create and sustain an inclusive contemporary school culture, where diversity, difference and individuality are recognised and celebrated.*
- ❖ *To prioritise physical and emotional wellbeing across every facet of our school community.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At Lingfield College we are committed to meeting the needs of our pupils. However, we recognise that not everything goes well for everybody all of the time. There are times when misunderstandings, confusion or genuine concerns give rise to complaints. The intention of this policy is to provide a clear and transparent process that will enable such complaints to be dealt with promptly, fairly and proportionately.
- 1.2 For the purposes of this policy, a 'parent' shall include a guardian, carer or any other person with parental responsibility for a child at the school.
- 1.3 For the purposes of this Complaints Policy, a complaint can only be made by a Parent if it is put in writing to the Headmaster (see Stage 2 below) whilst the Pupil to which it relates is still on roll.

2.0 ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headmaster or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.



3.0 **DUPLICATE COMPLAINTS**

After closing a complaint at the end of the procedure, if a duplicate complaint is received from:

- spouse
- partner
- grandparent
- child

Lingfield College will inform the new complainant that the school has already considered that complaint and the local process is complete. Lingfield College will advise the new complainant to contact the Department of Education if they are dissatisfied with the school's handling of the original complaint.

4.0 **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

4.1 This policy has been approved by the Headmaster and Governing Body of the College and is available on the College's website or on request from the School Office in either Prep or Senior School. It can be made available in large print or another more accessible format, if required. If assistance is needed with making a complaint, for example because of a disability, a parent should contact Mrs Tara Unwin (the Headmaster's P.A.) who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

Separate procedures apply if the Headmaster expels or asks a pupil to leave and a parent seeks a Review by the Governors of that decision (a copy of these procedures is available on request).

4.2 All College staff are made aware of this policy and are expected to familiarise themselves with the procedures for dealing with complaints to ensure they can be of most assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

4.3 The College's guiding principles in complaint resolution are:

- to give careful and prompt consideration to all complaints
- to seek to achieve a just and fair outcome, taking due account of all relevant evidence
- to attempt to resolve complaints through dialogue and mutual understanding, and at as early a stage as possible

4.4 This policy outlines three stages of complaint:

- Stage 1: Informal Resolution
- Stage 2: Formal Resolution
- Stage 3: Panel Hearing

4.5 Where timescales are given in 'working days', this is defined as Monday - Friday during term time (the dates of which are available on our website). Complaints received during holiday periods will be dealt with as soon as is practicable but are likely to take longer to resolve due to the unavailability of relevant staff. Under such circumstances the complainant will be notified of any extension to the time scales and the reason(s) why an extension is necessary when the complaint is acknowledged.

4.6 If a parent wishes to know the number of formal complaints received by the College in the preceding academic year, this information is available on request from the Headmaster.



5.0 STAGE 1: INFORMAL RESOLUTION

- 5.1 It is hoped that most complaints and concerns can be resolved quickly and informally. A parent with cause for concern or complaint should feel free to talk directly to a member of staff, to telephone, or write with the details of the issue that concerns them. In the first instance, it is usually best to address a concern to the one of the following, as they are often best placed to resolve the matter quickly:
- **Academic Matters:** If the complaint or concern relates to the classroom, the curriculum or Special Educational Needs, it should be discussed with the child's Tutor in the first instance. The Tutor will then help the Parents to put their concerns to the appropriate Head of Department or the SENDCo. He/she may also refer it to the Deputy Head (Academic) in the Senior School or Director of Studies in the Prep School.
 - **Pastoral Matters:** If the complaint or concern relates to a matter outside the classroom or any welfare issue, this should be raised with the Tutor, who will refer it to the relevant Head of Year and the Deputy Head (Pastoral) in the Senior School or the Head of Prep School if deemed necessary.
 - **Disciplinary Matters:** A complaint or concern about disciplinary sanctions should be first raised with the Tutor, who will discuss the situation with the member of staff who imposed the sanction.
 - **Financial Matters:** A complaint or concern about matters relating to fees or extras should be put in writing to the Finance Manager.
- 5.2 The parent may also refer a matter to the Headmaster, one of the Deputy Heads, the Head of Prep School or to the Nursery Manager, either directly or after an initial discussion with one of the above.
- 5.3 If concerns are related to the Headmaster himself, then contact should be made with the Chair of Governors through the HR Manager, Cathryn Marsden at marsdenc@lingfieldcollege.co.uk without [notifying the Headmaster. \(see also Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy LP-PW-034\).](#)
- 5.4 We will acknowledge a written notification of a complaint or concern by telephone, email or by letter within two working days of receipt. Depending on the nature of the complaint or concern, the appropriate member of staff will arrange to speak with the complainant, email them or invite them to a meeting within five working days of acknowledgement. This meeting may prompt further investigation or wider consultation but, in any event, this stage of the complaints process should be completed within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.
- 5.5 Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days of acknowledgement or in the event that the parent and member of staff fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then the parent will be advised to proceed with the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

6.0 STAGE 2: FORMAL RESOLUTION

- 6.1 If a complaint has not been resolved on an informal basis, then the parent should make a formal complaint to the Headmaster. This must be done in writing, stating explicitly that he/she wishes to invoke the formal complaints procedure.
- 6.2 Formal complaints will be acknowledged in writing by the Headmaster within two days of being received. In most cases, the Headmaster will meet or speak to the parent concerned to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. It may be necessary, however, for the Headmaster to conduct an investigation. Once the Headmaster is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and the parent will



be informed of this decision in writing, no later than 10 working days after the formal complaint was acknowledged. The Headmaster will give reasons for the decision reached.

- 6.3 Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept. The complainant will be informed if due to exceptional circumstances any additional time is necessary to complete the investigation.
- 6.4 If the parent is still not satisfied with the decision, he/she should proceed to Stage 3 of the complaints procedure.

7.0 **STAGE 3: PANEL HEARING**

- 7.1 If the parent wishes to proceed to Stage 3 (following a failure to reach a resolution earlier in the complaints process) they should write to Chair of the Board of Governors, who is responsible for making the arrangements for a Panel Hearing, at the school address. In the written request for a Panel Hearing, the parent should state the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired. He/she should also send a list of all the documents that they believe to be in the College's possession that they consider relevant in the matter and that they wish the Panel to see. Copies of all such documents shall be supplied to all parties not later than five working days before the hearing.
- 7.2 The Chair of Governors will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days and will schedule a meeting of the Panel within 15 working days thereafter. The Panel is appointed by the Chair of Governors and will consist of at least three people not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the College. The complainant may be accompanied by a friend or relative, but legal representation is not usually appropriate. If the complainant wishes to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, acting in their professional capacity, the School must be notified at least seven working days before the hearing.
- 7.3 If possible, the Panel will resolve the parent's complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.
- 7.4 After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel will reach a decision. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations shall be confirmed in writing to the parent and, where relevant, to the person complained about, within five working days of the hearing. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Headmaster and the Chair of Governors.

8.0 **RECORD KEEPING AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

- 8.1 A written record will be kept by the Headmaster of all formal complaints, including any action(s) taken by the school as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether it is upheld), and of whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or progressed to a panel hearing.
- 8.2 Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except as required by the school by paragraph 33 (k) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014; namely, where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them, or where any other legal obligations prevail. Records of individual complaints will be retained at least until the school's next inspection thereafter, in



accordance with data protection principles, only for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in the circumstances.

- 8.3 Senior leaders and governors will maintain oversight of these records in order to determine the appropriate implementation of this policy and to respond to any patterns of complaints which may be apparent.

9.0 COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE FULFILMENT OF EYFS REQUIREMENTS

- 9.1 Additional regulatory requirements apply to written complaints regarding the fulfilment of EYFS requirements. Specifically, the complainant will be notified of the outcome of any investigation by the school into their complaint within 28 days. The College's record of complaints will be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.
- 9.2 In the event of dissatisfaction with the above actions, the complainant may refer the matter to the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) or to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The contact details for these organisations are as follows:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

www.ofsted.gov.uk
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
0300 1231231

Independent Schools Inspectorate
CAP House
9-12 Long Lane
London
EC1A 9HA

www.isi.net
concerns@isi.net
0207 600 0100

- 9.3 The School will notify parents about an inspection, and supply to parents a copy of the final inspection report.

10.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

- 10.1 The Board of Governors will monitor the number and type of complaints received and the operation of the procedures set out in this policy. They will also review the policy at least annually to ensure it meets statutory requirements and continues to reflect best practice.
- 10.2 **The number of formal complaints registered under the complaints procedure during the preceding school year is available from the Headmaster by request.**

Last reviewed August 2024

Next review due August 2025