



Complaints Policy

Introduction

At Ocean Lodge Independent School we recognise that it is essential to be open to criticism or complaint from any source and that only by being open to criticism or complaints can we hope to improve our service and the attainment of the pupils we teach.

Ocean Lodge Independent School is clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint and recognises that taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

However, formal complaints should always follow the complaints procedure. 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.

Policy Aims:

- to encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
- to be easily accessible and publicised
- to be simple to understand and use
- to be impartial
- to be non-adversarial
- to allow swift handling of complaints with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress
- to ensure a full and fair investigation
- to respect people's desire for confidentiality
- to address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary
- to provide information to the senior management team and proprietor so that services can be improved.

Recording Complaints

Ocean Lodge Independent School will 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, the member of staff investigating the complaint

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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.

Time Limits

Ocean Lodge Independent School recognise the need for complaints to be considered and resolved, as quickly, and efficiently as possible; however, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set. The complainant should be sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay. Following receipt of the initial complaint, the complainant should expect a written response to be sent with 3 working days.

Cut-off Limits

Ocean Lodge Independent School recognises that it is arguably reasonable to expect the complainant to make a complaint as soon as possible after an incident arises but there may be good reasons why the complainant has not made a complaint earlier (e.g. they were gathering further information to support their complaint or they were not fully aware of the implications of an incident until a later date).

The Complaints Procedure

All complaints, whether formal or informal, will be recorded in the complaints log.

Stage 1 (informal)

- complaint heard by staff member (though not the subject of the complaint)
- where the complaint concerns the headteacher the member of staff receiving the complaint will refer the complaint to the proprietor.

Stage 2 (formal)

- complaint heard by Headteacher
- the complainant may be dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at Stage 1 as well as pursuing their initial complaint
- the headteacher may delegate the task of collating the information to another staff member but not the decision on the action to be taken
- a reference number and the name of the person investigating the complaint will be provided to the complainant within 3 working days.

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- the complaint will be investigated and an outcome provided to the complainant in writing within 3 working days
- if, for any reason, the complaint cannot be investigated within 3 working days the complainant must receive notification in writing which provides an explanation and new 10 day timescale.

Stage 3 (formal)

- Provision will be made for a hearing before a panel consisting of 3 people, including an objective panel member who is not directly involved or part of the staff team.
- if the complainant is not satisfied with the response of the panel or the complaint is about the headteacher, the complainant should write to the proprietor to request that their complaint is considered further.
- the complaint will be investigated and an outcome provided to the complainant in writing within 3 working days
- if, for any reason, the complaint cannot be investigated within 3 working days the complainant must receive notification in writing which provides an explanation and new 10 day timescale.

Investigating complaints

At every stage the person investigating the complaint will:

- 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
- arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting.
- Provide complainant and person complained about with a copy of the minutes of the meeting
- Action to be taken whether the complaint was upheld or not.

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Resolving complaints

At each stage Ocean Lodge Independent School will 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 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 Ocean Lodge Independent School could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

Vexatious Complaints

There may be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the proprietor is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that 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 to respond.

However; Ocean Lodge Independent School recognise that should a complainant raise an entirely new, separate complaint, it must be responded to in accordance with the complaints procedure. It is not the complainant who is vexatious; it is the correspondence.

To be read in-conjunction with:

- **Complaints Procedure**

Proprietor signature.....

Date 26/10/2016

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