



# READING BLUE COAT

## Complaints Policy

### Introduction

Reading Blue Coat School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its students. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School with care and in accordance with this Complaints Procedure. The School makes its Complaints Procedure available to all parents of students and of prospective students on the School's website and will ensure that parents of students and of prospective students who request it are made aware that this document is published or available and of the form in which it is published or available, and of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding School year. In accordance with paragraph 32(1) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulation 2014, the School will also make available, on request, to Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE) or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), details of this Complaints Procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding School year.

Although this Procedure is made available to parents of prospective students, it is not available for use by them; it may only be used by parents of current students.

Complaints by parents of former students will be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure only if the complaint was initially raised when the student to which the complaint relates was still registered as a student at the School.

"Parent(s)" means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for a current or prospective student about whom the complaint relates.

"Working days" refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays and half term. This means that during School holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although the School will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay.

### What Constitutes a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The School is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you or your child raises in good faith.

## **The Three-Stage Complaints Procedure**

### **Stage 1 – Informal Resolution**

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their son/daughter's Form Tutor. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Tutor cannot resolve the matter alone it may be necessary for him/her to consult a more senior colleague, usually the Headmaster of Year or Director of Section.
- Complaints made directly to Head of Year, Head of Department, Director of Section or Headmaster will usually be referred to the relevant Form Tutor unless he/she deems it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
- The Form Tutor will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the dates on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days or in the event that the Form Tutor and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Complaints Procedure.
- If the complaint is against the Headmaster, in the first instance the parents should raise the matter directly with the Headmaster if they feel comfortable in doing so. If parents are not comfortable speaking directly to the Headmaster then the complaint should follow the Stage 2 process set out below and the complaint directed to the Chair of Governors (whose contact details are available from the School Office on request).

### **Stage 2 – Formal Resolution**

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Headmaster.
- Formal complaints will be acknowledged in writing by the Headmaster within two days of being received. In most cases, the Headmaster will meet with or speak to the parents concerned, within 5 working days of the complaint being acknowledged, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage
- The Headmaster will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. It may be necessary for the Headmaster, or their nominee, to carry out further investigations.
- The Headmaster will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- 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 parents will be informed of this decision in writing, no later than 15 working days after the formal complaint was acknowledged. The Headmaster will give reasons for the decision reached.
- If the complaint is against the Headmaster, the complaint should be made to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors or their nominee will call for a full report from the Headmaster and for all the relevant documents. The Chair of Governors or their nominee may also call for a briefing from members of staff, and will in most cases, speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the Chair of Governors or their nominee is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing. The Chair of Governors or their nominee will give reasons for his/her decision. The time scales that apply to any other formal complaint (see above) will be followed.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

### **Stage 3 – Panel Hearing**

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they should do so in writing to the Chair of Governors within 10 working days of receiving the decision at Stage 2, setting out their grounds of appeal. Any supporting evidence which the parents wish to rely on should also be provided with their grounds of appeal. The Chair of Governors will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days.
- The Convenor (usually the Clerk to the Governors), who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel, will then refer the appeal to the Complaints Panel for consideration.
- The Convenor, on behalf of the Panel, will schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and within 15 working days of the request for a Panel Hearing being acknowledged.
- The Panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the School.
- The Complaints Panel will appoint one of the Panel members to act as the Chair of the Panel.
- If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing or further investigation be carried out. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than 5 working days prior to the hearing.
- The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. The Panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend.
- The remit and the manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.
- After due consideration of the merits of the complaint and all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and decide whether to:
  - dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part;
  - uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and
  - make recommendations.
- The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, within 10 working days of the hearing (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following the hearing). The decision of the Panel will be final. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents, and, where relevant, the person complained about. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair of Governors and the Headmaster.

### **Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints**

All complaints will be taken seriously and handled sensitively and within timescales set out in this policy.

During School holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although the School will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay. It may also take longer to resolve a complaint during periods of significant disruption to School life or as a consequence of unavoidable staff absence, however deviation from the normal timescale for resolving a complaint during term time will only occur on an exceptional basis, and the School will take all reasonable steps to limit any such delay.

### **Persistent or serial complaints**

The School will do its utmost to be helpful to parents who make contact with a concern, complaint or request for information. However, there may be occasions when, despite all stages of the complaints procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If a complainant attempts to re-open the same issue, the School will inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed. If the complainant contacts the School again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the School may choose not to respond. However, this will not occur until the complainant has completed the three stages of the complaints procedure. The application of a 'serial or persistent' designation for a complaint will be against the subject of the complaint rather than the complainant themselves.

### **Recording Complaints and use of personal data**

Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all formal complaints i.e. those that progress to Stages 2 or 3 of this process and any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld).

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 for at least seven years thereafter, in accordance with data protection principles, only for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in line with statutory guidance.

The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice. When dealing with complaints the School (including any Panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of student
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name and contact details of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes/minutes of the hearing, and
- The Panel's written decision

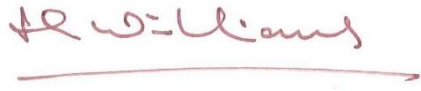
This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the School's *Privacy Notice* and/or *Data Protection Policy*, but potentially including, for instance, information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the School's *Data Protection Policy*.

**Monitoring and review of the complaints policy and procedures**

The Governing Body will monitor the number and type of complaints received and the operation of the procedures set out in this policy; these are reported to Governors on a regular basis. They will also review the policy at least annually to ensure it meets statutory requirements and continues to reflect best practice.

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

The *School* will provide ISI, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaints will be kept in accordance with its *Privacy Notice* and *GDPR Retention Policy*.

Author(s):	Pete Thomas (Headmaster)
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