



ACORN HOUSE COLLEGE

Complaints Policy

Acorn House College

Complies with paragraph 25 of the schedule to the Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2014 (SI 2014/1997)

Authorised by	The principal and the proprietor
Date	December 2015
Effective date of the policy	January 2016
Circulation	Teaching staff, all other staff, volunteers, parents and students (on request)
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Introduction

Circulation: This policy is addressed to the Senior Management Team and to all members of the teaching and pastoral staff. It is also made available to parents via the website or by request from the College Office. This policy can be made available in large print or other more accessible format, if required. If, as the parent of a student at the College, you require assistance with making a complaint, for example because of a disability, please contact the Complaints Co-ordinator who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

Policy status: The policy has been approved by the Principal and the Governing Body of Acorn House College (which is an advisory body). It provides guidelines for handling complaints. It takes account of paragraph 33 and 33 (K) of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014 which came into force in January 2015.

Application: Any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the school is treated as a complaint. Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue or if the Principal expels or suspends a pupil and the parents seek a Governors' Review of that decision. Please see the Expulsion, Removal and Review Policy and the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy for full details.

"Parent/s"/"You" means a current parent or legal guardian or education guardian, or a pupil aged 16+, and may include a parent whose child has recently left the college, but only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still registered.

This policy describes a three stage procedure:

Stage 1 - Raising a complaint to be considered initially on an informal basis.

Stage 2 - A formal complaint.

Stage 3 - A reference to the Complaints Panel.

Timescales: We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. When we refer to "working days" we mean Monday to Friday, when college is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the school's website.

Policy aim and statement

Our college ethos promotes open communication with parents and encourages a continuing dialogue between home and college throughout a pupil's education.

Aim: The aim of this policy is to ensure that a complaint or any concern is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible.

Policy statement: We need to know **as soon as possible** if there is any cause for dissatisfaction or concern. Parents and pupils should never feel - or be made to feel - that a complaint or concern will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or his/her opportunities at this college.

Management of complaints

Complaints Co-ordinator: The Principal has appointed a senior member of staff – the Vice Principal – to be responsible for co-ordinating complaints in consultation with the Principal. He is known as the Complaints Co-ordinator. If the Complaints Co-ordinator is unavailable, or is the subject of the complaint, his duties will be carried out by the Principal or another senior member of staff appointed by the Principal. The main responsibilities of the Complaints Co-ordinators is to:

- Co-ordinate the complaints procedures in college.
- Arrange assistance for parents who require this, for example, because of a disability.
- Maintain an on-going training programme for all college employees in relation to complaints.
- Monitor the keeping, confidentiality and storage of records in relation to complaints.
- Report regularly to the Principal with respect to complaints. The Principal will provide regular feedback to the governing body during termly meetings.

Complaints form: Informal complaints may be noted, together with the action taken, on a standard form. These will be kept for management purposes to enable patterns to be monitored. All complaints progressing beyond the informal stage will be reported to the governors at termly meetings by the principal and/or the complaints co-ordinator.

All formal complaints will be noted on a complaints form with a record of whether they are resolved at that stage or have proceeded to the third stage. In both cases a record will be made on the student Management Information System(MIS).

A complaints form is available on request from the head office of Regent Group. See appendix 2.

Stage 1 - Informal resolution of complaints

We expect that most complaints where a parent seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken will be able to be resolved informally. Complaints may be raised either orally or in writing.

Notification:

Education issues, pastoral care, and disciplinary matters may be raised with a subject teacher, specialist teacher, Head of Department, Head of Year, Vice Principal or Principal.

Financial matters - a query relating to fees or extras should be stated in writing to the Head of Admin.

Acknowledgement: We will acknowledge a written notification by telephone, email or letter within three working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable in the holidays. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing but in either case a complaint form may be completed, a log made in the student MIS and the complaints coordinator will be notified.

Resolution: We would aim to investigate and resolve an informal complaint within 15 working days during term time and as soon as practicable during the holidays.

Unresolved complaints: If a parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with the informal procedure above, they may follow the formal procedure below. **This formal complaint must be made in writing.**

Stage 2 - Formal resolution of complaints

Notification: A formal complaint should be set out in writing with full details and sent with all relevant documents and your full contact details in an envelope addressed to the Principal.

Acknowledgement: Your complaint will be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within three working days of receipt during term time, and as soon as practicable in the holidays indicating the action that is being taken and the likely timescale.

Investigation: The Principal may ask the Complaints Co-ordinator to act as "investigator" and/or may involve one or more Governors in their advisory capacity. The investigator/s may request additional information from you and will probably wish to speak to you personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. The outcome of the investigation will be reported to the Principal who will then notify you in writing of his decision and the reasons for it. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to your complaint and any action taken as a result of a formal complaint will be recorded.

Confidentiality: Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except to the extent required by section 25 (k) of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, that is where access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of a school's inspection or under other legal authority. In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will normally be destroyed following each college inspection. In exceptional circumstances some details will be retained for a further period as necessary.

Outcome: The Principal's aim would be to inform any complainant of the outcome of an investigation and the resolution to the complaint within 15 working days from the receipt of the complaint. Please note that any complaint received within one month of the end of term or half term is likely to take longer to resolve owing to the presence of college holidays and the unavailability of personnel.

A written record will be kept of all formal complaints, and of whether they are resolved or proceed to a panel hearing. The action taken by the college as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld) will also be recorded in writing and kept. The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding college year is supplied to parents.

Unresolved Formal Complaints: If the parent is not satisfied with the response and decisions taken the complaint will proceed to Stage 3.

Stage 3 – Complaints Panel Hearing

A Complaints Panel hearing is a review of the decisions taken by the Principal. Stage 3 will look at all aspects of the complaint.

The role of the Panel: the Panel's task is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties, and
- any representations made

If, after establishing the facts, the Panel consider that the complaint is made out, they will uphold the complaint. If the Panel consider that the complaint is not made out, they will dismiss the complaint. They will make these decisions on the balance of probabilities.

It is not within the powers of the Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils, or parents. The Panel may make recommendations on these or any other issues to the Principal or to the full body of Governors as appropriate.

The panel will make findings and recommendations which will be provided to the complainant and where relevant the person complained about and made available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the principal.

Composition: We have constituted a Complaints Panel comprising governors of the College and three members who are independent of the governance, management and running of the college and not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint. One panel member will be independent of the management team and the advisory board, who has held a position of responsibility and is used to analysing evidence and putting forward balanced arguments (e.g. business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of other schools, people with legal background,

retired members of the Police Force). The parent will be allowed to attend and be accompanied if s/he wishes.

Notification: To request a hearing before the Complaints Panel please write to the Clerk to the Governors **within seven working days of the decision at the formal stage**. Your request will only be considered if you have completed the procedures at Stages 1-2. Please ensure that a copy of all relevant documents and your full contact details accompany your letter to the Clerk. The Clerk will be appointed at the time and may be a member of the College administration staff but will be independent of the complaint to be heard. Please state in your letter the outcome that you desire and all the grounds of your complaint. Please also send the Clerk a list of the documents that you believe to be in the school's possession and wish the Panel to see. The Clerk will acknowledge your request in writing within four working days. If you require assistance with your request, for example, because of a disability, please contact the Clerk who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

Convening the Panel: The Clerk will convene the Complaints Panel within ten working days, but the Panel will not normally sit during half terms or college holidays. The Panel will consist normally of a minimum of three individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint. One member of the Panel shall be an independent member. You may ask the Clerk to tell you who has been appointed to sit on the Panel.

Notice of hearing: The Panel hearing will take place within ten working days of the receipt of your request. As soon as reasonably practicable, and in any event, at least seven working days before the hearing, the Clerk will send you written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing together with brief details of the Panel members who will hear it. The hearing will normally follow the procedure set out in Appendix 1.

Attendance: You will be asked to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, teacher, or friend. It is not necessary for that person to be legally qualified. If you do wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person acting in their professional capacity, please notify the college at least five working days before the hearing. Copies of additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk at least **three clear days** prior to the hearing.

Chair: The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Panel (chosen by themselves) and will be conducted in an informal manner.

Hearing: All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Clerk will be asked to take a handwritten minute of the proceedings.

Evidence: The Chair will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding, and the Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses, but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.

Parents will have the opportunity to submit written evidence to support the complaint prior to the meeting of the panel and also to attend and appeals panel meeting accompanied by a friend, partner or member of a professional association.

Conduct: All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his/her comment will be minuted.

Adjournment: The Chair may, at his/her discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue. This may include an adjournment to take legal advice.

Decision: After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel shall reach a decision unless there is an agreed position. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations may be notified orally at the hearing or subsequently and shall be confirmed in writing to you by electronic mail where appropriate within seven working days. If you do not wish to receive the decision by electronic mail, a copy will be given or posted to you. The decisions, findings and any recommendations will be made available for inspection on the college premises by the Governing Body and the Principal. Reasons for the decision will be given. The decision may include recommendations and will be sent to you, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Principal and, where relevant, any person about whom the complaint has been made.

The parents/complainant will receive an email or letter that sets out the reasons for the decision and where relevant the person complained about, making them available to the Principal and Advisory Board within five working days of the meeting.

Private proceeding: A hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints must be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them. Details of the complaints procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure will be made available to parents and prospective parents via an annually updated statement printed at the end of this policy (appendix 5) and made available on demand.

The College maintains a database of complaints and records are kept of all complaints whether they are resolved following a formal procedure or whether they proceed to a panel hearing. Records include action taken by the College as a result of all complaints, regardless of whether or not they are upheld.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Contacting Ofsted or ISI

Contacting Ofsted and/or the ISI

The college is inspected by the ISI, an independent organisation which reports to the Government on schools. Parents have the right to contact an inspector from Ofsted or the ISI if they have a complaint. Ofsted and/or the ISI will usually expect parents to have followed the school's formal complaints procedure before contacting them. However, you can report your concerns by calling or writing to their regional office.

Ofsted

Enquiries
National Business Unit
Ofsted
5th, 6th and 7th Floors
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Telephone: 0300 1234 234

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House
9 - 12 Long Lane
London
EC1A 9HA
Telephone: 020 7600 0100

Appendix 2: Requests for complaints form

All requests should be sent to Mrs Tharshiny Pankaj, the managing director of Acorn House College.

Contact details:

Mrs Tharshiny Pankaj

Regent Group

Email: tharshiny.pankaj@regentgroup.org.uk

Appendix 3: Contacting the principal or chairman of board of governors and proprietor

Principal: Dr Francis Choi

Chairman of Board of Governors: Mr Selva Pankaj

The principal can be contacted at the College's address:

Acorn House College
39-47 High Street
Southall
London
UB1 3HF
info@acornhousecollege.co.uk
0208 571 9900

The proprietors and Chair of Governors:

Mr Selva Pankaj CEO Regent Group
167 Imperial Drive
Harrow
Middlesex
HA2 7HD
Email: selva.pankaj@regentgroup.org.uk

Mrs Tharshiny Pankaj, managing director
167 Imperial Drive
Harrow
Middlesex
HA2 7HD
Email: tharshiny.pankaj@regentgroup.org.uk

Appendix 4: Procedures to be followed at a hearing of the Complaints Panel

Introduction: This is the procedure that will normally be followed by the Complaints Panel and is designed to ensure that all parties have the opportunity to present their views to the Panel.

Meeting format: The meeting will take the form of a "round the table" hearing, where all parties and the Panel are present in the same room throughout. Present in the room throughout the hearing will be:

- The Panel Members;
- The Clerk to the Panel. The Clerk will take notes of the meeting. Any notes produced by the Clerk will not be verbatim and will belong to the Chair. The Chair can authorise the release of the Clerk's notes on the condition that they remain confidential;
- The parents and/or individuals who have made the complaint;
- Any person that the parents have brought as a supporter;
- The Principal;
- Any other appropriate member of staff.

Note: Any witnesses called by any of the above parties may be asked to make their contribution and then leave rather than staying for the whole proceeding.

Suggested agenda

Welcome and introductions by the Chair.

Parents present their complaints. Where two parents are present, it is often more helpful if one parent undertakes the responsibility of presentation and answering of questions.

The Panel and the Principal may ask questions of parents for clarification. Questions should be put through the Chair of the Panel who can intervene if s/he thinks that questions are inappropriate or are straying into cross-examination.

The Principal explains the reasons for the decision.

The parents and Panel Members may ask questions of the Principal for clarification. Again such questions should be put through the Chair who can intervene as necessary.

The Principal is invited to make any further relevant points.
The parents are then invited to make any further relevant points.

When the Panel is satisfied that it has established facts sufficient for it to make its decision, the Chair may bring the hearing to a close and inform the parties that they will be notified in writing of the decision, within seven working days.

The parents and the Principal leave together with any witnesses, supporters or representatives.

Legal advice: if, during the hearing, parents introduce legal points on which the Panel feel they will need advice, they will consider one of two options:

- The Panel may decide to take a careful note of points made and to consider the advice of the college's lawyers before making their final decision; or
- If the Panel feel that an immediate response is required, they may adjourn the hearing to take telephone advice from the college's lawyers.

Appendix 5: Number of formal complaints made using this procedure

Academic year (1 Sept – 31 Aug)			Number of complaints
	Resolved level 1	Resolved level 2	Resolved level 3
2015/2016	0	1	0
2016/2017	0	0	0
2017/2018			