

NEW HORIZON COMMUNITY SCHOOL

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Introduction

NHCS is dedicated to providing the best possible education and support for all its students. This means having a clear, fair, and efficient procedure for dealing with any complaints to or against the School, so any issues that arise can be dealt with as swiftly and effectively as possible.

All School staff will be made aware of this complaints procedure and will be expected to review this policy regularly to ensure they are familiar with the process.

The purpose of this policy is to explain the steps individuals need to take if they wish to raise any issues that are causing concern.

Definition

A complaint is defined as “dissatisfaction about any aspect of the Schools work.”

Concerns and complaints may be communicated in writing, by telephone or in person and can be about any aspect of the Schools work. They may be expressed by parents, guardians, neighbours or anyone with an interest in the working of the School.

The majority of concerns/complaints can be dealt with on an informal basis, where the School will ensure that the complaint will be treated in confidence, evaluated, investigated and hopefully resolved. Where this is not possible, the complaint should be addressed through the formal (Stage 2) procedure outlined in this policy.

If there is an allegation or concern about physical or sexual misconduct towards a child, or there is a belief that a child may be at risk of serious harm, the School may immediately refer the case to Child Protection and Welfare Services. If it is decided that there is cause for an official investigation, the decisions by these authorities will supersede those made by the School and outlined in this policy.

For more information on our Schools provision for protecting our students, read our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, and the Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy, available from the School Office.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution When an Issue/Concern First Arises

If you have a concern that you would like to take up with the School you should initially inform a member of staff either in person, over the telephone, or in writing. You will then be invited to an informal meeting with the member of staff most appropriate for dealing with your concern. We encourage parents to approach staff with any concerns they may have, and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding. Where possible, please provide a written explanation of your concerns and what action you feel would help to resolve the problem. If you should have to take your complaint further, this will help any review panel to see what the initial problem was.

If your complaint is about a member of staff, you should first raise this with the Head teacher either in person or in writing, and a meeting can be arranged with the Head teacher to discuss the issue at hand.

If your complaint is about the Head teacher, you should raise your concern in writing with the Proprietor. Contact details can be found at the end of this policy. Please note that if you send your complaint directly to the Proprietor, he may refer the complaint to an appropriate member of staff for investigation if it does not warrant the Proprietors involvement at that point.

Initial Informal Meeting

Once a concern has been raised you will be invited to attend an informal meeting with a member of staff or the Head teacher to discuss your concerns. You are welcome to bring a friend, partner, or – in the case of a student who has raised a concern – a parent, to this meeting.

Staff have a responsibility to ensure that you understand any future points of action that have been agreed upon in this meeting and should make a record of what has been discussed, as well as any outcomes and a plan of action, if one has been agreed.

All staff will do their best to ensure that your concerns are dealt with appropriately and efficiently but if you cannot come to an agreement, or are dissatisfied with the outcome of your meeting, you can make a formal complaint in writing to the Head teacher.

Response times – Stage 1

You should expect to receive a response to your complaint within 15 school working days following receipt of your complaint. If, due to the complex nature of the complaint a longer investigation time is needed, the School will contact you to agree a response time.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint to Head teacher /Proprietor

If you do not feel that your concern has been dealt with as you would like at Stage 1 of the procedure, or if you feel that the issue is serious enough that it warrants it, you can make a formal complaint in writing to the Head teacher, or if your complaint is about the Head teacher, to the Proprietor.

The Head teacher or Proprietor:

- Should acknowledge your complaint in writing within 7 school working days.
- May call you in for a meeting to discuss the issue outcome, possible solutions, or to explain what has or will happen as a result of your complaint.
- Will keep a record of all interactions with you and other staff, meetings and decisions made in reference to your complaint.

If the complaint is against a member of staff, the Head teacher will talk to that employee. If it is an allegation of abuse, a formal investigation may be instigated by the School or external child welfare authorities to whom the School reports. Please refer to our Allegations of Abuse Against Staff policy for an outline of this procedure.

Response times – Stage 2

You should receive a written acknowledgement within 7 school working days following receipt of your complaint, and receive a full written response within 15 school working days. If this is not possible, you should receive a letter explaining the reason for the delay and a revised target date.

Stage 3 – Appeals Panel

If you would like to launch an appeal following the outcome of a formal complaint, this will be taken to the Appeals Panel of the Governing Body.

The Appeals Panel

The appeals panel will be made up of members of the Governing Body and will include at least one independent person who is not involved in the management and running of the School. No member of the Governing Body can sit on the Appeals Panel if they have had any former knowledge or involvement in the case that is being dealt with at that time, or if they are employed by the School.

You will be entitled to attend the Panel Hearing and be accompanied if you wish. The panel will give careful consideration to how the plaintiff can be made to feel most comfortable presenting to the panel, especially in the case of a young child having to present or explain information.

Conduct during an Appeals Panel Hearing

Please note this is a non-adversarial process and is purely there to ascertain the facts. All persons attending the Hearing will be expected to treat each other with dignity and respect. Abusive behaviour will not be tolerated, and may jeopardise the Hearing. Any person behaving in an abusive way will be asked to leave. When the facts have been established, the Panel will make a binding judgement.

Appeals Procedure

The procedure for an appeal is as follows:

1. The Panel will be provided with a copy of all correspondence relating to the complaint
2. A date will be set for the hearing providing a minimum of 5 working days' notice
3. The Panel will interview the complainant:
 - The Proprietor will introduce the panel members and outline the process
 - The complainant will explain the complaint
 - The panel will question the complainant
 - The complainant will sum up their complaint
4. The Panel will interview the Head teacher / Proprietor:
 - The Head teacher / Proprietor will explain the Schools actions
 - The panel will question the Head teacher / Proprietor
 - The Head teacher Proprietor will sum up the Schools actions
5. The Panel will interview other staff as appropriate
6. The clerk will stay with the panel to clarify

The Appeals Panel Will:

- Dismiss all or part of the complaint
- Uphold all or part of the complaint
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- Evaluate all the evidence available and recommend changes to the Schools systems or procedures as a preventative step against similar problems arising in the future
- Provide a written response to the complaint within 14 school working days

NHCS will review and evaluate all complaints no matter how far they are taken or what the outcome to ensure that similar problems are avoided in the future or to see if they could have been managed any more effectively.

The panel's decision is final. If you are unhappy with the outcome, you may wish to put your complaint to the Secretary of State.

Response times – Stage 3

The Appeals Panel Hearing will be set up within 15 working days following the receipt of the request for an appeal. The Appeals Panel will give a minimum of 5 working days' notice of the Hearing date.

The Appeals Panel will issue a full written response within 14 school working days of the Appeals Panel Hearing date.

Confidentiality

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

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