

# Horizon Community College Complaints Procedure Policy - College

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# **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE POLICY** **COLLEGE**

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## SECTION 1 Responsibility and College Statement

In accordance with Section 29 of the Education Act 2002, all local authority (LA) maintained schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides.

The responsibility for the procedure whereby parents can make a complaint is that of the Governing Body of the College. The Local Authority has no role in the managing of complaints against the College.

### College Statement

“The College is committed to providing the very best opportunities for all students in our care. There are occasions, however, when parents/carers may feel the need to challenge a decision that the College has made. To that end, what follows is a Policy to ensure that complaints are treated promptly, fairly and transparently.”

This policy does not include complaints against the College representative or a member of the Governing Body. These complaints are dealt with by separate policies which can be requested from the College.

Anonymous complaints will not be dealt with.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
(College representative)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Chairperson of the Governing Body)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION 2 Complaint or Concern

A 'concern' may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*. A complaint may be generally defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

Where a parent/carer raises an issue with the College, it will be important to establish whether the parent/carer has a concern regarding a particular issue which they wish to be addressed by the College, or whether the parent/carer has a complaint which they want investigating.

Sometimes parents/carers use the term 'complaint' which in fact is a concern that can be dealt with quickly and informally, normally by arranging a meeting at the College.

The procedure for contacting the College regarding a parent's concern: -

In the first instance, parents/carers should contact by letter, email or in person, the appropriate Head of School for the year group of their child.

Where a parent's/carer's concern cannot be resolved, they have the right to submit a formal complaint, the procedure for which is set out below.

### **Who can make a complaint?**

Any person, including members of the general public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that a school provides, unless separate statutory procedures apply (such as exclusions or admissions). Schools must not limit complaints to parents/carers of children that are registered at the school.

A complaint can be made by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant. However, written consent from the complainant **must** be given before disclosing information to a third party.

## SECTION 3 Complaints not in the Scope of the Procedure

A complaints procedure should cover all complaints about any provision of facilities or services that a school provides with the **exceptions** listed below, for which there are separate (statutory) procedures.

Exceptions	Who to Contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admissions to schools</li> <li>• Statutory of Assessment of Special Educational Needs (SEN)</li> <li>• School reorganizational Proposals</li> <li>• Matters likely to require a child Protection Investigation</li> </ul>	<p>Concerns should be raised direct with local authorities (LA). For school admissions, it will depend on who is the admission authority (either the school or the LA). Complaints about admission appeals for maintained schools are dealt with by the Local Government Ombudsman.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exclusion of children from school</li> </ul>	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at:</p> <p><a href="http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</a></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whistleblowing</li> </ul>	<p>Schools have an internal whistleblowing procedure for their employees and voluntary staff. Other concerns can be raised direct with Ofsted by telephone on: 0300 123 3155, via email at:</p> <p><a href="mailto:whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk">whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk</a> or by writing to:</p> <p>WBHL, Ofsted          Piccadilly Gate          Store Street Manchester          M1 2WD.</p> <p>The Department for Education is also a prescribed body for whistleblowing in education.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures</li> </ul>	<p>These matters will invoke the school's internal grievance procedures. Complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any investigation.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities.</li> </ul>	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. They should be contacted direct.</p>

## SECTION 4 Sample Policy for Unreasonable Complaints

Horizon Community College is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Horizon Community College defines unreasonable complainants as *'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'*.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint: -

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome



- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically: -

- maliciously
- aggressively
- using threats, intimidation or violence
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language
- knowing it to be false
- using falsified information
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the College representative or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues the College representative will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Horizon Community College causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from Horizon Community College.

## **SECTION 5 Barring from the School Premises**

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Schools will therefore act to ensure they remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community.

If a parent's/carer's behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask him/her to leave school premises. In serious cases, the College representative or the local authority can notify them in writing that their implied license to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make. Schools should always give the parent/carer the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing.

The decision to bar should then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent/carer, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent/carer should be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the College representative or Chair of Governors. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the Department for Education. Once the school's own complaints procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.

## SECTION 6 Complaints Procedure

1. In order for a complaint to be considered, the parent/carer must complete the complaint form, which is provided at the end of this policy. The complaint form can be submitted as a paper copy or by email to Karen Cooper, P.A. to College representative, - [kcooper@horizoncc.co.uk](mailto:kcooper@horizoncc.co.uk)

Complaints made by telephone will not be dealt with until a complaint form is received.

2. An acknowledgement to the complaint will be made within 5 school days of receiving the complaint form.
3. The parent/carer **may** be invited to consider resolving the issue by an informal meeting at the College. (Please note meetings are scheduled between 8am and 4pm, during the school working day).
4. The person who will manage the complaint and carry out the investigation will be nominated by the College representative and will depend on the content of the complaint.
5. A complaint will be investigated as quickly as is reasonably possible, taking account of the complexity of the issues. Under normal circumstances, a parent/carer would receive the outcome to the complaint within 15 school days after the initial response to the complaint being received.

6. Complaints should not be shared with the whole governing body, except in very general terms, in case an appeal panel needs to be organised

If the whole governing body is aware of the substance of a complaint before the final stage has been completed, schools should arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint. They may approach a different school to ask for help or the local Governor Services team at the LA, or the Diocese

7. Investigating the complaint

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;
- keep notes of the interview.

8. Resolving the complaint

There are three possible outcomes to complaints: -

- no evidence to support the complaint; or
- valid in part; or
- valid in whole.

Depending on the outcome of the complaint, the College representative will decide which of the following responses is appropriate: -

- the complaint is not upheld;
- offering an apology and full explanation for what went wrong;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- taking steps to remedy the situation if appropriate;
- taking action to ensure that the problem is not repeated, including amending a College policy if this is appropriate.

The response to the complainant will be confirmed in writing.

## SECTION 7 Appeals Procedure

### Appeal to the Governing Body

Where the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, **they can** make an appeal to the Governing Body Complaints Committee. An appeal **must** be made within 10 school days of receiving the response to the complaint.

Complainants have the right to request an independent panel, if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. Schools should consider the request but ultimately, the decision is made by the governors;

The purpose of the appeal is to ensure that the complaints procedure was implemented correctly and every issue within the complaint thoroughly investigated. The appeal panel can decide to consider the complaint afresh in certain circumstances.

**It is important to note that professional decisions that are made in College are the responsibility of the College representative. If the Complaints Committee does not agree with the College representative's decision, they can make recommendations to the college representative inviting them to re-consider their original decision.**

Where a parent/carer decides to appeal the College decision, they **must** submit an appeal form to the Chairperson of the Governing Body at the College address.

Upon receipt of the appeal form it will be acknowledged within 5 school days.

The Appeal Hearing will be arranged within 15 school days of the College receiving the parent/carer's appeal form.

Two dates for the appeal will be offered to the parent/carer. The parent/carer must confirm within 3 school days their preferred date. If the parent/carer cannot attend the dates offered, the appeal will go ahead, and the parent/carer will be informed by letter of the outcome.

### Legal Representation

In the event that a complaint progresses to a committee of members of the school governors, it is recommended that neither the complainant nor the school bring legal representation. These committees are not a form of legal proceedings. The aim of the governors committee should be:

- reconciliation

- to put right things that may have gone wrong

We recognise there are occasions where legal representation may be appropriate.

## **SECTION 8 Advice to Parents**

### **Referring the complaint to Ofsted**

Ofsted will not usually consider a complaint if the parent/carer has not first followed the School's and Local Authority's complaints procedure.

Ofsted can consider complaints where it affects the College as a whole e.g.: -

- the College not providing a good enough education;
- the students are not achieving as much as they should, or their differing needs are not being met;
- the College is not well led and managed, or is wasting money;
- the students' personal development and well-being are being neglected.

Ofsted will not normally investigate cases to do with individual students.

Ofsted cannot consider complaints when there are other statutory ways of pursuing them.

Examples include complaints relating to: -

- admission procedures;
- exclusion of individual students;
- provision for individual students with special educational needs;
- religious education or the religious character of a school;
- temporary changes to the curriculum.

Ofsted are not in a position to: -

- Investigate incidents that are alleged to have taken place;
- Judge how well a school investigated or responded to a complaint;
- Mediate between a parent/carer and a school to resolve a dispute.

### **Referring the complaint to the Secretary of State**

If the parent/carer considers that the Governing Body have acted unreasonably, they can write to the Secretary of State for Education. Complaints are handled by the Department for Education (DfE).

The DfE role is not to investigate the individual complaint, but to ensure that the College's published policy is correct and that all the procedures were followed within the timescales and the parent/carer provided with an outcome to their complaint.

# **GOVERNING BODY COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE**

## **CONSTITUTION**

1. The Committee shall consist of 3 Governors appointed by the governing Body excluding the College representative and Staff Governors.
2. Where the Chairperson of the Governing Body is a member of the Committee they shall not attend any meeting where they have participated in the management of the complaint.
3. The Chairperson of the committee shall be elected by the Committee.
4. The quorum shall consist of the 3 members of the Committee.
5. The Governing Body shall appoint a Clerk to the Committee.
6. The Clerk will ensure:
  - I. a minimum of 7 clear days' notice of a meeting is given in writing to each committee member along with the agenda;
  - II. the minutes and decisions of the committee are recorded and made available for inclusion in the agenda of the next Committee meeting and/or Governing Body meeting.
7. The Committee is authorised to make decisions on behalf of The Governing Body only in respect of those powers specifically within the Terms of Reference.

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

1. To hear appeals from parents/carers together with representations from the College representative or Chairperson.
2. To notify in writing, to the parent/carer, the outcome of the appeal.

## **PROCEDURE FOR THE COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE OF THE GOVERNING BODY**

1. The College representative (or Chairperson<sup>1</sup>) and parent/carer will be invited into the meeting.
2. Those present will introduce themselves.
3. The Clerk will explain the procedure for hearing the parent's/carer's complaint.
4. The parent/carer will present the complaint.
5. The Governors may if they wish, ask the parent/carer questions.
6. The College representative/Chair of Governors may ask questions of the parent/carer.
7. The College representative/Chairperson will be invited to explain how the complaint was managed and what decisions were taken on the complaint.
8. The Governors, may if they wish, ask the College representative/Chairperson questions.
9. The parent/carer may ask the College representative/Chairperson questions.
10. Following summaries by the parent/carer and College representative/Chairperson, they will leave the meeting.
11. The Committee will then come to a decision on the complaint.
12. Following the meeting the Clerk will write to the parent/carer and the College representative/Chairperson informing them of the Committee's decision.

Witnesses may be questioned on any statement made or evidence given.

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<sup>1</sup> Where the Chairperson has investigated the complaint instead of the College representative