

<b>Local Procedure Title</b>	<b>Comments and Complaints Local Procedure</b>
<b>Site</b>	<b>Sketchley School, Forest House and Progression House</b>
<b>ECS Policy number and title</b>	<b>OP03: Complaints</b>
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<b>Local Procedure Author(s)</b>	<b>SJ Astbury</b>
<b>Local Procedure Ratification</b>	<b>Checked and Approved by:</b>

## Philosophy

Sketchley School, Forest House and Progression House aim to provide a high standard of education in a safe environment.

In order to provide a high standard of education for the students, we are happy to receive and discuss with you any comments, suggestions or complaints you may have.

This policy and procedure applies equally to parents, staff working at Sketchley School, Forest House, Progression House, visitors, including placing authorities and those involved indirectly in the education of students.

You can make your feelings known, particularly, if they are not about major issues, by posting your comment, complaint or suggestion in the 'suggestion box' in the school reception area. You can do this anonymously if you wish.

The Principal, Deputies or other member of the management team will address all issues weekly.

Staff are encouraged to resolve any issues or problems through their line manager, or can approach any other senior member of staff if they prefer. Staff may request a supervision session for this purpose at any time.

This policy should be read in conjunction with Sketchley and Forest house procedures on:

- Anti-Bullying
- Safeguarding Children

## Principles

Staff at our sites believe that it is in the best interest of the Schools, students and staff to implement a procedure that will respond promptly and fairly to any worries or concerns.

Comments or complaints will be treated confidentially and will be taken seriously. Anonymous comments and complaints will be treated in the same way.

## Procedures and Practice

The Priory Group process for resolution of all complaints consists of 3 stages:

- Stage 1** - Local resolution at service/site level

Some complaints represent a minor concern for the complainant and these may include general comments, suggestions or criticisms about a service. Complaints falling into this category will normally be made verbally to 'front line staff' and will be seen as issues that can be 'fixed' either immediately or relatively quickly. Staff receiving such complaints, should note the details on **OP Form: 18G** Complaint Record and whilst ensuring that the service user's immediate health and care needs are being met attempt to address and resolve the concern.

If the employee to whom the complaint is made is unable to resolve the problem immediately or feels unable to give the assurances that the complainant is looking for, School Principal or Deputy Head will take responsibility to resolve the complaint, by the next working day, in an informal and conciliatory manner ('next working day' excludes weekends and bank holidays).

Should the School Principal or the Deputy Head be unable to resolve the matter quickly and to the complainants' satisfaction, they must advise the complainant that their concerns will require further time to investigate fully prior to responding to the issues raised.

In such circumstances, staff should assist the complainant in putting their concerns in writing, if previously verbal, and advise them further on the complaint process. It should be noted, however, that failure to put a verbal complaint in writing, will not prevent a complaint from being investigated.

In those cases in which staff are able to satisfactorily address and resolve a minor concern by the next working day, the complainant should receive a full and positive response with the aim of assuring them that their concerns have been addressed and this should include an expression of regret and/or explanation for the earlier problem.

Some concerns, be they verbal or written, will be viewed as more serious or complex and it will not be possible to address and resolve these by the next working day.

Staff receiving such a complaint either verbally or in writing (including email) must ensure that it shows the date of receipt by the site/service and is passed **immediately** to the School Principal for recording and investigation purposes.

Full details of the complaint must be recorded on eCompliance Complaint Reporting system and a note made of the system generated Complaint Reference Number which will be unique to that service/site complaint. An investigating officer must also be assigned.

Any complaints from MP's and Officers of the Crown, complaints that may result in litigation, involve accidents and injury or that may involve a gesture of goodwill payment being made must be emailed to the Group Complaints Co-ordinator and Group Risk Manager **immediately**.

Letters from solicitors should be faxed to the Group Risk Manager, on the day of receipt, who will then liaise with the company loss adjusters regarding the response.

A case file should be created in which copies of all complaint investigation related documentation will be held throughout the investigation. **OP Form: 18A** - Complaints Process Checklist is designed to assist in this matter.

A letter of acknowledgment **MUST** be sent to the complainant, by the School Principal or delegated member of staff **within 2 working days** of the date on which the complaint was received. A copy of the **signed** letter must be kept in the case file. **OP Letter: 18A** – Complaint Acknowledgement Letter Template, published on the Intranet, is to be completed and used for this purpose. This letter must also offer the complainant the opportunity to meet with the Investigating Officer if this would be helpful and will state that we aim to respond fully to all complaints within 20 working days of the date of receipt.

If at working day 15, it is clear that the investigation and response will not be complete within the agreed 20 working day timeframe a further letter will be issued informing the complainant of the reason for the delay and advising on a revised timeframe.

The complaint investigation should be assigned to the investigating officer for their action, which includes production of an investigation report and subsequent preparation of a draft response to the complainant.

All investigation documentation should be placed in the complaint case file and copies uploaded to the eCompliance system when updating the case record.

A formal and detailed response should be sent to the complainant within the agreed timescale. This letter **must** also signpost the complainant as to the course of action available to them should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 1 investigation.

In the event that a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 1 investigation, they have the right to request that their case be considered at Stage 2 – Internal Review by the Group Complaints Co-ordinator. It should be noted, however, that an expression of dissatisfaction will in itself not automatically warrant a review at Stage 2, since it may be more appropriate for the School Principal to offer a further opportunity for a discussion/meeting in order to attempt to reach an amicable resolution.

We do take all complaints very seriously and will always thoroughly investigate any service users' concerns in those circumstances in which it remains right and possible to do so despite the lapse of a period of time. However, it is generally felt that a complaint should be made as soon as possible after the matter that a service user is complaining about happened; with the time limit usually being:

- (a) six months from the date something happened, or
- (b) six months from the date that a service user first becomes aware of it.

We can and do extend the time limit in circumstances where it would be unreasonable to expect a service user to have complained within time so long as it remains possible for us to investigate the service users' concerns.

(b) **Stage 2** - Internal Review by the Group Complaints Co-ordinator

If a complainant remains dissatisfied after **all** attempts to resolve a complaint locally have failed they may, within 6 months of the date of the Stage 1 formal response, request that their case be reviewed at Stage 2 of the Priory process. The request must be in writing and forwarded to:

Group Complaints Co-ordinator  
Priory Group Northern Office  
Middleton St George  
Darlington  
Co. Durham DL2 1TS

### **STAGE 3 – INDEPENDENT COMPLAINT PANEL (EDUCATION)**

Should a parent, carer or funding authority be dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation at Stage 1 by the School Principal and at Stage 2 following review at Executive Director level, the complainant can make a written request for the complaint to be heard by a panel; thereby fulfilling the requirements of Schedule 1 (Part 7) of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010 (S.I. 2010 No 1997) – with regards to the arrangements made in the event that a parent remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the school's earlier investigation and Executive Director review.

The Panel membership will comprise the following:

- (a) Head of Quality (Education)
- (b) Quality Advisor for Children's Social Care
- (c) Operations Director/Regional Manager (out of area)
- (d) Group Complaints Co-ordinator
- (e) SIP representative (optional – if the nature of a complaint warrants external input).

The Panel will be convened and a date for hearing set within seven days of the written request being received; with the parents/carers being invited to attend with a representative should they wish.

The Panel will make findings and recommendations, with copies of the findings being sent or given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about and will also be made available for inspection on the school premises by a representative of Priory Group as Proprietor.

#### **Outcomes**

A record is kept at the school of all complaints, whether they are resolved at the preliminary level, or whether they proceed to a panel hearing. These records are kept in a confidential file. The records are indexed in the School's Complaints File, which is kept at the school site. The information kept in the confidential file is only made available to the inspectors of regulatory bodies, or to the Secretary of State, on request.

#### **Evaluation**

Evaluation of the policy will be based upon monitoring of:

- Student views where appropriate.
- Family views.
- Professional judgements.
- Staff views – daily practitioners and seniors.
- Numbers of comments and complaints.

The effectiveness of the policy and procedures will be reviewed annually, and the outcomes of monitoring will be used to make recommendation for improvement if necessary.