



FOREST SCHOOL

Complaints Procedure

v2.2

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Owner (Name, Title):	Warden and The Bursar
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Complaints Procedure

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1. Introduction

1.1 Forest School (hereafter referred to as ‘the School’) takes a serious and professional approach to the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents wish to make a complaint the School will treat it seriously and deal with it promptly, impartially and sensitively.

Parents can be assured that any concerns and complaints raised will not adversely affect a pupil or their opportunities at Forest School.

1.2 A ‘concern’ may be defined as ‘an expression of wrong or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which re-assurance is sought’. A ‘complaint’ may be generally recognised as ‘an expression or statement of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action’. (DfE Best Practice for School Complaints procedure 2020 updated January 2021)

1.3 **The School's complaints procedure has three stages:**

Stage 1: informal raising of a concern or difficulty with a member of staff orally or in writing as set out in 2.1 - 2.9

Stage 2: a formal complaint in writing to the Warden

Stage 3: appeal to the Complaints Panel

A written record will be kept of all complaints that are made and whether they are resolved following an informal procedure, or proceed to a formal process.

A record will also be kept of the action taken by the School as a result of a complaint, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld.

1.4 Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

- 1.5 Parents making a complaint can expect the following procedure to apply. School Days for the purposes of this procedure means any weekday during School term on which lessons are taught.
- 1.6 This policy should be read in conjunction with;
 - Procedure for appeals against exclusions
 - Behaviour Policy
 - School Rules
 - Admissions Policy
 - Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
 - Keeping Children Safe in Education, Statutory Guidance

2. Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- 2.1 The School would expect most minor complaints or concerns to be resolved quickly and informally as part of the regular dialogue between home and School. The School will take the necessary measures to resolve problems effectively before they become a formal matter. Such measures will include some or all of the following; giving advice or reassurance; explaining the context to an incident or a decision; gathering information from other staff or from pupils; finding information from other sources; referring the potential complaint to a senior colleague; reviewing or amending the School's practice; giving feedback to parents; acknowledging and apologising for mistakes or oversights.

The following process, outlined in 2.2-2.9, uses Senior School nomenclature. In the Prep School parents should contact their child's Form Teacher in the first instance who will liaise with the relevant Prep School Deputy Heads, Senior Deputy Head of the Prep School and the Head of Prep School according to the severity of the matter. Prep School parents may choose to make a complaint to other members of staff who will follow the appropriate consultation pathways. Should the matter not be resolved, following the complaint having been escalated appropriately to the Head of Prep School, parents are advised to proceed with the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 which would include the Warden.

- 2.2 If a Tutor is unable to resolve the parent's concern, or if the concern is in relation to a member of staff, they will refer the matter to the appropriate Head of Section. The Head of Section will include the relevant Deputy Head or the Bursar in the process, as appropriate, depending on whether the nature of the complaint is academic, pastoral, disciplinary, financial, co-curricular or other.
- 2.3 If the complaint is about the Tutor, then the parent should contact the relevant Head of House who will refer the complaint to the relevant Head of Section.
- 2.4 In all cases of complaints against a member of staff, the Head of Section will act as the Complaint Manager, gathering information from tutors, teachers, Heads of Departments and Heads of House as appropriate. The Head of Section will respond to the parent once they have the information or resolution.
- 2.5 When a parent raises a concern about a member of staff the original email will be sent

directly to the relevant Head of Section and not be put on a pupil file or sent to a school office email distribution list. The Head of Section will retain a working file while they investigate the issue and which they will share with the relevant Deputy Head. Once the issue has been resolved the working file containing the original complaint and the resolution will be added to the pupil file. A separate report will be added to the staff file to record specific staff concerns.

- 2.6 It is hoped that working closely with Heads of Departments, subject teachers, Heads of House and Tutors, the Heads of Section will be able to address most concerns. Where a concern cannot be resolved in the way described, the relevant Deputy Head will hold any necessary meetings with staff or pupils in the attempt to reach an informal resolution.
- 2.7 A written record of all complaints and the date on which they were received will be kept.
- 2.8 All complaints will be treated in a timely and confidential manner. Knowledge of the complaint will be limited to those directly involved only.
- 2.9 Should the matter not be resolved in this informal way within 10 School Days of the complaint being made, and with the complaint having clearly been escalated appropriately to Senior Leadership Team level, parents may proceed with the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 which would include the Warden.

3. Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- 3.1 If the complaint cannot be, or is not being resolved on an informal basis Parents may write to the Warden (email or letter) stating their wish to make a formal complaint. They should explain the nature of the complaint and include names of those members of staff they have spoken with already and the specific remedy they are seeking. Parents should note that the complaint at this stage should not change in scope from that presented at Stage 1. Should any new matters be presented, parents will be advised that these will be dealt with under Stage 1.
- 3.2 The Warden will respond to the parent's concerned within 5 School Days of receipt of the email/letter, indicating how the School proposes to proceed. In most cases the Warden will invite the parents concerned to an initial informal meeting to discuss the nature of the complaint, the remedy they are seeking and ways to achieve a resolution. At the end of this meeting the parents will be asked to confirm that they wish to proceed with Stage 2.
- 3.3 If Parents choose to proceed, it may be necessary for the Warden, or another member of the Leadership Team acting on his behalf, to carry out further investigations as soon as possible. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews conducted.
- 3.4 Once the Warden is satisfied, insofar as is practicable, that all the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and communicated to parents, in writing, within 10 School Days setting out the reasoning behind it.
- 3.5 Please note that any complaint received towards the end of term or half term is likely to take longer to resolve owing to school holidays and the unavailability of staff.
- 3.6 If parents are not satisfied with the outcome, and do not consider that all their concerns have been fully and fairly considered they may if they wish to proceed to Stage 3 of the

complaints procedure.

4. Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

4.1 Parents who remain dissatisfied with the outcome under Stage 2, or where the parent's complaint relates to the Warden's own actions, they should write to the Clerk to the Governors, by email (clerktothegovernors@forcst.org.uk) and within 5 School Days of the receipt of the Warden's decision at Stage 2, to request a panel hearing.

4.2 The email should:

- set out the specific grounds of appeal citing the reasons why they consider the decision (3.4 above) is not a satisfactory response to the original complaint
- include a list of supporting documents they wish to go before the Complaints Panel.

The Clerk will forward this to the Warden and the Complaints Panel.

4.3 The Clerk to the Governors, on behalf of the Complaints Panel, will acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and within 20 School Days.

4.4 The request will usually only be considered if Stages 1 and 2 of the Complaints procedure have been completed. The Panel will not hear any new areas of complaint which have not been previously been addressed under stages 1 and 2.

The Warden will submit a statement in response to the Stage 3 complaint, and any relevant documentation for the Complaints Panel, via the Clerk to the Governors. The Warden should do so within 10 School Days from the date the Warden receives a copy of the information provided by the parents at clause 4.2 (above). This will be passed to the Panel.

4.5 The Complaints Panel will consist of at least three people not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom will be independent of the management and running of the School. Each of the panel members shall be appointed by the Chair of Governors who will appoint a Chair of the Panel from the three members of the Panel.

4.6 The Complaints Panel will consider the documentation from all parties in advance of the hearing to allow sufficient time for the Complaints Panel to request further details about the complaint, or any matter related to it, and for such information to be supplied in advance of the Hearing. Copies of this information will be sent by the Clerk to the Governors to all concerned parties prior to the hearing.

4.7 Parents may attend the hearing.

4.8 The Complaints Panel may request a meeting with the Warden before the hearing if they require clarification on any of the written information provided by the School.

4.9 If possible, the Panel will make a decision regarding the complaint following the hearing, without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will inform all parties how it should be carried out and the time within which it should be completed.

- 4.10 Notes will be taken of the Hearing to support the panel in its consideration only.
- 4.11 The Panel will reach its findings and recommendation, and the Panel Chair will write to the Parents, within 10 School Days of the Hearing. A copy will also be sent to both the Chair of Governors and the Warden (and, where appropriate, the person about whom the complaint was made) setting out the Panel's reasoned decision. The findings and recommendations of the Panel will be final.
- 4.12 A hearing under this procedure is not a legal hearing, but a private and confidential matter. 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 to the School on these matters or any other issues as appropriate.

If, prior to the Hearing, the Parents indicate they do not wish to proceed further, or decides not to attend, the Panel Hearing will be cancelled and the School's original decision, as set out in clause 3.4, will stand.

5. Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

- 5.1 In the case of complaints received relating to pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage, a record of complaints is kept for three years. Parents of pupils in the EYFS may contact Ofsted 0300 123 1231 or by email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk and ISI (020 7600 0100) or by email: concerns@isi.net and may make a complaint to Ofsted and ISI if they so wish. Complainants will be notified of the outcome of an investigation within 28 days of the School having received the complaint. The School will provide Ofsted and ISI, on request, with a written record of all the complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaint will be kept in accordance with its Privacy Notice and the Schools Retention of Records Policy.

6. Retention:

- 6.1 The period of retention for all complaints will be for a minimum of seven years and these will be held, securely, by the Warden's PA. In direct liaison with the Local Authority Designated Officer, Keeping Children Safe in Education and Working Together to Safeguard Children, any complaint that is associated to an allegation against a member of staff including supply staff, contractor or volunteer will be retained for the term of the independent inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or 10 years from the date of the allegation if it is longer.

During the 2022-23 academic year, the School received 3 formal (stage 2 and above) complaints. 3 in the Senior School and 0 in the Preparatory School.

Appendix 1 Procedural flowchart

