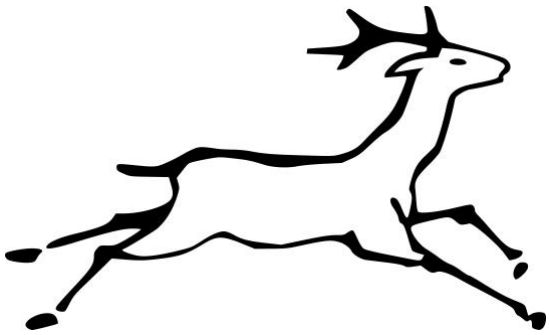


Running Deer School Complaints Procedure

Reviewed: 13/10/2026| Next date for review: 13/10/2027

Introduction

Running Deer School 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 [from parents of registered students] to or against the school, so that any issues that arise can be dealt with as swiftly and effectively as possible.

This policy only fully applies to parents of registered students at the school. If complaints are raised by persons other than parents, they will be dealt with under [stages 1 and 2] [stage 2] of the formal policy.

All school staff will be made aware of complaints procedures and expected to review this document regularly in order that they are familiar with our process of dealing with complaints and can be of the most assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

This document explains that procedure, and the steps that it outlines should be referred to and followed by all students and their parents whenever an issue arises that causes them concern. If it becomes necessary to alter the time limits and deadlines set out within this procedure, you will be advised accordingly, given an explanation and provided with revised timescales for example e.g., school holidays, complexity of complaint, availability of key witnesses.

This document does not apply to complaints about:
- Student admissions
- Student exclusions
- EHC Plans
- Appeals relating to internal assessment decisions for external qualifications
- Disciplinary issues relating to members of staff

Each of these follows its own process of complaints and appeals which are outlined in their relevant policies. 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 document.

Where the complaint relates to a safeguarding referral made by a member of staff at the school, an consideration of that complaint by the school will be limited to a review of the reasonableness of the decision to make the referral in light of the evidence available to the member of staff at that time and in light of the school's safeguarding policies.

For more information on our school's provision for protecting our students, read our child protection and safeguarding policy, on the Running Deer School website.

This policy cannot be seen in isolation and must be considered in the context of UNICEF states the following as rights relevant to all children and therefore a must in our school: The following rights are of equal importance to every child. Every child has the right to:

- Relax and play (Article 31)
- Freedom of expression (Article 13)
- Be safe from violence (Article 19)
- An education (Article 28)
- Protection of identity (Article 8)
- Sufficient standard of living (Article 27)
- Know their rights (Article 42)
- Health and health services (Article 24)

Any member of staff, pupil or visitor (including families) are agreeing to adhering to meeting these rights and working together in meeting these rights as soon as they enter our school site or correspond with people in the school. This is also must be read in conjunction with the visitor policy.

Our employees have a right to feel safe, be safe, be always respected and listened to.
To this end, a pragmatic approach needs to be taken to set everyone's expectations around what can be done with the resources allocated to us by the local authorities in the best interest of meeting a child's rights and needs. Anonymous complaints will not be examined under this document because anonymous complaints cannot be properly investigated as the school cannot gather necessary information or provide a response

For complaints to be resolved effectively, they should be specific, include as much detail as possible, and be raised in a timely manner. Complaints that lack sufficient detail or clear terms of reference may be difficult - or even impossible - to investigate effectively or to achieve satisfactory outcomes for all parties. This complaints procedure is published on the school website and is available on request to parents of pupils and prospective pupils. A written record of the panel's findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and the school. This record will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and head of school. This policy is available on the school website and will be provided on request to parents of pupils and prospective pupils.

When an issue or 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 may then be invited to an informal meeting with the member of staff most appropriate for dealing

with your concern. You may wish to approach your child's teacher first as they will be best placed to help you either directly or by figuring out which other member of staff you should be speaking to. We encourage parents to approach staff with any concerns they may have and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding.

A written explanation of your concern will need to be given to the staff member that you speak to, so that it is easy to see – when complaints are taken further or referred back to in the future – what the initial problem was.

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

If your complaint is about the head of school, you should raise your concern in writing with the nominated chair of the board.

If your complaint is about a Director, you should raise your concern in writing with the clerk to the Board of Directors.

Any director will refer complaints that are taken straight to them back to the appropriate member of staff unless one of the above exceptions applies.

At least one member of the appeals panel will be independent of the management and running of the school

1. Initial informal meeting

Once a concern has been raised you may be invited to attend an informal meeting with a member of staff or the head of school/chair of directors 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. It may be appropriate for a student to attend the meeting if their parent has raised a concern, depending on the nature of the issue.

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 of school.
There is no suggested time-scale for resolution at this stage given the importance of dialogue
through informal discussion although it would be expected that most issues would be resolved within 20 school days.

2. Formal complaints

In order to ensure that complaints are processed efficiently and effectively, Running Deer School deals with formal complaints in three stages:

Stage 1

If you do not feel that your concern has been dealt with as you would like, are unhappy with the outcome of your informal meeting or feel that the issue is serious enough that it warrants it, you can make a formal complaint in writing to the head of school. If your complaint is about the head of school you should go straight to Stage 2 of this procedure. Your written complaint should provide sufficient detail of the issues to allow the head of school to investigate and respond to the complaint. You should also set out what you feel would resolve the complaint.

The head of school should acknowledge your complaint in writing within 5 school days. They may already be aware of the situation. They will outline their decision if there is one to be made, and any action to be taken as a result of your complaint.

The head of school 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. The head of school 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 of school 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 safeguarding policy for an outline of this procedure.

The head of school will respond to you in writing within 20 school days outlining their response to your concern, and any action that has or will be taken. If they have decided not to take any further action on the issue, they will explain what they have decided, how they have reached this decision, and will outline your right to take the matter further and the steps to be taken.

Stage 2

If, having spoken to the head of school, you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint or your complaint is about the head of school, you may lodge your complaint with the nominated chair of the board. The complaint must be in writing and it should explain your concern in sufficient detail and the steps that have lead up to you taking this course of action. You should also set out the actions you feel would be necessary to resolve the complaint.

If the complaint is against a member of staff, that employee will be given the opportunity to write a response, which will be sent to the nominated chair of the board within 10 school days of the complaint being lodged with them.

The nominated chair of the board will respond to you in writing within 20 school days outlining their response to your concern, and any action that has or will be taken. If they have decided not to take any further action on the issue, they will explain what they have

decided, how they have reached this decision, and will outline your right of appeal and how you can start your appeal.

Appeals - Stage 3

If you would like to lodge an appeal following the outcome of a formal complaint at stage 2, this will be taken to the appeals panel. You should write to the clerk to the board of directors to exercise this right within 5 school days of the outcome at Stage 2. If no request for an appeals panel hearing is received within 5 school days, it will be deemed that the decision is accepted, and the complaint will be closed.

If an appeals panel is requested, clerk to the board of directors will acknowledge your appeal and make the necessary arrangements and will usually convene the appeals panel within 20 school days from the acknowledgement being sent. Where it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date within that timescale, the school will take reasonable steps to agree a time and date mutually convenient to all parties.

The clerk will ensure that all parties to the appeal have access to the same documentation and set out a timetable to support the collation and circulation of documents. Any supporting documentation relevant to the complaint must be submitted to the appeals panel by both parties at least 5 days before the appeals panel hearing.
You are entitled to attend the appeals panel hearing and may be accompanied by a person of your choice and should notify the clerk in advance if you attend to bring anyone.

The appeals panel

The appeals panel will be made up of between three to five members of the board of directors. No person 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. The chair of the panel will be nominated from within the group of panel members. All panel members will be familiar with and have access to the complaints policy At least one panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school.

The panel will give careful consideration to how the complainant 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.

Appeals procedure

The Appeals Panel will determine the procedure to be followed to ensure that it is best placed to deal with the issues arising from the complaint. The procedure for an appeal is usually as follows:

- The complainant and head of school will enter the hearing together.
  The chair will introduce the panel members and outline the process.
  The complainant will explain the complaint.

- The head of school and panel will question the complainant.
  The head of school will explain the school's actions.
- The complainant and panel will question the head of school.
  The complainant will sum up their complaint.
- The head of school will sum up the school's actions.
- The chair will explain that both parties will hear from the panel within 5 working days. Both parties will leave together while the panel decides.
- The clerk will stay to assist the panel with its decision making
- A written record of the panel's findings and recommendations will be provided to you and the school, and will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and head of school

The chair of the panel/clerk to board of directors will notify the complainant of the panel's decision in writing within 5 school days of the appeal hearing. The letter will set out the decision of the panel together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The letter may set out recommendations which will be made to the governing body.

The appeals panel may:

- 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 school's systems or Procedures as a preventative step against similar problems arising in the future.

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. Complaints can be submitted online at https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school.

4. Vexatious | persistent complaints

Whilst it is hoped that this document will reduce any dissatisfaction with the school, it is acknowledged that there may be rare occasions where a complainant continues to be dissatisfied with the school and the outcomes achieved under the complaints procedure.

Where a complainant attempts to re-open an issue which has already been dealt with under the complaints procedure, the nominated chair of the board will contact them to inform them that the matter has already been dealt with and that either that stage of the policy has been exhausted or that the complaints procedure has been exhausted and the matter is considered closed. Where further correspondence is received on the same matter, this may be considered vexatious and the school will be under no obligation to respond to that correspondence.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond.

The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, and the school's position has been clearly set out in writing together with the complainant's options.
- The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time.
- The school reasonably believes the aim of the contact is to cause disruption or inconvenience.
- That the complainant acts or communicates in an inappropriate way towards school staff.

Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing. The school will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the school acts reasonably.

Running Deer defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- 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 and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

For complainants who excessively contact the 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 be reviewed after six months.

5. Complaints about the proprietor or the Board of Directors as a whole.

You should submit your complaint in writing to the clerk to the Board of Directors. The clerk will convene an independent complaints panel in accordance with Stage 3 (Appeals) of this procedure. At least one member of this panel will be independent of the management and running of the school. The panel's decision will be final, and a written record will be provided to you and made available for inspection on the school premises.

Contact details:
Clerk to the Board of Directors
Running Deer School, Butterdon Wood, Moretonhampstead, Exeter TQ13 8PY
Email: Lisa.bastin@runningdeer.org.uk

6. Board of Directors– records, review and monitoring of complaints

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls. This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel. Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data
protection law.

Running Deer School 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. All records of any complaints will be kept confidential but may be inspected where appropriate by the Secretary of State or any inspection body. The governing body will review the complaints procedure every year.

7. Staff complaints

Staff who have a concern about a colleague or a volunteer member of staff should refer to our whistleblowing policy.

The procedure for dealing with any other staff complaints or employment grievances is set out in the school's staff disciplinary and capability procedure which is available on the Running Deer School website.

Contact Running Deer

Running Deer School, Butterdon Wood, Moretonhampstead, Exeter TQ13 8PY
Telephone: 01647 400201 | Email: school@runningdeer.org.uk

Website: https://w w w.runningdeerschool.org.uk

Independent School Standard	Requirement	Evidence from Running Deer School Policy	Location in Policy
Standard 7(a)	A complaints procedure must be drawn up and effectively implemented which deals with the handling of complaints from parents of pupils	"Running Deer School 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 [from parents of registered students] to or against the school"	Introduction
Standard 7(a)	The complaints procedure must be available on request to parents of pupils and prospective pupils	"This policy is available on the school website and will be provided on request to parents of pupils and prospective pupils"	Introduction
Standard 7(b)(i)	The complaints procedure must be published on the school's internet website	"This complaints procedure is published on the school website"	Introduction
Standard 7(b)(ii)	The complaints procedure must provide for a suitable opportunity for an informal resolution of the complaint at an early stage	"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 may then be invited to an informal meeting with the member of staff most appropriate for dealing with your concern"	When an issue or concern first arises / Initial informal meeting
Standard 7(b)(iii)	The complaints procedure must	"Stage 1: If you do not feel that your concern has been	Section 2: Formal

Independent School Standard	Requirement	Evidence from Running Deer School Policy	Location in Policy
	provide for a formal stage involving the head teacher or other senior member of staff	dealt with as you would like, are unhappy with the outcome of your informal meeting or feel that the issue is serious enough that it warrants it, you can make a formal complaint in writing to the head of school"	complaints - Stage 1
Standard 7(b)(iv)	The complaints procedure must provide for a panel hearing as the final stage	"Appeals - Stage 3: If you would like to lodge an appeal following the outcome of a formal complaint at stage 2, this will be taken to the appeals panel"	Section 2: Formal complaints - Stage 3 Appeals
Standard 7(b)(v)	The panel must consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint	"The appeals panel will be made up of between three to five members of the board of directors. No person 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"	Section 2: The appeals panel
Standard 7(b)(vi)	The panel must include at least one person who is independent of the management and running of the school	"At least one member of the appeals panel will be independent of the management and running of the school"	Introduction / Section 2: The appeals panel
Standard 7(b)(vii)	The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and	"You are entitled to attend the appeals panel hearing and may be accompanied	Section 2: Appeals - Stage 3

Independent School Standard	Requirement	Evidence from Running Deer School Policy	Location in Policy
	be accompanied if they wish	by a person of your choice and should notify the clerk in advance if you attend to bring anyone"	
Standard 7(b)(viii)	A written record of findings and recommendations must be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about	"A written record of the panel's findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and the school"	Introduction / Section 2: Appeals procedure
Standard 7(b)(ix)	The written record must be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher	"This record will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and head of school"	Introduction / Section 2: Appeals procedure
Standard 7(c)	The complaints procedure must allow for complaints to be made and considered about the proprietor	"Complaints about the proprietor or the Board of Directors as a whole, you should submit your complaint in writing to the clerk to the Board of Directors. The clerk will convene an independent complaints panel in accordance with Stage 3 (Appeals) of this procedure"	Section 5: Complaints about the proprietor

Ofsted EIF Area	Inspection Focus	Evidence from Running Deer School Policy	How This Supports Quality
Effectiveness of safeguarding	Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective and that concerns are dealt with promptly	"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" "Where the complaint relates to a safeguarding referral made by a member of staff at the school, an consideration of that complaint by the school will be limited to a review of the reasonableness of the decision to make the referral"	Demonstrates that safeguarding takes priority over complaints procedures and that safeguarding decisions are appropriately protected
Governance and accountability	Governors hold leaders to account and ensure compliance with statutory duties	"The appeals panel will be made up of between three to five members of the board of directors" "At least one panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school" "The governing body will review the complaints procedure every year"	Shows governance oversight of complaints, independent scrutiny, and commitment to continuous improvement
Engagement with parents	Leaders engage effectively with parents and respond to their concerns	"We encourage parents to approach staff with any concerns they may have and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding" "This complaints procedure is published on the school website	Demonstrates accessible, transparent approach to parent engagement and concern resolution

Ofsted EIF Area	Inspection Focus	Evidence from Running Deer School Policy	How This Supports Quality
		and is available on request to parents of pupils and prospective pupils"	
Use of complaints to improve	Leaders use feedback, including complaints, to improve the school	"Running Deer School 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" "Evaluate all the evidence available and recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures as a preventative step against similar problems arising in the future"	Clear commitment to learning from complaints and using them for school improvement
Staff wellbeing	Leaders consider staff workload and wellbeing	"Our employees have a right to feel safe, be safe, be always respected and listened to" Comprehensive vexatious complaints section protecting staff from unreasonable behaviour	Balances parent rights with staff protection and wellbeing
Transparency and accountability	Leaders are transparent about policies and accountable for decisions	Clear publication of procedure on website, written records provided to complainants, records available for inspection, clear timescales at all stages	Demonstrates transparency in process and accountability for decisions
Promoting children's rights	School promotes understanding of rights and responsibilities	"This policy cannot be seen in isolation and must be considered in the context of UNICEF states the following as rights relevant to all children"	Embeds children's rights into complaints handling, ensuring

Ofsted EIF Area	Inspection Focus	Evidence from Running Deer School Policy	How This Supports Quality
		Lists 8 UNICEF children's rights including freedom of expression, protection from violence, right to education	child-centred approach
Pupil voice and participation	Pupils' views are heard and acted upon	"It may be appropriate for a student to attend the meeting if their parent has raised a concern, depending on the nature of the issue" "The panel will give careful consideration to how the complainant 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"	Recognises importance of pupil voice in complaints, with age-appropriate considerations
Creating a positive culture	Leaders create a culture of respect and high expectations	Rights-based approach for children and staff, clear expectations about respectful behaviour, procedures for dealing with unreasonable behaviour	Creates culture where concerns can be raised respectfully and resolved fairly
Managing behaviour effectively	School has clear procedures for managing inappropriate behaviour	Comprehensive vexatious complaints section with clear definition of unreasonable behaviour and proportionate responses including communication plans	Shows school can manage difficult situations while maintaining fairness
Curriculum implementation	Leaders monitor implementation of policies and procedures	"All school staff will be made aware of complaints procedures and expected to review this document regularly in order that they are	Ensures staff understand and can implement

Ofsted EIF Area	Inspection Focus	Evidence from Running Deer School Policy	How This Supports Quality
		familiar with our process" Record keeping and monitoring systems in place	complaints procedures effectively