

Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints Procedure

RIDGEWAY EDUCATION TRUST

Approved by the Trust Board: 08 December 2020

This procedure is based on the model procedure from the Department for Education (DfE) and will be reviewed as new guidance is released from the DfE.

Ridgeway Education Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to the complainant. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and we will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive, threatening and/or vexatious in nature.

Ridgeway Education Trust 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:

- 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
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- 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 Trust'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 threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Our RET Complaints Procedure contains full details of the scope of the complaints procedure and where to direct complaints.

- Complaints against staff (except the head teacher) at a school within Ridgeway Education Trust should be made, in the first instance, to the head teacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

- Complaints about staff who work across the Trust should be addressed to Mrs S Parkin-Haig (the Clerk to the Trust Board) via the St Birinus School office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- Complaints about Ridgeway Education Trust as an organisation should be sent to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) via the trust office at Didcot Girls' School. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- Complaints that involve or are about the head teacher of a school within Ridgeway Education Trust should be addressed to the school's Chair of Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- Complaints about a school's Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the Local Governing Body of a school within Ridgeway Education Trust should be addressed to Mrs J Wright (the Clerk to the Governing Body) via the St Birinus School office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- Complaints about the CEO or a trustee of the Trust, should be addressed to Dr M Gover, Chair of Trustees, via the trust office at Didcot Girls' School. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the 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 Headteacher (or Chair of the Local Governing Body if the complaint relates to the Headteacher of a school within Ridgeway Education Trust) will discuss any concerns regarding the complainant's behaviour with the complainant informally before applying an *'unreasonable'* or *'unrealistic'* marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher or Chair of the Local Governing Body (if the complaint relates to the Headteacher of a school within Ridgeway Education Trust) will write to the complainant explaining their concerns and asking them to modify their behaviour and/or desist from their persistent contact. For complainants who excessively contact our Trust or schools 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.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate any agreed action from our discussions with the police in writing.

Links with other policies/procedures

- RET Complaints Procedure
- Safeguarding and Child Protection policies of Trust Schools (section 12)
- RET Whistleblowing Policy