

# Complaints Policy and Procedures

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## 1. Aims

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage and with the most appropriate member of staff. The first contact between the complainant and the school is often crucial in determining whether the matter will escalate. For this reason, all Riverside staff are made aware of the Complaints Procedure and trained to know how to respond appropriately when they receive a complaint.

This policy relates specifically to complaints from parents or carers; student concerns and staff grievances are managed through separate, designated procedures.

Riverside International School aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents/carers of students and others. Our objectives are to:

- **Be impartial and fair:** Ensure all parties are heard and complaints handled in a non-adversarial way.
- **Investigate fully:** Facilitate a thorough investigation by an appropriate person or panel where required.
- **Resolve promptly:** Address concerns at the earliest possible stage, with the appropriate staff member.
- **Respect confidentiality:** Protect sensitive information while complying with legal requirements.
- **Treat complainants respectfully:** Demonstrate care and courtesy throughout the process.
- **Make fair and lawful decisions:** Ensure responses are rational, reasonable, and proportionate.
- **Communicate clearly:** Keep complainants informed of progress to maintain transparency and trust.
- **Support school improvement:** Use complaints to identify lessons learned and strengthen policies and practice.

Through these aims, Riverside promotes its strategic values:

- **Challenge:** Rigorous handling of complaints drives accountability and improvement.
- **Community:** Transparent and respectful engagement strengthens trust and relationships.
- **Care:** Sensitivity and support for all parties promote well-being and constructive dialogue.

Complaints are resolved informally wherever possible. If this is not sufficient, formal procedures will be followed.

### Accessibility and Language Support

The full complaints process is available on the school website and in print upon request, and reasonable adjustments are made where necessary to ensure accessibility, particularly for children or vulnerable complainants. In all such adjustments and proceedings, the school remains committed to the principles of the UK Equality Act 2010, ensuring that no individual is disadvantaged or discriminated against due to a protected characteristic while engaging with this policy.

While this policy is published in English, Riverside International School will, where practicable, provide language support such as translation or interpretation during meetings to enable parents and carers to engage effectively with the process.

## 2. Scope of the Policy

This Complaints Policy and Procedures applies to complaints raised by parents, carers, and external stakeholders regarding the provision of education or services at Riverside International School.

This policy does not apply to:

- **Student concerns or complaints**, which are managed through age-appropriate pastoral and safeguarding systems designed to encourage early, informal resolution and student voice.
- **Staff complaints or grievances**, which are addressed through the school's Grievance Procedure Policy and relevant HR procedures.

By maintaining distinct procedures, the school ensures that concerns are handled through the most appropriate, lawful, and supportive mechanisms.

### **3. Legislation and Guidance**

This policy is based on:

- UK Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Part 7, requiring a written procedure for handling parental complaints.
- UK Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) best practice guidance for academy complaints procedures.
- Relevant Czech and EU regulations, including Czech School Inspectorate (ČŠI) requirements.

By following these standards, Riverside ensures its complaints procedure is robust, transparent, and aligned with both national and international expectations.

### **4. Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **4.1 The Complainant**

Complainants can help ensure their concerns are dealt with effectively by:

- Following the school's procedures.
- Co-operating with staff and meeting reasonable deadlines.
- Treating all involved with respect.
- Avoiding direct approaches to individual Board members.
- Refraining from posting details of the complaint on social media or group messaging platforms.

Parents may bring a friend, family member, or support person to meetings. Legal representation is not permitted at the informal or formal stage, as these are intended to be constructive and solution-focused.

#### **4.2 The Investigator**

An investigator will be appointed at the formal stage to establish the facts. They will:

- Interview relevant parties, keeping notes.
- Review records and written evidence.
- Prepare a clear report for the Principal, Co-Director, or Complaints Panel, setting out findings and possible resolutions.

#### **4.3 The Complaints Coordinator**

The complaints coordinator may be the Principal, a Co-Director, a designated Board Member, or another staff member with appropriate administrative responsibility. They will:

- Keep the complainant informed at each stage.
- Liaise with staff, the Principal, Co-Director, Chair of the Board, and Secretary to the Complaints Panel.
- Ensure accessibility and make reasonable adjustments where needed, particularly for children or vulnerable complainants.
- Maintain accurate records.

#### **4.4 Secretary to the Complaints Panel**

Appointed by the complaints coordinator, the secretary is the main contact for the complainant. The secretary will:

- Arrange the date, time, and venue of the hearing, ensuring accessibility.
- Circulate written materials to all parties in advance.

- Welcome the parties and record proceedings.
- Notify all parties of the panel's decision.

#### 4.5 Chair of the Board

The Chair of the Board is responsible for:

- Ensuring correct procedures are followed.
- Requesting the secretary to convene a panel if a hearing is required.
- Receiving complaints escalated beyond Stage Two and appointing a panel (or nominated Board Member) as necessary.

#### 4.6 Chair of the Panel

The Chair of the Complaints Panel ensures hearings are fair, impartial, and properly managed. Their role is to:

- Explain the remit of the panel.
- Ensure each party presents their case without interruption and in a respectful manner.
- Make key findings of fact.
- Put complainants, particularly parents or children who may be nervous, at ease.
- Maintain informality, while ensuring all issues are addressed.
- Guarantee that panel members are impartial and independent.
- Allow both parties to state their case, present evidence, and ask questions.
- Ensure written material is shared with all parties.
- Confirm the complainant receives the panel's decision, in writing, within five working days of the hearing.

### 5. Principles for Investigation

When investigating a complaint, we aim to clarify:

- What happened.
- Who was involved.
- What the complainant believes would resolve the issue.

#### 5.1 Timescales

- Complaints should normally be raised within 3 months of the incident (or last in a series).
- Exceptions may be made where there are valid reasons for delay and a fair investigation is still possible.
- Complaints received during holidays will be treated as received on the next school day.
- If the school cannot meet the published timescales, we will agree revised deadlines with the complainant and explain the delay in writing.

### 6. Stages of the Complaints Process

Riverside International School has a three-stage process for handling complaints:

- **Stage 1 – Informal Resolution**
- **Stage 2 – Formal Investigation**
- **Stage 3 – Complaints Appeal Panel**

#### 6.1 Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Riverside International School takes informal complaints seriously and aims to resolve issues quickly and fairly.

## Raising a Complaint

- Complaints should be raised as soon as possible, within the timescales set out in section 4.
- Concerns should normally be directed to the relevant member of staff, who will seek to resolve the issue constructively.
- If the complainant is unwilling to approach a particular staff member, the Principal may reassign the matter to another staff member to ensure impartiality.
- Complaints received directly by a Co-Director will be acknowledged and referred to the relevant Principal, who will determine the appropriate staff member to handle the complaint.

## Respecting Roles and Boundaries

- If the complaint concerns the Principal, it should be referred to a Co-Director. Complaints about a Co-Director should be referred to the Chair of the Board.
- If a complaint is made directly to a Board Member, the complainant will be referred to the proper procedure. Board Members cannot become involved at this stage, as they may later be required to serve on an appeal panel.

## Process and Timelines

1. A meeting will normally be arranged within five working days of notification.
2. The staff member will discuss the concern with the complainant and, if possible, agree a resolution.

## Resolution and Documentation

3. At the conclusion of the informal discussion, the Principal or relevant staff member will provide the complainant with a summary of the discussion and any agreed actions via email.
4. Resolution may include an explanation, clarification, apology, or agreement on any action to address the concern.
5. If the complainant is satisfied, the complaint will be considered resolved at Stage 1.
6. If the complainant is not satisfied, they may escalate the matter to Stage 2 – Formal Investigation.

## 6.2 Stage 2: Formal Investigation

If a complaint cannot be resolved informally, the complainant may escalate it to a formal written complaint.

### Submitting a Formal Complaint

- The complainant should complete the **Riverside School Formal Complaint Form** ([Appendix 1](#)), setting out:
  - Relevant dates, times, and witnesses.
  - Copies of any supporting documents.
  - A clear statement of the resolution they seek.
- The complaint should be submitted to the Principal. If the complaint involves either of these individuals, it should be submitted to a Co-Director.
- The complaint will be acknowledged, and the date of receipt recorded.

### Meetings and Investigation

- A meeting will normally be arranged within five working days of receipt.
- The Principal, Co-Director, or another appointed investigator will carry out a full and fair investigation.
- The investigator may meet with the complainant, staff, and any witnesses, and review relevant documents.

## Outcome

- A written conclusion will normally be sent within 10 school days, setting out:
  - Whether the complaint is upheld (in whole or in part).
  - The reasons for the decision.
  - Any action the school will take to resolve the matter.
- If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may request escalation to Stage 3.

### 6.3 Stage 3: Complaints Appeal Panel

If a complainant remains dissatisfied following Stage 2, they may write to the Chair of the Riverside Board, requesting a hearing before a Complaints Appeal Panel.

#### Panel Composition and Independence

- The Panel will consist of at least three members who have had no prior involvement in the complaint.
- At least one panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school.
- At least one panel member will be a Board Member.
- The Panel will select its own Chair.
- To preserve impartiality, complaints are never heard by the full Board.

#### Purpose and Remit

- The Panel will consider the evidence, listen to both parties, and determine whether the complaint should be upheld in whole or in part.
- The aim is to secure a fair resolution and, where possible, reconciliation.
- The Panel may also recommend changes to school systems or procedures to prevent recurrence.

#### Meetings and Process

- The Panel hearing will normally be held within 15 working days of referral (or 25 working days during school holidays).
- The secretary will propose at least three possible dates within 10 school days of the request. If these are unreasonably rejected, the secretary will set a date and the Panel may proceed based on written submissions.
- Written materials will be circulated to all parties at least 10 school days before the meeting.
- Hearings will be private. Audio recordings are not normally permitted unless agreed as a reasonable adjustment.
- The Panel will ensure minutes are taken as an accurate record.

#### Attendance and Participation

- The complainant and the Co-Director (representing the school) will attend.
- Each party may present their case, call witnesses, and question the other side's evidence.
- The Panel may ask questions at any point.
- Both parties may make closing statements before withdrawing while the Panel deliberates.
- Complainants may be accompanied by a friend or support person. Legal representation is not encouraged but may be permitted in exceptional cases at the discretion of the Panel Chair. Media representatives are not permitted.
- If the complainant is a child, special care will be taken to ensure they feel supported and that their views are heard.

## Outcome

- The Panel may:
  - Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
  - Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
  - Recommend appropriate actions to resolve the matter.
- The Chair of the Panel will provide the complainant with a written decision, including findings and recommendations, normally within five working days of the hearing.
- Copies will be sent to the complainant, any individual who is the subject of the complaint, the Proprietor, and the Co-Directors, and will be available for inspection if required.

## 7. Complaints Against the Principal, a Co-Director, Board Member, or the School Board

Riverside International School recognises that complaints may involve senior staff or members of the Board. These complaints follow the same three-stage process as other complaints but with adjusted roles to ensure impartiality and transparency.

### 7.1 Stage 1: Informal Resolution

- Complaints against a Principal should be referred to a Co-Director.
- Complaints against a Co-Director should be referred to the Chair of the Board.
- Complaints against an individual Board Member should be referred to the Board Secretary, who will advise the complainant on the appropriate procedure.

A suitably skilled and impartial person will carry out the informal stage as set out in **Section 5.1**.

- If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will progress to Stage 2.
- Complaints about the whole school Board will proceed directly to Stage 2.

### 7.2 Stage 2: Formal Investigation

- Complaints about a Principal will be formally investigated by a Co-Director.
- Complaints about a Co-Director will be formally investigated by the Chair of the Board.
- Complaints about an individual Board Member will be managed by the relevant Board Member, who cannot act unilaterally and must advise the complainant about the procedure.

### Submission of Complaints

Complaints may be submitted:

- By letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

The complaint should include:

- How the previous stage did not address the issue
- What the complainant believes would resolve it

### Special Cases

- Complaints involving the Chair and Vice-Chair, the entire Board, or the majority of the Board will be formally investigated by an independent investigator appointed by the Board.
- The investigator will provide a written conclusion to the complainant, normally within 10 school days.

### 7.3 Stage 3: Complaints Appeal Panel

If the complaint remains unresolved after Stage 2, the complainant may appeal to the Riverside Board Complaints Appeal Panel, following the same steps outlined in Section 5.3.

#### Key Points

- Individual complaints are never heard by the full Board, to preserve impartiality.
- Complaints involving the Chair and Vice-Chair, the entire Board, or the majority of the Board will be heard by a committee of independent individuals from recognised professional bodies following the same Stage 3 process.
- The secretary will acknowledge receipt of any Stage 3 request in writing within 10 school days.

## 8. Unreasonable and Persistent Complaints

Riverside International School recognises that most complaints are valid and will be treated seriously. However, in rare cases, a complaint may become unreasonable or persistent, requiring specific management to ensure the school can continue to operate effectively while treating all parties fairly.

### 8.1 Unreasonable Complaints

A complaint may be considered unreasonable if the complainant:

- Refuses to clearly articulate the complaint, specify the grounds, or state the desired outcome, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process.
- Does not accept that certain issues are outside the scope of the complaints procedure.
- Insists on handling the complaint in ways incompatible with this procedure or good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information and expects it to be addressed.
- Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and demands immediate responses.
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff attempting to resolve the issue, including requests for their replacement.
- Changes the basis of the complaint during the investigation.
- Repeatedly raises the same complaint after it has been investigated and resolved.
- Refuses to accept the findings of a properly conducted investigation.
- Seeks an unrealistic or disproportionate outcome.
- Places excessive demands on school time through frequent, lengthy, or complex contact by any method.
- Uses threats, abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language, or violence.
- Knowingly provides false or misleading information.
- Publishes unacceptable content on social media or public forums.

This list is not exhaustive and is provided for guidance. The school will determine what constitutes unreasonable behaviour on a case-by-case basis.

### Complainant Conduct

- Complainants should aim to limit repeated correspondence while the complaint is being progressed, as excessive contact can delay resolution.

## Steps the School Will Take

- The school will take reasonable steps to address the complaint, provide a clear statement of the school's position, and outline available options.
- Wherever possible, the Principal, Co-Director, or Chair of the Board will discuss concerns informally with the complainant before designating a complaint as unreasonable.
- If behaviour continues, the complainant will receive a written explanation, a reference to this policy, and a reminder to follow the procedure.

## Management of Persistent Contact

For complainants who excessively contact the school and cause significant disruption, the school may:

- Assign a single point of contact via a dedicated email address.
- Limit the number of contacts allowed per term.
- Request that a third party act on behalf of the complainant.
- Implement any other measures deemed appropriate to manage the situation.

## Serious Incidents

- Any incident involving aggression or violence will be reported to the police immediately.
- Written confirmation of actions taken will be provided, including possible barring from school premises and measures to support staff affected.

## 8.2 Serial or Persistent Complaints

- If a complainant repeatedly contacts the school regarding the same issue after it has been resolved, further correspondence may be filed without response.
- The school will continue to treat any new complaints or genuinely unresolved issues according to the standard complaints procedure.

## 8.3 Written Records and Confidentiality

- Written records will be maintained for all formal written complaints, noting that they were not resolved at the informal stage, and recording whether they were resolved during the formal investigation or subsequently escalated to a Complaints Appeal Panel.
- All correspondence, statements, and records will be treated as confidential, except where access is required by law.
- Records will document the progress of the complaint, including actions taken at each stage, the resolution stage, and the final outcome. This includes letters, emails, and notes from meetings or phone calls.
- Records will be stored securely (in the 'Formal Complaints Log') and accessed only by those directly involved in investigating the complaint or serving on a Complaints Appeal Panel.
- Exceptions to confidentiality apply when:
  - Access is requested by the Secretary of State or their representative
  - Requested through a Freedom of Information (FOI) or Data Protection Act subject access request
  - Required during a school inspection

## Retention of Records

- Records will be kept only for as long as necessary and in compliance with data protection law.
- The Complaints Panel will provide copies of minutes, findings, and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint.
- A copy will also be made available for inspection by the proprietor and Co-Director.

## 9. Learning Lessons

Riverside International School views complaints as an opportunity to improve its policies, procedures, and practice.

- Where appropriate, the Complaints Panel may make recommendations for changes to school systems, processes, or procedures in order to reduce the likelihood of similar issues arising in the future.
- Insights gained from complaints are used to inform the review and updating of school policies, procedures, and guidance, supporting a culture of continuous improvement and effective governance.
- All recommendations arising from complaints are reviewed by the relevant school leaders and implemented where appropriate, with due regard to proportionality and feasibility.
- In addition, complaint data is monitored through the Formal Complaints Log and analysed periodically, at least annually, to identify trends or recurring themes. An anonymised summary of complaint trends and learning points is presented to the Board each year to support oversight, accountability, and ongoing improvement.

### Review Process:

**Date of Review:** September 2025

**Date of Next Review:** September 2027

## Appendix 1

<b>Riverside School Formal Complaint Form</b>	
Complete this form and return it to a Co-Director, who will acknowledge receipt and outline the next steps.	
<b>Complainant's Details</b>	
Name:	
Email:	Telephone:
Relationship to the Student (if relevant):	
<b>Student's Details (if relevant)</b>	
Name:	Year:
<b>Details of Complaint</b> <i>(Please give clear details of your complaint, including relevant dates, times, locations, and names of those involved. Attach additional sheets if necessary.)</i>	
<b>Action Already Taken</b> <i>(What steps have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? Who did you speak to and what was the response?)</i>	
<b>Outcome Sought</b> <i>(What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?)</i>	
<b>Supporting Documents</b> <i>(Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.)</i>	
<b>Declaration</b> I confirm that the information I have provided is accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge.	
Signature:	Date:
<b>Office use:</b>	
Date acknowledgement sent:	By whom:
Complaint referred to:	Date:

## Complaints Procedure Flowchart

The following stages summarise the procedure for dealing with complaints:

