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Aims:

- Easily accessible and published to all via the school website.
- Be simple to understand and use by a parent, member of staff or member of the wider community.
- Be impartial and adopt an investigatory rather than adversarial approach.
- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means, wherever possible and with minimal conflict.
- Allow for a swift response to any issue.
- Ensure a full and fair investigation of any issue.
- Respect confidentiality, wherever possible.

- Address all the points that arise from any investigation appropriately.
- Provide information for the School's Senior Management Team and Trustees so that services can be improved.
- This procedure does not replace or alter any of the existing arrangements established within the school e.g.
 - Disciplinary Procedures
 - Dignity at Work Policy
 - Staff Grievance Policy
 - Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

General Principles:

- This procedure is intended to allow an individual to raise a concern or complaint relating to the school, or the services it provides
- Under the terms of this policy, anonymous complaints will not be investigated, unless there are exceptional circumstances such as Safeguarding concerns. Such investigations will be at the discretion of the Headteacher or Chair of Trustees if the complaint is about the Headteacher.
- To allow for a proper investigation, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the school as soon as possible. In general, any matter raised more than 2 months after the event being complained of, will not be considered.

Scope

The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage. There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints. This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline
- Curriculum
- Collective worship

- Withdrawal from the curriculum (parents and carers can withdraw their child from any aspect of religious education, including the daily act of collective worship. They do not have to explain why)

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned

Who can make a complaint?

Any person, including parents and carers of children registered at the school or members of the public, may make a complaint to Thomas Keble School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. We will use this complaints procedure unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions).

The difference between a concern and a complaint

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”
- A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”

School Complaints Procedure Informal Stage – How to raise a concern

- It is normally appropriate to communicate directly with the member of staff concerned. This may be by letter, by telephone or in person, by appointment. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved by this informal stage.
- In the case of serious concerns, it may be appropriate to address concerns directly to the Headteacher (or to the Chair of the Trust Board, if the complaint is about the Headteacher).
- In the event of a safeguarding concern regarding a member of staff, then all matters should be referred to the Headteacher. In the event that a concern is raised about the Headteacher, then all concerns should be referred to the Chair of Trustees.
- If there is uncertainty about who to contact, advice can be sought from the Clerk to the Trustees.

How a concern will be managed

- The Headteacher will decide on the most appropriate course of action to investigate and manage informally.
- If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the concern is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

If appropriate, this approach will be taken at all stages of the complaints procedure.

- It is nearly always appropriate that concerns are answered at an informal stage, without initiating the complaints procedure.
- If a concern cannot be resolved informally it will be escalated to a complaint which is set out in the following process.

Stage 1

- If a concern is not resolved at the informal stage it will be considered a complaint. The complaint must be put in writing and sent to the Headteacher (or the Clerk to the Trustees, for the attention of the Chair if the complaint is about the Headteacher). The Headteacher (or Chair) will be responsible for ensuring that it is investigated appropriately. A 'Formal Complaint Form' is provided to enable this (Appendix 2).
- The 'Formal Complaint Form' will assist in ensuring all the necessary information is gathered to assist in dealing with the complaints including dates / times of incidents; names of potential witnesses and the inclusion of any relevant documentation. It is very important that the Complaint Form includes a clear statement of the actions that the complainant would like the school to take to resolve their concerns. Without this information, it is much more difficult to proceed.
- Once the 'Formal Complaint Form' is complete, it should be sent, in a sealed envelope, to the Headteacher or Clerk to Trustees as appropriate.
- The Headteacher will decide how the complaint should be investigated. This investigation may be carried out by the Headteacher or delegated to another member of the school's senior leadership team. Where the investigation is delegated, any decisions about how the complaint should be resolved will still be made by the Headteacher.
- During the investigation, the Investigator will:
 - if necessary, interview those involved in the matter
 - keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to the investigation

- examine any relevant documentation
- At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.
- If a complaint cannot be resolved at the meeting, arrangements will be made for the complaint to be fully investigated, using the appropriate procedure as outlined in the Report / Complaint Triage Table (Appendix 1). The school will confirm within 5 days of the school receiving a 'Formal Complaint Form', how the investigation will proceed. This notification should also include an indication of the anticipated timescale.
- Any investigation will begin as soon as possible and when it has been concluded, the complainant will be informed of its conclusion.
- If the complainant is not satisfied with the response to their complaint, they may request that the Trust Board reviews the original complaint and the school's response. Any such request must be made in writing to the Clerk to the Trustees within 10 school days of receiving notice of the outcome. Such a request should be accompanied by a 'Complaint Review Form' (Appendix 3). Receipt of a 'Complaint Review Form' will trigger Stage 2 of the Complaints Process.

Stage 2

- Upon receipt of a 'Complaint Review Form', the Clerk to Trustees will inform the Chair of Trustees who will review the request received and discuss the request with the school representative (usually the Headteacher).
- The Chair of Trustees will then consider the Complaint Review Request and respond to the complainant with their findings.
- If, after a review by the Chair of Trustees, the complainant remains dissatisfied, a request can be made for the complaint process and procedures to be reviewed by the Trustees' Complaint Review Panel. This can be actioned by completing a 'Complaint Panel Review Request Form' (Appendix 4). Receipt of this form would trigger Stage 3 in the complaint process.

Stage 3

- The 'Complaint Panel Review Form' will be considered by the relevant Trustee (usually the Chair of the Complaint Review Panel). Any review request that is based solely on dissatisfaction with the outcome, rather than any identified failure to deal with a complaint according to relevant procedures and policies is unlikely to be accepted. Appendix 1: Contact / Complaints Triage Table should be used to establish whether the necessary policies and procedures have been followed.
- Any review of the process followed by the school will be conducted by a panel of 3 members of the Trust Board. This will usually take place within 10 school days of receipt of the request.

- The review will normally be conducted through a consideration of written submissions but reasonable requests to make oral representations will be considered sympathetically.
- The panel's meeting will be minuted by the Clerk to Trustees. Evidence will be received and considered from the complainant first. The panel will then invite the school representative (normally the Headteacher or Chair of Trustees if appropriate) to make a response to the complainant's statement.
- The review panel will have access to the records of the processes followed. Confidentiality will be maintained in accordance with the relevant policies.
- The panel shall make findings and recommendations, and a copy of the findings and recommendations will be sent by electronic mail and / or via hard copy sent by first class post. Where relevant, the person complained about will also receive a copy of the findings and recommendations informing them whether the complaint is:
 - rejected
 - upheld
 - requires further investigation.

In the event that the panel decides that a complaint requires further investigation, this will be defined and reviewed by the panel at a date agreed with the school representative. This date should be set to enable any further investigation to be thorough but with the aim of reaching an outcome in a timely way, usually within 15 school days of the panel's recommendations being published.

In the event of further investigation being recommended, the panel will reconvened to consider the results of the investigation to then determine whether the complaint is:

- a) upheld
- b) rejected

Following the completion of the Complaint Review Panel process, the matter will then be closed as far as the school is concerned. If a complainant believes the Trust Board has acted illegally or arbitrarily in handling the complaint, they can make representation to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families or alternatively contact the Education Funding Agency and use their form.

A written record shall be kept of all complaints, and whether they are resolved at Stage 1, 2 or proceed to Stage 3, a panel hearing. These will be retained for a period of 6 years, in line with retention of all Trustee records.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 8 of the Education Act 2005 requests access to them for safeguarding purposes.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

At any stage in the complaints procedure, if a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Vexatious complaints:

If all stages of the procedures have been followed and the complainant remains dissatisfied and attempts to re-open the same complaint, the Chair of Trustees may write to them to inform them that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is now closed.

The Headteacher will update all staff on the above annually via the Staff Handbook. The Head will inform all parents of the procedures via the school website.

Persistent complaints

Unreasonably persistent complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure, beyond all reason
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the timeframes it sets out
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place. We may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#)
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from our school site.

Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint
- If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

Record keeping

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.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or through a subject access request under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and [records management policy/record retention schedule].

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

Learning lessons

The Board of Trustees will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher / senior leadership team, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

Monitoring arrangements

The Board of Trustees will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The Board of Trustees will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the PA to the Headteacher.

This policy will be reviewed by Board of Trustees every 3 years.

At each review, the policy will be approved by Board of Trustees