



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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1. Aims and principles

ReFocus aims to resolve concerns fairly, promptly and at the lowest appropriate level while ensuring that parents can complete the statutory complaints procedure. The process will be impartial, non-adversarial, accessible and sensitive to the welfare of pupils and the rights of everyone involved.

- Treat complainants and those complained about with respect and courtesy.
- Address the points raised and provide reasoned outcomes.
- Keep the complainant informed and explain unavoidable delays.
- Make reasonable adjustments, including help to put a complaint in writing, interpretation, accessible meetings and support for disability or communication needs.
- Protect confidentiality while sharing enough information for a fair process.
- Use learning from complaints to improve practice.

Informal resolution, mediation or restorative discussion may be offered but will not be used to prevent or unreasonably delay access to the formal stages.

2. Legal framework, scope and availability

The proprietor ensures that this written procedure is drawn up and implemented effectively in accordance with Part 7 of the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. It provides the required informal stage, formal written stage and hearing before a panel of at least three people, including one person independent of the management and running of ReFocus.

The statutory procedure applies to complaints from parents of current registered pupils. "Parent" includes a person with parental responsibility or care of the pupil. ReFocus may use the same procedure, or an appropriately adapted process, for complaints from pupils, parents of former pupils, commissioning organisations, visitors or others. Pupils may raise concerns with any trusted member of staff and may receive advocacy or communication support.

The procedure is available on the school website and free of charge on request. The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year will be made available to current and prospective parents without identifying individuals.

3. Roles and responsibilities

The Headteacher and proprietor are the same person, Paula Tucker. As proprietor she retains legal accountability for ensuring that this procedure is compliant and effectively implemented. She manages ordinary complaints unless she is personally involved or is the subject of the complaint.

The governing board provides support and oversight. A nominated complaints member of the governing board coordinates independent appointments and administration when a complaint concerns Paula Tucker or when another conflict arises. Coordination does not make that member the decision-maker and does not make them independent of ReFocus for the statutory panel requirement.

- The complaints coordinator acknowledges correspondence, maintains records, supports reasonable adjustments and monitors timescales.
- An investigator establishes relevant facts fairly, considers records and representations, keeps appropriate notes and produces a reasoned report.
- The panel clerk arranges the hearing, circulates papers, records attendance and decisions, and issues the panel's findings and recommendations.
- All participants must disclose conflicts of interest and preserve confidentiality.

4. Timescales and investigation

Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the incident or, for a series of related incidents, the most recent incident. ReFocus may accept a later complaint where there is a valid reason, the matter affects a child's welfare or a fair investigation remains possible.

"School day" means a day on which ReFocus is open to pupils. Complaints received outside term are treated as received on the first school day of the next term, except where safeguarding, data-protection or

another legal timetable requires earlier action. If a stated timescale cannot be met, ReFocus will explain the reason and provide a revised date.

Investigations will clarify what happened, who was involved, the effect of the matter and what outcome the complainant seeks. Relevant people will have a fair opportunity to respond. Evidence will be considered objectively and findings made on the balance of probabilities.

5. Stage 1: informal resolution

A concern should normally be raised with the relevant member of staff or a senior leader in person, by telephone, letter or email. If the complainant is unsure whom to contact, they may contact the school office on 01933 391660 or enquiries@refocus.school.

ReFocus will acknowledge the concern within two school days and aim to respond within five school days. A meeting or other discussion may be offered. If the concern is not resolved, the complainant will be told how to make a stage-two formal written complaint. A complaint concerning Paula Tucker may bypass stage 1 where informal discussion would be inappropriate.

6. Stage 2: formal written complaint

A formal complaint must be made in writing, normally by letter or email, and should set out the relevant facts, dates, people involved, supporting information and desired outcome. Where a complainant has difficulty putting the complaint in writing, ReFocus will provide reasonable assistance, make an accurate written record and ask the complainant to confirm it.

The complaint will be acknowledged within five school days. An impartial person with no material prior involvement will investigate. The complainant and person complained about will be given an appropriate opportunity to provide information and respond. A written outcome, addressing the issues and explaining any available next step, will normally be issued within 20 school days.

Confidential staff disciplinary details will not normally be disclosed. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they must request a stage-three hearing in writing within five school days of the stage-two outcome, explaining the grounds for further review. A reasonable late request may be accepted.

7. Stage 3: panel hearing

7.1 Appointment and independence

The panel is appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and consists of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters complained about. At least one member must be independent of ReFocus's workforce, governing board, proprietorial body, management and running. A regular professional adviser who is involved in managing ReFocus will not be treated as the independent member.

An uninvolved governing-board member may chair or sit on the panel but cannot satisfy the independent-member requirement. Panel members must declare conflicts and must not have received information that could compromise their impartiality.

7.2 Arrangements

The clerk will make reasonable efforts to agree a hearing date, normally within 30 school days of the request, and give reasonable notice. Papers will normally be circulated to the parties and panel at least five school days beforehand. New material may be admitted where fairness permits.

The parent may attend and be accompanied. Legal representation is not normally necessary but may be permitted where fair and appropriate. The hearing is private. If the parent chooses not to attend after reasonable efforts to facilitate attendance, or rejects reasonable dates without good reason, the panel will still meet and may decide the complaint on the written evidence.

The panel will ensure that each party can explain their position and respond to relevant evidence. It may uphold or dismiss the complaint wholly or partly, make findings and recommend action. The panel does not impose staff disciplinary sanctions.

7.3 Outcome

The written findings and recommendations will normally be issued within five school days to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. A copy will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and Headteacher. Full deliberative minutes are not automatically

provided and any request for records will be considered under confidentiality and data-protection law. The panel decision completes ReFocus's internal procedure.

8. Complaints about the Headteacher/proprietor or governing board

Where a complaint concerns Paula Tucker in her capacity as Headteacher and/or proprietor, she will take no part in investigating or determining the formal complaint. Stage 1 may be an informal discussion with her only where appropriate and acceptable to the complainant.

At stage 2, the nominated governing-board complaints member will arrange for a suitably experienced person who is independent of Paula Tucker and the matters complained about to investigate and issue the formal outcome on behalf of ReFocus. The investigator must have no conflict of interest and sufficient authority, information and administrative support to act fairly.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, the nominated complaints member will arrange a fresh panel of at least three people with no previous involvement. At least one member must meet the statutory independence test; wherever practicable, all members will be sufficiently separate from Paula Tucker to provide objective consideration. Paula may provide evidence but will not appoint individual panel members, chair the hearing or take part in the decision.

A complaint about an individual governing-board member will be handled by an uninvolved person. A complaint about the whole governing board will be investigated independently and, if escalated, heard by a fresh compliant panel. The proprietor's statutory accountability remains in place but does not permit a person to determine a complaint about themselves.

9. Safeguarding and other procedures

An immediate safeguarding concern, allegation about an adult or risk of harm will be referred promptly to the DSL and handled under the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, including referral to the LADO, police or children's social care where required. A complaint about how ReFocus acted or failed to act may continue under this procedure when doing so will not prejudice safeguarding or external enquiries. It may be paused, with an explanation, while another process takes priority.

Admissions, suspension, permanent exclusion, placement termination, staff grievance or discipline, whistleblowing and local-authority EHC-plan decisions may have separate routes. A complaint that ReFocus failed to follow its own procedure may still be considered here where appropriate. Commissioning bodies may initially use contractual or placement escalation, but families will not be passed repeatedly between organisations and responsibility for responding will be made clear.

10. Data-protection complaints

A complaint about ReFocus's use of personal data may be made electronically or by another accessible means and will be coordinated with Paula Tucker as School Data Protection Lead unless she is the subject of the complaint, when an independent person will coordinate it. ReFocus will acknowledge a data-protection complaint within 30 calendar days, take appropriate steps to investigate it without undue delay and communicate the outcome promptly. School holidays do not suspend this statutory timetable.

The outcome will explain the right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office. The Data Protection and UK GDPR Policy applies alongside this procedure and takes precedence where a specific data-protection requirement sets a different timetable or process.

11. Persistent or unreasonable contact

ReFocus distinguishes between a complaint and the way a person communicates. It will not treat contact as unreasonable simply because it is persistent, critical or inconvenient. Before restricting contact, ReFocus will normally complete the applicable procedure, consider disability and communication needs, make reasonable adjustments, give a written warning and explain the reasons, scope, duration and review arrangements.

Proportionate arrangements may include a single contact point, agreed contact times or consolidated responses. A safe route will remain for genuinely new complaints, safeguarding concerns and legally protected disclosures. Restrictions will be reviewed. Threats, harassment or violence will be risk assessed and police or emergency services contacted where circumstances warrant it. Any site-access restriction will be proportionate, confirmed in writing and reviewed while preserving necessary communication about the pupil.

Complainants are asked to preserve confidentiality and not publish information that identifies children, breaches another person's privacy or prejudices an investigation. Use of social media will not by itself remove access to this procedure.

12. Records, confidentiality and learning

ReFocus keeps a written record of every stage-two formal complaint, whether it is resolved at the formal stage or proceeds to a panel, the outcome and action taken regardless of whether it is upheld.

Correspondence, statements and records are stored securely under the Records Management and Retention Schedule.

Individual complaint records are confidential except where access is requested by the Secretary of State or an inspectorate, disclosure is required by law, or lawful sharing is necessary for safeguarding or another proper purpose. ReFocus is not generally subject to the Freedom of Information Act as an ordinary independent school. A subject access request gives access to the requester's personal data, not automatically to the entire complaint file; third-party rights and exemptions will be considered.

Anonymised themes, timescales and actions may be shared with the proprietor and governing board for oversight and improvement. Information will be limited where disclosure could compromise eligibility to investigate or sit on a future panel.

13. External referral, monitoring and review

After completing ReFocus's procedure, a complainant who believes the school has failed to meet the Independent School Standards may contact the Department for Education through the GOV.UK "Complain about a school" service. The DfE considers regulatory compliance; it does not ordinarily rehear the complaint or overturn the panel's decision. Data-protection concerns may be referred to the ICO and safeguarding concerns to the appropriate safeguarding authority.

The Headteacher monitors ordinary case administration. The proprietor/owners retain accountability, and the governing board reviews anonymised trends and improvement actions. This procedure is reviewed at least annually and sooner after a significant complaint, legal change or identified weakness. It is approved by the proprietor/owners.