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# INTRODUCTION

**Implementation:** It is the responsibility of the Head Teacher to ensure that staff members are aware of and understand this policy and any subsequent revisions.

**Compliance:** This policy complies with all relevant regulations and other legislation as detailed in the *Compliance with Regulations & Legislation Statement*.

Options Trent Acres School is a specialist, independent day school offering places to pupils aged 5 to 19. Places are offered to pupils who have complex needs including ASC, ADHD. A high number of our pupils may also have experienced early childhood trauma and may present with attachment difficulties.

The school operates across 2 sites within the Staffordshire borough and offers up to 141 across both facilities.

Options Trent Acres School, based in Kings Bromley is set within 12 acres of Staffordshire countryside. The full national curriculum is taught from key stage 1 to key stage 4, adapted to meet the needs of individual pupils. Post-16 pupils can access a range of qualifications, including additional GCSE’s and BTEC qualifications and a number of A-Level opportunities (please see Post-16 Policy for further information) The school is also home to a range of farm and domestic animals and reptiles who provide emotional support for pupils as well as curriculum enhancement. Additional opportunities to study animal care, land based studies, equine studies, psychology and engineering are also available to pupils.

Trent Acres - Brookfield is a purpose-built vocational college. We offer places for pupils aged 14 to 19, enabling them to study vocational routes into computer gaming and coding, hospitality and barista music production and health and social care. Students will also be able to achieve Functional Skills in English, Mathematics and ICT from Entry Level to Level 2. Many of the staff will work across sites, providing consistency and stability for pupils.

# THE YOUNG PERSON WITH AUTISM, COMPLEX NEEDS & COMPLAINTS

Options Trent Acres offers places to pupils who have complex needs. It is likely that they have experienced disruption to their education and many have missed significant amounts of learning prior to joining the school. The majority of pupils experience difficulties with social interaction and communication. This impacts on their abilities to form and maintain relationships.

It is recognised that children with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder may find it very difficult to complain, and in some circumstances don’t realise that to make a complaint is a reasonable course of action for a given situation. The support system within school encourages key staff members to advocate for children and make complaints on their behalf. All complaints are dealt with seriously.

# THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

**Stage 1:**

**Informal Resolution**

* It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
* If a young person or parent/ carer has a complaint they should normally contact the Teacher in the first instance. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straight away by this means, to the parent/ carer’s satisfaction. If the Teacher cannot resolve the problem alone, it may be necessary for him/ her to consult the Head Teacher – Melanie Callaghan-Lewis.
* Complaints made directly to the Head Teacher will usually be referred to the relevant Teacher or staff member concerned unless it is deemed inappropriate for them to deal with the matter personally.
* The relevant Teacher / member of staff will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. The complainant will receive acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint within one working day, with an explanation of the procedure to be followed, including time scales. Should the matter not be fully resolved within 3 working days, or in the event that the Teacher / and the parent/ carer is unable to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents/ carers will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

**Formal Resolution**

**Stage 2: Formal Resolution**

* If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the pupil/ child/ parents/ carers should put their complaint in writing to the Head Teacher. After considering the complaint, the Head Teacher will decide on the course of action to take.
* In most cases, the Head Teacher will meet or speak to the pupil/child/parents/ carers concerned within 2 working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
* It may be necessary for the Head Teacher to carry out further investigations.
* The Head Teacher will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. These will be stored centrally in the Head Teachers office and will be made available for inspection if needed.
* Once the Head Teacher is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made. Parents/ carers will be informed in writing of the decision, together with reasons for the decision, within 10 working days.
* If parents/ carers are not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure by putting their complaint in writing to the Regional Director Chris Groom.

**Stage 3: Panel Hearing**

* If parents/ carers seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the Regional Director, who will refer the matter to a hearing of the Complaints Panel.
* The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three people not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. The panel will allow for a parent to attend (if this is appropriate and complaint with any care order which may be in place) and for the parent to be accompanied if they wish. The complaint will be acknowledged and a hearing scheduled to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 14 days. The complainant will be given at least 5 working days’ notice of the date of the hearing, with an invitation to attend. They will be informed that they may bring with them a relative, teacher or friend if they wish.
* If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than 3 days’ prior the hearing.
* If possible, the Panel will resolve the parent/ carer’s complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.
* Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all the facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within 7 days of the hearing. The Panel will write to the parents/ carers (sent by electronic mail or otherwise) informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel’s findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing (by electronic mail or otherwise) to the parents/ carers, the Head Teacher, the Regional Director, The Group Board and, where relevant, the person of whom the complaint was raised.

Young People should also be given information about where to seek help if needed:

NSPCC Helpline: 0800 800 500

CHILDLINE: 0800 1111

**Unreasonable Complainants**

The school is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

The school defines unreasonable complainants as ‘those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people’s complaints’. A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

* 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 while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
* refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
* insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
* introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or 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 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, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:

* maliciously;
* aggressively;
* using threats, intimidation or violence;
* using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
* knowing it to be false;
* using falsified information;
* publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a 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 Regional Director will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an ‘unreasonable’ marking. If the behaviour continues the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable, asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months. In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from the school.

In accordance with DfE Policy, you cannot complain directly to a private school if you do not have a child at the school.

**Records of Complaints**

* Following any complaint and course of action to reach a resolve, the school will keep confidential records detailing whether the complaint was dealt with informally or following a more formal route. Records will be made available if requested as part of school inspection or if requested by the Secretary of State. The school will also keep records of any actions taken as a result of the complaint. The outcome of the complaint will be detailed along with any statements or correspondence.

# BACKGROUND

During the writing of this policy, consideration and guidance has been taken from;

The Independent School Standards – Part 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled.