



Complaint Procedure Policy

Approved by: Board of Directors

Last reviewed on: January 2023

Next review due by: January 2024

1. Aims

The Ranch aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of children at The Ranch, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- › Be impartial and non-adversarial
- › Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- › Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- › Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- › Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- › Make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- › Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- › Consider how the complaint can feed into The Ranch improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The Ranch will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the Ranch website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of children at The Ranch

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on [creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations](#), and refers to [good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

3. Definitions and scope

3.1 Definitions

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”

3.2 Scope

The Ranch 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
- › Exclusion
- › Whistle-blowing
- › Staff grievances ›
- Staff discipline

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

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

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- › Follow these procedures
- › Co-operate with The Ranch throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- › Ask for assistance as needed
- › Treat all those involved with respect
- › Not publish details about the complaint on social media

4.2 The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- › Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- › Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- › Prepare a comprehensive report to the directors which includes the facts and potential solutions

4.3 The complaints co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- › The designated complaints Director
 - › Any other staff member providing administrative support
 - › The complaints co-ordinator will:
- › Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- › Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members and directors
- › Be aware of issues relating to:
 - Sharing third party information
 - Additional support needed by complainants, for example interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person › Keep records

5. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- › What has happened
- › Who was involved
- › What the complainant feels would put things right

5.1 Time scales

The complainant must raise the complaint within two weeks of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 2 weeks of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made from term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the time scales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- › Set new time limits with the complainant
- › Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

6. Stages of complaint

6.1 Stage 1: informal

The Ranch will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff either in person or by letter, telephone, or email.

The Ranch will acknowledge informal complaints within 5 working days and investigate and provide a response within 15 working days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and a director as appropriate.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

6.2 Stage 2: formal

Formal complaints can be raised:

- › By letter or email
- › By a third party acting on behalf of the complainant in writing

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents, and what they feel would resolve the complaint. If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office.

The Admin team will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 working days.

The directors will call a meeting to clarify concerns and seek a resolution. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting and should inform the school of the identity of their companion in advance.

In certain circumstances, The Ranch may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case, The Ranch will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant can arrange alternative accompaniment.

The directors (or other person appointed by the directors for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 15 working days.

7. Persistent complaints

7.1 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 Ranch'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 complaint's 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 complaint's procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames it sets out
- › Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance, or excessive demands on Ranch time
- › Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value

Steps we will take

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

Stopping responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when all 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 Ranch site

8. Record keeping

The Ranch 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 inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices.

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.

9. Learning lessons

The directors board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that The Ranch can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.