Complaints Policy

Gecko Community

Empower, Inspire, Educate

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1. Scope

This policy is written to ensure that parents/carers of students at Gecko Community, or other persons who wish to raise a concern regarding provision or practice, understand how to do that.

There is a separate whistleblowing policy that staff should read and refer to should they wish to raise concern(s) re the practice of (an)other member(s) of staff.

Gecko Community has a nominated Trustee who is responsible for monitoring the way in which complaints are responded to. This is Emily Hartley-Heaven.

Gecko Community understands the requirement to ensure that a complaints procedure is drawn up and effectively implemented. The procedures:

- are made here in writing;
- will be uploaded to the website.;
- set out clear time scales for the management of a complaint;
- allow for a complaint to be made and considered initially on an informal basis.

Gecko Community will ensure that a written record is kept of all complaints that proceed to the formal stage together with any action taken as a result of the complaints regardless of whether they are upheld. Further we will ensure that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 requests access to them. Any findings reached and / or recommendations made will be available for inspection.
NB Wherever the term parents is used in the policy, that means any person with parental responsibility for the young person.

2. Policy statement and provision

Gecko Community seeks to:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- make procedures easily accessible;
- be impartial;
- be non-adversarial;
- allow swift handling with established time-limits for action, keeping people informed of the progress;
- ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- respect people's desire for confidentiality;
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
- provide information to the school's senior management team so that services may be improved if appropriate.

In investigating complaints Gecko Community will:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant and re-contact them should clarification or further information be required;
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- interview those involved in the matter (including those complained of), allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct all interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of interviews.

In seeking to resolve complaints, it might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur, together with an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review school policies and / or practice in light of the complaint.

3. Procedures

Aims and objectives

Gecko Community seeks to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint. Careful consideration is given to all complaints and we aim to deal with them as swiftly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding and, in all cases, we put the interests of the child above all other issues. Further we aim to provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed and subsequently resolved.

The complaints process

The process has three distinct sections:

- Informal (stage 1)
- Formal (stage 2)
- Formal with a committee hearing (stage 3)

Stage 1 - Informal… *(a Trustee, usually Emily Hartley-Heaven, will respond within one working day when a concern is raised - she will assure the complainant that the complaint has been received and will be responded to, and arrange either a meeting that is mutually convenient or a time for a further telephone conversation).*

How to share a concern

If, for example, a parent is concerned about anything to do with the education or mentoring that we are providing, they should, in the first instance, either by telephone or through an arranged meeting, discuss the matter with Emily Hartley-Heaven or the next Trustee on matters of Complaint which is, Mel Duncan. Most matters of concern can be dealt with in this way. All staff work very hard to ensure that each young person is well provided for at Gecko Community, is happy at Gecko Community, and is making good progress. They always want to know if there is a problem so that they can take action before the problem seriously affects the young person's progress. All Gecko Community staff involved will listen carefully to any concern expressed, treat the complainant respectfully and make every attempt to ensure that concerns are allayed and / or the matter resolved.

It may be necessary to hold further meetings to ensure that the complaint has been appropriately responded to, and any improvements in practice identified as a result of the complaint, implemented.

Assuming that the parent is content that the response has been sufficient and appropriate, this will still be deemed to be an informal response.

Stage 2 - Formal - *what to do if the matter is not resolved through informal discussion.*

In any situation where a parent or other complainant feels that the complaint they have made has not been sufficiently well dealt with, or that their concern is of such a serious nature that an informal response is insufficient, then they should request that the process move to a formal investigation. In order to do this they should put their concerns into a written form (email is acceptable), submit that to Emily Hartley-Heaven and make an appointment to discuss it formally.

Emily Hartley-Heaven will then carry out an investigation regarding the complaint. This may involve interviewing staff or students, examining internet records, checking students' work or any other activity pertinent to the complaint.
Emily Hartley-Heaven will complete this process within twenty working days. She will make coherent records of her investigation and share these with the complainant within ten working days of the submission of the request to move to a formal complaint.
Emily Hartley-Heaven will then share details of their findings in the meeting with the complainant. Emily Hartley-Heaven will explain whether she considers the complaint to be wholly or partially legitimate or unsubstantiated and explain, if appropriate, how either practice or policy will be amended to ensure best practice in the future.
If the complaint concerns Emily Hartley-Heaven, then the written (again email is acceptable) details would be submitted to the next Trustee on matters of Complaint, Mel Duncan. She will then contact the complainant and investigate the complaint in the same manner as that described above. Again the investigation process should be completed within twenty working days.

This complaint must be made in writing (as stated previously email is acceptable), stating the nature of the complaint, how the centre has handled it thus far, and whether the complaint at this point concerns:

- a perceived failure to investigate the initial complaint properly;
- a belief that the findings were correct but have not been appropriately responded to;
- a wish to contest the findings.

The complainant should send this written complaint to the chair of trustees. The complainant will be made aware that if they would like to use a template for submitting the complaint (template attached at the end of this policy), then they should request a copy of the template (available either in hard copy or as email attachment) from the centre administrator.
Either the chair of trustees Vikki Mead or the trustee with responsibility for managing complaints will arrange a meeting to consider the complaint and invite the person making it to attend the meeting, so that they can explain the complaint in more detail. The centre will give the complainant at least five working days notice of the meeting and explain to them that they may be accompanied if they so wish.

Stage 3 - panel hearing following further complaint to trustees subsequent to the formal investigation... *(receipt of the complaint must be acknowledged within one working day and a panel hearing convened within fifteen working days of that acknowledgement)*

The panel will consist of a minimum of three people who were not directly involved in the issues covered by the complaint. One of those panel members should be 'independent of the management and the running of the school'. DfE advice is that persons suitable for this role are those, "who have held a position of responsibility and are used to scrutinising evidence and putting forward balanced arguments - examples of persons likely to be suitable are serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background and retired members of the police force".

After hearing all the evidence, the trustees will consider their decision and inform the complainant about it in writing or in a different format as requested. The findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. This will be done as soon as possible, but, at the latest, within five working days from the hearing. The trustees will do all they can at this stage to resolve the complaint to the complainant's satisfaction, and will ensure that any action identified as required is undertaken.

At this stage the process is complete from a centre viewpoint. Complainants do, however, have the right to contact either the DfE (Secretary of State) or the Independent Schools Inspection Service (as the inspecting agency) if they still believe that the complaint has not been satisfactorily dealt with.

4. Template for making a complaint

Please complete and return to Emily Hartley-Heaven or Mel Duncan (responsible for complaints) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.
emily.hartley-heaven@geckocommunity.org.uk
mel.duncan@geckocommunity.org.uk
(Please try to provide as much detail as possible, if using a word processor, the boxes expand)

Your name:

Student's name:

Your relationship to the student:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

E-mail address:

Please give details of your complaint.

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? (eg: who did you speak to and what was the response?)

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage? Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

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Placement Coordinator and Safeguarding Lead



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