Complaints Policy

Ethos Statement

TAO Independent School provides a nurturing, relational, and therapeutic learning environment where every child is known, valued, and supported. We believe that safety, trust, and belonging are the foundations of growth.

Our curriculum and culture are shaped by outdoor learning, trauma-informed practice, and compassion. This policy reflects those principles and sets out how we meet statutory requirements while maintaining the high levels of care and personal understanding that define TAO

Purpose

From time-to-time parents/carers may be unhappy about the way their child has been treated at TAO. When this is the case parent/carers should communicate in the stages outlined below. TAO operates a 6-month time frame in which a complaint can be lodged. This means 6 months from when the incident/complaint occurred (or if it is a series of events, when the last incident occurred) to contacting TAO about it. The School may consider complaints raised outside this timeframe where there are exceptional circumstances, including where safeguarding concerns are raised or where it was not reasonably practicable for the complainant to raise the matter sooner**.**

Principles

- Throughout the procedure, the complainant can expect to be treated with courtesy, respect and fairness at all times. We expect that TAO in dealing with the complaint will be shown the same courtesy, respect and fairness. We will aim to respond to a complaint and each stage of the procedure within 10 working days.

  Anonymous complaints will normally not be investigated; however, the Headteacher or Proprietor may determine that an anonymous complaint should be considered where it raises serious safeguarding, welfare, health and safety, regulatory or other significant concerns.

- Complaint details, outcomes and actions taken are recorded by TAO and used for service improvement. We will handle your information so that it is processed and retained appropriately and legally, in line with data protection legislation.

- Formal complaints may be submitted in writing by email or post. A complaint should identify the nature of the complaint, relevant circumstances and, where possible, the outcome sought. Reasonable assistance will be provided where a complainant has difficulty submitting a complaint in writing.

Complaints Procedure

Concern or Complaint?

For the purposes of this policy, a concern is an expression of worry or doubt about an issue for which reassurance is sought, while a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about an action taken or a lack of action. TAO seeks to resolve concerns at the earliest appropriate opportunity without preventing access to the formal complaints procedure:

"*an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important and for which reassurances are sought*"

and a complaint:

"*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action".*

This policy is designed having regard to this guidance. Furthermore, this procedure refers to 'complainants' who, for the purpose of this policy, should be taken to include both those who raise concerns and complaints.

Policy Scope

- This procedure covers all concerns and/or complaints about any provision or facilities provided by TAO.

- This procedure meets the requirements of Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (as amended) for complaints made by parents or carers of pupils attending TAO Independent School concerning their child. The School may use the principles of this procedure to consider concerns raised by other individuals where appropriate, but such complaints do not fall within the statutory Part 7 procedure.

Notes

Complainants are asked to note that:

TAO will keep a written record of all formal complaints, including whether they were resolved following the formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing, and any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint, regardless of whether the complaint was upheld.

- Complaint records will be securely retained in accordance with the School's Data Protection & Privacy Policy and documented retention arrangements..

- All complaints raised will be dealt with in confidence. Every effort will be made to ensure that correspondence, statements and records relating to the individual complaints are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

- Anonymous complaints will not be investigated except in exceptional circumstances. This is due to the absence of a complainant to respond to.

- If the complaint concerns the conduct of the Headteacher, it will be dealt with initially at Stage 3 of this procedure.

- A concern/complaint will not be referred to the next stage unless and until the previous stage of this procedure has been completed. Except where this policy expressly provides otherwise, a complaint will normally progress through the stages in sequence. The School may move directly to a later stage where the subject matter, seriousness of the complaint or identity of the person complained about makes an earlier stage inappropriate.

- Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them, or where disclosure is otherwise required or permitted by law.

- As an independent school, TAO is responsible for administering its own complaints procedure. This does not prevent referral to a local authority, safeguarding agency, police, regulator or other statutory body where that body has a separate legal, safeguarding or commissioning function..

- A complaint which raises a safeguarding or child protection concern will be managed in accordance with the Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy alongside, or instead of, this complaints procedure where appropriate. Allegations about an adult working with children which may meet the harm threshold will be referred to the Headteacher/DSL, Proprietor or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), as appropriate, in accordance with Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026

- The complaints procedure must never delay immediate safeguarding action, referral to children's social care, the police, the LADO or another statutory agency where this is required

- A complaint about the Headteacher will normally enter the procedure at Stage 3 and be considered by the Proprietor or another suitably independent person appointed for that purpose.

- A complaint about the Proprietor will not be investigated by the Proprietor. It will be referred directly to an appropriately independent person appointed to consider the formal complaint. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, the complaint will proceed to an independent panel hearing in accordance with Stage 4.

Pupil Complaints

TAO recognises the importance of listening to the voices of its pupils. If a pupil wishes to raise a concern or complaint, they will be supported in doing so in line with this procedure, with adaptations where necessary to ensure age-appropriate understanding and safeguarding

Where a pupil raises information which indicates a safeguarding concern, the Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy takes precedence and the DSL or DDSL must be informed without delay.

Stage 1: Concern/Complaint Heard by Staff Member

The purpose of this stage is to seek to resolve any concern/complaint as quickly as possible. This stage is to be considered 'informal'.

In the first instance, a complainant should discuss the concern/complaint with the member of staff concerned. The aim will be to resolve any concern/complaint directly at this stage. However, if a complainant feels unable to approach the member of staff involved, the concern/complaint must be made direct to the Headteacher, who will arrange for another member of staff to investigate the concern/complaint (for the avoidance of doubt, the referral to the Headteacher and subsequent appointment of another member of staff will not be treated as at Stage 2). Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with the concern/complaint, the concern/complaint will be referred to the Headteacher who will arrange for another member of staff to investigate the concern/complaint.

The member of staff who investigates the concern/complaint will:

- Invite the complainant(s) to suggest what they think might resolve the concern/complaint.
- Subject to discussion of any suggestions made, investigate the concern/complaint; and where the concern/complaint is investigated advise the complainant (orally) of their findings and conclusions.

The investigation will be objective, impartial and fair.

Timescales for Stage 1: normally, it is expected that this stage should be resolved within five working days (term time).

Stage 2: Concern/Complaint Heard by the Headteacher

This stage applies when a complainant is not satisfied with the way the concern/complaint was dealt with at the informal Stage 1. The purpose of this stage is to provide reassurance that concerns/complaints will be taken seriously.

The aim of the Headteacher will be to resolve at Stage 2 the concern/complaint as quickly and as amicably as possible.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied following Stage 2, they may progress to Stage 3 by submitting the complaint in writing to the Proprietor within 10 working days of the conclusion of Stage 2. The written complaint should clearly set out the grounds of complaint and the outcome sought.

The written complaint should be concise and specify precisely what the complainant's ground(s) of complaint are, and the outcome(s) sought**.**

STAGE 3: Formal / Written Complaint

If the matter has not been resolved at stage 2, parent/carers should put their complaint in writing within 10 working days of the stage 2 meeting to the proprietor (Daniel Giblin). This must be done via a TAO complaints form which will be made available to the complainant at the impasse of stage 2 by the Headteacher.

The proprietor (Daniel Giblin) upon receipt of the complaints form will contact the parent/carer to arrange a formal meeting. When writing, the parent/carer must clearly state what the complaint is and what TAO has done so far to address it and why they feel it hasn't

been resolved. If this is the first TAO is aware of this issue, the parent/carer should go to Stage 1 (see above).

If the proprietor (Daniel Giblin) cannot resolve the problem, parents should move to stage 4 of the process.

STAGE 4: Complaints Panel Hearing

If the complainant remains dissatisfied following the Stage 3 response, they may request a panel hearing in writing within 10 working days of receiving that response. The School will arrange the hearing within a reasonable timescale and provide the complainant with appropriate notice of the date, time and arrangements..

The panel will consist of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one member of the panel will be independent of the management and running of TAO Independent School. The panel will be appointed by, or on behalf of, the Proprietor.

The complainant may attend the panel hearing and may be accompanied if they wish. Reasonable adjustments will be made where necessary to enable participation

The panel will make findings and recommendations that are shared with the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, as well as being available for inspection on the school premises. The decision at stage 4 is final. Written minutes of the meeting will be taken and shared with both parties. The School will aim to provide the panel's written findings and recommendations within 5 working days of the hearing. Where this is not reasonably practicable, the complainant will be informed of the revised timescale. These are also available for inspection in the TAO premises by the proprietor

For all complaints which get to the formal stages (3 & 4), TAO will keep a written record. This will include how/if the complaint was resolved, and any actions taken by the TAO following the complaint. All records of formal complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 109 of the 2008 Act request access to them.

The panel will consider the complaint fairly and impartially and will make findings and recommendations. A copy of the panel's findings and recommendations will be provided in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. The findings and recommendations will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the Proprietor and Headteacher.

A written record of the panel hearing and its outcome will be retained by the School in accordance with its complaints and data retention arrangements.

STAGE 4 The panel hearing represents the final stage of TAO Independent School's internal complaints procedure.

Post Stage 4 Next Steps:

If a complainant believes that the School has failed to meet the Independent School Standards or has not operated its complaints procedure appropriately, they may raise the matter with the Department for Education. The Department for Education does not normally determine the merits of individual complaints but may consider information relevant to its regulatory responsibilities for independent schools. Concerns that a child is at risk of harm should not wait until the complaints procedure is exhausted and should instead be reported immediately through the appropriate safeguarding route.

Summary of Stages:

1. Stage 1 – Informal Resolution: concern raised with the relevant member of staff or Headteacher.

2. Stage 2 – Headteacher Review: unresolved concern considered by the Headteacher.

3. Stage 3 – Formal Written Complaint: complaint considered by the Proprietor or an appropriately independent person where the complaint concerns the Proprietor.

4. Stage 4 – Panel Hearing: hearing before a panel of at least three people, including at least one person independent of the management and running of the School.

Complaints concerning the Headteacher or Proprietor will be handled in accordance with the specific arrangements set out above. Safeguarding concerns will be managed under the Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy and referred to external safeguarding agencies where appropriate, Where a complaint includes an allegation about an adult working with children that may meet the harm threshold, the matter will be considered under the School's safeguarding allegations procedure and referred to the LADO where appropriate.

Unreasonable Complaints and Unacceptable Behaviours

Whilst TAO will always respond positively to concerns and/or complaints, there may be occasions when it would not be appropriate for TAO to follow this procedure or when TAO takes the view that the procedure should be ended.

The School will not mark a complaint as unreasonable solely because the complainant is persistent, dissatisfied or raises challenging issues. Any restrictions imposed will be proportionate, justified, documented and will not prevent legitimate safeguarding concerns or new complaints from being raised.

For example:

- Where this complaints procedure has been exhausted, the issue closed and the complainant seeks to raise the same or similar issues again.
- Where TAO believes it has made every reasonable step to address the reasonable concerns of the complainant. In this regard, the ability of TAO to respond positively may be limited by the resources available (including staff time).
- Where TAO believes that the complainant is intent on causing disruption or inconvenience; or where the complainant demonstrates abusive or aggressive behaviour towards TAO or any member of staff at TAO.

Where behaviour becomes abusive, threatening, harassing or unreasonably persistent, the School may take proportionate action. This may include limiting the method or frequency of contact, restricting access to the premises where necessary, seeking legal remedies or notifying the Police where appropriate. Any such arrangement will preserve an appropriate route for urgent matters, safeguarding concerns and genuinely new complaints to be raised.

Confidentiality

- Efforts will be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned.

- Information should be handled and disseminated on a “need to know” basis only, however, correspondence, statements and records relating individual complaints are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

- Complaint information will be processed and stored securely in accordance with the TAO Independent School Data Protection & Privacy Policy and will only be accessible to those with a legitimate need to know**.**

Accessibility:

TAO will make reasonable adjustments for accessibility, language, or communication needs to ensure all complainants can access this procedure fairly. Reasonable adjustments may include alternative communication formats, support to formulate a written complaint, accessible meeting arrangements or other proportionate support according to individual need.

Monitoring and Review

The Headteacher and Proprietor will review complaint information as appropriate to identify recurring themes, safeguarding issues or areas requiring improvement. The policy and complaints arrangements will be reviewed at least annually and following significant regulatory or procedural change. This procedure is designed to meet Part 7 of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (as amended).

Legal & Statutory Framework

This policy has been developed with reference to the following legislation and guidance:

- Children Act 1989 / 2004
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Department for Education – Independent School Standards Guidance (2026)
- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (as amended), Schedule 1, Part 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled
- Education and Skills Act 2008, Section 109 (Inspection Powers)
- Equality Act 2010
- KCSIE 2026 (in relation to complaints raising safeguarding concerns)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026

Version Updates

Version	Date	Author	Review / Changes	Approved By

1.2	08/09/2026	Daniel Giblin	Published	Headteacher / Proprietor