



ROSARYHILL SECONDARY SCHOOL

GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING
SCHOOL COMPLAINTS



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Foreword

Rosaryhill Secondary School is devoted to educating our students lovingly and skillfully upon a solid spiritual, emotional and physical foundation. Our vision is to nurture our students to become the persons they are meant to be in the eyes of God. We believe each of our students is a precious seed entrusted to use, and we envisage our students will bear beautiful fruits by receiving good education and nourishments at our school. To fulfil our goals, we believe that the collaboration and cooperation among the stakeholders is of utmost importance. Their feedback, criticism and suggestions enable us to make positive changes to our school to provide quality education as well as a safe environment to our students. We have appropriate measures to handle different forms of feedbacks and suggestions given.

Chapter 1 Scope of Application

1.1 The policy is applicable to the handling of complaints about the daily operation and internal affairs of the School lodged by different stakeholders including parents, students or members of the public through various means, including post, fax, email, phone or in person.

(i) Complaints about the daily operations and internal affairs of the school

Domain	Examples
Management & Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ School accounts (e.g. accounting records) ➤ Other charges (e.g. registration fees) ➤ School policies (e.g. arrangements regarding suspension of students from school) ➤ Standards of contractors' services (e.g. supply of meal boxes) ➤ Service contracts (e.g. tendering procedures) ➤ School environment and hygiene (e.g. noise pollution)
Learning and Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ School-based curriculum (e.g. subject lesson time) ➤ Selection of subjects and class allocation (e.g. arrangements for students' choice of subjects) ➤ Homework (e.g. amount of homework) ➤ Students assessment (e.g. assessment criteria) ➤ Staff performance (e.g. behavior / attitudes of teaching staff)
School Ethos & Student Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ School ethos (e.g. different aspects related to appearance) ➤ Home-school cooperation (e.g. communication channels) ➤ Student support (e.g. support for students with special educational needs) ➤ Extra-curricular activities (e.g. arrangements for interest groups and other student activities)
Student Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Students' overall performance (e.g. academic results, conduct) ➤ Student discipline (e.g. foul and abusive language, smoking, fighting, bullying)

1.2 If a complaint falls into any of the following categories, school should be informed for advice. School may then help direct or advise to direct the complaints to relevant party:

Domain	Examples
Complaints about education policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Class structures, class size ➤ School environment and hygiene (e.g. noise pollution)
Complaints about alleged contravention of the Education Ordinance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ in relation to unregistered teacher or contravention of the Codes of Aid (e.g. exorbitant charges, expulsion of students)
Complaints about services directly provided by the EDB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ school place allocation, services provided by the Regional Education Offices

Chapter 2 Guiding Principles for Handling Complaints

Principle I: Handling by the appropriate party/parties

- (i) Complaints related to daily operations and internal affairs should be handled by school.
- (ii) The EDB should handle complaints concerned with the Education Ordinance, education policies and services.
- (iii) Complaints that involve other laws of Hong Kong should be lodged to and handled by the relevant law enforcement agencies.
- (iv) If a complaint involves both school and the EDB, it should be handled by the school involving relevant sections of the EDB.

Principle II: Timely and efficient response

- (i) Promptly respond to all sorts of inquiries to avoid any uninviting situation from worsening. Upon receipt of an inquiry/a complaint, frontline staff should be appointed to handle it or immediately refer it to the designated staff/task force for action. If the responsible staff cannot resolve the problem, they should seek help from the seniors.
- (ii) If an incident is referred or reported to the School by the media, the School's Crisis Management Committee will take appropriate measures.

Principle III: Clear and Transparent Mechanisim

- (i) Prepare stakeholders guidelines on the relevant policies and procedures to enable responsible staff are well-equipped and informed for handling complaints.
- (ii) The school management should make parents and staff fully aware of the details of the procedures through different channels, e.g. school websites, circulars, student handbooks or parent-teacher meetings.
- (iii) The school authority regularly review the complaint handling policies and guidelines by consulting staff and parents, and revise the handling procedures whenever necessary.

Principle IV: Fair and impartial handling

- (i) The school will approach complaints in a positive way, and ensure the complainants and respondents of the complaints are treated fairly. Sufficient appeal channels should be

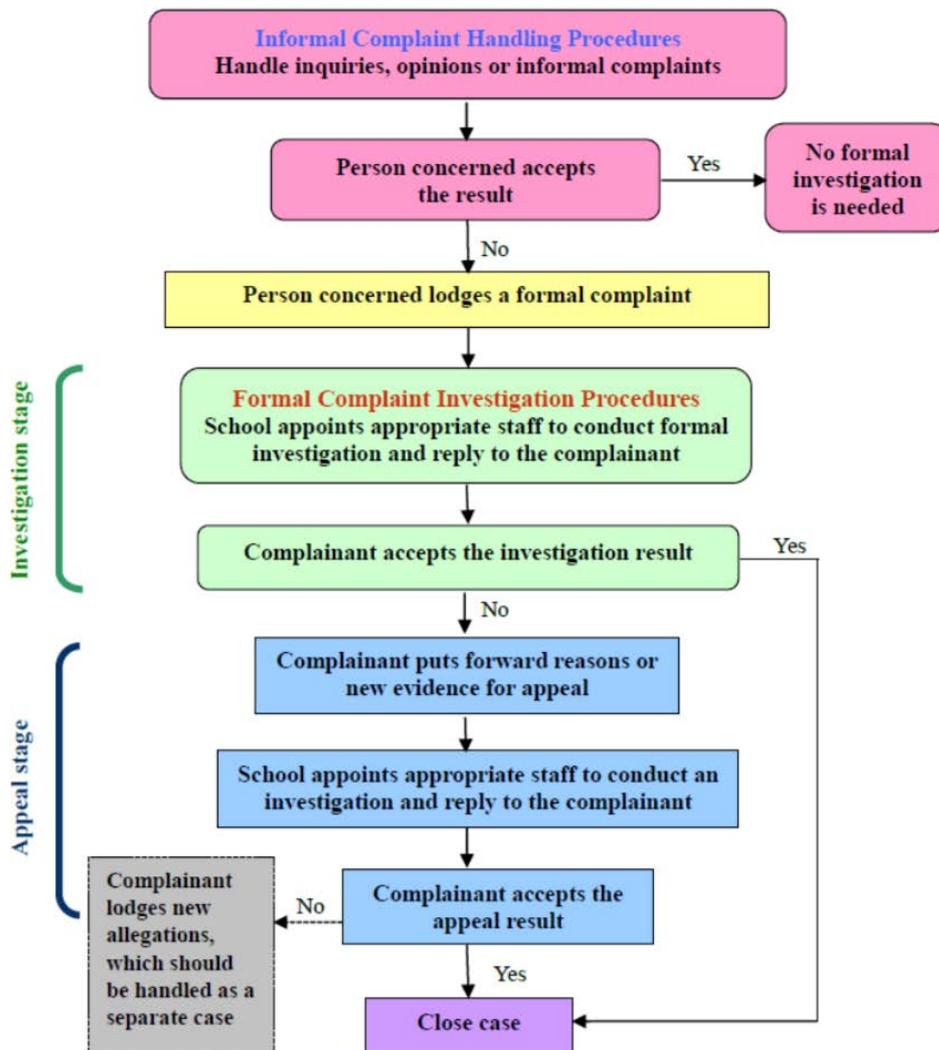
	provided.
(ii)	Before an investigation begins or where appropriate, the designated staff should declare interests. In order to avoid conflict of interest, any staff member who is the respondent of the complaint should not be involved in handling the case, supervising the investigation, or signing and issuing letters to the complainant.
(iii)	The school management will ensure the rights of the complainants or other persons involved in the complaint are being protected.

Chapter 3 Procedures for Handling Complaints

3.1 Interpretation of Complaints

To avoid misunderstanding in the handling process, all staff should be cautious when differentiating between *concerns* and *complaints*. A *concern* is the inquiry or opinion expressed by the stakeholders for the interests of themselves, their children or the school, in the hope of making changes or improvement to the existing situation. Meanwhile, a *complaint* is an expression of disappointment, dissatisfaction or grievance expressed by the complainant. They may require the school to rectify its mistakes, take disciplinary action against the suspected offenders, or resolve the issue raised in the complaint. Persons-in-charge should avoid confusion between the two so as to determine the appropriate handling procedures.

Diagram 1: Complaint Handling Procedures in School



3.2 Immediate/prompt handling

- I. If the school receives an inquiry, suggestion or informal complaint from the public, the frontline staff should clearly distinguish its nature and take appropriate action.
- II. Under normal circumstances, the persons-in-charge may handle concerns, opinions or informal complaints by following the informal complaint handling procedures in order to provide relevant parties with immediate or prompt assistance or a solution to the issues.
- III. In general, an inquiry or an informal complaint that has been answered or handled instantly need not be documented in formal writing. Where necessary, the staff concerned may however record the key points.
- IV. If necessary, the on-duty administrative staff will, through direct talks or interviews with the person(s) concerned, relay the school's stance, clear misunderstandings and remove any misgivings or worries.
- V. School will, according to our own situation, set the time limit (in general: within five working days) for an initial response.

- VI. If necessary, the on-duty administrative will seek support by referring the case to a designated or senior officer for prompt follow up and resolution. The principal will decide whether to take up the handling of the case depending on the situation and the nature of the case.

3.3 Replying to complaints

- I. For verbal inquiries/ opinions/ complaints handled by the informal complaint handling procedures, verbal replies will suffice and written replies are normally not required.
- II. For opinions/complaints which are presented in written form, if the school wishes to make clear its stance or provide relevant details, the responsible staff may decide whether a simple written reply to the person concerned/complainant is necessary.

3.4 Complaints record

Cases handled by the informal complaint handling procedures normally need not be documented in formal written records. If an inquiry/complaint has been answered or resolved instantly, it is advised that the designated staff may record the key points in a log book for reference and record.

3.5 Appropriate follow-up

Review whether the policies or procedures regarding complaints have been properly handled and suggest appropriate measures for the improvement of handling similar cases or preventing similar cases from recurring.

Formal Complaint Handling Procedures

3.6 Arrangements for investigation and appeal stages

In spite of the efforts to resolving the problems by the informal complaint handling procedures, if the school still cannot address the complainant's concerns or resolve the problems, or the school's response is not accepted by the complainant, the formal complaint investigation procedures (including an appeal mechanism) will be launched to handle the case.

(i) Investigation Stage

Our school will carry out investigation according to the following procedures if formal complaints (including those referred by EDB or other organisations) are received:

- assign appropriate staff to look into the complaint and give appropriate response to the complainant;

- acknowledge receipt of the complaint, seek the complainant's consent to obtain his/her personal data and information relating to the complaint, and inform him/her of the name, post title and phone number of the staff responsible for handling the case for contact purposes.
- Contact or arrange interviews with the complainant and other person(s) concerned to learn more about the situation or ask the person(s)/organisation concerned to provide information, if necessary.
- handle the complaint timely.
- acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 5 working days after receiving the complaint
- if the complainant accepts the investigation result, conclude the case officially; and
- if the complainant does not accept the investigation result or the way the school handles the complaint, and is able to provide new evidence or sufficient justification, he/she may lodge an appeal in writing against the school's decision within 14 days from the date of its reply.

(ii) Appeal stage

If the school accepts an appeal case, the following procedures will be proceeded:

- According to the school-based appeal mechanism, assign an appropriate staff who is at a higher rank than the person-in-charge of the investigation or an officer from a different section to handle the appeal and reply to the complainant.
- Handle and resolve the appeal as quickly as possible.
- If the complainant accepts the appeal result, the case can be closed.
- If the complainant does not accept the appeal result or the way the school handles the appeal, the school will review the handling procedures again to ensure that they have been properly followed.
- If the complainant raises other new allegations, then our school will handle them separately so as to avoid mixing up the old and new complaints.

3.7 Responding to complaints/appeals

- I. Written complaints or appeals will be replied in written form. If they are made verbally, the responsible staff will determine the appropriate way to reply the complainant. If a case is referred by EDB/other organisation(s), the investigation result will be copied to EDB/relevant organisation(s) for information.
- II. In general, the time limit for a reply will, as the case will be, start counting from the date on which the complaint was received or the complainant agreed to let the school access his personal data. In case the school requires the complainant to submit further information, the time limit will start counting from the date on which the school receives the required information. If a reply cannot be given within the specified period, the school will issue a letter explaining to the complainant the reasons for longer handling time of the complaint/appeal.

III. In general, the School **will not handle** the following types of complaints:

Anonymous complaints

- i. Should the complainant fail or refuse to provide the personal details (including complainant's name, contact phone number and correspondence/e-mail address), the complaint will be regarded as anonymous and the school will not handle it. If in doubt, the school may request the complainant to show his/her identity documents.
- ii. However, when there is sufficient evidence or when the case is serious or urgent, the school authority reserves the right to decide whether to follow up with an anonymous complaint.

IV. Complaints involving incidents that happened more than one year ago

- i. Complaints related to daily operations of schools should normally be lodged within the same school year. If the incident involved occurred more than one year, it would be difficult for the school to collect evidence for investigation as the environment or evidence might have been changed or disappeared; or the person concerned/the target of complaint had quitted the school already.
- ii. In this sense, the time limit for lodging a complaint should be set within one calendar year.
- iii. Even the incident involved happened more than one year ago, the school will decide whether to conduct an investigation under special circumstances, e.g. there is sufficient evidence available, or the complaint is concerned about serious and urgent matters.

3.8 Complaint/appeal record

- I. A clear record of cases handled by the formal complaint investigation procedures should be kept by our school administration.
- II. A sample of complaint record is given in Appendix IV. Our school will establish a complaint record management system to keep relevant information (including correspondences, investigation reports, etc). Our school will also keep the statistics of complaint and appeal cases being handled by informal or formal complaint handling procedures for future reference.
- III. A "Complaint Record Management system" will be established to store relevant information (including correspondences, investigation reports and interview records).

Chapter 4 Arrangements for handling complaints

Designated staff

- I. The School may, having regard to the nature of the complaint, its scope and the persons involved, designate a staff member to handle the complaint:
- II. Persons responsible for handling the investigation and appeal stages will be different. In principle, the person-in-charge of the appeal stage will be in a higher rank than the one responsible for the investigation. If this is not practicable, the school will make other arrangements, such as appointing a person from another department to re-investigate the case to ensure fairness.
- III. Where necessary, the school/sponsoring body may establish a task force to handle special complaint cases.
- IV. The appointed staff should be proactive in communicating with the inquirers/complainants, and providing prompt responses as well as the information they need. The school should also ensure that the frontline/ designated staff should have proper authorisation and understand thoroughly their roles and responsibilities.
- V. Concerning the deployment of staff for handling complaints at different stages, the school may refer to the guidelines in the table below:
- VI. Where necessary, we may set up a task force to handle special cases. Depending on the situation, the task force may include members of the IMC.
- VII. The appointed staff should be proactive in communicating with the inquirers/complainants and prompt in providing responses as well as the information they need. The School will also ensure that the designated staff have proper authorisation and clearly understand their roles and responsibilities.

Targets involved	Example	Investigation stage	Appeal stage
Teaching and school staff	1	Teachers/Department or Team Head	Office Head / Deputy Principal
	2	Deputy Principal	Principal
	3	Principal	Supervisor
Principal	1	Supervisor	SSB Designated Staff
	2	IMC Investigation Task Force	Supervisor / IMC Appeal Task Force
Supervisor / IMC		SSB Designated Staff / Task force	SSB Designated Staff / Task force

Confidentiality

- I. All contents and information of complaints will be kept strict confidential and restricted to internal reference/responsible persons only.
- II. When the school needs to collect personal data during the handling process or when they receive requests for the disclosure of data/records in respect of the complaint case, they should observe the regulations and recommendations laid down in the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance.

- III. Our school will adopt appropriate security measures to protect personal data and privacy, such as keeping the data at highly confidential places. Computer data will be protected with passwords. The use of portable data storage devices will be under restriction and other necessary measures to ensure no personal data and privacy is disclosed.

Follow-up and evaluation

- I. Conduct a comprehensive review on the strategies, process and steps taken in handling complaints in order to benefit from past experiences, improve the way of handling, and avoid similar cases from recurring.
- II. Take appropriate steps to handle complaints so as to gain benefit from the experiences and improve the handling measures in order to avoid reoccurrence of similar cases in future.
- III. Review the school own complaint handling policies and report to the IMC by providing relevant data concerning complaint/appeal cases, and suggest improvement measures to enhance the school-based complaint handling mechanism and procedures.

Support and training

The School will provide appropriate support and training to assist staff to effectively handle inquiries/complaints. This includes arranging experience sharing sessions and workshops for staff to enhance their capability in handling complaints and resolving conflicts, and encouraging staff to attend relevant training programmes organised by the EDB.

Chapter 5 Handling of unreasonable behaviour

In case of the occurrence of unreasonable behaviour of complainants which impose a negative impact on school, the Principal shall decide appropriate measures. However, if the complaint is lodged against the Principal, such decisions shall be made by the Supervisor or the IMC.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Effective school-based mechanism

In order to increase public confidence in school governance, and to ensure that public inquiries/complaints/ opinions are handled properly, our school will follow the following principles in establishing the school-based complaint handling mechanism :

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| ➤ Be clear and unequivocal | ➤ Be fair and just |
| ➤ Be open and transparent | ➤ Ensure confidentiality |
| ➤ Be concise and easy to follow | ➤ Ensure continuous review and improvement |

Appendix I Complaints Relating to Daily Operations and Internal Affairs of School

Scope	Particulars
Management and Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ School accounts (e.g. accounting records) ➤ Other charges (e.g. extra-curricular activities charges and registration fee) ➤ Policies (e.g. reward and penalty systems, school suspension arrangements) ➤ Contractor services standard (e.g. school bus service, meal box supply) ➤ Service contracts (e.g. tendering procedures) ➤ School environment and hygiene (e.g. noise, mosquitoes problem)
Learning and Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ School-based curriculum (e.g. teaching hours of different subjects) ➤ Selection of subjects and class allocation (e.g. arrangement for student choice of subject) ➤ Homework (e.g. homework amount) ➤ Students assessment (e.g. assessment standards) ➤ Staff performance (e.g. teaching staff behaviours/attitudes, job performance)
School Ethos and Student Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ school ethos (e.g. uniform, appearance) ➤ Home-school cooperation (e.g. consultation mechanism, communication channels) ➤ Student support (e.g. support for special educational needs) ➤ Extra-curricular activities (e.g. interest group or activity arrangements)
Student Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Students' overall performance (e.g. academic performance, conduct) ➤ Student discipline (e.g. bullying, fighting, abusive language, smoking)

Appendix II Sample of Acknowledgement Letter (1)

[For cases where complainants have provided their personal particulars and no referral is needed.]

DD MM YYYY

Name of the complainant

Address of the complainant

Dear Mr/Ms *XX:

We have received your written/verbal* complaint on DD MM YYYY. The case is being investigated and a reply will be sent to you within XX days / as soon as possible.

If you have any inquiries, please call Mr/Ms X (Teacher/Senior Teacher/Vice Principal*) at XXXXXXXX (telephone number).

Yours sincerely

Principal

*Please delete where inappropriate

Appendix III Sample of Acknowledgement Letter (2)

[Referral of the complaint to third parties (e.g. relevant government departments or contractors of school services) is needed.]

DD MM YYYY

Name of the complainant

Address of the complainant

Dear Mr/Ms* XX:

We have received your written/verbal* complaint on DD MM YYYY. For the purpose of investigation and follow-up, please fill in the reply form attached, and send it to the school before DD MM YYYY. We will reply to you when the investigation is completed.

If you have any inquiries, please call Mr/Ms X (Teacher/Senior Teacher/Vice Principal*) at XXXXXXXX (telephone number).

Yours sincerely

Principal

* Please delete where inappropriate

Reply Form

To: Name of School

File No.: (if applicable)

Name of the complainant: Mr/Ms _____

[Please write the name borne on your HK I.D. Card]

Correspondence Address: _____

Contact No.: _____

I understand that the personal information provided above will only be used for investigating the complaint.

To assist the school in handling this complaint, I agree that:

1. The school may copy the complaint and other information I presented, and transfer the copies to relevant persons/organisations; and
2. The school may ask relevant persons/organisations for my personal information and other information related to this complaint.

Date

Signature of the complainant

Fields must be completed

Sample of Complaint Record

Date received _____

Source: Directly lodged to the school

Referred by EDB

Referred by other organisations: _____

Mode: Letter Email Fax Others: _____

Personal information of the complainant:

Name: Mr/Ms/Mrs _____

Identity: Parent Councillor Public

Organisation _____

Others _____

Authorised representative of the complainant (please state the name, address and contact telephone number of the representative and his relation with the

complainant): _____

Tel: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____

Subject(s) of complaint:

Principal Teacher Office staff Others: _____

Nature of Complaint:

Management and Organisation

Learning and Teaching

School Ethos and Student Support

Student Performance

Others _____

Summary of complaint:

Investigation stage

Person-in-charge : _____

Issuing Notice of Acknowledgement (date: _____)

Telephone contact (date: _____)

Interview(s) with the complainant (date: _____)

Issue of written reply (date: _____)

Summary of investigation findings:

Appeal stage (if applicable)

Date of appeal: _____

Person-in-charge: _____

Issue of Notice of Acknowledgement (date: _____)

Telephone contact (date: _____)

Interview with the complainant (date: _____)

Issue of written reply (date: _____)

Summary of appeal result:

Follow-up actions or recommendations (if applicable)

Signature of person-in-charge: _____

Name of the complainant

Address of the complainant

DD MM YYYY

Dear Mr/Ms* XX:

We have received your letter dated DD MM YYYY. As our views on the complaints you lodged have been detailed in our reply/replies sent to you dated DD MM YYYY [and dates of other replies (if applicable)], we will not respond to or contact you in respect of this complaint further.

Yours sincerely

Principal

* Please delete where inappropriate

***** THE END *****