

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Including Early Years Foundation Stage

Introduction

The School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents or pupils do have a complaint (other than in relation to disciplinary matter which is the subject matter of a separate procedure), they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this Procedure.

What constitutes a complaint

A complaint is an expression of genuine dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. A complaint may be made if a parent (or pupil) thinks that the school has, for example

- * Done something wrong
- * Failed to do something it should have done
- * Acted unfairly

A complaint may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific department in the school or about an individual member of staff

Dealing with Complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. Parents can be reassured that we listen to them and take complaints seriously.

If you are in any doubt about whether a complaint should be passed on, please do contact your child's Form Tutor, Head of Year, relevant Boarding staff or the Finance Director in the first instance to discuss the matter.

Recording Complaints

A written record of all concerns and complaints that cannot be resolved informally will be made and, where applicable, may include the following information:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of Parent
- Name of Pupil
- Brief statement of issue
- Location of file (if applicable)
- Staff member handling the issue
- Brief statement of outcome

The written record will record action taken by the school regardless of whether a complaint is upheld.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and **informally**.
- All members of staff are encouraged to deal with a parental or pupil concern that lies within their area of responsibility. However, if parents have a complaint they should normally contact their son's / daughter's subject teacher, form teacher, tutor or (if appropriate) boarding Housemaster/mistress. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the person cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him / her to consult either a head of department or the Deputy Head.
- Complaints made directly to a head of department, the Deputy Head or the Headmaster will usually be referred to the relevant form teacher, housemaster / housemistress unless that person deems it appropriate for him / her to deal with the matter personally.
- The form teacher, tutor or (if appropriate) boarding housemaster will make a **written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received**. Should the matter not be resolved **within five working days*** or in the event that the form teacher, tutor or (if appropriate) boarding housemaster and the parent **fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2** of this Procedure.

*'working days' shall mean working days during school term time.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should **put their complaint in writing** to the Headmaster. The Headmaster will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Headmaster will meet / speak to the parents or pupils concerned, normally **within 5 working days** of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. During the holiday period, complaints will be dealt with as swiftly as possible, but absence of staff may well lead to delays.
 - If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Headmaster to carry out further investigations.
- The Headmaster will **keep written records** of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

- Once the Headmaster is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and the parent will be informed of this decision in writing. This will be within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint during term time and 15 working days during the holiday period. The Headmaster will also give reasons for his decision.
- **If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3** of this Procedure.

If a complaint is made during the holiday period, every effort will be made to adhere to the timescale above but parents will be kept fully informed if this is not possible due to the unavailability of staff.

Although all formal complaints must be made in writing to the Headmaster, this does not mean that the formal stage is automatically triggered whenever a concern is expressed in writing to the Headmaster, which may include a handwritten or typed complaint. Complaints will usually only progress to the formal stage after first being considered at the informal stage and only then if the complainant intends to escalate a matter to the formal stage. If the Headmaster is contacted directly by a parent with an initial complaint or concern, they may ask the Deputy Head or Headmaster of Prep School to deal with the matter in the first instance in line with the informal Stage 1 process.

Should the formal complaint relate to the Headmaster, the complaint should be addressed to the Chair of Governors c/o the school's address.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they will be referred to the Clerk to the Governors who has been authorised by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel.
- **The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration.** The Panel will consist of **at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Board of Governors.** The Clerk to the Governors, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally **within 15 working days.**
- 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 5 working days prior to the hearing.

- **The parents may be accompanied to the hearing.** This may be by relatives, teachers or friends. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' 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 facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete **within 5 working days of the hearing. The Panel will write to the parents 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 to the parents, the Headmaster, the Governors and, where relevant, the person complained of.**

Parents and pupils can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially by the proprietor and the Headmaster. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them; where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

The number of complaints received during an academic year will be notified to parents on an annual basis – see appendix A.

When a complaint concerns only the matter of finance such as fees in lieu which remain outstanding, the matter of the fees owed alone falls outside the scope of this procedure. The Headmaster / Finance Director of the school remains responsible for all financial decisions.

A complaint raised in relation to a child who has left the school will not fall under the scope of this procedure and will be dealt with in line with current guidelines or legislation depending on the nature of the complaint. The child is taken off roll on the final day of the term in which they leave. Parents are therefore advised to raise any issues with the school in a timely manner so that it can be addressed and resolved promptly.

JP Standen
Headmaster
Senior School

C Gatherer
Headmaster
Prep School

Reviewed: February 2018
Review Date: February 2019

Appendix A

18 October 2017

Dear Parents

I am required to inform parents annually that we have a clear and transparent procedure for dealing with any complaints and that the relevant policy document is available on the College intranet /website or on request from the school office. We hope, of course, that you will not have cause to complain; however should you bring matters to our attention which are of concern to you we will endeavour to do all we can to resolve things informally in accordance with the procedure. If a resolution cannot be reached in this way, then there is a formal process to be followed involving the Governors.

We had one formal complaint last year which was dealt with informally.

Can I take this opportunity to remind you that most of our key policies can be seen on our intranet / website.

Yours sincerely

CDM Gatherer
Headmaster