



Concerns and Complaints Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

Application: Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue or if the Principal expels or asks a pupil to leave and the parents seek a Review of that decision.

Four stages: This policy describes a four-stage procedure:

- Stage 1: Informal raising of a concern or difficulty notified orally or in writing to a member of staff
- Stage 2: A formal complaint in writing to the Principal
- Stage 3: A renewed complaint in writing to the School Supervisor
- Stage 4: A reference to the Complaints Panel

Timescales: We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. When we refer to 'working days' we mean Monday to Friday, when school is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the Schools' websites.

A concern about the safety of your child should be notified immediately to the person you believe is best placed to take urgent action and should be confirmed in writing to the Principal.

2. AIMS

The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice, it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote parents' and pupils' confidence in our ability to safeguard and promote welfare. We will try to resolve every concern or complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, reviewing our systems and procedures in light of the circumstances.

3. STATEMENT

The School needs to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. We recognise that a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, which would be damaging to relationships and also to our school culture. Parents and pupils should never feel - or be made to feel - that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or his/her opportunities at this school. The policy however distinguishes between a concern or difficulty which can be resolved

informally and a formal complaint which will require investigation.

4. MANAGEMENT OF COMPLAINTS

Complaints Coordinator: The Principal is responsible for the co-ordination and administration of the Complaints Procedure. If the Principal is unavailable or is the subject of the complaint, his/her duties will be carried out by the Deputy Head or another senior member of staff, as applicable. The main responsibilities of the Complaints Co-ordinator are to:

- be the first point of contact while the matter remains unresolved and keep records
- co-ordinate the complaints procedures in school
- maintain an on-going training programme for all school employees in relation to complaints
- monitor the keeping, confidentiality and storage of records in relation to complaints
- report regularly to the School Board with respect to complaints

Complaints Form: Every concern or complaint notified to a member of staff will be noted, together with the action taken, on a standard form. A sample of the form is attached to this policy in Appendix 2.

5. STAGE 1: CONCERNS AND DIFFICULTIES

Concerns: The School expects that most concerns, where a parent or pupil seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken, can be resolved informally. Examples might include a dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, or about allocation of privileges or responsibilities, or about a timetable clash or some other aspect of the School's systems or equipment, or a billing error. **Complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation are taken very seriously and may need to be dealt with at Stage 2 without action at Stage 1.**

Notification: If appropriate, please raise the concern initially as follows:

- Education issues - If the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, please speak or write to the Principal
- Pastoral care - For concerns relating to matters outside the classroom, please speak or write to the Principal
- Disciplinary matters - A problem over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised with the Principal
- Financial matters - A query relating to fees or extras should be stated in writing to the Principal

Acknowledgement: The School will acknowledge a written notification by telephone, e-mail or letter within two working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable in the holidays. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing but a Complaints Form will be completed.

Unresolved Concerns: A concern which has not been resolved by informal means within 15 working days should be notified in writing as a formal complaint which will be dealt with in accordance with Stage 2

below.

6. STAGE 2: FORMAL COMPLAINT

Notification: An unresolved concern under Stage 1, or a complaint which needs investigation, or a dissatisfaction with some aspect of the School's policies, procedures, management or administration should be set out in writing with full details and sent with all relevant documents and your full contact details in an envelope addressed to the Principal. Your complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, e-mail or letter within two working days during term time, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale. A Complaints Form will be completed and sent to the Principal.

Investigation: The Principal may request additional information from you and will probably wish to speak to you personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. The Principal will notify you by telephone, e-mail or letter of the outcome of the investigation, his/her decision and the reasons for it. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to your complaint.

Outcome: The Principal's aim would be to inform any complainant of the outcome of an investigation and the resolution to the complaint within 28 working days from the receipt of the complaint. Please note that any complaint received within one month of the end of term or half term is likely to take longer to resolve owing to the presence of school holidays and the unavailability of personnel.

7. STAGE 3: REFERENCE TO THE SCHOOL SUPERVISOR

Further Steps: If you are dissatisfied with the Principal's decision under Stage 2, your complaint may be renewed in writing to the School Supervisor. Please note that this is an optional stage. It may be more appropriate for your complaint to be referred to the Complaints Panel in which case you are invited to follow the procedure set out in paragraph 8.

Notification: You should write to the School Supervisor within 5 working days of receiving the Principal's decision. Your letter to the School Supervisor should give full details of your complaint and enclose all relevant documents and your full contact details. Your letter will normally be acknowledged by telephone, e-mail or letter within four working days during term time, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale.

Action by the School Supervisor: the School Supervisor will arrange for your complaint to be investigated following procedures equivalent to those described in Stage 2 (above). When the School Supervisor is satisfied that he/she has established all the material facts and relevant policies, so far as is practicable, he/she will notify you in writing of his/her decision and the reasons for it. He/she will aim to provide a response within ten working days of receiving your letter. If you are not satisfied with the School Supervisor's decision you may ask for the complaint to be referred to the Complaints Panel, by writing to the Chairman of the School Board.

8. Stage 4: reference to the Complaints Panel

A **Panel hearing** is a review of the decisions taken by the Principal and the School Supervisor. The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure.

The Role of the Panel: The Panel's task is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties; and
- any representations made by you, the Principal or the School Supervisor

If, after establishing the facts, the Panel consider that the complaint is worthy, they will uphold the complaint. If the Panel consider that the complaint is not worthy, they will dismiss the complaint. They will make these decisions on the balance of probabilities.

Composition: We have constituted a Complaints Panel (Panel) comprising the Chairman and two other School Board members.

Notification: To request a hearing before the Complaints Panel please write to the Chairman of the School Board, within five working days of the decision complained of. Your request will usually only be considered if you have completed the procedures at Stages 1 and 2 (and where appropriate, Stage 3). Please ensure that a copy of all relevant documents and your full contact details accompany your letter to the Chairman. Please state in your letter the outcome that you desire and all the grounds of your complaint. Please also send the Chairman a list of the documents which you believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to see. The Chairman will acknowledge your request in writing within two working days.

Convening the Panel: the Chairman will convene the Complaints Panel as soon as reasonably practicable but the Panel will not normally sit during half terms or school holidays.

Notice of Hearing: Every effort will be made to enable the Panel hearing to take place within 10 working days of the receipt of your request. As soon as reasonably practical and in any event, at least 5 working days before the hearing, the Chairman will send you written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the Panel members who will be present. The hearing will normally follow the procedure set out in Appendix 1.

Attendance: You will be invited to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, teacher, or friend. It is not necessary for that person to be legally qualified but if you do wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, acting in their professional capacity, please notify the School at least 5 working days before the hearing. Your child may attend part or all of the hearing at the discretion of the Chairman. Copies of additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Chairman at least three clear working days prior to the hearing.

Chair of the Hearing: The hearing will be chaired by the Chairman of the School Board and will be

conducted in an informal manner.

Hearing: All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. One of the Board members will be asked to take a minute of the proceedings. The minute will be handwritten or, subject to agreement of all parties, typed directly onto a laptop.

Evidence: The Chairman will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.

Conduct: All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chairman. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his/her comment will be minuted.

Adjournment: The Chairman may, at his/her discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue. This may include an adjournment to take legal advice.

Decision: After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel shall reach a decision unless there is an agreed position. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations may be notified orally at the hearing or subsequently and shall be confirmed in writing to you by e-mail where appropriate within seven working days. If you do not wish to receive the decision by e-mail, a copy will be given or posted to you. The decisions, findings and any recommendations will be made available for the Principal and the School Supervisor. Reasons for the Decision will be given. The Decision may include recommendations and will be sent to you, and any person about whom the complaint has been made.

Private Proceeding: A hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.

Confidentiality: A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at Stage 1 or proceed to a panel hearing. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except to where disclosure is required in the course of a school's inspection or under other legal authority.

The School is very careful to support parents who are making a complaint, be it formal or informal. The School is mindful of the Data Protection Act and will in all circumstances do its utmost to protect the child/children and the parents involved. The proprietors of the School are clear on their roles and responsibilities of protecting the child and the Data Protection Act and training about sensitivity and privacy for our children and their families has been given to all staff.

9. MONITORING AND REVIEW

The School Board monitors the complaints procedure, in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. The Principal logs all complaints received by the school and records how they were resolved. This log is reviewed on an annual basis.

All parents receive a copy of the complaints procedure, if requested.

The School Board takes into account any local decisions that affect the complaints process, and make any modifications necessary to this policy.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Procedures To Be Followed At A Hearing Of The Complaints Panel

Introduction: This is the procedure that will normally be followed by the Complaints Panel and is designed to ensure that all parties have the opportunity to present their views to the Panel.

Meeting Format: The meeting will take the form of a "round the table" hearing, where all parties and the Panel are present in the same room throughout. Present in the room throughout the hearing will be:

- the Chairman of the School Board
- two members of the School Board. One of the School Board members will take notes of the meeting. Any notes produced by him/her will not be verbatim and will belong to the Chairman. The Chairman can authorise the release of his/her notes on condition that they remain confidential.
- the parents who have made the complaint
- any person that the parents have brought as a supporter
- the Principal
- the School Supervisor
- any other appropriate member of staff

Note: Any witnesses called by any of the above parties may be asked to make their contribution and then leave rather than staying for the whole proceeding.

Suggested Agenda

1. Welcome and introductions by the Chairman
2. Parents present their complaints. Where two parents are present, it is often more helpful if one parent undertakes the responsibility of presentation and answering of questions.
3. The Panel, the School Supervisor and the Principal may ask questions of parents for clarification. Questions should be put through the Chairman who can intervene if s/he thinks that questions are inappropriate or are straying into cross-examination.
4. The Principal puts his/her case, explaining the reasons for the decision and consideration and calling witnesses if necessary.
5. The parents and Panel Members may ask questions of the Principal for clarification. Again such questions should be put through the Chairman who can intervene as necessary.
6. The Principal is invited to make any further relevant points.
7. The parents are then invited to make any further relevant points.

8. When the Panel is satisfied that it has established facts sufficient for it to make its decision, the Chairman may bring the hearing to a close and inform the parties that they will be notified in writing of the decision, normally within seven working days.
9. The parents and the Principal leave together with any witnesses, supporters or representatives.
10. Legal advice: if, during the hearing, parents introduce legal points on which the Panel feel they will need advice, they will consider one of two options:
 - i. The Panel may decide to take a careful note of points made and to consider the advice of the School's lawyers before making their final decision; or
 - ii. If the Panel feel that an immediate response is required, they may adjourn the hearing to take telephone advice from the School's lawyers.

This form is to be completed by any member of staff who receives a complaint or who wishes to make a complaint. It should be passed to the Principal.

Please complete **unshaded areas**.

Name of Complainant	
Name of the Pupil	
Name of the School	
What is the nature of the complaint? (Please tick boxes as appropriate)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff Conduct	<input type="checkbox"/> Parental Conduct
<input type="checkbox"/> Teaching Standards	<input type="checkbox"/> Pastoral Care
<input type="checkbox"/> Condition of School Premises	<input type="checkbox"/> Time Tabling
<input type="checkbox"/> Matters of Regime and Routine	<input type="checkbox"/> Access to or Regulation of Extra Curricular Activities
<input type="checkbox"/> School Bus Services	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please give details)	
Please give details of the complaint	
Date/s of Incident	Time/s
If you are complaining about someone's behaviour please give the names of any witnesses to the incident/s	
Investigation Delegated to	
Record of actions taken and communication to original complainant	
Name	Position
Signed	Date