



Concerns and Complaints Policy

Our school aims to meet its obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others. When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed. The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full. To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

A concern or complaint should be raised in accordance with the policy set out below.

Policy Aim and Statement

Aim: the aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level. Concerns or complaints should be resolved as soon as

possible. Doing so is good practice – it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote staff, parent and pupil 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.

We need 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 for resentment, which would be damaging to relationships and also to our school culture. Parents, pupils and staff members should never feel – or be made to feel – that a complaint will adversely affect a pupil or staff member 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.

Definitions and scope

A concern is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”. The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.

A complaint is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”. The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved

We also take into account what the complainant feels would put things right. We aim to resolve any concern through dialogue and mutual understanding and, in all cases, we put the interests of the child above all other issues.

We intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits will be set for each action within each stage. Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set, and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline with an explanation for the delay.

The school expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and no later than 3 months afterwards. We will consider exceptions to this time frame in

circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

Three Stages of the Complaints Procedure

Stage 1: Informal raising of the concern or complaint notified orally or in writing to a member of staff/Parent Liaison.

Stage 2: A formal complaint in writing to the Head of Primary & Secondary or Principal

Stage 3: A renewed complaint in writing to the Review Panel

If a parent wishes to raise a formal complaint against the Principal, they should proceed directly to Stage 3 of the Procedure.

A concern about the safety of a child should be notified immediately to the relevant Head of Primary/Secondary and/or Parent Liaison Officer and should also be confirmed in writing to the Principal.

Management of Complaints

For staff making a complaint, complaints should initially be raised informally with the person involved. If a resolution cannot be reached following this procedure then the relevant Head of Primary/Secondary must be notified.

If the Head of Primary/Secondary is unavailable or are the subject of the complaint, his/her duties will be carried out by the Principal or another senior member of staff. The main responsibilities of the Head of Primary/Secondary with regard to complaints are to:

- Be the first point of contact while the matter remains unresolved and keep records;
- Coordinate the complaints procedures in the 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 Principal with respect to complaints.

Record Keeping

Every concern or complaint notified to the Parent Liaison Officer by a parent or pupil will be noted by them, together with the action taken. A log book will be maintained recording each concern or complaint, procedure followed, outcome and any action taken. This includes complaints which are not upheld.

STAGE 1: Concerns and Complaints

We expect that most concerns and complaints, where a staff member, parent or pupil seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken, can be resolved using the investigation procedure. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to your concern or complaint. The Investigation Procedure is outlined in full and attached to the end of this policy. Examples of a concern or complaint may include dissatisfaction about an aspect of teaching or pastoral care; about allocation of privileges or responsibilities; about a timetable clash or some other aspect of the school's systems or equipment; though this is not an exhaustive list. It is important that you choose the person to speak to whom you feel most comfortable discussing the matter with, but for academic, pastoral and disciplinary matters, we recommend that you speak to the Class teacher, Form Tutor or Parent Liaison, in the first instance.

Acknowledgement: we will acknowledge informal complaints by telephone, email or letter within 24 hours of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable in the holidays.

Unresolved concerns: if a concern cannot be resolved by informal means within 5 working days, the period for resolution can be extended, provided that the complainant has been contacted and informed of the delay. A new date should be agreed for provision of a response. If matters are still unresolved this will be escalated to a formal complaint which will be dealt with in accordance with Stage 2 below.

STAGE 2: Formal Complaint

Notification: an unresolved concern under Stage 1 or a more serious complaint or 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 Head of Primary/Secondary and/or the Principal. Your complaint will be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within 24 hours during term time, indicating the action that is being taken and confirming that a response will be provided within 5 working days.

Investigation: the Principal may ask the relevant Head of Primary/Secondary or a senior member of staff to act as an "investigator". The Investigation Procedures will be followed. The investigator may request additional information from you and will probably wish to speak to you personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to your complaint.

Once the investigation has been concluded, the evidence/information will be passed to the Principal who will provide a decision in writing within 5 working days.

STAGE 3: Referred to the Review Panel

Notification: If you are dissatisfied with the Principal's decision under Stage 2, your complaint may be renewed in writing to the Review Panel. The Review panel consists of 2 members – the school Chairman plus one independent (of the management and running of the school) reviewer. They will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress.

Hearing: A review panel hearing date will be set and the complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting. The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied by a suitable companion if they wish. At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence. The panel, complainant and school representatives will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representatives have completed presenting their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered. The panel must then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide a copy of the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the subject of the complaint, and make a copy of the findings and recommendations available for inspection by the Principal. The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 working days. This decision is final. A copy of the outcome and any action taken will be held confidentially by the school.

Investigation Procedure

The relevant Head of Primary/Secondary will be appointed by the Principal in the first instance to investigate any formal complaints. If the Principal is implicated in any accusation the investigating officer will be appointed by the Chairman of the Board of Directors. Steps should be taken to ensure that the investigation is conducted in an impartial and objective manner.

Step 1: A written statement will be taken from the complainant/accuser. This will provide the investigator a framework from which the investigating officer can conduct the investigation. It also ensures that the allegations are coming directly from the accuser, and have not been "filtered" by anyone else. If the accuser is a young student and is not capable of drafting a complete and coherent written statement, an oral interview may be justified. Whoever conducts the interview should transcribe a written account of the interview as soon as the interview ends.

Step 2: A written statement will be taken from the person who is the basis of the formal complaint. Taking a statement from both parties will allow the investigator to cross reference both accounts and highlight any discrepancies. The incident should not be discussed with the

accused before a written statement is taken so that interpretation of events is not influenced. After the statement is written, the accused has the right to ask for details of the complaint. This is decided at the discretion of the Principal.

Steps 1 or 2 are interchangeable to minimise disruption for both parties.

Step 3: Discrepancies in written accounts will be investigated further. If there are any discrepancies in the written statements, the investigator may seek further clarification from the complainant/accuser or accused. Although this must be recorded, at this point this does not constitute a formal interview. This is to ensure that the investigator fully understands both accounts and is able to draw their conclusions as to appropriate action.

At this point if, after reviewing the written statements, it appears that there are no reasonable grounds for concern, the investigation will be concluded and those persons involved, informed.

Please note that all school records of an incident are confidential and will not be released to parents and any actions to be taken are at the school's discretion. In addition, if disciplinary action is taken against the accused, the school will not enter into discussion as to the nature of the severity of the action being taken. If conclusions indicate that the accused deliberately caused harm to the accuser or were negligent in their role, an internal investigation will take place as per the relevant policy.