



Complaints Policy and Procedures

Person responsible	Head
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Contents

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Aims**
- 3. Scope and Responsibilities**
- 4. Stage 1 – Informal Resolution**
- 5. Stage 2 – Formal Resolution**
- 6. Stage 3 – Panel Hearing**
- 7. Recording Complaints & Confidentiality**
- 8. Early Years Foundation Stage**
- 9. Monitoring and Review**

1. Introduction

This policy applies equally to the EYFS (Reception Class), Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 as taught at Bute House (the School).

Annual recording of formal complaints is noted for the previous year.

Number of formal complaints in 2022/23 THREE (TWO from the same complainant)

Information pertaining to complaints received, including records of the action taken as well as the stage of their resolution – whether informally, formally or via panel hearing –, is retained in the Complaints File which is held in the Office of the Head's PA and a summary maintained in electronic form.

Any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the School is a complaint and in the scope of the Complaints Procedure.

This Complaints Procedure is available to all parents of current pupils on the School's website and in hard copy from the School Office on request.

This Policy has been prepared to meet the School's responsibilities under the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSR), Statutory Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE September 2021), Education and Skills Act 2008, Data Protection Act 2018, General Data Protection regulation (UK GDPR), the Children Act 1989 and Childcare Act 2006, and the Equality Act 2010.

Parents are encouraged to bring any matter causing concern to the School's attention as soon as possible. Whenever possible, a complaint should be raised within three months of the incident, or where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. The School will however consider complaints made within up to 12 months if exceptional circumstances apply. A complaint raised after three months should therefore include details of the issues which led to the delay.

Timescales for each stage of the School's complaints procedure are set out below. It is expected that the management of every complaint will progress in a timely manner. Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay to the timescales for a stage of the complaints procedure (such as other bodies investigating aspects of the complaint), the School will notify the parents and inform them of the new timescales as soon as possible.

Complaints which are raised in the School holidays will be deemed to have been received on the first working day after receipt. Working days means Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays) when the school is open during term time. Aspects of this policy can only be carried out during term time.

The School's policy allows for complaints to be considered in 3 stages outlined below.

2. Aims and Objectives

The School aims to work closely with parents to resolve complaints in a timely manner and whenever possible, informally.

The School aims to ensure that all complaints will be taken seriously and a full and fair investigation will be carried out where appropriate, which addresses all the points at issue and provides an effective response and appropriate redress.

Where necessary, the outcomes of any complaint provide information to the School's senior leadership team so that services can be improved and any systemic issues can be identified to help create a culture of safety, equality and protection.

3. Scope and Responsibilities

This policy applies to parents and guardians of current registered pupils.

This policy applies to parents of former pupils, only where the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still registered at the School.

This policy only applies to complaints by parents. The School has separate grievance and whistleblowing policies to cover concerns that a member of staff may have.

This policy does not apply to exclusions, to which the School's Positive Behaviour Policy applies or where a child protection issue arises. In these situations, there are separate procedures.

Anonymous complaints will not be investigated under this procedure.

Governors who are approached with a complaint, will refer the matter to the Head, in the first instance, unless the complaint is about the Head's response to the complaint.

The Head may carry out an investigation into a complaint or appoint a member of the Senior Leadership team to investigate a complaint and compile evidence. The Governing Body assume overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy.

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

1. It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally.
2. If parents have a complaint, they should normally contact their daughter's Form Teacher and/or Head of Phase. The member of staff receiving the complaint may seek the assistance of a member of the Senior Leadership Team to help resolve the issue. An informal complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within **three (3) working days** of receipt, indicating the action being taken and the timescales. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. The Form Teacher, Head of Phase or SLT member will make a written record of all concerns and complaints, the date on which they were received and the discussions which took place. These notes are kept on CPOMS.
3. An informal complaint will be resolved within **fourteen (14) working days**.

4. If no satisfactory resolution is reached, then parents should promptly put their complaint in writing to the Head and include any relevant documents. The complaint then proceeds to Stage 2.
5. If the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors whose contact details are available from the School Office on request.
6. Complaints against the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Director of Finance and Operations via the School Office marked Private & Confidential.

Stage 2 - Formal Resolution

1. The Head will convene a meeting with the parents within 5 working days of receipt of the written complaint.
2. The written complaint from parents should:
 - Be addressed to the Head
 - State the reason for seeking a formal resolution
 - Include a copy of any relevant documentation
 - State the desired outcome
3. At the meeting, the Head will determine the next appropriate course of action which may include further investigations and discussions with staff and pupils. The Head may invite another member of SLT to take notes or record the meeting if all parties agree.
4. Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing **within a further ten (10) working days**. The Head will also give reasons for her decision. In some cases, the Head may convene a further meeting to offer verbal feedback along with the written feedback.
5. If the complaint is against the Head, the Chair of Governors will carry out the previous actions stated above.
6. If the complaint is against the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body, the Director of Finance and Operations will carry out the actions stated above.
7. If parents are dissatisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

1. If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the Director of Finance and Operations, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel. Parents should make a written request for a Complaints Panel Hearing **within ten (10) working days** from receipt of the Stage 2 decision.
2. Parents should include in their written request:
 - Details of the aspects of the complaint about which they remain dissatisfied
 - The outcome they desire

- Whether or not they wish to attend the hearing and, if so, if they propose to be accompanied, and by whom
- Whether they will require any special assistance to join the panel hearing, for example because of a disability

3. The role of the Complaints Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that remain in issue by considering the documents provided by both parties and any representations made by the parties; to review the process and the decision reached at Stage 2, and to consider whether or not to uphold the complaint. The Panel is not obliged to consider any new complaints at this stage.

4. The complaints panel will comprise of at least three individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint, including at least one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the School. The Director of Finance and Operations, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint **within five (5) working days** and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and **within fourteen (14) working days**.

5. The Head and the parents may supply to the Director of Finance and Operations any documentation that they wish to go before the Complaints Panel. This should be done **seven (7) working days** before the Complaints Panel is due to meet.

6. 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 no later than **three (3) working days prior to the hearing**.

7. **The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person.** This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Parents are not entitled to insist on legal representation at a hearing. Parents are required to confirm the name and profession of the person they wish to be accompanied by no later than **five (5) working days** after the Panel hearing date is confirmed.

8. If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.

9. The manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel. A hearing under this procedure is not a legal hearing, but a private and confidential matter. The Director of Finance and Operations will take minutes of the hearing or record the meeting, if all parties agree, for transcribing purposes. No video or digital recording should be made by any party other than the DFO. No notes, other records or oral statements about any matter discussed or arising from the proceedings shall be made available directly or indirectly to third parties including the press or other media.

10. The Panel will:

- Hear from parents, the Head and/or other relevant staff members
- Review all parties' statements, and the documentation from Stage 1 and Stage 2
- Require all those present at the hearing to show respect, courtesy and restraint
- Adjourn the meeting at any time at its discretion if it feels it is appropriate to do so

11. After establishing the facts, the Panel will either uphold or dismiss the complaint, making any recommendations that they deem appropriate. It is not within the Panel's power to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils or parents.

12. The Panel will write to the parents when it has reached a decision **within fourteen (14) days of the Panel Hearing** informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final.

13. The Panel's findings and recommendations, if any, will also be shared with the Head, the Governors and, where appropriate, the person (other than a child) about whom any complaint was made. If the complaint was about another person's child, the parents of that child will also be told. The decisions, findings and any recommendations will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Governing Body and the Head.

14. For compliance purposes, a panel hearing will take place even if the parent indicates later that they are now satisfied and do not wish to proceed further. The panel hearing will, therefore, proceed notwithstanding that the parent may subsequently decide not to attend. If necessary, the panel will consider the parent's complaint in his/her absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion. The requirement for the panel to proceed does not prevent the school from accommodating parental availability for dates or considering comments concerning panel composition.

Recording Complaints & Confidentiality

1. **Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially, except in circumstances where access to correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of an inspection or under other legal authority.**

2. The School processes data in accordance with the privacy notices for parents and pupils. When dealing with complaints the School may process a range of information, including but not limited to, the following: date when the complaint was raised, name of parent/s, name of pupil, description of the issue, records of any investigations, witness statements (if applicable), name/s of members of staff handling the complaint at each stage, copies of all correspondence, notes of meetings and hearings (if applicable), the panel's written decision (if applicable). A summary of all complaints will be kept in the Complaints File in the office of the Head's PA.

3. The School is mindful of its obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation to keep such information for no longer than necessary. Records of complaints will be securely retained for 7 years (to allow for inspection cycles), after which the records will be safely destroyed. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept as required by regulation and confidentially except as required under paragraph 33 (k) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requires access to them.

Early Years Foundation Stage

1. Any written complaint concerning a child in the Early Years Foundation Stage (the School's Reception class) about the fulfillment of the EYFS requirements must be investigated and the complainant informed of the outcome of the investigation **within fourteen (14) days**. A record of the complaint will be made available to OFSTED and ISI on request.

2. Parents have the right to contact Independent Schools Inspectorate (tel 020 7600 0100) First Floor, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA, or to **info@isi.net** or OFSTED on 08456 404045 if they believe the school is not meeting the EYFS requirements. The School must inform parents if they are to be inspected by Ofsted and supply parents with a copy of the report post inspection (ISSR 32(1)(d) and 33.

Monitoring and Review

The Head and Senior Leadership Team will regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this Policy.

The Complaints Procedure will be subject to review at least annually (or more frequently if changes to legislation, regulation or statutory guidance so require) by the Head.

The Complaints Procedure will also be subject to critical review by the Governing Body, and will be reviewed by the relevant committee of the Governing Body on an annual basis.

The date of the next review is shown on the front page.