



## Complaints Policy and Procedures

Person responsible	Head
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## 1. Introduction and Aims

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

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

- Number of formal complaints in 2024/25: two.

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 Policy.

This Policy 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. Complaints made after the time limit *may not be considered* unless exceptional circumstances apply and the Head has discretion to determine this. 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 Policy 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 Policy (such as other bodies investigating aspects of the complaint) the School will notify parents and inform them of the new timescales as soon as possible.

“Working Days” means Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays) when the School is open during term time except in the case of an emergency when it shall mean Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays). Complaints which are raised in the school holidays which are not stated to be an emergency will be deemed to have been received on the first Working Day after the first day of the following term. Complaints which are stated to be an emergency will be deemed to have been received on the first Working Day after receipt by the School.

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

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, addressing all the points at issue and providing 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.

## **2. Scope and Responsibilities**

This Policy applies to parents 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.

The School will make reasonable adjustments to ensure that parents with disabilities or additional needs are able to access and participate fully in the complaints process, including providing information in alternative formats or arranging suitable support where required.

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 Policy.

Group complaints (i.e. several signatories) or petitions will not be investigated under this Policy.

If the School receives a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject, it will treat these complaints as being part of a campaign and send the same response to all complainants.

The School reserves the right not to investigate complaints that are considered to be vexatious, malicious or repeated complaints about the same issue without new evidence. In such cases, the complainant will be informed of the decision and the reasons for it.

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. If the complaint is against the Head, Governors will refer the matter to the Chair of Governors.

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 assumes overall responsibility for the implementation of this Policy.

### 3. 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. Complaints may be submitted by letter or by email to the School Office or to the Head's PA. The School will acknowledge receipt by the same method unless otherwise requested. 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.

### 4. 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 that it is a Stage 2 complaint
  - 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 for the Stage 2 complaint which may include further investigations and discussions with staff and pupils. Minutes of the meeting will be taken.

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 their decision and provide a copy of the minutes. 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.

## 5. 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 Clerk to the Governors 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 Complaint Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that remain at 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 Complaints Panel is not obliged to consider any new complaints at this stage.
4. The Complaints Panel will comprise at least three individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint. Two of the panel will be serving governors, whilst the third member will be independent of the management and running of the School. The Clerk to the Governors, on behalf of the Complaints 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 Clerk to the Governors 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 Complaints 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, who attends for support only, and may not speak at or contribute to the hearing. 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 Complaints Panel hearing date is confirmed.

8. If possible, the Complaints 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 Complaints Panel. A hearing under this procedure is not a legal hearing but a private and confidential matter. The expectation is that its duration will be limited to 1 hour 30 minutes unless the circumstances dictate otherwise. The Clerk to the Governors 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 Clerk. 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. All parties (with the exception of the Complaints Panel) will leave at the conclusion of the hearing.

10. The Complaints 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 Complaints Panel will either uphold or dismiss the complaint, making any recommendations that it deems appropriate. It is not within the Complaints Panel's power to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils or parents.

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

13. The Complaints Panel's findings and recommendations, if any, will also be shared with the Head, the Governors and, where appropriate, the person (other than a pupil) 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 Complaints Panel hearing will take place even if the parents indicate later that they are now satisfied and do not wish to proceed further. The Complaints Panel hearing will, therefore, proceed notwithstanding that the parent may subsequently decide not to attend. If necessary, the Complaints Panel will consider the parent's complaint in their absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion. The requirement for the Complaints Panel to proceed does not prevent the School from accommodating parental availability for dates.

15. If a parent remains dissatisfied after the School's complaints process has been exhausted, they may refer their complaint to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) if it relates to the School's compliance with the Independent School Standards. ISI can be contacted at CAP House, 9–12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA, telephone 020 7600 0100, or by email at [info@isi.net](mailto:info@isi.net). Complaints relating to broader legal duties can be referred to the Department for Education.

## 6. 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) and the Complaints 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 seven (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.



## 7. 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) Working 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 0300 123 1231 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.

## 8. Wellbeing

The Head and the Governors are fully committed to the wellbeing of all parties involved in these procedures. Any concerns about wellbeing should be raised with the School's Director of Finance and Operations.

## 9. Monitoring and Review

An anonymised annual report of the number and nature of complaints received, including trends and any actions taken, will be shared with the Governing Body as part of its oversight responsibilities.

The Head and Senior Leadership Team will regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this Policy. The Complaints Policy 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 Policy will also be subject to critical review by the Governing Body and will be reviewed by the Finance, Operations and Risk Committee on an annual basis. The date of the next review is shown on the front page.