



Complaints Policy

This policy is published on the school's website and is available to staff and parents who request it. All parents are informed how to register a concern or make a complaint when their child joins the school.

There are three stages to the policy:

Stage 1 – Informal Complaints

Most worries and complaints can be dealt with satisfactorily at an early stage, often by House staff. At this stage there is usually no formal complaint – merely a worry or a problem to be solved. Where communication is by telephone, staff will respond within an agreed timeframe. Concerns in writing, including e-mail will receive an initial response within 48 hours. Parents whose children are about to enter the school for the first time are given the following information as part of their joining details:

“We hope that all parents will be happy with the service which the School provides. Please do not hesitate to let us know if you are dissatisfied in any way. If you have a worry, the first person to inform will probably be your son or daughter's Housemaster or Housemistress. However you may also like to contact a Deputy Headmaster, the Second Master or the Headmaster. Formal complaints must be made to the Headmaster in writing. If, after this, you still feel that any complaint has not been properly dealt with, or you disagree with the outcome, it is possible to appeal to the Chairman of the Governors by writing to him at the school address.”

Stage 2 – The Formal Complaint to the Headmaster

This is made in writing. The Headmaster undertakes to acknowledge the receipt of the complaint within 48 hours of receiving it. He will then investigate the complaint and report back within a reasonable time. He will make it clear in his letter to the complainant how he/she may appeal to the Governors should they be dissatisfied either with the Headmaster's decision or his explanation. The Headmaster keeps a log of formal complaints.

Stage 3 – The Appeal to the Governors

Parents who are dissatisfied with the Headmaster's decision, or who have a serious complaint about the Headmaster himself should write to the Chairman of the Governors at the School. He will set up a Complaints Panel as outlined in the procedure below:

1. Complaints Panel

Should a parent decide to appeal against a decision by the Headmaster a Panel consisting of two members of the Board of Governors and an independent member will be appointed by the Chairman of Governors (excluding himself). They will provide a fair and impartial judgement, having equal responsibility for the interests of pupils, staff and the school. The panel members will have no detailed previous knowledge of the case, other than that contained in the same set of papers that are made available to the parents. The Chairman of Governors will appoint one of the members of the Panel to chair it. The Panel meeting will take place at the school premises on a date to be arranged with the parents, normally within 14 days of receipt by the school of the written request for an

appeal. It is a private procedure and all those who are concerned in it are required to keep its proceedings confidential, subject to any overriding legal objections.

2. Attendance

Those present at the Panel Meeting will be:

- 2.1. Members of the Panel and the Clerk to the Governors, or a deputy, as secretary.
- 2.2. The Headmaster and any relevant member of staff whom he, or the parents have asked should attend and whom the Head considers should attend in order to secure a fair outcome.
- 2.3. The parents and, exceptionally, the pupil. The parents may be accompanied by a friend or relation, but not a legal representative, as the panel is non-adversarial in nature. Should the friend or relative be legally qualified the school should be provided with seven days notice of this.

3. Procedure

The Panel will consider each of the outstanding concerns raised by the parents so far as relevant to:

- 3.1. What action the parents seek in order to satisfy the complaint in their eyes.
- 3.2. Whether the facts of the case were sufficiently established. The civil standard of proof, namely "the balance of probability" will apply.
- 3.3. Whether any further investigation is required.
- 3.4. If so, by whom and by when.

This will allow the Panel to review the reasonableness of the decision of the Headmaster and either reach a finding or determine the further action required.

4. Conduct of the Hearing

The Panel Chairman will conduct the meeting in a manner, which is fair to all participants, having regard to any representations made to him by any participant as to the most appropriate way to determine the issues. The meeting will be held in a suitable room and in an informal manner. All statements made at the meeting will be unsworn. The proceedings will not be tape-recorded without the consent of both the Chairman of the Panel and a parent. Any tape-recording will be used only to assist the panel members in reaching their decision and formulating their reasons, and will belong to the School. The secretary will be asked to keep a hand-written minute of the main points, which arise at the meeting. All those present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes. Everyone is expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners. The Chairman of the Panel may at his/her discretion adjourn or terminate the meeting. If the meeting is terminated, the original decision will stand pro tem. The meeting will be

directed by the Chairman of the Panel who will conduct it so as to ensure that all those present have a reasonable opportunity of asking questions and making appropriate comment, normally as follows:

- 4.1. The Headmaster and parent/pupil would be present throughout.
 - 4.2. The Headmaster would outline the reasons for his recommendations, including the relevant school rules.
 - 4.3. Both parties would then be asked, in turn, to respond to each of the questions raised in the Request for the Appeal and may be allowed to cross-question each other, in turn, at the discretion of the Chairman.
 - 4.4. Panel members may question either party at this stage in the proceedings.
 - 4.5. Other witnesses, if any, would be called in turn, questioned first by the party who called them and then by the other party and panel; they leave after their evidence is completed.
 - 4.6. The Headmaster summarises his position in the light of all the evidence heard.
 - 4.7. The parents are given the last word to summarise their position.
 - 4.8. When the Chairman of the Panel decides that all issues have been sufficiently discussed and if by then there is no consensus, she/he may adjourn the meeting; alternatively, the Chairman of the Panel may ask those present to withdraw while the Panel considers its decision.
5. In the absence of a significant procedural irregularity which might lead to a re-hearing, the decision of the Panel will be final. The decision will be recorded and will be available for inspection by the Headmaster and the Chairman of the Governors. The decision will be notified, with reasons, to the parents by the Chairman of the Panel in person or the Chairman of Governors by letter, e-mail or telephone within five days of the meeting, or, if further investigation has been ordered, within 14 days. If relevant, the person complained about will also receive a copy of the decision.

6. Confidentiality

Any correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 162A of the 2002 Act, as amended, requests access to them.

7. Recommendations

It is possible that the Panel will propose changes to organisation or procedures as a result of their deliberations. These are to be presented to the Board of Governors.

8. Whistleblowing

If, having exhausted all the school's procedures, you feel that your complaint has not been properly addressed, you might consider reporting your concerns to the Independent Schools' Inspectorate (ISI): 020 7600 0100 or, in the case of boarding welfare, to OFSTED: telephone 08456 404040

Appendix 1

Below is the information about complaints which is issued to all boarders:

Information for Boarders

If you are worried about something, or feel that you would like to complain about something, it is important that you tell somebody.

The best person while you are at School is probably your Tutor or your Housemaster/Housemistress. If you feel that you would rather not approach these people, then you may approach anyone on the Staff of the School including the Headmaster and all the Matrons.

Whoever you approach will help you. If something needs to be investigated, they will do so and then tell you what has happened.

It may be that you would prefer to speak to someone outside the School. In this case, your parents or guardian are probably the best choice, but you could also approach:

The School Nurse

or

The School Doctor Tel: 01323 848494

or

Rev Charlie Hill

or

you could consider ringing

Child Line (0800 1111)

or

OFSTED: 08456 404040

Further copies of this sheet are available from your Housemaster/Housemistress.