



## Bowdon Preparatory School Complaints Policy

### Introduction

Bowdon Preparatory School strives to provide a high standard of teaching and pastoral care for its pupils. The school welcomes suggestions and comments from parents and takes seriously complaints and concerns they may raise.

This policy sets out the school's expectations for practice and the responsibilities of different staff in contributing to an outstanding learning environment. It should be read in conjunction with the following policies and documents:

School's Aims	Terms and Conditions
Home School Agreement	Admissions Policy

A complaint will be treated as an expression of genuine dissatisfaction which needs a response. The complaints procedure is for parents of current registered pupils and past pupils parents if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was registered.

We wish to ensure that:

- Parents wishing to make a complaint know how to do so.
- We respond to complaints within a reasonable time and in a courteous and efficient way.
- Parents realise that we listen and take complaints seriously.
- We take action where appropriate.

The aim of this policy is to outline how a parent can expect a complaint to be treated.

A parent correspondence log details a brief summary of communications relating to matters where parents sought clarification, raised concerns or made a formal complaint. Details relating to concerns and formal complaints are entered onto the child's record on the Management Information System. A notification is sent to the Headmistress and Pastoral Leader each time this record is updated.

### Process Summary

**Stage 1** aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school.

**Stage 2** is the first formal stage where written complaints are considered by the Headmistress (or a designated governor if the complaint is about the Headmistress), who has responsibility for dealing with complaints.

**Stage 3** is the next stage once stage 2 is complete. It involves a review of the complaint by the Chair of Governors, who may convene a complaints review panel of governors.

## **STAGE 1:**

Informal: Please start by telling the class teacher or the subject teacher about your concern. This is usually the best and quickest way of resolving issues.

- It is recommended that you make an appointment to speak to the class teacher as soon as possible as this will give both parties the opportunity to talk about the issue in an appropriate manner and without being interrupted.
- It is important to recognise that schools are busy organisations and it may not be possible to offer an appointment straight away.
- The purpose of this meeting should be to establish the nature of the concern and to seek a realistic resolution to the problem.
- It is good practice for the class teacher to make a brief written record of the concern raised and any actions agreed.

### **Furthermore**

Informal: If parents still require clarification or don't feel fully satisfied with the outcome of discussions with the class or subject teacher, they should ask for an appointment to meet with the Head of Department, Pastoral and Welfare Leader, Director of Studies, Deputy Headmistress (Progress Coordinator) or Headmistress.

The purpose of this meeting should be to establish the nature of the ongoing concern, what has been discussed with the class/subject teacher so far and any actions arising from the initial meeting. It is in everyone's interest, particularly that of the child or children, for concerns to be sorted out quickly and smoothly. However, it may be that the Senior Leader will need to look into what has happened since the initial meeting before she can suggest how your concern might be resolved. If this is the case, the Senior Leader will contact you within 2 weeks to let you know the outcome of their enquiries and what actions they have taken/propose to take.

The Senior Leader will make a written record of the concern discussed and what has been agreed and write to parents summarising this.

It is hoped that most problems will have been resolved at this stage through the informal process.

## **STAGE 2:**

Formal - complaint in writing (email/letter) to the Headmistress. If you feel that the issue you have raised has not been resolved through the informal process and you wish to pursue it further you may raise it through the formal procedure. To do this you must write a formal letter of complaint to the Headmistress (you may use the form attached as Appendix 2). Your letter should set out clearly the concern which has previously been discussed and why you feel that the issue is unresolved. It is also helpful if you can set out in your letter what resolution you are seeking.

Moving to the formal complaints procedure is a serious stage. In consideration of future home/school relationships, everyone concerned will need to concentrate on finding a resolution to the issue and negotiate an agreement as to how this can best be achieved.

The Headmistress will consider the complaint and in doing so will:

- Establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- Meet or contact you if they need further information
- Clarify what you feel would put things right if this has not been set out in your letter
- Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Conduct any interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning, keeping notes of any interview for the record.

The Headmistress will keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- An apology
- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better (please note this is not an admission of negligence)
- An assurance that the event complained of will not recur
- An explanation of the stages that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- An undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint.

It may also be the case that the complaint may not have any substance and is therefore considered to be unfounded or unsubstantiated.

The Headmistress will discuss the outcome of their consideration of your complaint with you and should send a detailed written response **within 20 school days**. Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated and complainant notified of the outcome within 28 days. Where this proves unrealistic (eg, when staff involved are on holiday and not contactable) you will be informed in writing and given an estimate of how long it will take to provide a detailed response.

### **Concerns or complaints specifically about the Headmistress or any individual governor.**

Where you are unhappy about the decision the Headmistress has made about your complaint, this does not become a complaint about the Headmistress. However, if the complaint is about the conduct of the Headmistress, and you feel that it has not been resolved at the informal stage then you should move directly to Stage 3 of the procedure and write to the Chair of Governors. A complaint that is specifically about the conduct of an individual governor, and which has not been resolved at the informal stage, should also proceed directly to Stage 3 and be made by writing to the Chair of Governors.

## Concerns or complaints specifically about the Chair of Governors

A complaint about the conduct of the Chair of Governors of the school, and which has not been resolved at the informal stage, will need to be dealt with outside this policy.

### STAGE 3:

Formal – If parents seek to invoke stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution, or in the event of an appeal against a decision to exclude a pupil made by the Headmistress), they must write a formal letter of complaint to the Chair of Governors. Complaints to the Chair of Governors should be sent to the Clerk to the Governors and you should write to him at the school address, marking the correspondence 'urgent, private and confidential'.

The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Complaints Panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, two of whom will usually be governors and one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school.

The Chair of Governors should acknowledge receipt of the letter **within 5 school days**. For complaints specifically about the Headmistress, the Chair of Governors will arrange for the complaint to be investigated, either by her, by an appropriate independent investigator or by a panel which will include a person not directly linked to the school and for the process set out in stage 2 to be followed.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except in so far as is required of the school by paragraph 6(2)(j) of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2003; where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

The complaints review panel operates according to the following formal procedures:

- The clerk to the governing body will aim to arrange for the panel meeting to take place **within 20 working days**.
- The clerk will ask you whether you wish to provide any **further written documentation** in support of your complaint. You can include witness statements, or ask witnesses to give evidence in person, if you wish.
- The Headmistress will be asked to prepare a **written report** for the panel. Other members of staff directly involved in matters raised in your complaint will also be asked to prepare reports or statements.
- The clerk will inform you, the Headmistress, any relevant witnesses and members of the panel by letter, at least **five working days** in advance, of the date, time and place of the meeting. We hope that you will feel comfortable with the meeting taking place in the school but we will do what we can to make alternative arrangements if you prefer.
- With the letter, the clerk will send you all relevant correspondence, reports and documentation about the complaint and ask whether you wish to submit **further written evidence** to the panel.
- The letter will explain what will happen at the panel meeting and the clerk will also inform you that **you are entitled to be accompanied** to the meeting. The choice of person to accompany you is your own, but it is usually best to involve someone in whom you have confidence but who is

not directly connected with the school. They are there to give you support but also to witness the proceedings and to speak on your behalf if you wish.

- With the agreement of the chair of the panel, the Headmistress may invite **members of staff** directly involved in matters raised by you to attend the meeting,
- The chair of the panel will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating for you and will do his or her best to **put you at your ease**.
- As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses **previously undisclosed** should be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the meeting will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to the new evidence.
- The chair of the panel will ensure that the meeting is properly **minuted**. Please understand that any decision to share the minutes with you, the complainant, is a matter for the panel's discretion and you do not have an automatic right to see or receive a copy. Since such minutes usually name individuals, they are understandably of a sensitive and, therefore, confidential nature.
- Normally, the written outcome of the panel meeting, which will be sent to you, should give you all the information you require. If, however, you feel that you would like to have a **copy of the minutes** it would be helpful if you could indicate this in advance. If the panel is happy for the minutes to be copied to you, the clerk can then be asked maintain confidentiality in the minutes.

During the meeting, you can expect there to be opportunities for:

- You to explain your complaint
- You to hear the school's response from the Headmistress
- You to question the Headmistress about the complaint
- You to be questioned by the Headmistress about the complaint
- The panel members to be able to question you and the Headmistress
- Any party to have the right to call witnesses (subject to the chair's approval) and all parties to have the right to question all witnesses
- You and the Headmistress to make a final statement.

In closing the meeting, the chair will explain that the panel will now consider its decision and that written notice of the decision will be sent to the Headmistress and yourself **within two weeks**. All participants other than the panel and the clerk will then leave.

The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in order to:

- Reach a unanimous or at least a majority decision on the complaint
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- Recommend to the governing body where appropriate, changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.

The clerk will send you and the Headmistress a written statement outlining the decision of the panel **within two weeks**. The letter will explain what further recourse, beyond the governing body, is available to you.

We will keep a copy of all correspondence and notes on file in the school's records but separate from pupils' personal records.

#### **Other sources of information and advice**

The Department of Education has published guidance – Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2016

For more information go to <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school/state-schools>

### What happens if you're not happy with the outcome?

#### Complaints to ISI regarding the school including EYFS:

Parents may also complain to the Independent Schools Inspectorate if they wish. ISI may be contacted on 020 7600 0100 or by email: [concerns@isi.net](mailto:concerns@isi.net) .

#### Monitoring, Review and Dissemination

The governors monitor the complaints procedure, in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. The Headmistress logs all complaints received by the school and records how they were resolved. Governors examine this log on an annual basis.

Date of update	Updated (U) Reviewed (R) by	How was updated disseminated	Parents informed	Policy on website
Sep 2016	H. Gee	Policy on Teachers Drive	No	Yes
Oct 2016	Gov (HR)		Yes	Yes