



Policy on the Handling of Complaints

Introduction

1. **Circulation:** This policy is addressed to the Leadership and Senior Management Teams; to all members of the teaching and pastoral staff, including school medical staff, nursing staff any staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage; and, on request to parents, prospective parents and pupils.
2. **Policy Status:** The policy has been approved by the Head and the Governing Body of Gateways School. It provides guidelines for handling complaints. It takes account of Sections 108 & 109 of the *Education & Skills Act 2008* and Part 7, paragraph 33 of *The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014*. The procedures set out below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and circumstances of each case. Certain parts of the procedures can only be carried out during term time.
3. **Application:** This policy applies to parents of currently registered pupils. It does not apply to parents of prospective pupils nor to parents of past pupils no longer registered at the school unless the initial complaint was raised when the pupil was still registered. Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue or if the Head excludes or asks a pupil to leave and the parents seek a Governors' Review of that decision. The policy applies to the Early Years Foundation Stage.
4. **"Parent/s"/"You":** includes a current parent or legal guardian or education guardian, or a pupil aged 16+.
5. **Three stages:** This policy describes a three stage procedure –
 - Stage 1** – Informal resolution of complaint notified orally or in writing to a member of staff.
 - Stage 2** – A formal complaint in writing to the Head.
 - Stage 3** – A renewed complaint to be heard before a Complaints Panel.

Separate procedures apply if a pupil has been excluded or asked to leave or if a child protection issue has arisen.

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A concern about the safety of your child should be notified immediately to the person you believe is best placed to take urgent action and should be confirmed in writing to the Head.

For the Early Years Foundation Stage, parents can make a complaint to Ofsted, and/or ISI, if they so wish. Contact details are –
Ofsted – Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester. M1 2WD.
General helpline – 0300 1231231. Telephone Number 0161 618 8524,
Independent Schools Inspectorate – Ground Floor, CAP House, 9 – 12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA, Telephone number 0207 600 0100.

Policy Aim and Statement

6. **Aim:** The aim of this policy is to ensure that a complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice, it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote parents' and pupils' confidence in our ability to safeguard and promote welfare. We will try to resolve every 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.
7. **Policy Statement:** 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 of resentment, which could be damaging to relationships and also to our school culture. Parents and pupils should never feel – or be made to feel – that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or his/her opportunities at this school. The policy however distinguishes between a **complaint** which can be resolved informally and a **complaint** which will require formal investigation. Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this may be regarded as vexatious, in which case it lies outside the scope of this policy.

Management of complaints

8. **Designated People:** The Head has appointed senior members of staff, Head of Prep, Deputy Head of the High School, Head of Pastoral Care (High School), Head of Sixth Form, Head of EYFS and the school Bursar to be responsible for investigating and resolving complaints. If the Designated Person is unavailable or is the subject of the complaint, his/her duties will be carried out by the Head or another senior member of staff. The main responsibilities of the Designated People are to –
 - 8.1 Be the first point of contact while the matter remains unresolved and keep records.
 - 8.2 Co-ordinate the complaints procedures within their designated area of school.

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- 8.3 Monitor the keeping, confidentiality and storage of records (for a minimum of 7 years if the complaint does not have any Safeguarding implications) in relation to complaints. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential.
- 8.4 Report regularly to the Head with respect to complaints.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

9. We expect that most complaints, where a parent or pupil seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken, can be resolved informally. Examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, or about allocation of privileges or responsibilities, or about a timetable clash or some other aspect of the School's systems or equipment, or a billing error.
10. **Notification:** Please raise the complaint initially as follows –
 - 10.1 **Education issues** – if the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, please speak or write to the Form Teacher or Head of Department / Subject Leader as appropriate.
 - 10.2 **Pastoral care** – for complaints relating to matters outside the classroom, please speak or write to the Form Teacher, Head of Pastoral Care (High School), Head of Prep or Head of Sixth Form.
 - 10.3 **Disciplinary matters** – a problem over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised first of all with the member of staff who imposed it, and, if not resolved, the Deputy Head of the High School or the Head of Preparatory School.
 - 10.4 **Financial matters** – a query relating to fees or extras should be stated in writing to the Director of Finance.
11. **Acknowledgement:** We will acknowledge a written notification by telephone, fax, e-mail or letter within two working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable in the holidays. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing but an entry will be made on the school's information management system at the appropriate level so that it can be viewed by the Designated People. A complaint will be fully investigated. A speedy resolution will be sought.
12. **Unresolved complaints:** A complaint which has not been resolved by informal means within 15 working days should be notified in writing as a **formal complaint** which will be dealt with in accordance with Stage 2 below.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

- 13 **Notification:** An unresolved complaint under Stage 1, or a complaint which needs investigation, or a dissatisfaction with some aspect of the School's policies, procedures, management or administration should be set out in writing

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with full details and sent with all relevant documents and your full contact details to the **Head**. If your complaint is in relation to the Head you may contact the school and request that an alternative person be provided for you to send your complaint to. Your complaint will be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within two working days during term time, indicating the action that is being taken.

14. **Investigation:** The Head (or alternative person) may ask a senior member of staff to act as “investigator” and/or may involve one or more governors. The investigator/s may request additional information from you and may wish to speak to you personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. The outcome of the investigation will be reported to the Head (or alternative person). You will then be invited to attend a meeting with the Head (or alternative person), or such person as she may appoint to act in her place, together with any other relevant member of staff. Your complaint will then be fully discussed and a decision reached. This will be communicated to you and confirmed in writing within five working days during term time and as soon as reasonably practicable outside of term time. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to your complaint and shall indicate at what stage the complaint was resolved. No more than 28 term time days shall pass between the school receiving the written complaint and notification of the outcome of the investigation.
- 15 Similarly, for Early Years Foundation Stage, the outcome of an investigation shall be notified to the complainant within 28 term time days of having received the written complaint.

Stage 3 – Reference to a Complaints Panel

- 16 **Composition:** We have constituted a Complaints Panel (“Panel”) comprising School Governor members and a member who is independent of the governance, management and running of the School.
- 17 **Notification:** To request a hearing before the Complaints Panel please write to the Head’s PA **within seven working days of the decision complained of**. Your request will only be considered if you have completed the procedures at Stages 1 and 2 above. Please ensure that a copy of all relevant documents and your full contact details accompany your letter to the Head’s PA. Please state in your letter the outcome that you desire and all the grounds of your complaint. Please also send the Head’s PA a list of the documents which you believe to be in the School’s possession and wish the Panel to see. The Head’s PA will acknowledge your request in writing within four working days.
- 18 **Convening the Panel:** The Head’s PA will convene the Complaints Panel on behalf of the Chair of Governors within 14 days of receiving the written complaint. The exception to this would be when a written complaint is received during a half term or longer school holiday. In this case the Panel will be convened to sit within 14 days of the resumption or the start of the school term.

The Panel will consist of three individuals who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. One member of the Panel shall be an independent member who is independent of the governance, management and running of the School. You may ask the Head's PA to tell you who has been appointed to sit on the Panel. If you have a genuine reason for objecting to one or more members of the Panel then all reasonable efforts will be made to find alternative members.

21. **Notice of Hearing:** As soon as reasonably practicable, the Head's PA will send you written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing together with brief details of the Panel members who will hear it.
22. **Attendance:** You may be asked to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, teacher, or friend. It is not necessary for that person to be legally qualified but if you do wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, acting in their professional capacity, please notify the School at least seven days before the hearing. Your child aged 13+ may attend part or all of the hearing at the discretion of the Chairman. Copies of additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Head's PA at least three clear days prior to the hearing.
23. **Chairman:** The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Panel (chosen by themselves) and will be conducted in an informal manner.
24. **Hearing:** All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Chairman may direct that the hearing is recorded to assist accurate recollection for purposes of the decision. The Panel will be under no obligation to retain recordings thereafter. The Head's PA will be asked to take a handwritten minute of the proceedings in any event.
25. **Evidence:** The Chairman of the panel will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or take written statements into account.
26. **Conduct:** All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chairman. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his/her comment will be minuted.
27. **Adjournment:** The Chairman may at his/her discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation or any relevant issue.

28. **Decision:** After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel shall reach a decision. The Panel's decision may be notified by electronic mail or otherwise to the complainant and, where relevant, to the person complained about. The decision will also be available for inspection at the school premises by the Chairman of Governors and the Headmistress. The decision will be final and binding and will be issued within 14 term time working days from the date of the panel hearing.
29. **Private Proceeding:** A hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceedings shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.
30. **Confidentiality:** All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the Education & Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.
31. For the Early Years Foundation Stage, the record of complaints is kept for at least three years.
32. The School shall provide Ofsted (and ISI), on request, with a written record of all formal complaints made during any specified period. This record will contain the following details;
 - whether each complaint was resolved following a formal procedure, or if they proceeded to a panel hearing;
 - the action taken by the school as a result of each complaint (regardless of whether it was upheld).

This policy and its procedures is applicable across the whole school and includes E.Y.F.S and out of school care.

For information, the school received 1 formal complaint during the last academic year.