



The Village School

COMPLAINTS POLICY

General

- 'Complaints' are not defined in the Independent School Standards Regulations. The Independent School Standards Regulations only refer to complaints from parents.
- This policy therefore concerns itself with complaints from parents.
- The policy provides on an annual basis, for written record to be kept of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary informal stage, or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing.
- The policy does not cover complaints from members of staff as these are covered by the school's grievance and disputes procedures.

Types of Concerns and Complaints

The majority of concerns/complaints received by the school fall into the following categories:

- financial and administrative (and breach of contract in independent schools)
- academic (course programme, unsatisfactory teaching, too much/too little homework, progress in a particular subject etc.)
- pastoral care (discipline/indiscipline, inappropriate sanctions, bullying, overall progress of the child, unhappiness of child, accommodation etc.)

Child Protection

(Allegations against staff, handling of sensitive issues) These will be dealt with initially by using the 'Safeguarding Children Policy' and recommendations acted upon.

Responsibilities

The Proprietor is responsible for:

- adopting the policy, procedures, and guidelines
- appointing where necessary an independent panel to hear complaints; when complainants are not satisfied with the school's response
- receiving reports and findings from the panel
- receiving reports from the Headmistress; advising the Headmistress.

The Proprietor will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes regularly. The Proprietor will also monitor the school's response to complaints and any panel recommendations.

The Proprietor is responsible for appointing a panel of at least three people independent of the management of the school to hear complaints from complainants not satisfied with the school's response.

Chair of the Independent Panel

The Chair of the Independent Panel is responsible to ensure that:

- the parties understand the procedure
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are established
- complainants are put at ease
- the hearing is conducted as informally as possible
- the panel is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome, or has been involved in the issues previously
- all parties have the chance to be heard
- any written material is seen by all parties
- findings are communicated to the parent and school within three days of the hearing.

The Secretary to the Head

The Secretary must act as the reference point for the complainant when the complainant has not been satisfied with the school's response.

The Secretary must:

- set convenient dates and times and venues for hearings
- collate any written material and forward it to the parties
- meet and welcome the parties
- record the proceedings
- notify the parties of the decision.

Head

The Head is responsible:

- for the overall internal management of the procedures
- for ensuring that there is both an informal and formal procedure
- for ensuring that the written policy and procedures are available to parents and pupils on request
- for hearing complaints at the second stage
- for receiving any child protection issues
- for ensuring that the procedures are monitored and reviewed and regular reports made to the Proprietor.

Deputy Head

The Deputy Head is responsible:

- for the efficient operation and management of the policy and procedures
- training staff on how to deal appropriately with complaints
- keeping parents, pupils and others informed of the procedure
- compiling reports for the Head as required.

Bursar

The Bursar is responsible for administrative, environmental and financial queries and complaints.

Heads of Subject

Heads of Subject are responsible for dealing with and where possible resolving concerns/complaints about academic matters/programmes of study/teaching methods at stage 1 of the procedures.

Form Teachers

Form Teachers are responsible for dealing with and where possible resolving complaints concerning overall pupil progress, discipline issues, pastoral care.

All staff are responsible for hearing any concerns brought to them by parents and pupils and reassuring them that they will be dealt with as soon as possible by the appropriate member of staff, and for informing the relevant staff of the concerns. They are also responsible for passing any complaints received from other people who are not parents or pupils to the Deputy Head.

Procedures

There are three possible stages:

Stage 1 Informal Resolution

Concerns expressed by parents or pupils to any member of staff should be dealt with by that member of staff if she is able to do so. If the member of staff considers the issue to be beyond her competence the concern should be passed to the Form Mistress.

Concerns/complaints which come to a member of staff from other sources should be passed immediately to the Deputy Head who will inform the complainant of the action she proposes to take.

Stage 2 Formal Procedure

Complaint heard by Head/ Deputy Head

Stage 3 Independent Panel Hearing

Complaint heard by the independent panel appointed by the Proprietor.

Detailed Guidance

All staff should be conversant with the procedures.

Stage 1

All staff should listen carefully and patiently to parents' and pupils' complaints, recognising that however ill-founded the complaint might be it is a matter of great concern to the parent or pupil.

Stage 1 24 hour service

If the matter is within the competence of the member of staff to resolve quickly this should be done. Otherwise the complainant should be reassured that the complaint will be passed to the relevant member of staff, and the relevant person should be informed by the member of staff as soon as possible. The complainant should be told that it is the school's policy to respond to the verbal complaint within 24 hours, even if the issue cannot be entirely resolved in 24 hours.

If a trivial/simple verbal concern/complaint is made it might be possible to resolve it immediately. In more serious cases, or where a member of staff is uncertain, parents should always be asked to put their complaint in writing.

This is to ensure that there is no conflict in determining what the complaint consists of and the action taken by the members of the school staff.

Stage 1 Serious complaint by a pupil

If a serious complaint is made by a pupil, the member of staff should immediately inform the Head who will discuss the issue with the relevant members of staff in order to determine what the course of action should be.

Members of staff receiving a concern/complaint must use the school's 'Complaints Form' to inform the relevant senior member of staff. But this does not prevent the member of staff also speaking to the relevant senior colleague about the matter at the earliest opportunity.

If the senior member of staff considers the issue to be serious, he/she should inform the Head, via the school's 'Complaints Form', and inform the complainant of the action taken. If the complainant is not satisfied with the informal response, he/she should be informed that they must make a formal complaint in writing to the Head.

In any cases of doubt members of staff should seek the advice of the Deputy Head who has the responsibility for mentoring colleagues. Informal resolution should normally take no more than **three** working days. If a longer period is necessary to complete investigations the complainant should be informed, within three days, of the reasons, and the new date for resolution.

Stage 2 Formal Procedure

When a written formal complaint is received, the Head must consult the relevant staff, make appropriate investigations, and attempt to resolve the issue within **three** working days. If a resolution cannot be found the Head should inform the complainant of his/her right of appeal to an independent panel.

If the complaint concerns a child protection issue or involves an allegation of abuse by a member of the school staff the Head should be informed.

No complaint should normally be left unresolved at this stage after **THREE** days of receipt of the complaint. Where more time is necessary to complete the investigations the complainant will be informed and another date set.

Stage 3 Hearings by an Independent Panel

Complainants who are not satisfied by the school's decision re the complaint can request a hearing by a panel of three members independent of the school management.

The complainant must be advised by the Head to write to the Proprietor via the School Secretary giving details of the complaint. The Head will nominate the panel.

The hearing must be within 10 days of the Head receiving notice of the complaint.

The complainant must be told of his/her right to be accompanied by a person of their choice.

The nominated panel will make its own procedures, and will agree these with the Head, who will report them to the next Proprietor's meeting.

The panel will ensure that the complainant is heard in private, is welcomed, and as far as possible is put at ease.

Careful consideration must be taken when the complainant is a pupil.

The panel will hear the appeal(s), consider all the views expressed and decide the outcome.

The panel can make such findings and recommendations as it wishes. It must send its report to the complainant and the person complained about within three working days of the hearing by electronic mail.

It should also be made available for inspection on the school premises by the Proprietor within three working days of the hearing.

Proprietor's Action

The Proprietor will consider the panel's findings and recommendations and make such decisions as it feels are necessary in the circumstances.

In general the Proprietor will take one of the following courses of action:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or part
- uphold the complaint in whole or part
- decide on appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures.

The Proprietor's decision is binding.

Reporting and Recording

In all cases it is important for staff to use the school's 'Complaints Form' so that records of the complaint and the action taken can be recorded and traced. Supporting documents should be attached to the form.

The School Secretary will ensure that all correspondence, statements and records pertaining to the complaint are kept confidential and secure except where the Secretary of State or inspecting body requests access to them.

The Head will report annually to staff and parents on the number of complaints received.

- There were no formal complaints received for the academic year 2008-2009
- There were no formal complaints received for the academic year 2009-2010
- There were no formal complaints received for the academic year 2010-2011
- There were no formal complaints received for the academic year 2011-2012
- There were no formal complaints received for the academic year 2012-2013
- There were no formal complaints received for the academic year 2013-2014
- There were no formal complaints received for the academic year 2014-2015
- There were no formal complaints received for the academic year 2015-2016

Prepared: 1 February 2007

Last Reviewed: May 2017

Date for review: May 2018