



COMPLAINTS POLICY

Reviewed: April 2020

Review due: April 2021

This policy will remain valid until the end of the academic year 2020-21

This policy is written with reference to parents of pupils and past pupils if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was registered.

The policy does not cover complaints from members of staff as these are covered by the School's Grievance and Disciplinary procedures.

Working days means days within term time.

Background:

The School is required under the Independent School Standards to make available and apply a complaints procedure in order to comply with the standards against which inspections will be carried out.

The standard does not distinguish between 'concerns' and 'complaints'. Any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the School is a complaint.

Types of Complaints:

The majority of complaints received by the School fall into the following categories:

- financial, administrative or breach of contract.
- 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 the child, accommodation etc)
- child protection and safeguarding (handling of sensitive issues, allegations against staff etc)

Responsibilities:

(a) PGHS School Council (Governing Body) will be responsible for:

- adopting the policy, procedures, and guidelines
- receiving and considering reports from the Headmistress
- appointing where necessary an Independent Panel to hear complaints when complainants are not satisfied with the School's response
- receiving and considering reports and findings from the Independent Panel
- deciding what course of action to take having regard to the reports and findings of the independent panel and the report from the Headmistress.

The School Council will monitor the level and nature of complaints, the School's response to complaints and any Independent Panel recommendations. They will review the outcomes regularly via the most appropriate sub-committee. They will also monitor the School's response to complaints and any panel recommendations.

(b) Chairman of the School Council will be responsible for:

- appointing a panel of at least three people who are not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and of whom at least one is independent of the management of the School (The Independent Panel) to hear complaints from complainants not satisfied with the School's response. The independent member should not only be outside of the School's workforce, and not a member of the Governing Body, but also should not be otherwise involved in the management of the School.

(c) Chairman of the Independent Panel will ensure that:

- the complainant is allowed to attend and be accompanied if they wish
- the above statement does not confer a right on a parent to have a legal representative to make representations on their behalf at the hearing, although the School can allow this if it wishes
- the complainant is put at ease
- the parties understand the procedure
- 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

- any written material is seen by all parties
- the issues are addressed
- all parties have the chance to be heard
- key findings of fact are established
- the panel makes findings and recommendations, a copy of which is provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. A copy is also made available for inspection on the School premises by the Chairman of the School Council and the Headmistress.
- findings are to be communicated to the complainant and the School within three working days of the hearing.

(d) Clerk to the Governors:

- will act as the reference point for the complainant when the complainant has not been satisfied with the School's response.

The Clerk is responsible for:

- keeping a written record of all formal complaints and whether they were resolved at Stage 2 or proceeded to an Independent Panel hearing and the action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether they were upheld)
- setting convenient dates, times and venues for hearings
- collating any written material and forwarding it to the parties
- meeting and welcoming the parties
- recording the proceedings
- sending or giving to the parties the written findings and recommendations of the Independent Panel.

(e) Headmistress is responsible for:

- the overall internal management of the procedures
- ensuring that there is both an informal and formal procedure
- ensuring that the written policy is made available to parents
- hearing complaints at Stage 2
- ensuring that the procedures are monitored and reviewed and regular reports are made to the School Council.

(f) 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 the Headmistress, staff and parents informed of the procedure

- keeping a written record of all complaints that were resolved at Stage 1.

(g) Bursar is responsible for:

- administrative, environmental, health and safety and financial queries and complaints.

(h) Heads of Department/Subject Co-ordinators are responsible for:

- dealing with and where possible resolving complaints about academic matters/programmes of study/teaching methods at Stage 1 of the procedures.

(i) Form Tutors/Class Teachers are responsible for:

- dealing with and where possible resolving complaints concerning overall pupil progress, discipline issues and pastoral care at Stage 1 of the procedures.

(j) Deputy Head (acting as Designated Safeguarding Lead) is responsible for:

- receiving any child protection issues.

(k) All staff are responsible for:

- hearing any complaint brought to them by a parent and reassuring them that it will be dealt with as soon as possible by the most appropriate member of staff and for informing the relevant member of staff of the complaint within 24 hours
- passing any complaints received from other people who are not parents to the Deputy Head within 24 hours.

COMPLAINTS POLICY PROCEDURES

There are three possible stages.

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

Complaints expressed by parents to any member of staff should be dealt with by that member of staff if they are able to do so. If the member of staff considers the issue to be beyond their competence the complaint should be passed to the Deputy Head who will ensure that the complaint is dealt with by the most appropriate person.

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 they propose to take.

Response Time

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 Deputy Head. The complainant should be told that it is the School's policy to respond to the complaint within 24 hours, even if the issue cannot be entirely resolved in 24 hours.

If a minor/simple complaint is made it might be possible to resolve it immediately. In more complex cases, or where a member of staff is uncertain of the details, parents should be asked to put their complaint in writing. This is to ensure that there is no misunderstanding in determining what the complaint consists of and the action taken by the members of the School staff. Putting a complaint in writing, for example an email, does not mean that the formal stage of the procedure is triggered.

Serious complaints

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

If the complaint concerns a Child Protection issue or involves an allegation of abuse by a member of the School staff the guidance contained in the School's Child Protection and Safeguarding policy about who to contact must be followed.

Members of staff receiving a complaint should use the School's 'Complaints Form' (Appendix 2) to inform the Deputy Head. The member of staff should also speak to a relevant senior colleague about the matter at the earliest opportunity.

If the Deputy Head considers the issue to be serious, they should inform the Headmistress and inform the complainant of the action taken.

In any cases of doubt, members of staff should seek the advice of the Deputy Head, who has responsibility for advising 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 working days of the reasons, and another date set.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the informal response, they should be informed that they must make a formal complaint in writing to the Headmistress.

Stage 2 - Formal Procedure

The complaint will be heard by the Headmistress.

When a written formal complaint is received, the Headmistress must consult the relevant staff, make appropriate investigations, and attempt to resolve the issue within **three** working days.

No complaint should normally be left unresolved at this stage. Where more time is necessary to complete the investigations, the complainant will be informed within three working days and another date set.

If a resolution cannot be found the Headmistress should inform the complainant of their right of appeal to an Independent Panel.

Stage 3 - Independent Panel Hearing

Complainants who are not satisfied by the School's decision re the complaint can request a hearing by an Independent Panel. The complainant must be advised by the Headmistress to write to the Chairman of the School Council via the Clerk to the Governors giving details of the complaint.

The complaint will be heard by the Independent Panel nominated by the Chairman of the School Council. The hearing must take place within 10 working days of the Chairman receiving notice of the complaint.

The complainant must be told of their right to be accompanied and, where relevant, translations/interpreters must be arranged by the Clerk in consultation with the parties.

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

The Independent Panel will hear the appeal(s), consider all the evidence and decide the outcome. It must report on its findings and recommendations in writing to the School Council, the Headmistress, the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about within ten working days of the hearing. [NB. The complainant is entitled to see its findings.]

A panel hearing will take place unless the parent later indicates in writing that they are now satisfied and do not wish to proceed further. If a parent does not exercise the right to attend a panel hearing, this does not remove the School's obligations to hold the hearing in conformity with this policy. The School's arrangements for the panel hearing will be reasonable in order to facilitate the parents exercising the right of attendance.

Action by the School Council

The School Council, after consultation with the Headmistress, will consider the panel's findings and recommendations and make such decisions as it feels are necessary in the circumstances.

On occasion, the views of the School's insurers and legal advisers may need to influence this process.

In general, the School Council 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 School Council'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 Clerk to the Governors will ensure that a written record of all formal complaints is kept for a minimum of 6 years from the date of the complaint which includes the following information:

- a) whether the complaint was resolved at Stage 2 or proceeded to Stage 3
- b) the action taken by the School as a result of the complaint regardless of whether it was upheld.

The SMT and Clerk to the Governors will ensure that all correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidentially except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

The Headmistress and Deputy Head will periodically review the handling of complaints and will discuss issues with staff as necessary.

EYFS

Additional requirements apply for EYFS settings beyond those which apply to the main school. Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements must be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days. The record of complaints must be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.

In other matters, in addition to complaining to the School and/or ISI (using the information in Appendix 1), complaints may also be made to Ofsted. ISI and/or Ofsted will usually expect parents to have followed the School's formal complaints procedure before contacting them.

Communication with Parents and Prospective Parents

The number of formal (stage 2 and 3) complaints made against the School in the preceding school year is available on request to parents and prospective parents.

APPENDIX 1

Ofsted

Aviation House

125 Kingsway

London

WC2B 6SE

Telephone 030 0013 0415

Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

ISI

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP HOUSE

9-12 Long Lane

LONDON

EC1A 9HA

Telephone 020 7600 0100

APPENDIX 2

PGHS COMPLAINT FORM

Member of Staff receiving the complaint: _____

From (Name of Parent): _____

Name of Pupil and Class: _____

Date/Time of complaint: _____

Complaint: _____

Action Taken: _____

Outcome: _____

Issue Passed to: _____ Date/Time: _____

Seen: Deputy Head: Date/Time: _____

Headmistress: Date/Time: _____