



Complaints Procedure (Parents) Policy

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Applies to	Whole School
Endorsed by	Head Master
Responsibility	Head Master
Date reviewed	April 2023
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Introduction

Bedford School prides itself on the quality of its teaching and the pastoral care it provides to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, it will be dealt with by the School in accordance with this Policy. This Policy is made available on the website for staff, parents of pupils and prospective pupils and pupils in hard copy on request.

Policy Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or 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. 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 would 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 opportunities at this school.

Policy Status

This Policy has been approved by the Governing Body of the School and provides guidelines for handling complaints. It takes account of paragraph 33 of schedule I to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (SI 2014/3283), and the Independent School Standards guidance for independent schools 2019. The policy applies to all sections of the school [including Early Years]. 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.

Application

The following procedure applies to all pupils and school issues but it is particularly important under National Minimum Boarding Standard 14 that boarders and parents of boarders are aware of its application. In respect of boarders and their parents, if they have particular complaints about Boarding Welfare, they can report those complaints directly to Ofsted and the Local Children's Services Department if they feel the issue is not being handled effectively by the School. Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue or if the Head Master expels or asks a boy to leave and the parents seek a Governors review of the decision.

Parent

The term parent includes a current or prospective parent or legal guardian or education guardian, and may at our discretion include a parent whose child has recently left the School.

What Constitutes a Complaint? A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the

School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The School is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you or your child raise in good faith.

Management of Complaints

The Head Master expects all senior members of staff to be responsible for the co-ordination and administration of the Complaints Procedure. Complaints that are unresolved will normally be directed to the Vice Master, Director of Finance & Operations, Deputy Head (Academic) or Prep School Headmaster who will:

- be the point of contact while the matter remains unresolved and keep records;
- co-ordinate the complaints procedures in school;
- arrange assistance for parents who require this, for example, because of a disability;
- ensure that the complaint is centrally recorded and monitored with appropriate confidentiality;
- report regularly to the Head with respect to complaints.

Senior staff are also responsible for maintaining an on-going training programme for all School employees in relation to complaints.

Complaints received directly from boys are dealt with under a separate procedure, a copy of which is made available on the School website.

Welfare of boarders: boarders are provided with appropriate helplines which they can ring in case of problems or distress. These include the Children's Commissioner or an inspector at the regulatory authority Ofsted or the local Children's Services Department. Parents may also contact an inspector or the Children's Services Department. Details of how to contact Ofsted are given at the end of this procedure. The Designated Safeguarding Lead at your school [Mr Matt Gracie] will be able to give you the name and contact details for the Children's Services Department with responsibility for your school. Alternatively you should be able to find these details on the Bedford Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) website.

Complaints Procedure

Complaints made with the school are dealt with via a three-stage process.

1. Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

1.1 It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved quickly and 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. Complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation are taken very seriously and may need to be dealt with at Stage 2 without action at Stage 1. The School will

acknowledge a written notification by email, letter or telephone within two working days¹ of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable during holidays.

1.2 If parents have a complaint concerning education matters they should normally contact their son's teacher or tutor as appropriate. In many cases, the matter will be resolved quickly by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the teacher or tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for the teacher/tutor to consult the Head of Department or Housemaster, as appropriate, who will then deal with the matter.

1.3 If the complaint concerns a pastoral matter, parents should normally contact the appropriate Tutor or Housemaster.

1.4 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, with the Vice Master or Prep School Headmaster.

1.5 A query relating to financial matters (for example, fees) should be stated in writing to the Director of Finances and Operations.

1.6 Complaints made directly to a Head of Department or Housemaster may be referred to the relevant teacher or tutor unless it is felt appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.

1.7 On occasion, complaints may be dealt with by members of the Core Management Team (including the Head) but still be resolved informally and successfully.

1.8 Should the matter not be resolved within 15 working days then parents may proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Policy.

Every complaint notified to a member of staff that has not been resolved informally will be noted, together with the action taken.

2. Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

2.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis as described in Stage 1, or if it has not been resolved within 15 working days, then the parents should put their complaint in writing² to the Head Master. He will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. This must be done even where the informal process has been conducted with the Head Master. If parents require assistance with their request, for example, because of a disability, the School will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.³

2.2 In most cases, the Head Master will meet with or speak to the parents concerned, normally within five working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

¹ When we use the term "working days" we mean Monday to Friday during term time. It may take longer to process complaints received during the last few weeks of term or during holidays due to the availability of staff.

² When we refer to notifications or requests in writing, both letter and email are acceptable.

³ Please note that the School will be very happy to arrange assistance if required, through the person coordinating complaints, in the event of any difficulty in submitting any request in writing required by this Policy.

2.3 It may be necessary for the Head Master to carry out further investigations or to ask a senior member of staff to act as Investigator. The Investigator may ask for additional information from you and may wish to speak to you personally and to others who may have knowledge of the circumstances including, if appropriate, your son.

2.4 Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept.

2.5 Once the Head Master is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head Master will also give reasons for this decision. The Head Master's aim will be to inform any complainant of the outcome of an investigation and the resolution of the complaint with 28 working days from the first receipt of the complaint.

2/6 Complaints about the Head Master will always be dealt with under the Stage 2 - Formal Resolution process. Parents who wish to make a complaint about Head Master should put their complaint in writing to the Chair of Governors. The Chair or their nominee will call for a full report from the Head and for all relevant documents. The Chair or their nominee may also call for a briefing from members of staff and/or may speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the Chair or their nominee is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing. The Chair or their nominee will give reasons for his/her decision.

2.7 If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they may proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

3. Stage 3 – Reference to the Complaints Panel

3.1 Introduction and Scope of the Hearing

A Complaints Panel (the Panel) hearing is a review of the actions taken at Stage 2 of this Procedure. The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint, which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure. The Panel will not seek to substitute its own judgment for that of the Head Master where the Head Master's decision falls within the bounds of what a reasonable Head Master, acting proportionately, might have decided given all the facts.

3.2 Notification

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they should write to the Chair of the Governors, within five working days of receipt of the decision at stage 2, requesting a Panel hearing. Parents must state in their letter full details of the complaint, the outcome sought, the grounds on which they wish to appeal against the decision and enclosing all relevant documents and full contact details. Parents should also include a list of the documents which they believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to see. If parents require assistance with their request, for example, because of a disability, the School will be happy to make appropriate arrangements. The parents' letter will normally be acknowledged by telephone, e-mail or letter within five working days, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale.

3.3 Convening the Panel

The Chair of Governors will then convene a Complaints Panel to consider the complaint. Please note, a Panel will only be convened if Stage 2 above has been completed. The Panel will consist of at least three members who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. The Panel shall be comprised of School Governor members (one of whom will be the Chair of the Panel) and one Panel member who will be independent of the governance and management of the School. The School has identified persons of standing within the local community, one of whom will sit as the independent member on the Complaints Panel for any given complaint. The Panel hearing will continue unless you formally withdraw your complaint in writing.

3.4 Notice of hearing

Every effort will be made to enable the Panel hearing to take place within 15 working days of the receipt of your request. As soon as reasonably practicable, and in any event at least five working days before the hearing, you will be sent written notification of the date, time, and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the Panel members who will be present.

3.5 Attendance

You will be invited to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, teacher, or friend. Legal representation is not necessary or normally appropriate 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 working days before the hearing. In exceptional circumstances and only if agreed by all parties, your child who is the subject of the hearing, aged 13 and above may be allowed to attend part or all of the hearing if the Chair of the Panel considers it would be in the interests of fairness to do so. Copies of additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Panel Chair at least three clear working days prior to the hearing. If you choose not to attend, the Panel may hear your complaint and may reach a finding and conclude the matter in your absence.

3.6 The Role of the Panel

The role of the Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaint by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties,
- any representations made by you, the Head Master or other members of staff.

3.7 Powers of the Panel

It is not within the powers of the Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils, or parents. The Panel may make findings and recommendations on these or any other issues to the Head Master or to the full body of School Governors as appropriate.

3.8 Hearing

All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn and all present will be entitled to make their own notes. The Panel Chair will arrange for a person to take written minutes of the proceedings.

3.9 Evidence

The Chair will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel is under no obligation to hear witnesses but may do so if it wishes.

3.10 Conduct

All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the Chair may terminate or adjourn the hearing. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with the conduct of the hearing must say so before the hearing proceeds further and his /her comment will be recorded.

3.11 Adjournment

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. However, the Chair may adjourn the hearing at his/her discretion for further investigation of any relevant issue including taking legal advice.

3.12 Decision

After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel shall reach a decision unless there is an agreed position. If, after establishing the facts, the Panel members consider that the complaint is made out, they will uphold the complaint. If they consider that the complaint is not made out, they will dismiss the complaint. They will make these decisions on the balance of probabilities. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations may be notified orally at the hearing or subsequently and shall be confirmed in writing to you by electronic mail where appropriate within ten working days. If you do not wish to receive the decision by electronic mail, a copy will be given or posted to you. The decisions, findings and any recommendations will be made available for inspection on the School premises by the Governing Body and the Head Master. Reasons for the decision will be given. The decision may include recommendations and will be sent to you, the Chair of Governors, the Head Master and, where relevant, any person about whom the complaint has been made.

3.13 Private proceeding

Any hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding and no records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceedings shall be made directly or indirectly available to the press or other media.

3.14 Records and Confidentiality

A written record will be kept of all formal complaints and of whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or proceed to a panel hearing. The record will also include written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint, as well as details of action taken by the school, regardless of whether or not the complaint was upheld. The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure (Stage 2 or beyond) during the preceding calendar year was zero.

The School processes data in accordance with its [Privacy Notice](#). When dealing with complaints the School (including any Panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of pupil
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name and contact details of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage

- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes/minutes of the hearing, and
- The Panel's written decision

This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the School's Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy) but potentially including, for instance, information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy.

The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Notice, Data Protection Policy, and Retention of Records Policy.

3.15 Persistent Correspondence

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 by the School as vexatious and outside the scope of this procedure.

3.16 Boarding

The school's written record of complaints identifies those complaints relating to boarding provision, and action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). The school keeps a record of complaints made but later withdrawn. The school keeps under review any emerging patterns arising from complaints.]