

WHOLE SCHOOL COMPLAINTS POLICY

This policy was revised in September 2011 in line with the School's Policy Review Schedule which ensures all policies are kept up to date and replaces that updated in 2010.

The Whole School refers to all staff and students at Lavant House in the junior and senior school which includes: the Early Years/Foundation Stage (EYFS), Pre-Prep School (Key Stage 1), Prep. School (Key Stage 2); Middle School (Key Stage 3); Senior School (Key Stage 4) and the Sixth Form (Key Stage 5).

This document sets out a procedure for handling complaints from parents and pupils.

While parents will often wish to raise issues on behalf of their children, there are other issues which pupils may choose to raise on their own behalf and which are best raised by them.

Complaints from members of the public will be treated in a similar way to complaints from parents, although most complaints from the public would be referred directly to the Head or a senior member of staff.

We are also required by legislation governing schools' complaints policies to state clearly here that "Within boarding and in relation to the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools, No. 5, this policy is also for staff, boarders and parents. This policy also takes account of the particular needs, within the whole-school complaints procedure, for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)."

Parental Complaints:

An Open Organisation: Climate and Culture

Problems are likely to arise if parents feel that the school is not open to their concerns. It is better to have a direct complaint to a member of staff than to have parents sharing their dissatisfaction with others. Parents like to feel valued and involved with the school and they should be encouraged to voice their concerns. This is helped where the culture of the school is open and complaints are received in positive manner.

- Is the school open, listening to parents and pupils?
- Are parents comfortable in contacting the Headmistress, the Deputy Headmistress, the housemistress, the year head, or other senior staff?
- Are staff comfortable in dealing with complaints?

An effective complaints procedure can defuse problems and can provide the school with helpful information. Complaints treated as constructive suggestions can be used to improve standards and may prevent cause for further complaint. Even an unjustified complaint may indicate an area which can be improved.

What constitutes a complaint?

A complaint is a written expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem.

A complaint may be made if a parent thinks the school has, for example,

- done something wrong
- failed to do something it should have done
- acted unfairly or impolitely.

A complaint may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific department in the school or about an individual member of staff.

All complaints need to be handled seriously. A gentle expression of concern, or a simple query, may grow into a painful matter if parents feel that they have been brushed aside. Equally, issues with the potential to become acutely difficult may dwindle and fade if they are handled well at the initial stage.

An unresolved problem may become a festering dispute or confrontation. Procedures must therefore be in place for appropriate action when a matter remains unresolved or cannot be resolved quickly.

Procedures need to be flexible to handle both formal complaints and the informal raising of issues. It does not seem helpful to attempt to differentiate between “formal” and “informal” complaints. One can easily become the other. Serious issues may be raised in an informal and friendly way, and apparently trivial issues in an adversarial manner. Complaints against members of staff need particularly sensitive handling.

All complaints need to be recorded.

Lines of Approach

All members of staff are encouraged to deal with parental concerns which lie within their area of responsibility.

If approached about a matter which lies outside their remit, staff should refer it to the appropriate person and inform the parents.

Matters incapable of resolution at a particular level should be referred to the appropriate senior person, with parents kept informed of the action being taken. This covers, for example, a complaint made to a relatively junior member of staff about a more senior colleague.

Staff will recognise when issues need to go straight to the Headmistress, with whom the responsibility for most complaints lies.

Certain parents will wish to go straight to the Headmistress with their concerns, and this should be respected. However, it should be explained that the Headmistress may not be able to respond until she has consulted the staff who can help.

Serious complaints will be shared with the Chairman of the Governors by the Headmistress. There may be certain circumstances, such as complaints about the Headmistress, when parents will need to write direct to the Chairman, whose address should be supplied on request.

Written responses should always be signed by the person to whom the parent made the complaint, or by a more senior person in the school.

Reducing Anxiety

Because the person who complains may feel vulnerable, the school should reduce anxiety by taking the matter seriously. Complaints should be acknowledged immediately or within five working days. Staff should inform parents what is happening to their concern or complaint and, if a more detailed response is needed, by what date it will be received. The issue should be dealt with as quickly as possible. The nature of the complaint and what is concerning the complainant should be clear. If it is not immediately obvious the parents could be asked to put their complaint in writing. They need to feel that their views matter.

Recording

The record of complaints is kept for three years. The school should keep an effective log of complaints and other parental concerns because:-

- HM Inspectors may wish to see the log as evidence of the school's attitude to complaints
- patterns in the record may indicate a need for action
- the Headmistress should be able to check the log and report on it regularly to Governors.

The log should contain the following information:-

- date when the issue was raised

- name of parent
- name of pupil
- brief statement of issue
- location of detailed file
- staff member handling the issue
- brief statement of the outcome.

Confidential files on all complaints should be maintained and kept together, cross-referenced with other files as necessary. The files should contain simple but clear notes of all conversations with parents about any source of dissatisfaction. This applies to friendly chats and to telephone conversations, as misunderstandings easily arise. There should be a clear statement of what is concerning the complainants. The notes can be agreed with parents.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important issue for pupils, parents and staff. It is essential that any complaint is treated in a confidential manner and with respect.

Parents often seek an assurance of confidentiality before expressing their concerns. If, for example, they wish to discuss a particular member of staff they may fear that their child will suffer in some way because they have complained.

It should be made clear to all concerned that it is the school's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children and similarly that complaints raised by pupils should not rebound on them or on other pupils.

The question of confidentiality should be discussed sensitively on an individual basis with the parents and the school's policy should be carefully explained.

It may be possible to deal with a problem without naming individuals. However, even if no names are given, the source of the complaint may be clear. Depending on the nature of the complaint and on the circumstances, it may be impractical to investigate without identifying the member of staff or the child – it may also be in the interest of the child to do so.

Staff members are rightly concerned that they should know about complaints which might be damaging to their reputation. Such complaints will be known only to themselves and to those who have to be consulted. Training should help staff to deal not only with complaints which are made to them, but also to complaints which are made about them. Schools should be aware of the need to provide support for staff against whom a complaint is made; this should be provided by a colleague who is not otherwise involved.

If there is a question of the child's safety or a possible situation involving the police, the guidance on confidentiality in the West Sussex Child Protection Guidelines should be followed.

Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints may be where there is no indication of either name or address, or where the complainants say that they do not wish to be identified. They may come from members of the public, from parents or from pupils. No action is to be taken if the complainant is unidentified but anonymous allegations should be handled under the West Sussex Child Protection Guidelines.

Staff Complaints:

The principles which apply to parental complaints should also be applied to complaints and concerns from staff

Pupil Complaints:

The principles which apply to parental complaints should also be applied to complaints and concerns from pupils.

There are, however, differences in approach. One important difference from the handling of parental complaints is that pupils should be able to raise concerns with any member of staff with whom they feel comfortable.

In more complex situations, once the matter is resolved, the outcome should be discussed with the pupil by a member of staff. To make sure that it is fully understood, a written record may be shared.

There is a School Council at which pupil representatives can raise complaints. At Council meetings issues can be aired and discussed and they are then recorded by the head-girl and deputy.

Complaints which appear trivial still need to be handled seriously. Young people may test the complaints procedures on relatively minor issues before finding the confidence to raise something painful, such as bullying.

If the issue is a painful one, or if exploration of it is taking time, a pupil may need support from another pupil or from an adult.

Procedure for Resolving Complaints

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and **informally**.
- If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their daughter's Form teacher or Housemistress. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Form teacher or Housemistress cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for her to consult the Deputy Headmistress.
- Complaints made directly to the Headmistress will usually be referred to the relevant Form teacher or Housemistress unless the Headmistress deems it appropriate for her to deal with the matter personally.
- **EYFS:** complainants will be notified of the outcome of an investigation within 28 days of the school having received the complaint and a written record of all complaints made during any specified period and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint will be provided to Ofsted and ISI on request.
- The Form teacher or Housemistress will make a **written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received**. Should the matter not be resolved within 2 weeks or in the event that the Form teacher or Housemistress and the parent **fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with stage 2** of this Procedure.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should **put their complaint in writing** to the Headmistress. The Headmistress will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Headmistress will speak to the parents concerned, normally **within 5 days** of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Headmistress to carry out further investigations.
- The Headmistress will **keep written records** of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Headmistress 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 Headmistress will also give reasons for her decision.
- **If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3** of this procedure.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), **the matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration.** The Panel will consist of **two Governors and one person who shall be independent of the management and running of the school and not previously involved in the complaint. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chairman of Governors.** The Panel will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable, convenient to all parties and normally **within 21 days.**
- If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than 5 days prior to the hearing.
- **The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person.** This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.
- Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete **within 7 days of the hearing. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it.** The decision of the Panel will be final. **The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head, the Governors and, where relevant, the person complained of.**
- The panel's findings will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Governors and the Headmistress.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 162A of the 2002 Act, as amended, requests access to them, or 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.

Parents of all Lavant House pupils, including EYFS are at liberty to make a complaint to Ofsted at: Royal Exchange Buildings, St Ann's Square, Manchester. M2 7LA, tel 0300 123 4234 and/or to ISI at Cap House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA if they so wish.

Registered Complaints

There were no formal written complaints registered under the formal procedure during the academic year 2008 – 2009.

Registered Complaints

There were no formal written complaints registered under the formal procedure during the academic year 2009 – 2010

Registered Complaints

There were no formal written complaints registered under the formal procedure during the academic year 2010 – 2011

Revised September 2011

Review September 2012