



Policy for Dealing with Parental Complaints

Please note the following when reading this policy:

- Reference to 'parent(s)' includes legal Guardian(s)
- 'the School' refers to Ashwicke Hall School

Introduction

Ashwicke Hall School takes pride in the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to their students. However, if parents do have complaints, this policy enables parents to express their concerns to a member of staff rather than sharing their dissatisfaction with others. An effective complaints procedure can defuse problems and can provide the school with helpful information. Complaints treated constructively can be used to improve standards and may prevent further cause for complaint.

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 will be taken seriously and all complaints will be recorded.

Overview

1. There are four key stages in the procedure: informal resolution, formal resolution, referral to the Proprietor, and panel hearing. Each of these stages is dealt with in more details below.
2. It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
3. It is essential that any complaint is treated in a confidential manner and with respect.
4. It is the School's policy that complaints made by parents will not rebound adversely on their children.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

1. If parents have a complaint, they should normally contact the member of staff most closely concerned with the issue or their son/daughter's Houseparents. Communication may be phone or more typically by email. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means, to the parents' satisfaction.
2. All members of staff are encouraged to deal with parental concerns which lie within their area of responsibility. Where a complaint lies outside their remit, staff should refer it to the appropriate person and inform the parent that they have done so.
3. Matters incapable of resolution at a particular level should be referred to the appropriate senior member of staff, with parents kept informed of the action being taken. Senior Staff should recognise when issues need to be referred directly to the School Director.
4. Complaints made directly to the School Director will usually be referred to the relevant staff member unless the School Director deems it appropriate for him to deal with the matter personally.
5. The staff member receiving the complaint will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. The matter should normally be acknowledged with the parent by the School within one working day (on Mondays to Fridays) and the School will aim to resolve the matter within one week but, in more complicated cases, it may take a further week to gather all the relevant information. Should the matter not be resolved within two weeks or in the event that the staff member 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.

Note that there may be certain circumstances, such as a complaint about the School Director, where parents will need to write to the Proprietor directly.

Stage 2: Formal Resolution

1. If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, parents should then put their complaint in writing to the School Director. The School Director will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
2. In most cases, the School Director will speak to the parents concerned, normally within three days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
3. It may be necessary for the School Director to carry out further investigations, or to delegate such investigations to another appropriate member of staff.



4. Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept both in the confidential student file and also in a central complaints folder.
5. Once the School Director 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 School Director will also give reasons for this decision.
6. If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3: Referral to the Proprietor

1. Where a complaint becomes intractable the School may choose to refer the matter to the Proprietor, following the process as set out below. In most cases the procedure will be that the School Director refers the matter to the Proprietor and informs the parents that this stage has been reached.
2. The Proprietor will then call for a full report from the School Director, and for all relevant documents. On the basis of these, the Proprietor may call for briefings from individual members of staff.
3. The Proprietor should inform the parents of any action taken and advice of a date by which to expect a full response, normally within two weeks of the matter being referred to the Proprietor.
4. The Proprietor's response should be clear and detailed, and should offer the parents a meeting if they remain troubled. If a meeting is requested it should include:
 - a. The Proprietor;
 - b. The School Director and at most one other member of staff;
 - c. The parents;
 - d. The parents are invited to bring with them a third party not involved with the complaint, e.g. a supportive friend. If this is the case, the School asks for prior notification that someone other than the parent(s) will attend the meeting.

Such a meeting could also take place by a conference call over the internet.

5. The Proprietor, after listening to the School Director and the parents, may be able to find a solution.
6. If the resolution is still not reached or the parents are still not satisfied with the decision and wish to take the matter further, they should be advised to proceed to Stage 4 of this procedure. Note that the Proprietor, in consultation with the School Director, may also decide to refer a complaint to a Panel Hearing.

Stage 4: Panel Hearing

1. If parents' concerns remain unresolved, they can be referred to a Convener appointed by the Proprietor to call hearings of the Complaints panel/Conciliation Committee, (referred to as "the Committee" below).
2. The matter will then be referred to the Committee for consideration.
3. The Committee should consist of three people:
 - a. The Convener and two other members, at least one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the School. No members may be directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and no person may be a member who has previously been involved in investigating the complaint.
4. Each of the committee members shall be appointed by the Proprietor.
5. The Proprietor has no further involvement until the Convener reports back at the end of the Committee's deliberations.
6. The Convener, on behalf of the Committee, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within two weeks.
7. If the Committee 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, and any papers to be tabled by either party, shall be supplied to all parties no later than two days before the Hearing.
8. Those involved in the Hearing are:
 - a. three Committee members, including the Convener;
 - b. the School Director, and possibly a key member of staff;
 - c. the parents;
 - d. the parents may be accompanied by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or as appropriate, in advance, with the Convener.



9. The proceedings of the Hearing are confidential. The content of the meeting should be recorded in writing. If possible, the Committee will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the committee will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Committee will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within two weeks of the hearing. Following discussion with the Proprietor, the decision of the Committee will be communicated to the parents.
10. The decision of the Committee will be final.
11. The Committee's findings and recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the School Director, the Proprietor and, where relevant, the person complained of.
12. If there is a question of the child's safety or a possible situation involving the police, the guidance on confidentiality in the Government's "Working Together to Safeguard Children" guidelines should be followed.

Further Action

1. Where a complaint has not been resolved at Stage 4, the parent can choose to go to his or her lawyer, Member of Parliament, if appropriate, or the Secretary of State.
2. The Department for Education has an interest in dealing with complaints in certain circumstances, as defined in the Education Act 1980. If a serious complaint is made to the Registrar, he or she will investigate and normally involve HM Inspectors of Schools in finding a solution.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except to the extent required by paragraph 6 (2)(i) of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) regulations 2003, by the Secretary of State for Education, or where disclosure is required in the course of the School's inspection or under other legal authority.

Communications

1. Information about the procedure for complaining should be readily available to parents who request it.
2. A parent who has made a complaint should be contacted within five working days. This communication should include how the particular complaint is to be processed and should inform parents of when they can expect to receive further communications.
3. The issue should be dealt with as quickly as possible.
4. The nature of the complaint and what is concerning the complainant should be clear. If it is not completely obvious then the person handling the complaint may need to give the parent the opportunity to provide a fuller explanation or ask the parent to put his or her complaint in writing.
5. At all times the parent must feel that his or her view matters.

Recordings

The school should keep an effective record of complaints and other parental concerns. This is good practice because:

- School inspectors may wish to see the record as evidence of the School's attitude to complaints;
- Patterns in the record may indicate a need for action;
- The School Director should be able to check the record and report on it regularly to the SABIS® management;
- As well as details of the complaint the record should also contain an account of how the complaint was handled and the outcome;
- Confidential files on all complaints should be maintained. The files should contain notes of all conversation with parents about any source of dissatisfaction. The notes may contain a clear statement can be agreed with parents.
- Often benefit can be gained by learning from complaints and improving best practice.



Anonymous Complaints

1. Anonymous complaints from the public about the behaviour of students should be dealt with on a general basis, with reminders of all about the School's expectations.
2. Parents should be encouraged to give their names and should be given reassurance on the issue of confidentiality. If they persist in remaining anonymous, it is the School Director's discretion as to when action, if any, should be taken, de-pending on the nature of the complaint.
3. Anonymous complaints should be recorded in the record, but it is recognised that anonymous complaints are harder to act on than those where a full discussion can be held.

Resolution

1. The School may provide satisfaction for a complainant in any of the following ways:
 - a. assurance that changes have been made, and that matters will be different in future;
 - b. assurance that the School is now alert to a possible problem;
 - c. feeling that his or her concern has been listened to and considered seriously;
 - d. an outcome which may be different from the one sought, but which he or she perceives to be well-considered;
 - e. a considered letter;
 - f. an apology

Where time is needed to consider a matter, parents should receive an interim letter. This should include:

- a. the issues raised;
 - b. how the issues were considered;
 - c. the people consulted;
 - d. the action that has been taken;
 - e. an apology, if appropriate
2. 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.

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually in the light of experience and in line with any changes in legislation or guidance, and amended as necessary.



STUDENT OR PARENTAL COMPLAINT – SUMMARY RECORD
(attach all relevant documents to this sheet)

Complainant's name			
Summary of complaint			
Tracking the complaint	Member of staff	Date	Tick if attachment
First Contact			
Summary of action			
Follow up letter written			
If not resolved, matter referred to _____			
If not resolved, Stage 3 or Stage action required (continue on other sheet)			



Signature of Director to confirm closure of complaint			
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Notes: One of these forms must be used to log the School's response to a student or parental complaint. Where there is doubt as to whether the matter is a "concern" or a "formal complaint", members of staff should bear in mind:

1. Has the issue been raised in writing? Has a meeting been arranged specifically to discuss the complaint? If the answer to both these questions is "yes", then it should be treated as a complaint unless the complainant specifically describes it in other terms. (see Q2 below.)
2. Has the complainant outlined whether they see it as a complaint? If they think it is a complaint, it is a complaint. It may be useful at a meeting to ask if the complainant wishes to make this a formal complaint or whether they are raising a general concern. The answer to such a question should be noted.

If a student or parent indicates verbally or in writing that they are making a complaint, then this form should always be completed as the front page of the papers stored in the Complaints File in the School Office.