

Parental Complaints Policy

Papillon House School

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The School aims to ensure that any complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently, quickly and at the appropriate level and resolved as soon as possible. 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, we will review our systems and procedures in light of the circumstances of the complaint.
- 1.2 We recognise that a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment and so we need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. Parents and pupils should never feel that making a complaint will adversely affect a pupil or his / her opportunities at the School.

2 Scope and application

- 2.1 This policy applies to the whole school.
- 2.2 This policy applies to any expression of dissatisfaction however made about actions taken, or a lack of action, by the School where the parent seeks action by the School.
- 2.3 This policy applies to complaints from each of the following:
- 2.3.1 parents of current pupils;
 - 2.3.2 parents of former pupils if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was registered at the School.
- 2.4 Requests for financial awards, such as claims for compensation, damages or fee refunds, are beyond the scope of the School's complaints procedures.
- 2.5 All parents should be aware that regardless of the nature of a complaint and whether or not it is upheld, parents are not entitled to details of any related sanctions imposed on staff, pupils or parents.

3 Publication and availability

- 3.1 This policy is published on the School website.
- 3.2 This policy is available in hard copy on request.
- 3.3 A copy of the policy is available for inspection from the School office during a working day.
- 3.4 This policy can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required.
- 3.5 Information regarding the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure of this policy during the preceding school year is available to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils and, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate. The School makes this available upon request.

4 Timescales

When we refer to **working days**, we mean Monday to Friday, when School is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website. In the event that the application of this definition is likely to introduce excessive delays, due to intervening School holidays, the School's

approach is to take sensible and reasonable steps so as to minimise any hardship or unfairness arising from such delays.

- 4.1 Timescales for each stage of the complaints procedure are set out below in the relevant paragraphs.
 - 4.1.1 It is expected that the management of every complaint will progress in a timely manner.
 - 4.1.2 The School aims to resolve all complaints efficiently and promptly and parents are encouraged to bring any matter causing concern to the School's attention as soon as possible.
 - 4.1.3 Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay to the timescales for a stage of the complaints procedure, the School will notify the parents and inform them of the new timescales as soon as possible.

5 Management of complaints

- 5.1 The School's complaints procedure has three stages:
 - 5.1.1 **Stage 1:** Informal raising of a complaint. Further details of this procedure are set out in Appendix 1.
 - 5.1.2 **Stage 2:** A formal complaint in writing. Further details of this procedure are set out in Appendix 2
 - 5.1.3 **Stage 3:** Reference to the Complaints Panel. Further details of this procedure are set out in Appendix 3.
- 5.2 Separate procedures apply if the Head expels or requires the removal of a pupil from the School and the parents seek a Review of that decision.

6 Expected standards of behaviour

- 6.1 Attention is drawn to the information included in Appendix 4 which is drawn from the Department for Education's Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures 2020 (January 2021).

7 Record keeping and confidentiality

- 7.1 A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they were resolved at Stage 2 or proceeded to a Panel hearing including the action taken by the School as a result of the complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).
- 7.2 Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of an inspection or under other legal authority.
- 7.3 In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will be kept only for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in the circumstances.

8 Related Policies & Documents

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures

9 Policy Review:

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years as a minimum or earlier if needed.

Version Number	Written / Revised by	Approved by	Date
1	Gillian Hutton	Management Team	Nov 2017
2	Alex Labbett	Gillian Hutton	May 2021
3	Alex Labbett	Gillian Hutton	May 2023

Appendix 1 Stage 1 - informal complaint

1 Informal resolution of a complaint

- 1.1 We expect that most complaints can be resolved informally. For example, dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care should be able to be resolved by the relevant member of staff.

2 Who to contact

- 2.1 Where appropriate, complaints should initially be raised as follows:
- 2.1.1 **Educational issues:** if the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, please speak or write initially to the pupil's teacher. Your complaint may be passed to a more senior member of staff if appropriate.
 - 2.1.2 **Pastoral care:** for complaints relating to matters outside the classroom, please speak or write to the Head of Primary or Head of Secondary.
 - 2.1.3 **Financial matters:** a query relating to fees or extras should be stated in writing to the Bursar.
- 2.2 An informal complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, e-mail or letter within three working days of receipt during term time, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely timescales. Such action may include an investigation and / or a meeting with the parent.
- 2.3 Wherever appropriate, the School will ask the parent at the earliest stage what they think might resolve the issue.
- 2.4 The parent will receive a response to the complaint within 15 working days.
- 2.5 If the parent is dissatisfied with the response to the informal complaint or in the event that the complaint cannot be resolved by informal means, the parent may make a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure as set out in Appendix 2.

3 Complaints about the Director

- 3.1 The procedure for dealing with an informal complaint about the Director of the School is set out below:
- 3.1.1 parents may choose to raise complaints directly with the Director if they feel that the matter is capable of resolution informally. The complaint may be raised orally or in writing. If in writing, the School will not automatically treat the complaint as a formal (Stage 2) complaint and the Director will endeavour to resolve the complaint informally under Stage 1;
 - 3.1.2 the Director will acknowledge informal complaints within three working days and will seek to resolve the matter under this Stage 1 by means of direct conversation or a meeting with the parents, to be held within 15 working days of the initial complaint;

- 3.1.3 if the parent is dissatisfied with the Director's response to the informal complaint or in the event that the complaint cannot be resolved by informal means, the parent may make a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure as set out in Appendix 2.
- 3.2 Alternatively, parents may choose to make their complaint about the Director in writing to the Business Manager. In this case, the complaint will be treated as a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure as set out in Appendix 2.

Appendix 2 Stage 2 - formal complaint

1 How to make a formal complaint

- 1.1 Complaints will usually only progress to Stage 2 after first being considered at the informal stage and only then if the parent indicates that they intend to escalate a matter to the formal stage.
- 1.2 The formal complaint must be in writing addressed to the Business Manager of the School and should include:
 - 1.2.1 a copy of all relevant documents and full contact details; and
 - 1.2.2 details of all the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired.
- 1.3 The complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, e-mail or letter within three working days, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale.

2 Investigation

- 2.1 The subject matter of the complaint will be investigated in the most appropriate manner, which may include some or all of the following steps:
 - 2.1.1 delegation of the investigation to a senior member of staff;
 - 2.1.2 request for additional information from the parent, including what they think might resolve the issue (if not already requested under Stage 1); and
 - 2.1.3 request for a conversation and / or a meeting with the parent personally and / or others with relevant knowledge of the circumstances.
- 2.2 Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. Where the investigation has been delegated to a senior member of staff, he / she will prepare a report on the investigation which will be considered by the Director. Personal data may be redacted and names anonymised or cyphered in line with data protection principles.

3 Decision

- 3.1 The Director will notify the parent by e-mail or letter of her Stage 2 decision and the reasons for it within 10 working days from the receipt of the formal complaint.
- 3.2 If the parent is dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response to the complaint, the parent can request that the complaint be referred to the Complaints Panel under Stage 3 using the procedure set out in Appendix 3

4 Complaints about the Director

- 4.1 The procedure for dealing with a formal complaint about the Director of the School is set out below:

- 4.1.1 The complaint should be put in writing to the Business Manager. The written complaint should include a copy of all relevant documents and full contact details and details of all the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired.
- 4.1.2 The Business Manager will acknowledge the complaint by telephone, email or letter within three working days of receipt and indicate the action that is being taken and the likely timescale. Such action may include an investigation and/or a meeting with the parent. The parent will receive a response to the complaint within 10 working days.
- 4.1.3 If the parent is dissatisfied with the response to the complaint, the parent can request that the complaint be referred to a complaints panel under Stage 3 using the procedure set out in Appendix 3.

Appendix 3 Stage 3 - Complaints Panel

1 Complaints Panel hearing

- 1.1 If a parent is dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response to the complaint, the parent can request a complaints panel hearing (Hearing).
- 1.2 The Hearing is to consider those elements of the Stage 2 response to the parent's complaint with which the parent remains dissatisfied. The Panel is not obliged to consider any new complaints which have not been previously raised.

2 How to request a Complaints Panel hearing

- 2.1 A request for a Hearing must be put in writing to the Business Manager and will usually only be considered if the procedure at Stage 2 has been completed.
- 2.2 The written request should include:
 - 2.2.1 a copy of all relevant documents and full contact details
 - 2.2.2 details of all the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired
 - 2.2.3 a list of the documents which the parents believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to consider and
 - 2.2.4 whether the parent proposes to be accompanied to the Hearing by someone who is legally qualified (see paragraph 3.5 below).
- 2.3 If assistance with the request is required, for example because of a disability, please inform the Business Manager who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.
- 2.4 The Business Manager will acknowledge the request for a hearing in writing within two working days of receipt.
- 2.5 Every effort will be made to enable the Hearing to take place within 15 working days of receipt of the request.
- 2.6 Parents may withdraw their request for a Hearing at any point up to and including the intended date of the Hearing.

3 Planning the hearing

- 3.1 A clerk appointed by the Panel (Clerk) will send written notification to each party of the date, time and place of the Hearing at least ten working days before the date of the Hearing.
- 3.2 Copies of any additional documents (additional to those specified in 2.2.1 and 2.2.3) that the parent wishes the Panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk to be received at least five working days prior to the hearing.

- 3.3 The Clerk will circulate a copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the Panel to all parties at least three working days prior to the hearing.
- 3.4 The parent may be accompanied at the Hearing by another person, for example a relative or friend. The Hearing is an internal proceeding, not legal proceedings, and legal representation is unnecessary.
- 3.5 As set out in 2.2.4 above, the parent is required to notify the Business Manager if he / she wishes to be accompanied by someone who is legally qualified in his / her initial request for a Hearing. The parent should note that the Panel will wish to speak to him / her directly. The legally qualified person will not be permitted to act as an advocate or to address the Hearing unless invited to do so by the Chair of the complaints panel.

4 Composition of the Panel

- 4.1 The Panel will comprise at least three individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint including at least one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the School.
- 4.2 The parents may ask the Clerk to tell them who has been appointed to sit on the Panel ahead of the hearing. Fair consideration will be given to any reasonable objection to a particular panel member.
- 4.3 The Panel members will appoint one of themselves to be the Chair of the Panel throughout the proceedings.

5 Role of the complaints panel

- 5.1 The role of the complaints panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:

5.1.1 the documents provided by both parties; and

5.1.2 any representations made by the parties

and to reach a decision, on the balance of probabilities, as to whether or not to uphold each complaint.

6 The Hearing

- 6.1 The Hearing should proceed notwithstanding that the parent may decide not to attend. In these circumstances, the complaints panel should consider the parent's complaint in his / her absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint.
- 6.2 During the Hearing, the parties shall have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. The Hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and / or may take written statements into account.
- 6.3 All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. The parties will be entitled to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Clerk will take a handwritten minute of the Hearing.

- 6.4 All those present during the Hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the Hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the Hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his / her comment will be minuted.
- 6.5 The Chair may, at his / her discretion, adjourn the hearing if he / she considers it appropriate to do so. This may include an adjournment for the parties to take legal advice on a specific issue arising.
- 6.6 A Hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.
- 6.7 When the Chair of the panel is satisfied that sufficient consideration has been given to the documentation provided and any representations made by the parties, he / she will conclude the Hearing.

7 Decision

- 7.1 The Panel will reach a decision about each complaint on a balance of probabilities and may make recommendations.
- 7.2 It is not within the powers of the complaints panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils or parents, although the complaints panel may make recommendations.
- 7.3 The decision, findings and any recommendations will be provided in writing to the parents, and where relevant, any person complained about, within five working days of the hearing.
- 7.4 The decisions, findings and any recommendations will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Director and the Head.
- 7.5 The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the School's complaints procedure.

Appendix 4 Unreasonable complaints

We are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with us. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

We adopt the Department for Education definition of unreasonable complainants as those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the School, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints.

Unreasonable complaints are taken seriously by the School as they put a strain on valuable resources and hinder the progress of proper investigations. The School may judge that a complaint is unreasonable by assessing a number of factors, including those that are outlined below.

1 **A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:**

- 1.1 refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- 1.2 refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
- 1.3 refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
- 1.4 insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
- 1.5 introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- 1.6 makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- 1.7 changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- 1.8 repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- 1.9 refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where our complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed;
- 1.10 seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- 1.11 makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

2 **A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:**

- 2.1 maliciously;

- 2.2 aggressively;
- 2.3 using threats, intimidation or violence;
- 2.4 using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence;
- 2.5 knowing it to be false;
- 2.6 using falsified information;
- 2.7 publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers or other public forums.

3 A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if it is manifestly unjustified, inappropriate, or an improper use of formal procedure.

In assessing this, the School shall have regard to all the circumstances of the case and the nature of the complaint itself rather than the nature of the complainant. In assessing all of the circumstances of the case the School will consider a range of factors including:

- 3.1 whether a complaint has reasonable foundation;
- 3.2 the history and context of the complaint (and any evidence where relevant);
- 3.3 whether the time and cost of investigating the complaint is proportionate to the issue(s) complained of;
- 3.4 whether an investigation of the complaint is likely to cause a disproportionate or unjustified level of disruption, irritation or distress;
- 3.5 unexplained delay in raising a complaint or issue;
- 3.6 if the purpose of the complaint is to obtain an outcome which is unavailable via the complaints procedure, such as a claim for compensation, damages or a refund of fees paid;
- 3.7 any evidence of a complaint being brought for an improper purpose.

Whenever possible, the Director will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before dismissing a complaint as unreasonable.

It is open to a complainant to request that a complaints panel be convened to determine the single issue of whether the School's dismissal of the complainant's original complaint(s) was justified.