

HIGHGATE SCHOOL

Complaints Procedure

Statement

Pupils, carers and parents are encouraged, through this procedure and through the pastoral structures which allow parents and pupils throughout the Foundation (including pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage) to make contact with well-placed staff, to raise concerns or to make complaints easily and without anxiety and in the knowledge that concerns and complaints will be treated seriously, impartially and, except where disclosure is legally required, confidentially. This procedure is available to all parents via the School's website and in the joining information and handbooks provided for parents. Parents of prospective pupils registered for entry are provided with a copy.

Informal resolution

- Resolution

Parents or carers should wherever possible seek an early and informal resolution of all concerns. The School will wish to take whatever measures are necessary to sort out any problems effectively before they turn a cause into a complaint; such measures will include some or all of the following: giving advice or reassurance; explaining the context to an incident or decision; gathering information from other staff or from pupils; finding information from other sources; referring the concern or potential complaint to a senior colleague; reviewing or amending practice; giving feed-back to parents; apologising for mistakes or oversights.

- Making contact

A parent or carer with a concern or potential complaint should normally first contact their child's Class or Form Teacher (Nursery to Year 8) or Housemaster (Years 9 – 13), although there may be occasions where the first contact may be with an alternative, normally more senior, teacher. Other staff (for example, a Subject Coordinator, Head of Department, Assistant Principal or Head, Director of Studies or Deputy Head) may need to be involved or consulted if this teacher cannot resolve the matter alone.

- Record-keeping

Class or Form Teachers and Housemasters keep a written record of concerns raised with them and the date on which they were received. In common with other correspondence from parents, details of concerns made in this way are kept on pupils' confidential files.

- Time-frame

In the event that a parent or carer (or a pupil using this procedure exceptionally) remains dissatisfied that a satisfactory resolution has not been reached through the School's response and within a reasonable time (normally ten School days), then the parent is entitled to proceed with a formal written complaint in accordance with the procedure below.

Formal Complaints

- Stage 1 - Formal Resolution by a Principal

If the concern or complaint has not been resolved informally the parent or carer should put it in writing, stating that a complaint is being made, addressed either to the Principal Deputy Head (Senior School), the Principal of the Junior School or the Principal of the Pre-Preparatory School (*a Principal*), who will decide after consideration the appropriate course of action to take. At this point a formal complaint will be registered and acknowledged. Where necessary, the Principal will meet with the parent or carer, within ten School days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter and if possible to reach a resolution at this stage. Where a complaint is received during a School holiday, it will be deemed to have reached the School on the first full School day following its arrival. It may be necessary to carry out further investigations. The Principal will keep written records of all complaints, and of meetings held in relation to them. Once the Principal is satisfied that all the relevant facts have been established, a response to the parent's or carer's complaint will be made and the parent will be informed in writing, within fifteen School days: the nature of the response will depend on the nature of the complaint but it will always give a judgement whether and to what extent, if at all, the complaint is justified, and reasons; the response may include actions which the School intends to take or a decision. A parent or carer who is not satisfied should proceed to the next stage.

- Stage 2 - Formal Resolution by Appeal to the Head Master

If Stage 1 has not resolved the complaint satisfactorily the parent should write to the Head Master within fifteen School days stating why an appeal for resolution by the Head Master is requested and, wherever possible, the action which the parent or carer wishes the School to take to resolve the problem. The procedure to be followed by the Head Master will involve the same steps, timescale, record keeping and form of response as set out for resolution by a Principal in Stage 1. A parent or carer who is not satisfied, after receiving the Head Master's decision, should proceed to Stage 3.

A parent or carer of a pupil in the Senior School may, for complaints of a particularly serious kind (and a parent or carer of a pupil in any part of the Foundation for a complaint relating to the actions or conduct of a Principal), may choose to address the complaint directly to the Head Master, in which case Stage 2, Formal Resolution by Appeal to the Head Master, will be dealt with jointly by the Head Master and a Governor.

- Stage 3 – Independent Resolution

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If Stage 2 has not resolved a complaint satisfactorily, the parent or carer should write within ten School days to The Secretary to the Foundation, Highgate School, North Road, London N6 4AY, who will acknowledge the letter of complaint within five School days. A Panel of three, consisting of two Governors (who have not been involved in the complaint up to that point) and one person of standing (usually a serving or retired Head) not connected with the management or governance of the School, will be convened to hear the complaint, normally within twenty School days. The Secretary to the Foundation, unless he is the object of the complaint, will be present to act as clerk to the Panel. Members of the Panel will have access

to all relevant documentation and will be able to ask the School and the parent or carer for any other relevant information or documentation. It is intended that the process should not be legalistic. Parents may be accompanied at this meeting by their daughter or son and by one other person (eg relative, friend or a relevant specialist). If possible the Panel will resolve the parent's or carer's concern without further investigation. Where further investigation is needed, the Panel will decide how to carry out the investigation. After due consideration of all relevant facts, the Panel will give written findings in response to the complaint: the findings will depend on the nature of the complaint but the Panel will always give a judgement whether and to what extent, if at all, the complaint is justified, and the Panel's reasons; the findings may include recommendations or actions which the Panel requires the School to take. The findings of the panel will be final. A copy of the findings will be sent to the parent or carer, Head Master and Governors (at the School address) and any person who is the object of the complaint.

Confidentiality

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 162A of the 2002 Act, as amended, requests due access to them.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

- A record of complaints is kept for at least three years for any pupil in the Foundation.
- Parents of pupils in the EYFS may also contact Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) or ISI (the Independent Schools' Inspectorate) to make a complaint should they wish.

Ofsted may be contacted by writing or e-mailing or ringing:

Ofsted

Royal Exchange Buildings

St Ann's Square

Manchester

M2 7LA

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

08456 014772 (8am to 6pm, Monday – Friday)

Independent Schools Inspectorate may be contacted by writing or emailing or ringing:

CAP House
9 - 12 Long Lane
London
EC1A 9HA

Telephone 020 7600 0100
Fax 020 7776 8849

Other relevant policies

For complaints relating to admissions, a separate appeals procedure exists which is outlined in the School Admissions Policy.

Appendix 1: Summary of time scales for a complaint

	Initial response by School	Investigation and response
Informal	Within 10 School days	Included in initial response
Formal	Within 10 School days	Within 15 School days
Appeal	Within 10 School days	Within 15 School days
Independent	Within 5 School days	Within 20 School days

Appendix 2: Number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the year 2008-2009

Schools are required to publish the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding year. In 2008-2009, no complaints were registered under this procedure.

ⁱ *The Principal may invite the parent or carer to a meeting in which s/he will set out his or her response which s/he will subsequently confirm in writing to the parent or carer within five school days.*