

Complaints Procedure

Policy Owner(s)	Bursar
Approved by	Governing Body
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ISSRs 2014	Part 7 Paragraph 33 Part 6 Paragraph 32(3)(f)

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1. Statement

[ISSRs 2014 Part 7, Paragraph 33(a) and (b); Part 6, Paragraph 32(3)(f)]

- 1.1 Pupils and parents¹ are encouraged, through this procedure and through the pastoral structures which allow parents and pupils throughout the School (including pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage) to make contact with well-placed staff, to make complaints easily and without anxiety and in the knowledge that 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. Although the procedure is made available to parents of prospective pupils, it is not available for use by them; it may only be used by parents of current pupils. Complaints by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under the Complaints Procedure only if the complaint was originally raised when the pupil to which the complaint related was still registered as a pupil at the School.
- 1.2 The School will be mindful of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in the application of this policy.
- 1.3 Although the School endeavours to manage complaints in an open and transparent manner, parents should be aware that there may be circumstances which mean the School is unable to share complete details about how a complaint has been handled by the School, the evidence collated, steps taken in response or other related matters. This could be the case even when a complaint is upheld. For example, this may be because such information constitutes sensitive third-party data (for example belonging to a staff member, pupil or other parent), legal or regulatory requirements prohibit disclosure, or withholding information is in accordance with specific instructions from a statutory agency. This list is not exhaustive.
- 1.4 Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them. There may also be other circumstances in which the School is required to share information relating to a concern or a complaint in order to comply with its legal or regulatory obligations.
- 1.5 "Parent(s)" means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for a current pupil about whom the complaint relates.
- 1.6 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(s) in good faith.

¹ All references to 'parents' in this policy includes parents/carers/guardians.

2. Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

[ISSRs 2014 Part 7, Paragraph 33(d)]

- 2.1 Parents should wherever possible seek an early and informal resolution of all complaints. 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 may 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 potential complaint to a senior colleague; reviewing or amending practice; giving feedback to parents; apologising for mistakes or oversights.
- 2.2 A parent with a potential complaint should normally first contact their child's Class or Form Teacher (Reception to Year 8) or Head of House (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, Principal, Senior Deputy Heads, Assistant Head or Deputy Head) may need to be involved or consulted if this teacher cannot resolve the matter alone.
- 2.3 Class or Form Teachers and Heads of Houses keep a written record of complaints raised with them and the date on which they were received. In common with other correspondence from parents, details of complaints made in this way are kept on pupils' confidential files.
- 2.4 In the event that no satisfactory resolution has been reached through the School's response and within a reasonable time (normally 10 school days), then the parent (or a pupil using this procedure exceptionally) is entitled to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Complaints Procedure.
- 2.5 If the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors whose contact details are available on the School website.

3. Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

[ISSRs 2014 Part 7, Paragraph 33(e)]

- 3.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head. The Head may require further information from the parents to help clarify the scope and nature of their concerns. The Head may, in some circumstances, deem it appropriate to nominate a staff member to hear the complaint and manage the Stage 2 complaint process. The Head (or their nominee) will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- 3.2 At this point a formal complaint will be registered. 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.

- 3.3 In most cases, the Head (or their nominee) will, where necessary, meet/speak to the parents concerned, within 10 school days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. It may be necessary for further investigations to be carried out. The Head (or their nominee) will determine who should carry out any investigation and this may be someone external to the School.
- 3.4 Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- 3.5 Once the Head (or their nominee) 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 writing². The Head (or their nominee) will also give reasons for their decision. In most cases, the Head (or their nominee) will make their decision and provide the parents with reasons within 15 school days of the complaint being put in writing or, if held, the date of the meeting with the parents whichever is later (or following the provision of any further clarificatory information about the complaint to the Head, if so requested).
- 3.6 If the complaint is against the Head, the complaint should be made to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors will nominate someone to determine the complaint. The Stage 2 process described above will then be followed as if the references to the Head (or their nominee) is to the individual nominated by the Chair of Governors to determine the complaint against the Head.
- 3.7 If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Complaints Procedure.

4. Stage 3 – Independent Resolution

[ISSRs 2014 Part 7, Paragraph 33(f), (g), (h), (i)]

- 4.1 If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they should do so in writing to The Secretary and Clerk to the Governing Body, Highgate School, North Road, London N6 4AY within 10 school days of receiving the decision at Stage 2, setting out their grounds of appeal. The Secretary and Clerk to the Governing Body will acknowledge the letter of complaint within 5 school days. Any supporting evidence which the parents wish to rely on should also be provided with their grounds of appeal. To the extent the parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated due to extenuating circumstances which have impeded the parents from taking action, the parents should request an extension in writing. Such a request should be made to the Secretary and Clerk to the Governing Body in advance of the original deadline, setting out the further time period requested and the reason for this. This will be considered. In the event the parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated (including to the extent applicable any extensions if agreed) the School reserves the right to conclude the complaint process and not progress the matter to Stage 3.

² The person hearing the complaint may invite the parent to a meeting in which they will set out their response, which they will subsequently confirm in writing to the parent within five school days.

- 4.2 A Panel of three who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, consisting of two Governors and one person of standing who is independent of the management and running of the School, will be convened to hear the complaint, normally within 20 school days. The Secretary and Clerk to the Governing Body, unless he is the object of the complaint, will arrange a relevant person to be present to act as clerk to the Panel and appoint one Panel member to act as Chair of the Panel.
- 4.3 Members of the Panel will have access to all relevant documentation and will be able to ask the School and the parent for any other relevant information or documentation. If the Panel or clerk to the Panel deems it necessary, they may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the meeting or further investigation be carried out. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than 5 school days prior to the meeting.
- 4.4 It is intended that the process should not be legalistic. Parents may attend the meeting and be accompanied by one other person (e.g. relative, or friend acting in a non-professional capacity). The Stage 2 decision-taker may also be invited to the meeting and shall be entitled to be accompanied by one other person if they wish. Legal representation will not be appropriate, and the companion should not be a lawyer. The identity of the companions should be confirmed to clerk to the Panel as soon as possible and by no later than 2 school days before the meeting. The Panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend. If it is deemed appropriate, the School reserves the right to have legal representation at the meeting.
- 4.5 The remit of the Panel shall be at the discretion of the Chair of Governors and the manner in which the meeting is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel.
- 4.6 If possible, the Panel will resolve the parent's concern without further investigation. Where further investigation is needed, the Panel will decide how to carry out the investigation.
- 4.7 After due consideration of the merits of the complaint and all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and decide whether **to:**
- i. dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part;
 - ii. uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and
 - iii. make recommendations for the School to consider. Stage 3 Panels cannot require that any financial compensation is paid to parents or otherwise obligate the School to take particular steps.
- 4.8 The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, **within 15 school days of the meeting** (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following the meeting).
- 4.9 The decision of the Panel will be final. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will be (a) provided to the parent and, where relevant, any person who is the object of the complaint as well as the Chair of

Governors and the Stage 2 decision-maker, by electronic mail or by post, at the discretion of the Panel and (b) available for inspection on the School premises by the Governors and the Head.

5. Persistent Correspondence

5.1 Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this will be regarded by the School as vexatious and outside the scope of this Complaints Procedure.

6. Records of Complaints and Confidentiality

[ISSRs 2014 Part 7, Paragraph 33(j), (k)]

6.1 Written records of formal complaints are kept (regardless of whether they are upheld) in line with the School's Retention Schedule. These records indicate whether the complaints are resolved at Stage 2 or 3 and the action taken by the School as a result of the complaints.

6.2 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); and
- The Panel's written decision.

6.3 This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the School's *Privacy Notice*, 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*.

6.4 The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel meetings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its *Privacy Notice* and *Retention Schedule*. All records relating to complaints shall be treated as confidential. In addition to where requested by the Secretary of State or an inspector (see above), there may be other circumstances where disclosure of the substance of a complaint or particular confidential records relating to

it is required, for example, where there is a legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligation (e.g. in response to a subject access request) which prevails over the requirement to maintain the records as confidential.

7. Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

[EYFS Requirement 3.98; 3.99]

- 7.1 Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of having received the complaint.
- 7.2 Parents of pupils in the EYFS may complain directly Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) or ISI (the Independent Schools' Inspectorate) if they believe the provider is not meeting the EYFS requirements.

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

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

0300 123 1231 (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

info@isi.net

Telephone 020 7600 0100

Other relevant policies

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

8. Number of Formal Complaints

[ISSRs 2014 Part 6, Paragraph 32(3)(f)]

The number of complaints first registered under the formal procedure was:

2024-2025:

Pre-Prep: 0

Junior School: 0

Senior School: 5

Appendix 1: Summary of time scales for a complaint

[ISSRs 2014 Part 7, Paragraph 33(c)]

	Initial meeting (from receipt of complaint)	Response (from date of meeting)
Stage 1	Normally within 10 school days	n/a
Stage 2	Normally within 10 school days	Normally within 15 school days
Stage 3	Normally within 20 school days	Normally within 15 school days

Please note that during School holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although the School will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay. It may also take longer to resolve a complaint during periods of significant disruption to School life or as a consequence of unavoidable staff absence, however deviation from the normal timescale for resolving a complaint during term time will only occur on an exceptional basis, and the School will take all reasonable steps to limit any such delay. The School expects parents to engage in the process in a reasonable, constructive and responsive manner to help ensure matters can be dealt with in a timely way and in line with the targets set out in this Procedure.

Table of substantive changes

Paragraph	Detail of Change	Date	Owner
All	Reformatted and reviewed to streamline the process Paragraph 7 – numbers updated	September 2023	JCP
All	Paragraph 7 – numbers updated	September 2024	JCP
All	Paragraph numbers added; Stage 2 and Stage 3 expanded and process clarified, including outcomes	November 2025	JCP

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