



Complaints Procedure (Parents) Policy

Policy number	BS018 / ISI 33a
Applies to	Whole School
Endorsed by	Head Master
Responsibility	Head Master
Date reviewed	March 2021
Next review	March 2022

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Introduction

Bedford School prides itself on the quality of its teaching and the pastoral care it provides to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, it will be dealt with by the School in accordance with this Policy. This Policy is made available on the website for staff, parents of pupils and prospective pupils and pupils in hard copy on request.

Policy Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice; it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote parents' and pupils' confidence in our ability to safeguard and promote welfare. 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, reviewing our systems and procedures in light of the circumstances. We need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. We recognise that a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, which would be damaging to relationships and also to our school culture. Parents and pupils should never feel (or be made to feel) that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or his opportunities at this school.

Policy Status

This Policy has been approved by the Governing Body of the School and provides guidelines for handling complaints. It takes account of paragraph 33 of schedule I to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (SI 2014/3283). The policy applies to all sections of the school. The procedures set out below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and circumstances of each case. Certain parts of the procedures can only be carried out during term time.

Application

The following procedure applies to all pupils and school issues but it is particularly important under National Minimum Boarding Standard 18 that boarders and parents of boarders are aware of its application. In respect of boarders and their parents, if they have particular complaints about Boarding Welfare, they can report those complaints directly to Ofsted and the Local Children's Services Department if they feel the issue is not being handled effectively by the School. Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue or if the Head Master expels or asks a boy to leave and the parents seek a Governors review of the decision.

Parent

The term parent includes a current or prospective parent or legal guardian or education guardian, and may at our discretion include a parent whose child has recently left the School.

Management of Complaints

The Head Master expects all senior members of staff to be responsible for the co-ordination and administration of the Complaints Procedure. Complaints that are unresolved will normally be directed to the Vice Master, Bursar, Deputy Head (Academic) or Prep School Headmaster who will:

- be the point of contact while the matter remains unresolved and keep records;

- arrange assistance for parents who require this, for example, because of a disability;
- ensure that the complaint is centrally recorded and monitored with appropriate confidentiality;
- report regularly to the Head with respect to complaints.

Complaints received directly from boys are dealt with under a separate procedure, a copy of which is made available on the School website.

Welfare of boarders: All boys are provided with appropriate helplines which they can ring in case of problems or distress. Parents may also contact an inspector, the police or the Children's Services Department if they have concerns about the safety or welfare of a child and do not feel that this will be resolved by dealing with the school. Contact information of the Independent Schools Inspectorate is: CAP House 9 - 12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA. Tel: 020 7600 0100. The Designated Safeguarding Lead is able to provide the name and contact details for the Bedford Borough Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). These are also given in the Contacts section of the school's Safeguarding Children and Child Protection Policy.

Complaints Procedure

Complaints made with the school are dealt with via a three-stage process.

1. Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

1.1 It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally. Examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, or about allocation of privileges or responsibilities, or about a timetable clash or some other aspect of the School's systems or equipment, or a billing error. Complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation are taken very seriously and may need to be dealt with at Stage 2 without action at Stage 1. The School will acknowledge a written notification by fax/email letter or telephone within two working days¹ of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable during holidays.

1.2 If parents have a complaint concerning education matters they should normally contact their son's teacher or tutor as appropriate. In many cases, the matter will be resolved quickly by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the teacher or tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for the teacher/tutor to consult the Head of Department or Housemaster, as appropriate, who will then deal with the matter.

1.3 If the complaint concerns a pastoral matter, parents should normally contact the appropriate Tutor or Housemaster.

1.4 A problem over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised first of all with the member of staff who imposed it and, if not resolved, with the Vice Master or Prep School Headmaster.

1.5 A query relating to financial matters (for example, fees) should be stated in writing to the Bursar.

¹ When we use the term "working days" we mean Monday to Friday during term time. It may take longer to process complaints received during the last few weeks of term or during holidays due to the availability of staff.

1.6 Complaints made directly to a Head of Department or Housemaster may be referred to the relevant teacher or tutor unless it is felt appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.

1.7 On occasion, complaints may be dealt with by members of the Core Management Team (including the Head) but still be resolved informally and successfully.

1.8 Should the matter not be resolved within 15 working days then parents may proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Policy.

2. Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

2.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis as described in Stage 1, or if it has not been resolved within 15 working days, then the parents should put their complaint in writing² to the Head Master. He will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. This must be done even where the informal process has been conducted with the Head Master. If parents require assistance with their request, for example, because of a disability, the School will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.³

2.2 In most cases, the Head Master will meet with or speak to the parents concerned, normally within five working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

2.3 It may be necessary for the Head Master to carry out further investigations or to ask a senior member of staff to act as Investigator. The Investigator may ask for additional information from you and may wish to speak to you personally and to others who may have knowledge of the circumstances including, if appropriate, your son.

2.4 Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept.

2.5 Once the Head Master 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 Head Master will also give reasons for this decision. The Head Master's aim will be to inform any complainant of the outcome of an investigation and the resolution of the complaint with 28 working days from the first receipt of the complaint.

2.6 If parents are dissatisfied with the Head Master's decision under Stage 2 they may proceed to Stage 3 of this Policy.

2.7 Complaints about the Head Master will always be dealt with under the Stage 2 - Formal Resolution process. Parents who wish to make a complaint about the Head Master should put their complaint in writing to the Chairman of Governors. The Chairman will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

3. Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

3.1 Introduction and Scope of the Hearing

The Complaints Panel hearing is a review of the actions taken by the Head Master at Stage 2 of this Procedure. The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint, which have not been previously

² When we refer to notifications or requests in writing, both letter and email are acceptable.

³ Please note that the School will be very happy to arrange assistance if required, through the person coordinating complaints, in the event of any difficulty in submitting any request in writing required by this Policy.

raised as part of the complaints procedure. The Panel will not seek to substitute its own judgment for that of the Head where the Head's decision falls within the bounds of what a reasonable Head, acting proportionately, might have decided given all the facts.

3.2 Notification

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they should write to the Chairman of the Governors, within five working days of receipt of the Head Master's decision, requesting a Panel hearing. Parents must state in their letter full details of the complaint, the outcome sought, the grounds on which they wish to appeal against the decision of the Head Master and enclosing all relevant documents and full contact details. Parents should also include a list of the documents which they believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to see. If parents require assistance with their request, for example, because of a disability, the School will be happy to make appropriate arrangements. The parents' letter will normally be acknowledged by telephone, fax, e-mail or letter within five working days during term time, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale.

3.3 Convening the Panel

The Chairman of Governors will then convene a Complaints Panel to consider the complaint. Please note, a Panel will only be convened if Stages 1 and 2 above have been completed. The Panel will consist of at least three members who have no prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint. The Panel shall be comprised of School Governor members (one of whom will be the Chair of the Panel) and one Panel member who will be independent of the governance and management of the school. The school has identified persons of standing within the local community, one of whom will sit as the independent member of the Complaints Panel for any given complaint. The Panel hearing will continue unless you formally withdraw your complaint in writing.

3.4 Notice of hearing

Every effort will be made to enable the Panel hearing to take place within 15 working days of the receipt of your request. As soon as reasonably practical, and in any event at least five working days before the hearing, you will be sent written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the Panel members who will be present.

3.5 Attendance

You will be invited to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, teacher, or friend. Legal representation is not necessary or normally appropriate but if you do wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, acting in their professional capacity, please notify the School at least seven working days before the hearing. In exceptional circumstances and only if agreed by all parties, your child who is the subject of the hearing, aged 13 and above may be allowed to attend part or all of the hearing if the Chair of the Panel considers it would be in the interests of fairness to do so. Copies of additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Panel Chair at least three clear working days prior to the hearing. If you choose not to attend, the Panel may hear your complaint and may reach a finding and conclude the matter in your absence.

3.6 The Role of the Panel

The role of the Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaint by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties;

- any representations made by you, the Head Master or other members of staff.

3.7 Powers of the Panel

It is not within the powers of the Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils, or parents. The Panel may make findings and recommendations on these or any other issues to the Head Master or to the full body of School Governors as appropriate.

3.8 Hearing

All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn and all present will be entitled to make their own notes. The Panel Chair will arrange for a person to take hand written minutes of the proceedings.

3.9 Evidence

The Chair will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel is under no obligation to hear witnesses but may do so if it wishes.

3.10 Conduct

All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the Chair may terminate or adjourn the hearing. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with the conduct of the hearing must say so before the hearing proceeds further and his /her comment will be recorded.

3.11 Adjournment

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. However, the Chair may adjourn the hearing at his/her discretion for further investigation of any relevant issue including taking legal advice.

3.12 Decision

After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel shall reach a decision unless there is an agreed position. If, after establishing the facts, the Panel members consider that the complaint is made out, they will uphold the complaint. If they consider that the complaint is not made out, they will dismiss the complaint. They will make these decisions on the balance of probabilities. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations may be notified orally at the hearing or subsequently and shall be confirmed in writing to you by electronic mail where appropriate within ten working days. If you do not wish to receive the decision by electronic mail, a copy will be given or posted to you. The decisions, findings and any recommendations will be made available for inspection on the School premises by the Governing Body and the Head Master. Reasons for the decision will be given. The decision may include recommendations and will be sent to you, the Chairman of Governors, the Head Master and, where relevant, any person about whom the complaint has been made.

3.13 Private proceeding

Any hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding and no records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceedings shall be made directly or indirectly available to the press or other media.

3.14 Records and Confidentiality

A written record will be kept of all formal complaints and of whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or proceed to a panel hearing. The record will also include details of action taken by the school, regardless of whether or not the complaint was upheld. The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure (Stage 2 or beyond) during the preceding year will be made available upon request from the Head Master's PA. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except to the extent required by paragraph 33(k) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations (SI 2014/3283), that is where access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of an inspection conducted by a body under Section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, or under other legal authority. In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will normally be destroyed following each school inspection. In appropriate circumstances, some details will be retained for a further period as necessary.