

Durston House

Complaints Policy

Aim of the Policy

- to establish a whole-school approach to receiving and logging complaints that is compliant with relevant regulatory standards. [*The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014*]

Objectives of the Policy

- to clarify what a complaint is
- to establish procedures for the receiving and logging of complaints by parents
 - to explain the procedure for staff members when receiving a complaint
 - to explain the procedure for the Senior Management Team (SMT) when receiving and logging complaints.

Introduction

It is a regular occurrence in schools to receive complaints from the different constituencies that make up the school community. It is important to remember that ‘When complaints are freely heard, deeply considered and speedily reformed, then it is the utmost bound of civil liberty attained that wise men look for.’ (Milton). Durston House will take seriously any complaint made, do its best to address such a complaint and make sure that it is duly recorded and the Headmaster properly informed. This Policy applies to the whole school, including the EYFS setting.

What is a Parental Complaint?

A parental complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or annoyance with something or someone. For the purposes of this policy it is incumbent on the school to take care when drawing a distinction between a ‘concern’ and ‘complaint’. Both can be regarded as formal expressions of dissatisfaction or annoyance, in which a disaffected parent (or parents) seeks to meet or to write to a member of the school staff about an issue. The school is aware of its duty to keep written records of all complaints, whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing, and to record in written form any action taken by the school as a result of any complaint, regardless of whether it is upheld or not.

Complaints by Parents

A parent wishing to make a complaint should

- make every effort to be clear about the issue.
- raise the issue initially with the Form Teacher, by telephone, in writing or in person.
- if they feel it is more serious, or if the issue concerns a member of staff, raise the issue with a member of the Senior Management Team (SMT), by telephone, or in writing.
- expect to be listened to.
- expect the complaint to be noted.
- expect an investigation be made.
- expect reasonable attempts to be made to address the nature of the complaint.
- expect a response by telephone or in writing, at a later date (no later than one week after the complaint).

Form Teachers should

- contact the parent to acknowledge receipt of any complaint.
- discern whether it is appropriate to discuss the issue with the parent.
- if appropriate, discuss the issue.
- if not appropriate, inform the parent that he/she will pass on the complaint to the Head of Pre-Prep/Junior School or the Deputy Head.
- reassure the parent that the complaint will be looked into.
- seek to address the nature of the complaint.
- write up the initial communication and outcome on the Oasis database.
- hand the form in to the School Office for filing and send a copy to the Deputy Head.

SMT members should

- contact the parent to acknowledge receipt of any complaint.
- discuss the issue with the parent.
- seek clarification from the parent, if unsure.
- expect the parent to provide evidence to justify the complaint.
- seek to reassure the parent.
- confirm when and how a response will be given to the complaint.
- investigate the complaint.
- seek to address the nature of the complaint.
- contact other parents who are involved if necessary.
- consult the Headmaster or other members of SMT if necessary.
- record the complaint on the form, Complaint by Parent, found in the folder Groups/Operations/PoliciesProceduresGeneral/Complaints/Complaints Template.
- send by email a copy of the form to the Headmaster.

The Headmaster should

- consider the complaint carefully.
- seek further clarification from, and discuss with relevant members of SMT, if considered necessary.
- consider whether further involvement by the Headmaster is needed.
- seek to address the nature of the complaint.
- keep careful written records of any investigation and its outcomes.
- respond to the parent verbally, in a meeting, or in writing, if deemed appropriate.

Protocols for Resolution

The manner in which a complaint is made and dealt with can be classified as follows:

- **Stage 1: Informal Resolution.** It is hoped that most concerns (complaints) can and will be resolved, quickly and informally, within seven days.
- **Stage 2: Formal Resolution.** A complex or more serious complaint – for example, an issue that is presented in writing to the Headmaster and which makes clear the need for a formal resolution of the matter – will normally lead to a meeting with the Headmaster within one week of the Headmaster’s receipt of the communication. It may be necessary for the Headmaster to carry out further investigations. When the Headmaster is satisfied that he has been in receipt of all relevant facts, a conclusion will be reached, a decision will be made, and parents will be informed of this conclusion and decision in writing, usually within one week of such a meeting with the Headmaster.
- **Stage 3: Panel Hearing:** If parents are not satisfied with the Formal Resolution, as outlined above, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure, as outlined below.

Stage 3: Panel Hearing

Upon receipt of a written response, which seeks to resolve an issue that has been the cause of a complaint, a parent or parents who are not satisfied with the decision may proceed to a ‘Panel Hearing’. He, she or they should

- write to the Headmaster within 21 days, informing him of the decision to seek a ‘Panel Hearing’.
- expect the Headmaster to refer the matter to the Chairman of the Governors or, in his absence, another named Governor.
- expect the Chairman of Governors (or named Governor) to arrange for the matter to be referred to a ‘Panel Hearing’.
- expect that at least three panel members, one of whom will be independent of the management and running of the school, and none of whom will have been previously directly involved in matters relating to the complaint, will be appointed by the Chairman of the Governors, or named Governor, on behalf of the Board of Governors to act in the matter.
- be prepared for such a hearing to take place as soon as is practicable and normally within 21 days.

Members of the panel of such a hearing may require further particulars of any complaint to be supplied to all parties in writing not later than seven days before the date of the hearing. (Any such particulars received within seven days of the hearing will be disregarded and inadmissible to the panel.) In the event that a complaint involves or relates to a teacher, the latter will be kept fully informed in writing of the procedure being adopted in relation to the management of the complaint and supplied with copies of all documentation. The teacher, too, will have the right to make representations to the panel.

The hearing will proceed in the following manner:

- A parent or parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person, usually a relative or friend. (The school will not preclude legal representation at a panel hearing.)
- If possible the panel will resolve the complaint at the hearing without the need for further investigation. Should the panel decide that further investigation is required, however, it will be decided at the hearing how a further investigation should be carried out and a date for conclusion determined.
- In the event of a further investigation, the panel will reconvene to make a decision, with possible recommendations. The process will be completed within fourteen days of the initial hearing, wherever possible, but within twenty-eight days in any event, unless otherwise agreed by all parties.
- The panel will write to the parents to inform them of their decision, which will be final.
- The findings of the panel, together with any recommendations, will be sent in writing to the Headmaster, Governors and, where the complaint relates to an individual, to that individual.
- The findings will be fully recorded and kept confidentially for at least three years.

Evaluation of this Policy

This policy will be evaluated annually, by the school, amended where necessary and approved by SMT.

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Appendix 1

1. Complaints with regard to the Headmaster

In the event that a complaint refers specifically to the Headmaster, the matter should be referred in the first instance to the Chairman of the Board of Governors, through the office of the Clerk to the Governors at the school address.

2. Variations to Timing of Complaints and Responses

As specified throughout this policy, response times of no later than a week, following a complaint, are the norm. If a complaint, or a request for an external hearing, is received during the final week of a term, or during a holiday period, a response can be expected within one week of the start of the next term.

Should a parent wish to make a complaint after a pupil has left the school, this should take the form of a letter to the Headmaster (or Chairman of Governors) within three months of the pupil leaving the school.

3. Rights of Access to Information about a Complaint

Any member of staff, parent, or parent on behalf of his/her child, about whom a complaint has been made, has a right of access to information about that complaint, in accordance with the school's Data Protection Policy. Otherwise, in all cases correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except in so far as is required of the school by paragraph 33 (k) of the *Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014* – that is, where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Education and Skills Act requests access to them, or where any other legal obligation prevails.

4. Variations with regard to Complaints in the EYFS setting

It is recognised that distinct arrangements should be in place for the parents of Reception pupils (that is, pupils in the EYFS setting) as follows:

- (i) Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome within 28 days (during term times – that is, when the school is in session). The record of such complaints will be made available to OFSTED and/or the Independent Schools Inspectorate on request. (In the unlikely event that a complaint is received during the summer holidays – a period that exceeds 28 days – a variation of timing may, of necessity, be agreed.)
- (ii) Should parents believe that the school is not meeting EYFS requirements, the school will make available details of how to contact OFSTED (Contact Centre Telephone 0300 123 1231) and the Independent Schools Inspectorate (Telephone 0207 600 0100).

5. Record of Complaints made in the previous Academic Year

The school will make available on an annual basis information with regard to the number of formal complaints made in the previous academic year and the outcome.

2018-2019	Number of Formal Complaints	One
	Complaints Upheld	None