

Complaints Policy and Procedure

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The Trust's Complaints Procedure is applicable to all schools, and must legally be made available to any parent or prospective parent on request. All parents should be made aware of the existence of the Procedure (e.g. via school web site, prospectus or newsletter) and a copy of the Procedure should be kept in the school office.

When dealing with complaints schools should follow the 'Guidance on dealing with complaints'.

A. Complaints Concerning the School

[NB: Sections in square brackets are to be included in Hub version for schools only, and should not be included in the version for parents, which is attached as Appendix 1.]

Appendix 1 is a second copy of this procedure, omitting all sections in square brackets. That version of the Complaints Procedure must be made available on request to all parents and prospective parents.

Introduction

[NAME] School welcomes suggestions and comments from parents, and takes seriously concerns or complaints which may arise, as they can help us to improve the educational experience that we provide.

The purpose of the procedure

- The aim of this procedure is to achieve a fair, effective and as rapid as possible resolution of parental concerns about the education and/or welfare of individual children in the care of Trust schools.
- *[Parents with broader concerns about school or Trust policies may raise these directly with the Head or Chief Executive.]*
- *[Where a more specific procedure (such as the Trust's exclusions policy) applies, and parents have exhausted their right of appeal under that procedure, this procedure may not be used to give parents a second opportunity to challenge the disputed decision, as this would not be "fair", "effective" or "rapid", as required by the first bullet point above.]*
- The expression 'parents' is used for those having parental responsibility for the child.
- These procedures apply to all parents of pupils and to prospective parents of the school. A copy of this procedure is available on the school's website and can also be obtained on request from the school office.

Timing

Effective and fair resolution of concerns usually requires that they are brought to the School/Trust's attention promptly, which should normally be within three months of the relevant event(s). Complaints may be heard after this time if the Chief Executive or Complaints Panel considers that the delay has not prejudiced an effective and fair resolution.

[Proportionality and minor complaints]

[Responses to complaints should always be proportionate to the issues, with primary regard to their importance in the onward education or welfare of the pupil concerned. Complaints about minor issues should be addressed with a light touch.]

Professional judgment

Where the judgment of a member of the Trust's staff is subject to complaint, the Chief Executive/Complaints Panel will determine whether the judgment was exercised fairly and reasonably according to the Trust's standards. There may be more than one fair and reasonable response to a situation. The Chief Executive or Complaints Panel will not normally substitute their decision for that of the staff concerned. Accordingly, where a complaint is upheld, the Chief Executive/Complaints Panel will usually make recommendations to be acted upon by the School concerned.

Legal proceedings

Where legal proceedings exist between the Trust and the parents/pupil, this procedure may be subject to the constraints of the legal process. *[For example, in personal injury cases, our insurers may not allow us to disclose information outside the formal legal process.]*

Record Keeping

A written record of all complaints (which may include notes, correspondence and statements) will be kept at each stage of the procedure, as detailed below, and will include details of whether individual complaints were resolved following a formal or informal procedure, or proceeded to a panel hearing. The record will include details of any action taken by the school as a result, regardless of whether they are upheld. [RHS Bath only: The record will also identify any complaints that relate to boarding provision.]

The written record of complaints will be reviewed regularly by the Head and by [PLEASE SPECIFY].

Records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 [such as the ISI] requests access to them. The record of complaints relating to EYFS must be made available to OFSTED on request.

The number of complaints recorded under the formal procedure during the preceding school year is available to parents of pupils (and prospective pupils) on request from the Head's PA.

Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS)

Complaints relating to EYFS requirements may be addressed to the Independent Schools Inspectorate at CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA, or may be raised by telephone: 020 7600 0100 or via their website: www.isi.net/contact

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their daughter's form or class teacher / Head of Year or Key Stage, as appropriate. In many cases the matter will be resolved straight away by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult with other staff within the school.
- The teacher will make a written record of all complaints, the date on which they were received and any action taken by the school as a result. Should the matter not be resolved within 10 school days or in the event that the member of staff and the parent

fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

PART A: School Level

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head (or Head of the Junior School, as appropriate) as soon as possible. *[In the case of Junior pupils, the Head of the Junior School should keep the Head fully informed.]* The Head (or his or her representative if the Head is not in School) will investigate the complaint. *[The Head should investigate the complaint unless the Head is out of School for a lengthy period. In such cases, it would be appropriate to delegate the investigation to the Deputy Head or other senior member of staff.]* The Head will respond to the parents usually within 10 school days. The Head will respond to complaints relating to the fulfilment of EYFS requirements within 28 days of receipt. *[The Head should respond within the stated timeframe unless there are exceptional circumstances. If a response is delayed, parents should be informed and appraised of the date on which the school will respond.]*

- The Head will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. For all complaints relating to the EYFS, the record of complaints will be kept for at least 3 years.
- The school will also keep a written record of complaints, any action taken by the school as a result, and whether they were resolved at the informal or formal stage or proceeded to a Panel hearing.
- Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents informed of this decision in writing. The Head will also give reasons for his/her decision.
- *[It is important that the Head, or the Head of the Junior School, satisfies herself / himself regarding the quality of the information available and any gaps in the School's performance.]*
- Complaints about the Head should be made directly to the Chief Executive (see part B below).

PART B: Trust Level

- If parents are not satisfied with the Head's response, the parents should write within 10 working days of the Head's response to the Chief Executive of the Trust at The Girls' Day School Trust, 10 Bressenden Place, London, SW1E 5DH. The complaint should clearly identify the main issue(s) of concern and, if possible, indicate the nature of the resolution they are seeking.
- If the complaint is about the Head, the parents should write directly to the Chief Executive of the Trust at The Girls' Day School Trust, 10 Bressenden Place, London, SW1E 5DH. The complaint should clearly identify the main issue(s) of concern, and, if possible, indicate the nature of the resolution that they are seeking.
- The Chief Executive will investigate the matter and will respond to the parents within 15 school days of receiving the complaint. Written records will be kept of all complaints received, the steps taken to investigate the complaint and any action taken as a result. In particularly complex cases, the Chief Executive will advise parents of any extra time needed to investigate properly. *[Following an investigation, any concerns or recommendations for action may be followed up with the Head in writing.]*

- If a complaint is made to the Chief Executive before a formal complaint has been made to the Head, the Chief Executive may refer the matter to the Head for resolution.
- *[NB In order to preserve the Chief Executive's independence, schools should wherever possible approach the Director of Legal for advice on handling a potential complaint at an earlier stage rather than the Chief Executive.]*
- *[If the Chief Executive is only copied in on a letter, the Chief Executive will not respond. Schools should provide the Chief Executive with a copy of any response.]*
- *[It is important that when a complaint is made to Trust Office, schools send all relevant documentation to the Chief Executive as soon as possible so that a response can be sent to the parents within the time limits set by the procedure. Documentation should be clearly indexed. Relevant documentation is likely to include any written complaints made by the parents to the school, notes of any meetings with the parents or the pupil, notes of meetings with other pupils involved (e.g. an alleged bully), notes of any relevant absences, and records of any concerns raised by staff with parents/pupil and actions taken. NB The Chief Executive or his or her representative may need to make her own enquiries of relevant members of staff once she has reviewed the material provided.]*
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, parents are able to proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure for those matters which are within the responsibilities of the school or of the Trust. Where the complaint is against the decision of an external agency or third party, such as an examination board or higher education institution, parents will be advised on the appropriate route for their complaint and, where possible, given information and advice about progressing their concerns.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- If parents wish to have their complaint considered at a Panel Hearing, they should write to the Chairman of the Council of the Trust at the address above, setting out their complaint.
- If a request for a Complaints Panel is made without the matter having previously been investigated by the Chief Executive, then the Chairman will refer the matter for investigation under Stage 2 of this procedure.
- In the interests of resolving the complaint expeditiously, complaints should focus on the main issues. It is helpful if the complainant is able to indicate the nature of the outcome which they are seeking as a means of resolving their complaint.
- The Chairman will then convene a Complaints Panel. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the Trust and its schools. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chairman of the Council, and shall normally include two members of Council who are not directly involved with the relevant school.
- The Clerk of the Panel will deal with administrative issues prior to the hearing. The Clerk will normally be the Director of Legal, or their nominee, but will not provide legal advice to the Panel on any substantive matters. The Clerk's role at the hearing will be limited to advice on procedure.
- A hearing will be scheduled to take place as soon as practical and normally within 25 school days of receipt of the parents' letter. If, despite the best efforts of Trust personnel, a hearing cannot be arranged within this time period the Clerk of the Panel will write to the parents before the expiry of the 25 day period setting out the likely timeframe for the hearing. The hearing will normally be held at Trust Office, but

in cases where it is not reasonable to ask parents and staff to travel long distances, efforts will be made to hold the hearing at premises near the school. *[Where this is not possible, reasonable travel expenses may be available in appropriate cases (e.g. for the parents of full bursary holders).]*

- The parents should supply copies of their previous written complaint to the Head and Chief Executive and any other documentation they may wish to rely on to the Clerk for circulation to the Panel and Head not more than 7 days after the date of notification of the hearing. Documentation must be relevant to those matters set out in the complaint.
- The parents will be supplied with copies of any statements and supporting/background documentation provided by the Head to the Panel not less than 10 school days before the hearing.
- The Panel may refuse to consider matters of which written notice has not been given if doing so appears to them likely to be prejudicial to a fair and effective consideration of the complaint.
- If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to the Chairman's PA not less than 5 school days prior to the hearing, for circulation to all parties.
- The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- The Head will be accompanied by the Chairman (or another appropriate member) of the School Governing Board.
- Conduct of the hearing shall be at the Panel's discretion which will be exercised in the interests of a fair, effective, and appropriately rapid resolution of the complaint. The Chairman of the Panel, or their Clerk, will normally write to the parents before the hearing, having considered the nature of the complaint and the documentary material, to state how the hearing will be conducted. Prior to the hearing, decisions relating to procedure may be dealt with by the Chairman of the Panel acting alone. Should the parents have any questions concerning the Panel's procedure, they should address them to the Chairman of the Panel at Trust Office.
- After due consideration of all relevant facts, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations.
- The Panel will write to the parents normally within 5 working days informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The Panel's findings, and (if any) recommendations will also be sent in writing to the Head, the Chief Executive, the Chairman of Council and, where relevant, the person(s) against whom the complaint was made. *[The Head will then follow up any recommendations directly.]*
- The findings and recommendations referred to may be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about.
- A copy of the findings and recommendations will be available for inspection on the school premises by Council (as proprietor) and the Head.
- The Head and the Trust's Director of Legal (on behalf of the Council) will keep a copy of the findings and recommendations for all complaints which have been dealt with at a Panel hearing under this procedure.
- Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection or where any other legal obligation prevails.

Mediation

At any stage of the process it may be helpful to consider mediation, or a facilitated discussion by an experienced mediator, as a way to address any particularly difficult or sensitive issues as constructively as possible.

[Experience has shown this can be helpful, but this is carefully positioned and worded to avoid any suggestion that mediation might be an alternative – or barrier – to the use of the complaints procedure, as this would not be acceptable to the ISI. Details of suitable mediators are available from the Legal team at Trust Office.]

B. Complaints Concerning Trust Office

- In the event of a complaint which the parents have been unable to resolve satisfactorily with the person concerned, or her or his line manager, the parents should put the complaint in writing to the Chief Executive as soon as possible. The Chief Executive will investigate the matter and respond within 10 working days.
- If the parents are not satisfied with the response or if the complaint is about the Chief Executive, the parent should write to the Chairman of the Council of the Trust at The Girls' Day School Trust, 10 Bressenden Place, London, SW1E 5DH within 10 working days of the Chief Executive's response. The Chairman will obtain a report from the Chief Executive and determine what future action (if any) should be taken regarding the complaint.