



**HEADINGTON**  
SCHOOL • OXFORD

# **Complaints Procedure Policy**

**Senior and Prep School  
(including EYFS)**

Approved by Council:	29 September 2022
Reviewed by:	Headmistress, Bursar and Head of Prep
Date of last Review	Sept 2022
Next Review Date:	In line with legislative updates
Meets:	ISI 33

# HEADINGTON SCHOOL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

## **Introduction**

Quality of teaching and pastoral care is very important at Headington School. We welcome contact with parents and working in partnership with them. Most concerns and complaints are dealt with quickly, efficiently and informally. This procedure is written so that parents know how a complaint will be treated by the school. Time scales referred to below are intended for guidance principally during school term time. During school holidays it may not be practical to meet these deadlines. This complaints procedure is documented in the parent portal and on the website. School guidance provided to boarding parents and boarders include details of the school's complaints procedures. Boarders are made aware of the procedures during their induction and are given information that allows them to make direct contact with a number of external agencies and help-lines.

In accordance the Independent School Standards, Headington School will make available to parents of pupils and of prospective pupils and provide, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or the ISI for the purposes of section 162A(1) of the Education Act 2002 (as subsequently amended), details of the complaints procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

In this document any reference to the Headmistress refers to the Headmistress (who oversees both the Senior and Prep Schools) or Head of Prep School as appropriate.

## **What Constitutes a Complaint?**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, or failed to do so something that it should have done or acted unfairly.

*Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. 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) raises in good faith.*

## **Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints**

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. They will be acknowledged within five working days if received during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the School's target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 28 working days if the complaint is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further 28 working days, if the appeal is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 working days. The record of complaints will be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.

## **Recording Complaints**

Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all complaints and whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing. At the School's discretion, additional records may be kept which may contain the following information:

- 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 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)

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 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

## **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 Head of Section (in the Senior School), Head of Key Stage (in the Prep School) or Housemistress/Housemaster. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction.
- If the Head of Section, Head of Key Stage or Housemistress/Housemaster cannot resolve the matter alone it may be necessary for her/him to consult with a Head of Department, Member of the Senior Management Group or Headmistress.
- Complaints made directly to a Member of the Senior Management Group or the Headmistress will usually be referred to the relevant Head of Section, Head of Key Stage or Housemistress/Housemaster, unless they deem it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.
- The Head of Section, Head of Key Stage or Housemistress/Housemaster will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within 14 working days, or in the event that the Head of Section, Head of Key Stage or Housemistress/Housemaster 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.
- For serious complaints written records of the complaint and outcomes will be sent by the Head of Section, Heads of Key Stage or Housemistress for review by the Headmistress.

- If, however, the complaint is against the Headmistress the following will apply:
  - Parents who make a complaint against the Head of the Prep School should make their complaint directly to the Headmistress (who oversees both schools) in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.
  - Parents who make a complaint against the Headmistress will be advised to proceed directly to Stage 2a of this procedure.

### **Stage 2 – Formal Resolution**

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Headmistress. The Headmistress will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Headmistress will meet the parents concerned, normally within seven working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Headmistress to carry out further investigations.
- The Headmistress will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Headmistress 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 Headmistress will also give reasons for her decision.
- The Headmistress will make a written record of any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

### **Stage 2a – Formal Resolution**

- If a complaint against the Headmistress, the Chair of Governors will nominate a Governor to investigate and they will call for a full report from the Headmistress and for all the relevant documents. The nominated Governor may also call for a briefing from members of staff, and will in most cases, speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the nominated Governor is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing. The nominated Governor will give reasons for his/her decision.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

### **Stage 3 – Panel Hearing**

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they will be referred to the Clerk to the Council who has been appointed by the Governors to call Hearings of the Complaints Panel.

- The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three persons who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the School. The Chair of the Panel will be responsible for seeking an independent panel member<sup>1</sup>. The Clerk to the Council, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a Hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 21 working days.
- 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 all parties normally not later than 7 working days prior to the Hearing.
- The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.
- After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings and may make recommendations.
- The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, normally within 7 working days of the hearing. The decision of the Panel will be final. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any, and any action to be taken as a consequence of the complaint) will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents, and, where relevant, the person complained about as well as the Chair of Governors and the Headmistress. A copy of the Panel's Findings and recommendations will be available for inspection on the School premises by the Governors and the Headmistress.

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

### **Notes**

A written record will be kept of all complaints that are made, whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing and the action taken by the school as a result of these complaints (regardless or not, whether they are upheld).

The DfE as regulator has advised that complaints which do not have safeguarding implications should be retained for a minimum of 7 years (a period determined by the 6-year inspection cycle with allowance for unforeseen circumstances). Where there is a safeguarding angle: 'Records concerning allegations of abuse must be preserved for the term of the Independent inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation if it is longer.'

<sup>1</sup>Our general view is that people who have held a position of responsibility and are used to scrutinising evidence and putting forward balanced arguments would be suitable. Examples of persons likely to be suitable are serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background and retired members of the police force might be considered.

All correspondence, statements and 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 2008 Act, requests access to them.

Parents may contact either Ofsted or ISI if they have a concern about the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision at the School. The contact details for both Ofsted and ISI are given below:

Independent Schools Inspectorate  
CAP House  
9 – 12 Long Lane  
London, EC1A 9HA

E-mail: [concerns@isi.net](mailto:concerns@isi.net)  
Telephone: 0207 600 0100

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

E-mail: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
Telephone: 0300 123 4666

There has been two formal complaints in the year 2021-22