



DORSET HOUSE SCHOOL

Complaints procedure

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1. POLICY STATEMENT

Dorset House has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this policy. This applies to the whole school including the Early Years Foundation Stage and a record of all complaints will be held for three years. If parents believe the School is not meeting the EYFS requirements, they can contact ISI and the details for doing so are given at the end of this policy.

This procedure has been drawn up in accordance with Paragraph 33 of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations January 2015.

Our principle aim is to deal with complaints:

- Openly
- Fairly
- Promptly
- Without prejudice

Our procedures for dealing with complaints will:

- Be publicised on the school's website and available to anyone on request
- Be simple to understand and follow
- Be focused on outcomes
- Have established time limits for action
- Keep people informed at all stages
- Where necessary, respect people's desire for confidentiality
- Be carefully monitored and evaluated

Guidance on Each Stage of the Procedure

There are three stages to this procedure:

- Stage 1 is informal
- Stages 2 and 3 are formal

What is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, whether made orally or in writing. Any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the school is a complaint. This policy addresses all complaints and matters of dissatisfaction with any aspect of the school's operation or decisions made in respect of an individual pupil. Complaints are handled using a three-staged approach.

How does the Staged Approach Work?

The staged approach is designed to ensure that every effort is made to deal with complaints informally at school level in partnership with the complainant. The formal stages should only be triggered in exceptional circumstances. All complaints are recorded initially by the member of staff receiving them. This written record is then passed to the Deputy Head who is responsible for



maintaining the Complaints file for informal complaints. (Unless the complaint concerns the Deputy Head, in which case, the details go to the Headmaster). The Headmaster is responsible for recording all formal complaints.

Stage 1 is an informal stage.

In the case of a complaint by a parent/guardian, the Form Teacher should receive the first approach and the majority of issues are expected to be resolved at this stage. In the event of a member of the teaching staff receiving a complaint they should liaise directly with the Form Teacher in the first instance. In the case of a complaint by a member of the public, the school office should be the first point of contact. A decision will then be made as to which member of staff is best placed to deal with the complaint.

Stages 2 and 3 are formal stages.

They involve the Headmaster and Governing Body.

Recording complaints and confidentiality

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 the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

The school will keep a written record of all formal complaints (i.e. those not resolved at stage 1) and whether they are resolved at stage 2 or proceed to a panel hearing.

Any person expressing continued dissatisfaction at the end of a particular stage should be advised of the next stage in the procedure.

2. STAGE ONE: INFORMAL

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint they should initially contact the person most closely concerned with the issue. This could be either the Form teacher, the Head of Boarding, the Head of Pre-Prep or the Bursar (for fee-related matters).
- In the majority of cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction, but if the person contacted cannot resolve the matter alone it will be necessary for them to consult the Deputy Head and/or Head of Department or the Head of the Pre-Prep.
- Complaints made directly to the Deputy Head, the Head of the Pre-Prep or the Headmaster will usually be referred to the relevant Form Teacher (or in some cases Head of Department) unless the Deputy Head/Head of the Pre-Prep/Headmaster judges it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.



- A record of all telephone calls, meetings and agreed actions should always be kept. Ideally these records should take the form of an email and should be sent to the Deputy Head who will print out complaints and file them in the Complaints file. The Deputy Head will monitor these records and advise on action to be taken where necessary. A record of action taken will also be kept.
- The school undertakes to acknowledge all written informal complaints within two days and all complaints should be addressed within five working days of the original complaint having been received.
- Where a complaint is received during the school holidays it will be acknowledged within two days of its receipt and addressed, if possible, within five days of the original complaint having been received. If the complaint involves interviewing absent staff or pupils, then the complaint will be addressed as soon as possible and within five working days of the start of the new term at the latest.
- In the event that the person receiving the complaint 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.
- Where the complaint is against the Deputy Head or the Head of the Pre-Prep or the Bursar, parents should make their complaint to the Headmaster.
- If however, the complaint is against the Headmaster, parents should make their complaint directly in writing to the Chairman of Governors, who may be contacted via the school office. The Chairman will then decide what process should be followed, depending on the nature and the substance of the complaint.

3. STAGE TWO: FORMAL

- In the event that the informal complaint has not been resolved or in the event that the Form Teacher/Head of Department/Head of the Pre-Prep/Deputy Head and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents should promptly put their complaint in writing to the Headmaster, including any relevant documents together with their full contact details.
- The written complaint will be acknowledged in writing within two working days of being received by the Headmaster.
- In most cases, the Headmaster will meet with the parents concerned, normally within 5 working days of receiving the written complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- If further investigations are necessary the Headmaster will undertake these.



- A record of all contacts relating to the complaint should be kept. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.
- Once the Headmaster 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, within 5 working days of the decision having been made. Any agreed actions should also be put in writing.
- If, as a result of the investigation, issues arise relating to staff discipline or capability, details should remain confidential to the Headmaster. However, the complainant should be informed that the school has taken appropriate follow-up action.
- The school complies with Standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools in that this Complaints Policy is for parents/guardians of boarders. The school recognises that it is not an appropriate procedure for children and young people for whom there are separate arrangements as detailed in the Boarders' Handbook.

4. STAGE THREE: PANEL HEARING

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they will be referred to the Chairman of Governors who will call a hearing of the Complaints Panel. A Complaints Panel hearing is a review of the decisions taken by the Headmaster. The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure. The Panel's task is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:
 - the documents provided by both parties and
 - any representations made by the parents and the Headmaster
- If parents are dissatisfied with the decision of the Headmaster they should write to the Chairman of Governors within 7 days of the date they have been notified of the decision so that the matter can be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. Parents should ensure that a copy of all relevant documents and their full contact details accompany their letter. A Complaints Panel will only be convened if Stages One and Two of this procedure have been followed.
- Acknowledgement of the written complaint should normally be sent by the Clerk to the Governing Body within five school days.
- It is for the governing body to agree upon the procedures for the Complaints Panel meeting. The panel itself will consist of three to five people, some of whom may be governors but who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. The Chairman will sit on the panel only if he has not been involved in the complaint thus far. The panel will include one member who is totally independent of



the management and running of the school. The panel will normally meet within 15 school days of receiving the complaint.

- The DfE gives the following guidance on the identity of an independent panel member: 'Our general view is that people who have held a position of responsibility and are used to analysing 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.'
- The Chair of the panel should notify the Headmaster and the complainant as to the date, time and place of the hearing together with brief details of the panel members. The parents may attend the meeting and be accompanied to the meeting by one other person if they wish. Legal representation is not normally appropriate at this stage.
- If the complaint relates to a staff disciplinary or capability matter about which the Headmaster has already taken action, the governors should focus on how the original complaint was managed to avoid prejudicing any ongoing disciplinary or capability procedures.
- The Headmaster, the person complained about and complainant should be informed of the panel's decision and any recommendations that it might make in writing within 5 working days of the hearing. This document must be available at the school premises for inspection by the Governing Body and the Headmaster.
- This is the final stage in the school's Complaints Procedure.

5. EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

It is intended that the above procedure provides a clear and thorough process for the resolution of all complaints. In the case of complaints concerning the Early Years Foundation Stage (Reception class), parents may make a complaint to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and/or Ofsted if they wish. The contact details are as follows:

- ISI, Cap House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA Tel: 020 7600 0100
- Ofsted, Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD
Tel: 0300 123 1231

The school acknowledges that additional requirements apply for EYFS settings beyond those which apply to the main school. Written complaints **about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements** will, therefore, be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days. The record of complaints will be made available to ISI and Ofsted on request.



6. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

During the school year 2015 – 2016, 1 complaint was registered under the formal procedure.

Parents are informed of the number of formal complaints received each year.

This policy will be reviewed annually and the results of the review will be reported to Governors.