



ORWELL PARK SCHOOL
Nacton, Ipswich IP10 0ER

SCHOOL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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ORWELL PARK SCHOOL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

I. INTRODUCTION

Orwell Park School ('the School') prides itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. If parents do have a complaint, however, they can expect it to be taken very seriously by the School and to be treated by the School in accordance with this procedure.

This policy and procedure is available to parents of all current and prospective pupils and can be obtained from the Headmaster's Secretary or the School website. This policy applies to the whole School, including the EYFS and Pre-Prep.

This policy has been developed to comply with Section 29 of the Education Act 2002 and the DfE guidance on School Complaints Procedure.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims and objectives of this procedure are:

1. To encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
2. To be easily accessible and available to all parents, carers, guardians and members of staff
3. To be simple to understand and use
4. To be impartial and non-adversarial
5. To allow swift handling of complaints with established time-limits for action and a mechanism to keep people informed of progress
6. To ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary
7. To respect people's desire for confidentiality
8. To address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress where necessary
9. To provide information to the School's Senior Management Team so that services can be improved.

3. INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS

At each stage in the Complaints procedure, the person investigating the complaint will make sure that they:

- Establish **what** has happened so far, and **who** has been involved
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- Meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary)
- Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish (formal stages)

- Conduct the interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- Keep notes of the interviews
- Complete the investigation in accordance with the time limit (see section 6 below).

4. RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

At each stage the School will keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid. It may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- An apology
- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- An assurance that the event complained of will not recur
- An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- An undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

Complainants will be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage.

5. MANAGING AND RECORDING COMPLAINTS

5.1 Recording Complaints

A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing. At the end of a meeting or telephone call, the member of staff will ensure that the Complainant and the School have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls will be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

All formal complaints received will be reported to the Headmaster and details will be kept as part of a central record maintained by the Headmaster's PA. Records of all formal complaints made to the Headmaster will be kept for three years. The records will show whether each complaint was resolved at the preliminary stage or whether it proceeded to a panel hearing, and the action that will be taken by the School as a result of the complaint, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld.

5.2 Governing Body Review

The Governing Body will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary.

5.3 Publicising the Procedure

This procedure is available upon request, from parents of current or prospective pupils, to the Headmaster's PA. It is also available on the School website.

5.4 Dealing with Complaints for the EYFS

This policy is applicable to the whole School including the EYFS and Pre-Prep. In addition, the following procedures will be carried out in relation to complaints from parents of pupils within the EYFS:

- A written record of any complaints, and their outcome, will be recorded and kept by the School.
- The School will investigate written complaints relating to the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements and notify complainants of the outcome of the investigation within 14 working days of having received the complaint.
- The record of complaints will be made available to Ofsted on request.
- The School will make available to parents and/or carers details about how to contact Ofsted, if they believe the School is not meeting the EYFS requirements.
- If the School becomes aware that they are to be inspected, they will notify parents and/or carers.
- After an inspection, the School will supply a copy of the report to parents and/or carers of children attending on a regular basis.

6. PROCEDURE

Stage I – Informal complaints

General complaints

It is in everybody's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. If parents have a complaint, in the first instance they should normally contact their son/daughter's teacher as indicated below:

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| ❖ Pre-Prep: | Class Teacher |
| ❖ Years 3-5: | Class Teacher |
| ❖ Years 6-8 | Tutor |

In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Class Teacher, Subject Teacher or Tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult a Head of Department/Deputy Head Academic (academic concerns) or the Deputy Head Pastoral / Head of Middle School / Head of Pre-Prep (pastoral concerns) as appropriate.

Boarding / Welfare complaints

Parents of pupils who are boarders or day pupils, and who may have a complaint or concern specifically related to boarding or welfare, should contact the Head of

Boarding. If the Head of Boarding cannot resolve the matter alone, it will be referred to the Headmaster.

If a parent wishes to raise a concern or complaint about the Head of Boarding or, for any reason, does not wish to discuss it with them, then they should contact the Headmaster directly.

Informal resolution

Informal complaints should be investigated and the outcome communicated to parents within 10 working days of the complaint having been received.

Complaints made directly to the Headmaster, Deputy Heads, Head of Middle School or Head of Pre-Prep will usually be referred to the relevant Class Teacher / Tutor, unless he/she deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally, or if he/she deems it to be so serious that it should be dealt with immediately under Stage 2 of this procedure (detailed below).

The Class Teacher / Tutor / Head of Boarding will make a written record of all concerns and complaints on the day on which they were received and take immediate action to investigate the problem and develop strategies to resolve it. This may include involving other staff and co-ordinating a joint approach to the problem. Should the complaint not be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties within a reasonable period of time i.e. within 10 working days of the complaint having been received, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

The School will respect the views of a complainant who indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. In these cases, the member of staff receiving the complaint will refer to a member of the Senior Management Team (SMT) for guidance. Similarly, if the member of staff involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, he or she will refer it to a member of the SMT.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then parents should put their complaint in writing to the Headmaster. The Headmaster will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

Where the complaint concerns the Headmaster, the complainant can make the first approach to the Chairman of Governors (see contact details on page 8).

Step 1

In most cases, the Headmaster will meet/speak with the parents concerned within three days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

Step 2

It may be necessary for the Headmaster to carry out further investigations. If the complaint is against a member of staff, he/she will be made aware of the complaint against him/her and the Headmaster will take all reasonable steps to establish the facts of the matter. The Headmaster may delegate the task of collating the information to another member of staff, but not the decision on the action to be taken.

Step 3

Once the Headmaster is satisfied that, so far as is reasonably 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 Headmaster will also give reasons for his decision. The complainant(s) will be notified of the outcome of an investigation within 28 days of the Headmaster having received the complaint.

If the complaint is against a member of staff he/she will also be informed of the Headmaster's decision and further actions (if any) to be taken. Actions may include the member of staff's referral to the School's Disciplinary procedures. Findings and recommendations relating to formal complaints received will also be available to the Chairman of Governors.

The Headmaster will keep written records of all meetings, interviews and correspondence held in relation to the complaint for at least three years.

If the complaint is still not resolved to the satisfaction of all parties, parents should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3 – Complaints Appeal Panel

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier solution), they will be referred to a nominated governor, who has been appointed to call hearings by the Complaints Appeal Panel.

The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Appeal Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of:

1. The appointed Governor (Chair of the Complaints Appeal Panel)
2. One further member of the Governing body
3. A third person independent of the management and running of the School.

It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and is seen to be so. No Governor may sit on the Panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. The Panel should be sensitive to issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.

The Chair of the Complaints Appeal Panel will acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and within the time limit of five working days.

Remit of the Complaints Appeal Panel

The Panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes to the School's system or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

The appeal hearing will be held in private and its aim will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the School and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised that the complainant may not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will show that the complaint has been taken seriously.

The parent(s) 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.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.

The Panel Hearing is the last School-based stage of the complaints process and is not convened merely to rubber-stamp previous decisions.

The findings and recommendations of the panel will be sent by e mail or otherwise given to the complainant and the person complained about (where relevant), within five working days of the Panel Hearing. They will also be available to the Headmaster and the Chairman of Governors.

There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the Complainant remains dissatisfied. If the Complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chairman of the Governing Body is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

Role of the Chair of the Complaints Appeal Panel

The Chair of the Complaints Appeal Panel will be required to:

1. check that the correct procedure has been followed so far
2. set a date for the appeal hearing and ensure that this is convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
3. collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing
4. record the proceedings
5. notify all parties of the Panel's decision.

The Chair of the Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

1. the remit of the Panel is explained to all parties and each party has the opportunity to put their case without undue interruption
2. the key issues are addressed
3. key findings of fact are made
4. parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease
5. the hearing is conducted in an informal manner, but with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy
6. the Panel is open-minded and acting independently
7. no member of the Panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
8. each party is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions
9. written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises all parties will be given the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

A checklist for a Complaints Appeal Panel can be found in Appendix I.

In the event that action is ongoing in accordance with the School's internal Disciplinary procedure, Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure will normally be suspended until the outcome of the Disciplinary process is known.

Time limits for complaints

Parents wishing to make a complaint should normally raise the matter with the school within 14 days of the incident occurring.

7. CONFIDENTIALITY

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

8. MONITORING

The record of complaints received in the Prep School and the Pre-Prep/EYFS, together with information about whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or proceeded to a panel hearing, will be regularly monitored by the Safeguarding and Welfare Committee and Board of Governors i.e. at least once each term.

9. FURTHER / ALTERNATIVE AVENUES FOR COMPLAINTS

The School will keep records of all formal complaints received for at least three years. The records will also show whether each complaint was resolved at the preliminary stage or whether it proceeded to a panel hearing.

Complainants and, where relevant, the person complained about will be notified of the outcome of an investigation within 28 days of the complaint having been received.

Independent schools are registered with the Department for Education. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, or if the complainant feels unable to complain directly to the School, they should contact the DfE or Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) directly. Contact details are detailed below:

10. PUPILS' COMPLAINTS

Information and guidance for pupils on how they may make complaints are detailed in:

- The School's Anti-Bullying policy
- Complaints Procedure for Pupils
- Boarders' Handbooks

Contact information:

DfE

Independent Education and Boarding Team
Level 3
Bishopsgate House
Feethams
Darlington
DL1 5QE
Tel: 01325 340 405

ISI

1st Floor
CAP House
9-12 Long Lane
London EC1A 9HA
Tel: 020 7600 0100

Chairman of Governors

Mr J Davison
c/o Orwell Park School
Nacton
Ipswich IP10 0ER
Tel: 01473 659 225

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD
Tel: 0300 123 4666

Number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during 2021-22: 3



APPENDIX I

CHECKLIST FOR COMPLAINTS APPEAL PANEL

The panel needs to take the following points into account:

- The hearing is as informal as possible.
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, the Complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.
- The Headmaster may question both the Complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Headmaster is then invited to explain the School's actions and be followed by the School's witnesses.
- The Complainant may question both the Headmaster and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Panel may ask questions at any point.
- The Complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Headmaster is then invited to sum up the School's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The Chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within five working days.