

Parental Complaints Policy

Written By	Bursar
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NMS	18

OVERVIEW

- General.** Sherborne Preparatory School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, it is important that they make contact with the School so that it can be quickly and effectively resolved. Any complaint will be treated by the School in accordance with this policy and in the strictest of confidence.
- Scope.** This policy is applicable to all parents, including those whose children are in EYFS or Boarding. It is available online from the Sherborne Prep website under 'Our Policies'. It is also contained with the School's Policy handbook and is available from the School Office upon request. Staff can access the policy on SharePoint.
- Complaint.** The School defines a complaint as any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy about and seeks action by the school.
- Timeline summary.** The detail of the School's timelines for each stage is contained in greater detail within the policy. An overview:

Stage	Meeting /Hearing	Response ¹	Remarks
Informal resolution	N/a	Within 7 days by email/verbally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Verbally or by email.
Formal resolution	Within 14 days	7 days of the final meeting and written	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If further investigation is required, the Headmaster will agree a date with the complainant/parent(s) for the next meeting. EYFS resolved within 28 days.
Panel Hearing	Within 28 days	Within 7 days of the final Hearing and written.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any further particulars to be provided at least 7 days prior to any hearing. In the case of further investigation the Panel to agree a date with the complainant/parent(s).

¹ During holiday periods when those involved are not available, timings may increase. An appropriate member of staff will communicate with parents and agree a timeline. All EYFS complaints must be completed within 28 days.

SCOPE

5. **General.** There are three stages to the complaints procedure which are usually chronological. Where a parent feels that the complaint relates to a member of staff, and they feel it inappropriate to address the complaint to that member of staff, they should then pass it to the next level of management². If they believe it to be very serious they should elevate it to the stage beyond; it should be noted that if the School, or the Governors, assesses that the complaint is not of sufficient severity, they reserve the right to revert the complaint to the circumnavigated stage. Circumventing a stage should only be for the most serious of issues and in exceptional circumstances.

6. **Confidentiality.** Correspondence, statements and records 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 them.

STAGES

7. **Stage 1 – Informal Resolution.** It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. The process:

a. **Point of contact.** If parents have a complaint they should contact their son/daughter's Form Teacher, Head of Year or member of Boarding Staff in the first instance. In many cases, the matter will be resolved to the parent's satisfaction with the 'informal resolution' point of contact. If the Form Teacher, Head of Year or Boarding Staff cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult the Head of Pastoral Care or a member of the senior management for advice. Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, Head of Year, member of the SMT or Headmaster will usually be referred to the relevant Form Teacher or member of Boarding Staff unless it is deemed appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.

b. **Timeline/response.** The matter should normally³ be resolved within 7 days. The response can be provided verbally or by email. In the event that the school and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to make their complaint in accordance with stage 2 of this policy.

c. **Record.** The person to whom the complaint is made will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. A record will be sent to the Deputy Headmaster who will retain the correspondence on file, and a synopsis in the Complaints Log.

8. **Stage 2 – Formal Resolution⁴.** If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the complainant will follow the formal resolution process. Stage 2 complaints must be formally recorded, along with the school's response. This will depend on the circumstances, but if the parents seek a formal meeting with the Head, or raise issues through a formal letter, which may require a

² If a Form Teacher, to the Head of Year. If a Head of Year/Department to the Director of Studies.

³ Complaints will fall outside normally if during the holidays and teachers are unavailable, or only in exceptional circumstances outside the control of the school.

⁴ Also, if a concern about a more minor matter is repeated and the parent is clearly not satisfied with the school's original response, it should be regarded as a complaint.

written response from the school, this would normally be regarded as a formal complaint, even if it has not been referred to as such in the letter:

a. **Point of contact.** The parent should put their complaint in writing to the Headmaster. The Headmaster will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

b. **Timeline/response.** In most cases, the Headmaster will meet the parents concerned, normally, within 14 days of receiving the complaint to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. If that is not possible, the Headmaster will agree a date with the parents about when they next meet and when he will provide a conclusive response to them. When 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 7 days of the final meeting.

c. **EYFS complaints.** For EYFS complaints, the Headmaster will deal with all complaints within 28 days of receipt of a written complaint to completion of his investigation, meeting the parents and providing a written response.

d. **Record.** The Headmaster will ensure a written record of all meetings, interviews, and a copy of the resolution – a letter - are held in relation to the complaint. A synopsis of all complaints will be held in the Complaints Log held by the Deputy Headmaster.

9. **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 Chairman of the Governors. The process:

a. **Point of contact.** The parent is to write to the Chairman of the Board of Governors who is the point of contact for complaints that are to proceed to a Panel Hearing.

b. **Panel membership.** The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one⁵ of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chairman of Governors.

c. **Timeline/response.** The Chairman of Governors on behalf of the Panel will acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable, and normally within 28 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 not later than 7 days prior to the hearing. If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out, and will agree timelines with the complainant. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within 7 days of the Hearing. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Headmaster, the Governors and, where relevant, the person complained about.

⁵ A number of independent professionals are held on file and are in accordance with direction in the ISI Handbook for Inspections.

d. **Parental attendance/support.** 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.

e. **Record.** All correspondence, papers and the formal letter to the complainant on the panel's findings will be retained on file by the Bursar on the premises on behalf of the Governors. They must be available for inspection by the Headmaster and Governors.

10. **Complaints about the Headmaster.** Where a parent has a complaint about the Headmaster they are to be made in writing to the Chairman of the Board of Governors. The letter is to be in a sealed envelope and will be sent on through the school Bursar.

11. **Record keeping.** The School is required to keep records of all complaints from the formal process onwards. The School will:

- a. Maintain a record if the complaint was resolved at the formal level.
- b. If the complaint has proceeded from the formal level to a panel hearing.
- c. The action taken by the School as a result of a complaint at the formal level and panel hearing.

Records are very important, including any identified as relating to the boarding provision, where applicable. The records must include the school's response, and any ensuing actions. Records of individual complaints must be made available as required to all parties involved

12. **Provision of information.** In accordance with the ISI regulations the School is obligated to provide the number of formal complaints registered during the preceding school year. The number of complaints is available on request from the Head's PA.

13. **Direction if a pupil has left or the complainant does not engage with the process.** If the original issue is raised whilst their child is registered at the school, the school will follow its complaints procedure as far is necessary. If parents will not engage with the complaints process, unless they are clearly satisfied with the response, the School will proceed with a panel hearing, keeping careful records of all documents and communication, to demonstrate that has made a reasonable attempt to accommodate any changes of date and venue

14. **Other agencies.** Parents may also contact:

Organisation	Address	Telephone	Email
Children Services Directorate	County Hall Colliton Park Dorchester	01305 221450	westdistrictchildcare@dorsetcouncil.gov
OFSTED, EYFS and Boarders Complaints	Picadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD	Ofsted helpline: 08444530221	N/A
ISI	Ground Floor, Cap House 9-12 Long Lane London EC1A 9HA	020 7600 0100	N/A

Any complaints will be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.