

Parental Complaints Policy

Written By	Bursar
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ISI Codes	A14, E7, B16
NMS	18

OVERVIEW

1. **General.** Sherborne Preparatory School (Sherborne Prep) 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 with care and in accordance with this Complaints Procedure. We make the Complaints Procedure available to all parents of pupils and of prospective pupils on the School's website and in the School office during the school day, and will ensure that parents of pupils and of prospective pupils who request it are made aware that this document is published or available and of the form in which it is published or available, and of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year. In accordance with paragraph 32(1) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulation 2014, Sherborne Prep will also make available, on request, to Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE) or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), details of this Complaints Procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

2. **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.

3. **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, and any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has 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] raise[s] in good faith.

4. **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).

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.

Former pupils. Complaints by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil to which the complaint relates was still registered as a pupil at the School. The only exception to this is if the complaint is a review of a decision taken by the Head to exclude or require the removal of a pupil under clause 6 of the School's Terms and Conditions of Contract in which case such a review must be requested by no later than five working days from the date of the decision to exclude or require the removal of a pupil.

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 Deputy Head (Pastoral) or a

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.

² If a Form Teacher, to the Deputy Head (Pastoral). If a Head of Year/Department to the Deputy Head (Academic).

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 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. **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.

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.

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.

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. **EYFS complaints.** Parents of EYFS children should follow the three stages of this Complaints Procedure. If parents remain dissatisfied and their complaint is about the School's fulfilment of the EYFS requirements, then parents may take their complaint to the ISI or Ofsted. Parents will be notified by ISI or Ofsted of the outcome of the investigation into their complaint within 28 days of the complaint being received. Sherborne Prep will provide ISI/Ofsted, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaints will be kept in accordance with its Privacy Notice.

11. **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.

12. **Record keeping.** Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all complaints, whether they are resolved at the Stage 1 (informal stage), the formal stage (Stage 2) or proceed to a Panel hearing (Stage 3) and any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld). The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice. When dealing with complaints the School (including any Panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent

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

- Name of pupil
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name and contact details 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)
- Notes/minutes of the hearing, and
- The Panel's written decision

This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the School's *Privacy Notice* and *Data Protection Policy*, but potentially including, for instance, information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the School's *Data Protection Policy*.

The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its *Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy*. 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 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

13. **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.

14. **Direction if a complainant does not engage with the process.** 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.

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

Organisation	Address	Telephone	Email
OFSTED, EYFS	Picadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD	Ofsted helpline: 0300 123 1231	enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
ISI	Ground Floor, Cap House 9-12 Long Lane London EC1A 9HA	020 7600 0100	concerns@isi.net

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