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Complaints Policy

Owner:

Board of Governors

- ✓ Policy required by ISI (inspection use)
- ✓ ISI requirement for publication on website
- ☐ Internal decision to publish on website
- ☐ Internal only
- ✓ Required reading for all staff

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Introduction

*Sunninghill Prep 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, they can expect it to be treated by the school with care and in accordance with this procedure. Sunninghill Prep School makes its Complaints Procedure available to all parents of pupils and of prospective pupils on the school's website and Sunninghill Prep School **will ensure that parents of pupils and of prospective pupils who request it are made aware that this document is published 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.*

Although this Procedure is made available to parents of prospective pupils, it is not available for use by them; it may only be used by parents of current 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.

In accordance with paragraph 32(1) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulation 2014, Sunninghill Prep School 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.

“Parent(s)” means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for a pupil about whom the complaint relates.

What Constitutes a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the school, 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. 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 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

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.

The three-stage Complaint Procedure

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most concerns will be resolved quickly and **informally**.
- If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their son/daughter's Form teacher. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the *Form teacher* cannot resolve the matter alone it may be necessary for him/her to consult the Deputy Heads/the Head.
- Complaints made directly to a head of department/the Deputy Heads/the Head will usually be referred to the relevant Form teacher unless the head of department/the Deputy Heads/the Head deems it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
- The Form teacher will make a written record of all concerns and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within 5 working days in term time or as soon as practicable in the school holidays or in the event that the *Form teacher* and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed with a written complaint in accordance with stage 2 of this Complaints Procedure.
- If, however, the concern or complaint is against the Head, parents should make their concern or complaint directly to the Chair of Governors whose contact details are available from the School's website.

Stage 2 - Formal Resolution

- If the concern cannot be resolved on an informal basis as per stage 1 above then the parents should put their complaint in writing, addressed to the Head either by email or by using the form at the end of this document. The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head will meet/speak to the parents concerned, normally within 7 **working days** in term time or as soon as practicable in the school holidays of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Head or their nominee to carry out further investigations.
- The Head will **keep written records** of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head will also give reasons for

his/her decision. In most cases, the Head will make his/her decision and provide the parents with reasons within 15 working days of the complaint being put in writing.

- If the complaint is against the Head, the complaint should be made to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors or their nominee will call for a full report from the Head and for all the relevant documents. The Chair or their nominee 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 Chair of Governors or their nominee is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing. The Chair of Governors or their nominee 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 should do so in writing to the Clerk to the Governors (the Bursar) within 10 school days of receipt of the decision made in Stage 2, setting out their grounds of appeal. Any supporting evidence which the parents wish to rely on should also be provided with their grounds of appeal. To the extent the parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated due to extenuating circumstances which have impeded the parents from taking action, the parents should request an extension in writing. Such a request should be made to the Clerk to the Governors in advance of the original deadline, setting out the further time period requested and the reason for this. This will be considered.
- The Clerk to the Governors, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel, will then refer the appeal to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three persons not 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 Governors will appoint one Panel member to act as Chair of the Panel. The Clerk to the Governors, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 20 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 5 days prior to the hearing.
- The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. The Head shall also be entitled to 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. The panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend.

- The remit of the Panel shall be at the discretion of the Chair of Governors and the manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel
- 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 as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and accordingly decide whether to:
 - Dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part;
 - Uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and
 - make recommendations
- The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, normally within 7 days of the hearing (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following the hearing). The decision of the Panel will be final. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) 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 Head. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair of Governors and the Head.

Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously, sensitively and within clear and reasonable timescales.

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 20 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 20 working days, if the appeal is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure working days refers to weekdays (Mondays to Fridays) during term time, excluding bank holidays. This means that during School holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although the School will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay. It may also take longer to resolve a complaint during periods of significant disruption to School life or as a consequence of unavoidable staff absence, however deviation from the normal timescale for resolving a complaint during term time will only be permitted on

an exceptional basis, and the School will take all reasonable steps to limit any such delay.

Persistent Correspondence

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

Recording Complaints and the use of personal data

Following resolution of a complaint, Sunninghill Prep School will keep a written record of all complaints made, 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
- 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 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, but potentially including information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. The 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, Data Protection Policy and Retention of Records Policy. All records

relating to complaints shall be treated as confidential. In addition to where requested by the Secretary of State or an inspector (see above), there may be other circumstances where disclosure of the substance of a complaint or particular confidential records relating to it is required, for example, where there is a legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligation (eg, in response to a subject access request) which prevails over the requirement to maintain the records as confidential.

For the academic year 2022-2023 the School received 2 formal complaints.

Early Years Foundation Stage

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.

Sunninghill Prep School will provide ISI, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, whether upheld or not and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaints will be kept for at least three years.

Parents may complain directly to ISI if they believe the provider is not meeting the EYFS requirements. Schools must make available details of how to contact the ISI:

ISI can be contacted on 020 7600 0100 or by email: concerns@isi.net

[ISI, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA](#)

References:

The Education (Independent school Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISS Regulations)

ISI handbook: Commentary on the Regulatory Requirements Jan 2017

DfE Model complaints procedure

ISBA Model complaints procedure

1.1 Complaint Form (overleaf)

Please complete and return to Mr David Newberry (Head)

dnewberry@sunninghill.dorset.sch.uk

or the Bursar & Clerk to the Governors)

bursar@sunninghill.dorset.sch.uk

who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.



Sunninghill
PREP SCHOOL DORCHESTER

COMPLAINT FORM – STAGE TWO FORMAL COMPLAINT

Your name:

Pupil's name (if relevant):

Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date: