

Complaints Policy (Trust including EYFS)

1. Introduction

- I. This policy applies to both Senior and Preparatory Schools and is written with regard to the Independent Schools Standards Regulations (ISSR) 2016 (Part 7) and National Minimum Standards 2015 (standard 18). It is published on the school's website and is available to staff and parents from both schools who request it. All parents are informed how to register a concern or make a complaint when their child joins the school.
- II. There are three stages to the policy:

1.1 Stage 1 – Informal Complaints

- I. Most worries and complaints can be dealt with satisfactorily at an early stage, often by House staff or Form Tutors. At this stage there is usually no formal complaint – merely a worry or a problem to be solved. Where communication is by telephone, staff will respond initially within 48 hours. If a fuller response is required, this will be within 5 days. Concerns in writing, including e-mail will receive an initial response within 2 working days. Parents whose children are about to enter the school for the first time are given the following information as part of their joining details:

“We hope that all parents will be happy with the service which the School provides. Please do not hesitate to let us know if you are dissatisfied in any way. If you have a worry, the first person to inform will probably be your son or daughter’s Housemaster, Housemistress (Senior School) or Form Tutor (Prep School) or Key Worker (Nursery). However you may also like to contact the relevant Deputy Head or Head. Formal complaints must be made to the relevant Head in writing. If, after this, you still feel that any complaint has not been properly dealt with, or you disagree with the outcome, it is possible to appeal to the Chair of Governors by writing to him at the school address.”

1.2 Stage 2 – The Formal Complaint to the Head

- I. This is made in writing. The Head undertakes to acknowledge the receipt of the complaint within 48 hours of receiving it. He will then investigate the complaint and normally report back within 14 days (excluding school holidays) from receipt of the complaint. If the complaint is received immediately prior to or during a school holiday the Head will report back within 14 days of the start of the new term. He will make it clear in his letter to the complainant how he/she may appeal to the Governors should they be dissatisfied either with the Head’s decision or his explanation. A log of formal complaints is kept by the relevant Head’s PA.
- II. Prep School parents who are dissatisfied with the decision made by the Prep School Head may appeal this decision by making a formal complaint to the Senior School Head / CEO.
- III. Prep School parents who have a serious complaint about the Prep School Head should direct this complaint, in writing, to the Senior School Head /CEO.

1.3 Stage 3 – The Appeal to the Governors

- I. Parents who are dissatisfied with the Senior School Head / CEO’s decision, or who have a serious complaint about the Senior School Head / CEO himself should write to the Chair of Governors at the School within 14 days of receipt of the decision letter from the Senior School Head / CEO. They will set up a Complaints Panel as outlined in the procedure below:

2. Complaints Panel

- I. Should a parent decide to appeal against a decision by the Senior School Head / CEO, a Panel consisting of two members of the Board of Governors and a member independent of the management and running of the school, appointed by the Chair of Governors (excluding themselves). They will

provide a fair and impartial judgement, having equal responsibility for the interests of pupils, staff and the school. The Panel should consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. The Chair of Governors will appoint one of the members of the Panel to chair it. The Panel meeting will take place at the school premises on a date to be arranged with the parents, normally within 20 working days (excluding school holidays) of receipt by the school of the written request for an appeal. It is a private procedure and all those who are concerned in it are required to keep its proceedings confidential, subject to any overriding legal objections.

2. 1 Attendance

- I. Those present at the Panel Meeting will be:-
 - a) Members of the Panel and the Clerk to the Governors, or a deputy, as secretary.
 - b) The Head and any other relevant member of staff whom he, or the parents have asked, should attend, along with anyone else whom the Head feels is needed in order to secure a fair outcome.
 - c) The parents and, exceptionally, the pupil. The parents may be accompanied by a friend or relation, but not a legal representative, as the panel is non-adversarial in nature. Should the friend or relative be legally qualified the school should be provided with seven days' notice of this.

2. 2 Procedure

- I. The Panel will consider each of the outstanding concerns raised by the parents so far as relevant to:
 - a) What action the parents seek in order to satisfy the complaint in their eyes.
 - b) Whether the facts of the case were sufficiently established. The civil standard of proof, namely "the balance of probability" will apply.
 - c) Whether any further investigation is required.
 - d) If so, by whom and by when.
- II. This will allow the Panel to review the reasonableness of the decision of the Head and either reach a finding or determine the further action required.

2. 3 Conduct of the Hearing

- I. The Chair of the Panel will conduct the meeting in a manner, which is fair to all participants, having regard to any representations made to him by any participant as to the most appropriate way to determine the issues. The meeting will be held in a suitable room and in an informal manner. All statements made at the meeting will be unsworn. The proceedings will not be recorded without the consent of both the Chair of the Panel and a parent. Any recording will be used only to assist the panel members in reaching their decision and formulating their reasons, and will belong to the School. The secretary will be asked to keep a hand-written minute of the main points, which arise at the meeting. All those present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes. Everyone is expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners. The Chair of the Panel may at his/her discretion adjourn or terminate the meeting. If the meeting is terminated, the original decision will stand pro tem. The meeting will be directed by the Chair of the Panel who will conduct it so as to ensure that all those present have a reasonable opportunity of asking questions and making appropriate comment, normally as follows:
 - a) The Head and parent/pupil would be present throughout.
 - b) The Head would outline the reasons for his recommendations, including the relevant school rules.
 - c) Both parties would then be asked, in turn, to respond to each of the questions raised in the Request for the Appeal and may be allowed to cross-question each other, in turn, at the discretion of the Chair of the Panel.
 - d) Panel members may question either party at this stage in the proceedings.
 - e) Other witnesses, if any, would be called in turn, questioned first by the party who called them and then by the other party and panel; they leave after their evidence is completed.
 - f) The Head summarises his position in the light of all the evidence heard.
 - g) The parents are given the last word to summarise their position.
 - h) When the Chair of the Panel decides that all issues have been sufficiently discussed and if by then there is no consensus, she/he may adjourn the meeting; alternatively, the Chair of the Panel may ask those present to withdraw while the Panel considers its decision.

2. 4 Decision

- I. In the absence of a significant procedural irregularity which might lead to a re-hearing, the decision of the Panel will be final. The decision will be recorded and will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Head and the Chair of Governors. The decision, with reasons, will be notified to those concerned by the Chair of the Panel at the end of the meeting or, if further discussion is necessary, by letter or e-mail by the Chair of the Panel or the Chair of Governors within five working days of the meeting. If relevant, the person complained about will also receive a copy of the decision.

3. Recording and Confidentiality

- I. A written record will be kept, on the school premises, by the relevant Head's PA of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at Stage 1, Stage 2 or proceed to a panel hearing. In addition, records are kept of how complaints were resolved and the action taken by the school as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year will be supplied to parents on request. 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 sections 108 and 109 of the 2008 Education Act, requests access to them.

4. Recommendations

- I. It is possible that the Panel will propose changes to organisation or procedures as a result of their deliberations. These are to be presented to the Board of Governors.

5. Whistleblowing

- I. If, having exhausted all the school's procedures, the parents submitting the complaint do not feel the complaint has been properly addressed, they do have the option of reporting their concerns to the Independent Schools' Inspectorate (ISI): 020 7600 0100.

6. EYFS Specific Information

- I. The Early Years Foundation Stage at Bede's is registered with OFSTED. In all written complaints relating to EYFS the complainant will be notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of having received the complaint. Records of complaints are kept by the relevant Head's PA on the school premises. Please note that parents of children in the Foundation Stage have the right to contact OFSTED and/or ISI directly should they have a complaint that they feel is not being addressed by the school.

OFSTED can be contacted at the following address:-

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Telephone: 0300 123 1231
✉ Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

ISI can be contacted at the following address:-

CAP House
9 – 12 Long Lane
LONDON
EC1A 9HA
Telephone: 020 7600 0100
✉ Email: info@isi.net

- I. The school will provide OFSTED and/or ISI, on request, with a written record of all formal complaints made during any specific period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint.
- II. Note: The number of formal complaints received during the last academic year was 1 (one) at the Senior School and 0 (zero) at the Prep School.

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