

Complaints Policy and Procedure

This policy was reviewed in: August 2024

This policy is due to be reviewed in: August 2025

This policy applies to the whole School including EYFS

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Introduction

Pipers Corner School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its students. 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. Pipers Corner makes its complaints procedure available to all parents of students and of prospective students on the School's website and in the School Office during the school day. Pipers Corner will ensure that parents of students and of prospective students who request it are made aware that this document is published or available and 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) Regulations 2014, Pipers Corner 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.

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

Complaints by parents of former students will be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure only if the complaint was initially raised when the student to whom the complaint relates was still registered as a student at the School.

The School will be mindful of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in the application of this policy. "Parent(s)" means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for a current or prospective student about whom the complaint relates.

Under EYFS regulations in the event of a complaint or a concern we follow the written procedure. This includes keeping a written record of any complaints and their outcome. In fulfilment of the EYFS requirements we investigate all written complaints and notify complainants of the outcome of the investigation normally within 28 working days of receiving the complaint, if this is received during term time. The record of complaints will be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.

What constitutes a 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 policy. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong or failed to do something that it should have done, or acted unfairly.

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. There may also be other circumstances in which the School is required to share information relating to a concern or a complaint in order to comply with its legal or regulatory obligations.

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 in good faith.

The Three-Stage Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 – Informal resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their child's Head of Year or the Head of Department. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the member of staff approached cannot resolve the matter alone it may be necessary for him or her to consult the Deputy Heads or one of the Assistant Heads.

- Complaints made directly to the Deputy Heads, one of the Assistant Heads or the Head will usually be referred to the relevant Head of Year or Head of Department, unless the Deputy Head/the Head deems it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
- The Head of Year or Head of Department will make a written record of all complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within 7 working term-time days or in the event that the Head of Year or Head of Department and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised in writing to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.
- If, however, the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors.

Stage 2 – Formal resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head. The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head will appoint a senior member of staff to meet the parents concerned, during term-time this would normally be within 7 days of receiving the written complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage although it may be necessary to carry out further investigations. During a school holiday the timeframe may need to be longer, depending on staff availability.
- Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the member of staff investigating the complaint will report their findings to the Head who will decide on the outcome of the complaint and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head will also give reasons for his/her decision.
- If the complaint is against the Head, the Chair of Governors will call for a full report from the Head and for all the relevant documents. The Chair 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 is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing. The Chair 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 within 14 working days of being informed in writing of the outcome of the Stage 2 complaint.

Stage 3 – Complaints Panel hearing

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they will be referred to the Clerk to the Governors who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel.

- The matter will then be referred 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 an independent member, i.e. someone who is not involved in the management and running of the School. The Clerk to the Governors on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 28 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 working days prior to the hearing.
- The parents will normally attend the hearing and may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative or friend. Legal or other formal representation will not be appropriate.
The person accompanying the parent(s) is present to provide personal support; they are not entitled to address the Panel or to speak on behalf of the parent(s).
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint following the hearing and 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 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 14 working days of 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.

Timeframe for dealing with complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously, sensitively and within clear and reasonable timescales. They will be acknowledged within five working days if received during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. 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 28 working days if the complaint is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

Stage 3, the Complaints Panel Hearing, will normally be completed within a further 28 working days, if the appeal is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

For the purposes of this Policy, working days refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays and half term. 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 occur 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 completion of all three stages, this is regarded as vexatious and outside the scope of this policy.

Recording complaints and use of personal data

Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all formal complaints and whether they are resolved at Stage 1, Stage 2 or proceed to a panel hearing (Stage 3), and the School will also keep a written record of 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 Notices which are available on the School's website. 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:

- The date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of student
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name 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 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, Data Protection Policy and Information and Records Retention 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 (for example in response to a subject access request) which prevails over the requirement to maintain the records as confidential.

Complaints received

During the Academic Year 2023/24 the School received one formal complaint.

Complaints relating to students in the Early Years setting

Parents of EYFS students should follow the three stages of this Complaints Policy. 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.

Pipers Corner School 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 and Information and Records Retention Policy.

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

Contact details for Ofsted and ISI are as follows:

- ISI
Cap House, 9 -12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA
Email: concerns@isi.net
Telephone: 020 7600 0100
- Ofsted
Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD
Email: enquires@ofsted.gov.uk
Telephone: 0300 123 1231