



APPLEFORD SCHOOL

**COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS**

This policy applies to the whole school, including boarding

This policy, which applies to the whole school, is publicly available on the school website and on request; a copy (which can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required) may be obtained from the School Office.

**Applies to:**

- The whole School, all staff (teaching, boarding and support staff), proprietors and volunteers working in the School

**Timescale**

- The process of dealing with a complaint in writing from the moment that it is received by the school to resolution will take no more than twenty eight (28) working days, except in circumstances in which the normal timescales are affected by issues that delay resolution; namely school holidays and other factors.

**Monitoring and Review:**

- The Headmistress logs all complaints (formal and informal) received by the school and records at which stage and how they were resolved. The record includes, at least: the person making the complaint, the date of the complaint, the nature of the complaint, any action taken and the outcome of the complaint. The logging of complaints for management purposes enables patterns of concern to be monitored.
- The Managing Director (who is the proprietor) monitors the Complaints Procedure to ensure that all complaints are handled properly, taking into account any local or national decisions that affect the complaints process, and making any modifications necessary to this procedure. The Managing Director also retains details of the number of complaints, registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.
- This Policy will be subject to continuous monitoring, refinement, review and audit by the Headmistress. The Proprietor will undertake a full review of this policy and procedures, inclusive of its implementation and the efficiency with which the related duties have been discharged no later than one year from the date shown below, or earlier if changes in Legislation, regulatory requirements or best practice guidelines so require.

Signed:

Date: September 2022

Dr Peter Gardner  
Proprietor

Mrs Fiona Filkins  
Headmistress

Review date: September 2023

Under the terms of this procedure a complaint is deemed to be any matter of parental or pupil dissatisfaction which is brought to the attention of the Headmistress, or a member of the Senior Leadership Team. This could be brought by a parent directly or escalated by another staff member.

Appleford School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. It is our aim that all pupils fulfil their potential.

Appleford School will ensure that the quality of teaching and pastoral care offered to pupils will be of the highest order. However, if parents have a complaint they can expect it to be treated by the school in accordance with this procedure. We are always willing to listen to concerns and anxieties, parental and pupil concerns being of particular importance. We aim for the closest co-operation between parents and the teachers to whom our pupils are entrusted. Dealing with parental concerns is a vital part of the ethos and mission of Appleford School. We aim to be open about the decisions we make and the actions we take and will always explain our rationale.

A complaint is likely to arise when there are issues of physical or emotional wellbeing and security at stake, or when the school's stated aims or values are being ignored. A breach of the law will always constitute a complaint. If parents of pupils at the school do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the school in accordance with this procedure. We use the term "complainant" to refer to the individual or individuals making the complaint. These may be one or a combination of any of the following: a parent or guardian of a pupil at the school, parents or guardians of a pupil at the school or several parents or guardians of pupils at the school. Complaints will be resolved either to the complainant's satisfaction, or with an otherwise appropriate outcome which balances the rights and duties of pupils. At every stage of the procedure, the handling of the complaint will be swift (using the agreed time frame), fair and necessarily confidential. Throughout the process, Appleford School will be willing to: listen, learn, admit mistakes, apologise if appropriate, address any issues raised and change practices including school policies and procedures if appropriate.

### **Stage 1 – Informal Resolution**

*(References to the number of working days refer to term-time only)*

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally if parents feel able to voice them as soon as they arise. Obviously, the more information the school gives to parents the less scope there is for misunderstanding. Parents will be encouraged to give feedback, preferably to the person concerned. In most cases, discussion, explanation, further information or an apology, if appropriate, will resolve any issues. Every effort will be made to allay concerns at this stage and with the least possible formality. Our ideal is that no concern should ever become a formal complaint, as through open dialogue, a resolution should always be accomplished.
- If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their child's Group Tutor. In most cases the matter will be resolved straight away by this means to the parent's satisfaction. If the Group Tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary to consult the Head of Pastoral Care or Co-Heads of Boarding or Director of Studies.
- The member of staff dealing with the matter will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date they were received. A written record is to be kept of the date a resolution was reached and the agreed nature of this.
- Should the matter not be resolved within five (5) school days, or in the event that Appleford School and the parents fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure. A written record is to be kept of the date a resolution was reached and the agreed nature of this. The parents will then be informed in writing.
- Although a written complaint is considered to be formal, this does not mean that the formal stage is automatically triggered whenever a concern is expressed in writing, for example, by email. These complaints will be treated at first in the informal resolution stage.

### **Stage 2 – Formal Resolution**

*(References to the number of working days refer to term-time only)*

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Headmistress who will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

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- In most cases, the Headmistress will speak to the parents concerned, normally on the day of receiving the complaint, so as to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- The Headmistress will:
  - establish what has happened so far and who has been involved; clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
  - meet with the complainant or contact them clarifying what the complainant feels would resolve the issue;
  - interview those involved, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish and
  - conduct each interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in questioning and keep notes of each interview.
- Within five (5) school days of receiving the complaint, the Headmistress will complete the investigation and contact the complainant to arrange a meeting. At any point in the process the Headmistress may decide or agree to commission a further investigation. If this occurs, the timescale may be extended by a further five (5) school days and the complainant will be informed in writing of the extension and the reason for it.
- When the investigation is complete, the Headmistress will meet the complainant to try to resolve the complaint. Any of the following may be appropriate at this point:
  - an acknowledgement that the complaint is valid in whole or in part; an apology; an explanation; clarification of any misunderstanding; an admission that the situation could have been handled better or differently;
  - an assurance that the event complained of will not recur; an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure it will not be repeated and
  - an undertaking to review school Procedures in light of the complaint.
- Once the Headmistress 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. The Headmistress will give reasons for the decision. A written record will also be kept of when a final outcome was reached.
- The Headmistress will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 - Complaints Panel Hearing.
- Should a parent or guardian have a complaint about the Headmistress it must be put in writing to the Proprietor, who will arrange for it to be investigated. Should the complainant not be satisfied with the outcome of the investigation then the complainant should proceed to Stage 3 – Complaints Panel Hearing.

### **Stage 3 – Complaints Panel Hearing**

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution of this procedure) they should write to Dr Peter Gardner who is the Managing Director. The parents' letter should include the nature of the complaint and how the school has handled it so far. The Managing Director is obliged to investigate the matter and will do everything possible to resolve the issue through a dialogue with the school. The contact details for the Managing Director are: Harpers Batch, Winford, Bristol, BS40 8AF.
- The Managing Director will appoint a Panel Convenor. The Panel will consist of at least three people not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. The Department for Education has given the following guidance on the identity of an independent panel member. *“Our general view is that people who have held a position of responsibility and are used to scrutinising evidence and putting forward balanced arguments would be suitable. Examples of persons likely to be suitable are serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background and retired members of the Police Force might be considered.”* Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Managing Director.
- The requirement for a panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school means that the independent member should not only be outside the school's workforce, and not a member of the governing/proprietary body, but also should not be otherwise involved with the management of the school – for example, this might well be the case with a solicitor who regularly acts for a school.

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- The Panel Convenor, on behalf of the Panel, should agree with all parties the date of the Appeal Meeting within five (5) school days of receipt of the written referral of the complaint. The meeting itself should be held within fifteen (15) school days of the receipt of the referral. If the complainant or Headmaster wishes to submit information in writing to the Panel this should be sent to the Panel Convenor at least five (5) days before the date of the hearing.
- 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 five (5) working days prior to the hearing.
- The provision requiring a complaint procedure to allow a parent to be accompanied at a panel hearing does not confer a right on a parent to have a legal representative to make representations on their behalf at the hearing, although the school can allow this if it wishes.
- If a parent does not exercise the right to attend a panel hearing, this does not remove the school's obligation to hold the hearing in conformity with its complaints procedure. The school's arrangements for the panel hearing should be reasonable in order to facilitate the parents exercising the right of attendance.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.
- Where further investigation is required, the Complaints Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Complaints Panel will reach a decision and may make findings and recommendations, which it shall complete normally within five (5) working days of the Hearing.
- A copy of the Panel's findings, and/or any recommendation and the reasons for them will be:
  - sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about and
  - available for inspection on the school premises by the Proprietor, Advisory Board and the Headmistress

As far as possible, the meeting should not be delayed if the referral comes at the end of term, especially at the end of the Summer Term. Since the aim of the procedure is to resolve the issue and effect reconciliation if necessary, it will be best if the matter can come to the Panel as quickly as possible, especially if the complainant will already have been engaged over a longer period in attempts to put things right.

**Role of the Panel Convenor is:**

- to confirm to all parties in writing the date, time and venue of the hearing; to receive and distribute any documentation to be read before the hearing; to meet and welcome all parties as they arrive at the hearing; to record the proceedings and
- to notify all parties of the Panel's decision. The wording of any letters will be agreed with the Chair of the Panel.

**The role of the Chair of the Panel is to ensure that:**

- procedure is properly followed;
- the procedure for the hearing of the complaint is explained to all parties and that they have the opportunity to put their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed; all parties are put at ease, especially those who are unfamiliar with such a hearing;
- proceedings are kept as informal as possible and that everyone treats each other with respect and courtesy;
- the Panel operates in an open-minded and independent way and time is given for all parties to consider 'new' evidence.
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**Options open to the Panel:**

The Panel may:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part; dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on an appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint or recommend changes to the school's systems or policies and procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not re-occur.

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### **After the Hearing:**

The Chair of the Panel agrees with the Convenor the wording of the letter to be sent to both parties. The Convenor will:

- ensure that the letter is sent out in accordance with the agreed time scales and procedure as stated in Stage 3 of this procedure;
- write up the notes of the meeting and gives a copy to the Chair of the Panel and
- ensure that any recommendation to change school policies or procedures is considered by the Managing Director.

### **Confidentiality**

Parents and Guardians can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Such 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 162A of the 2002 Act requests access to them; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

### **Record keeping for the Whole School**

A written record of all complaints and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage, or proceed to a panel hearing, is kept by the Headmistress for a minimum of three years. The record includes, at least: the person making the complaint, the date of the complaint, the nature of the complaint, any action taken and the outcome of the complaint. A written record will also be kept of when a final outcome was reached. The Managing Director will examine this written record on an annual basis. The school will provide, on request to Ofsted, a written record of all complaints made during a specified period and the action that was taken as a result of each complaint. We pride ourselves in the way we look after any concern or complaint a parent or child may have, with four complaints received in the academic year commencing 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021 and finishing 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022, two of these being of the same matter which were not Upheld, and one matter being Partially Upheld.

### **Child Protection**

For any complaint that involves a potential child protection issue, this must be reported immediately to the Headmaster (see our Child Protection Policy for details of the procedure).

### **Grievance, Disciplinary and Capability Procedures with reminders to all about the school's expectations**

This Complaints Procedure is totally separate from any Disciplinary or Capability Procedures. Should a complaint lead to concerns on the part of the Headmistress or Managing Director about the capability or conduct of a member of staff, these would not be discussed or dealt with within this procedure. This procedure does not apply to members of staff who wish to make a complaint as this would need to follow the school's Grievance Procedure.

### **Legal Status:**

- This procedure incorporates the manner in which complaints are to be managed in accordance with Part 7, paragraph 33 (a) to (k) inclusive of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) currently in force.