

Complaints Procedure for Parents

Parental concerns and complaints are normally raised and resolved informally, and directly with the person concerned or through the child's Form Tutor, as a Stage 1 Complaint. The school aims to resolve the matter with due speed and to the satisfaction of the parents without recourse to any formal process. The school will respond to a Stage 1 complaint within ten (10) school days.

If the complaint cannot be resolved via this informal route, parents may wish to proceed by putting their complaint formally in writing to the Principal, which is a Stage 2 Complaint. This type of complaint will be dealt with by the Principal or a senior member of staff acting on behalf of the Principal. The process of dealing with a formal Stage 2 complaint, in writing, from the moment that it is received by the school to resolution, normally will take no more than ten (10) school days, except in circumstances in which the normal timescales are affected by issues that may delay resolution, for example the need for further investigation, school holidays or illness.

Where parents are dissatisfied with the outcome of a Stage 2 Complaint, they may request a hearing before the Complaints Panel. This request must be put in writing to: info@dukeseducation.com. This will be treated as a Stage 3 Complaint and will be dealt with by the Chair of Governors through an appointed panel.

There is no further internal stage for the consideration and resolution of complaints. The process of dealing with a formal Stage 3 Complaint in writing from the moment that it is received by the school to resolution normally will take no more than eighteen (18) school days, except in circumstances in which the normal timescales are affected by issues that may delay resolution, for example the need for further investigation, school holidays or illness.

This Complaints Procedure and other school policies and procedures are available through the school's website www.radnor-twickenham.org or from the school office.

Review Process

The Principal undertakes a formal annual review of the Complaints Procedure, in consultation with the Board of Governors where appropriate.

Signed:



Darryl Wideman
Principal
September 2023

Introduction

The school does its best to ensure that the quality of teaching and pastoral care it offers to pupils is 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, with 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 aims of the school. We seek to be open about the decisions we make and the actions we take, and we will always try to 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.

Complaints will be resolved either to the complainant's satisfaction or with an otherwise appropriate outcome which balances the rights and duties of pupils and their parents. At every stage of the procedure, the handling of the complaint will be carried out with due speed, using the agreed time frame, and with fairness and the necessary confidentiality. Throughout the process, the school will be willing to: listen, learn, admit mistakes, apologise if appropriate, address any issues raised and change practices and procedures if appropriate.

The term 'staff' is inclusive of all teaching and support staff and is also inclusive of students on placement, contractors, supply or agency staff, volunteers, the Proprietor and the Board of Governors. The term 'parents' is used to apply to all parents, guardians and carers of children in the school.

The term 'complainant' is used 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 of a pupil at the school, or parents of more than one pupil at the school. Parents may, if they wish, be accompanied to any meeting – for example, by a friend or relative. However, legal representation is not normally appropriate.

The term 'school days' refers to days within term-time only.

Stage 1 Complaints: Informal Resolution

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. 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, achieving through open dialogue a satisfactory resolution.

If parents have a complaint, they should normally contact their child's Form Tutor. In most cases the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means, to the parents' satisfaction. If the Form Tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary to consult the Head of Year, one of the Deputy Heads, the Head or the Principal.

Any Stage 1 Complaints that are made directly to one of the Senior Leadership Team or Head of Year, will usually be referred to the relevant Form Tutor for their consideration, unless the original recipient of the complaint deems it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally, for example if the complaint relates to a classroom teacher.

Regardless of whether the Stage 1 Complaint has been received by the school orally or in writing, the Form Tutor will make a written record of the concerns/complaint, the date on which they were received and any resultant actions taken. Stage 1 Complaints should be responded to by the school within ten (10) working days.

Should the matter not be resolved to their satisfaction, the complainants are free to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Where a complaint is about the Principal, parents may choose to speak to the Principal directly and informally, or contact the Chair of Governors (in writing to: info@dukeseducation.com) invoking the formal process by registering a Stage 3 Complaint as below, either immediately or because they are dissatisfied with the Principal's response to their informal approach.

Stage 2 Complaints: Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis to the complainants' satisfaction, they should put their complaint in writing to the Principal, who will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. In most cases, the Principal 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. However, it may be necessary for the Principal to carry out further investigations.

The Principal 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;
- conduct each interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in questioning.

Normally within ten (10) school days of receiving a Stage 2 Complaint, the Principal will complete the investigation and contact the complainant to arrange a meeting. At any point in the process, the Principal 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 Principal 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;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint;
- a written record will be kept.

Immediately after this meeting, when the Principal 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 and the reasons for it in writing. The parents will also be informed at this point that, if they are dissatisfied with the outcome, they should proceed to Stage 3 of the complaints process.

Normally, the Principal will write to parents with his decision on a formal Stage 2 Complaint within ten (10) school days (or fifteen (15) school days, if any further investigation is required) of the receipt of the formal Stage 2 complaint. A summary record of the concern or complaint, its resolution and any action taken as a result will be made. This record will be made available to the Governors.

If the complainant is still not satisfied with the Principal's decision following a Stage 2 investigation, they may then register a Stage 3 Complaint as below, whereby they will be referred to the Panel Convener, who has been appointed by the Board of Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel.

Stage 3 Complaints: Complaints Panel Hearing

A Complaints Panel hearing is a review of the decisions taken at Stage 2 by the Principal (or in circumstances where the formal complaint concerns the Principal, a governor is appointed to act in his / her place). The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure.

The role of the Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties and any representations made by the parents and the Principal;
- then, to reach a decision, on the balance of probabilities, as to whether each complaint is made out in whole or in part.

It is not within the powers of the Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils or parents. The Panel may make recommendations to the school on these matters or any other issues as appropriate.

A request for a hearing before the Complaints Panel must be put in writing to Dukes Education (info@dukeseducation.com) within five working days of the Stage 2 decision complained of. The request will usually only be considered if the procedures at Stages 1 and 2 have been completed.

The written request should include:

- a copy of all relevant documents and full contact details;
- details of all the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired;
- a list of the documents which the parents believe to be in the school's possession and wish the Panel to see; and
- whether the Complainants propose to be accompanied to the hearing by someone who is legally qualified (see paragraph 'Planning the Hearing' below).

If assistance with the request is required, for example because of a disability, please inform the Panel of this and they will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

The request for a hearing will be acknowledged in writing within two (2) working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable during the holidays. Every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within fifteen (15) working days of receipt of the request.

However, it should be noted that the Panel will not normally sit during half terms or longer school holidays.

Planning the Hearing

As soon as reasonably practicable, and in any event at least ten (10) working days before the hearing, the Panel will send written notification to each party of the date, time and place of the hearing. Copies of any additional documents that the complainants wish the Panel to consider should be sent to: info@dukeseducation.com to be received at least five (5) working days prior to the hearing.

The Complainants may be accompanied to the hearing by another person, for example a relative, teacher or friend. The Panel Hearing is not a legal proceeding and so legal representation is not necessary. If the Complainants wish to be accompanied by someone who is legally qualified, they should have notified the Panel of this in the initial request for a panel hearing. If they did not do so and wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, they must inform the Panel of this at least five (5) working days prior to the hearing. Parents should note that the Panel will wish to speak to them directly and the legally qualified person will not be permitted to act as an advocate.

A copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the Panel will be circulated to all parties at least three (3) working days prior to the hearing.

Composition of the Panel

The Panel comprises at least three individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint, including at least one panel member who is independent of the management and running of Radnor House Twickenham. The parents may ask who has been appointed to sit on the Panel ahead of the hearing.

The Panel members will choose one of themselves to be the Chair of the Panel throughout the proceedings.

Panel Hearing

The hearing will be conducted in an informal manner. All those present at the hearing will have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel will be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. A clerk appointed by the Panel will take handwritten minutes of the proceedings.

All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his/her comment will be minuted.

The Chair may, at his/her discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue. This may include an adjournment to take legal advice.

A hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.

The Decision

The Panel will reach a decision on a balance of probabilities unless there is an agreed position. The decision, findings and any recommendations will be confirmed in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, by email, normally within five (5) working days of the hearing. If the parents do not wish to receive the decision by email, they should inform the Panel of this so that a copy may be given or posted to them.

The decisions, findings and any recommendations will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the Proprietor and the Principal. Actions taken by the school as a result of the complaint regardless of the findings will also be recorded in the Complaints Log.

The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the school's complaints procedure.

Confidentiality, Records and Other Matters

Parents are 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 109 of the 2008 Education and Skills Act requests access to them; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

A written record of all Stage 2 and 3 Complaints, and of whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or 3, is kept by the Principal. The record, regardless of the outcome of the complaint, includes, at least: the name of the complainant, the date of the complaint, the nature of the complaint, any action taken and the outcome of the complaint. The written record will include the date when a final outcome was reached.

The Board of Governors examines this written record on an annual basis. The school will provide, on request to the Independent Schools Inspectorate or to any other inspectorate carrying out an inspection on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education, a written record of all complaints made during a specified period and the action that was taken as a result of each complaint.

Any concern or complaint which involves a potential child protection or safeguarding issue must be made immediately, and in accordance with the school's Safeguarding Policy and related procedures, to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, the Principal or the Chair of Governors. Any appeal against the exclusion of a pupil may be made to the Chair of Governors with reference to the school's Behaviour Policy. More general or other concerns or complaints relating to the application of the Behaviour Policy should be made in accordance with the procedures set out above.

This Complaints Procedure is totally separate from any disciplinary, grievance or capability procedures for members of staff. Should a complaint lead to concerns on the part of the Principal or Board of Governors about the capability or conduct of a member of staff, these would not be discussed or dealt with within this complaints process. Parents with concerns about individual members of staff must understand that the processes involved in staff discipline and in staff capability are sometimes protracted and do not always lend themselves to speedy resolution.

The number of formal parental complaints in the academic year 2022/23 was as follows:

- Stage 2 Complaints: 3
- Stage 3 Complaints: 0