

Policy A14: Complaints

Complaints procedure

Introduction

Queen Margaret's School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if current parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the school in accordance with the following procedure. (Parents of past pupils will receive a response to any concerns they raise but the following procedure does not apply). The policy is available for all parents of pupils and of prospective pupils on the school's website and Queen Margaret's School will ensure that any parent or prospective parent who requests it, is made aware that this document is available to download from the website or that a hard copy can be requested from the Head's PA.

What Constitutes a Complaint?

The Department for Education definition is that "any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the school is now a complaint" and is to be recorded as a complaint.

It may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the school has done something wrong, or failed to do so something that it should have done or acted unfairly. A formal complaint is defined as one which has not been resolved at the first stage by direct contact with school staff, and is then made in writing or received by email to a senior member of staff or the Head; it immediately becomes a formal complaint and goes to stage 2.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially and that no child will be penalised for a complaint raised by a parent or child in good faith.

Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible, with that in mind timescales have been allocated to each stage of the process for resolving complaints as set out below. The timelines set out below are in school working days. A school working day is defined as a week day when school staff are in work and will include days out of term time. In the event that a stage of the process cannot be completed within the given timescale the complainant will be given an explanation and a revised timescale

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint they should, at the earliest possible opportunity, raise the matter initially with the Housemistress/Head of Year if it is a pastoral matter or with the Form Tutor/Director of Studies if it is an academic matter. In the vast majority of cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Housemistress, Head of Year, Form Tutor or Director of Studies cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for her/him to consult other senior staff.
- Complaints made directly in the first instance to Heads of Department, the Deputy Head or the Head will usually be referred to the relevant Housemistress/Head of Year/Form Tutor, unless the Head of Department, Deputy Head or Head deem it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
- If a complaint is being raised during the School Holidays it should be addressed to the Bursary or to the Clerk to the Governors. If the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chairman of Governors who may be contacted via the Clerk.
- The member of staff dealing with the complaint will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were communicated to the School. Should the matter not be resolved **within 10 school days** of the complaint being made or in the event that the staff member and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution earlier than that date, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis or has not been resolved to the complainants' satisfaction with 10 school days of it being communicated to the School, then the complaint must be put in writing to the Head (or Bursar, if concerning a Bursarial matter). The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate cause of action to take. In most cases, the Head will meet or speak to the parents concerned to discuss the matter within **5 school days** of receiving the written complaint (or if the Head is absent from school, within 5 schooldays of his/her return). If possible, a resolution will be reached at this

stage. Exceptionally the Head may consider that she needs to proceed to a detailed investigation, in which case the Head will acknowledge the complaint in writing within **5 school days** of receiving the complaint (or her return to School if later) and confirm that investigations are on-going

- 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 of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision either orally with the decision confirmed in writing or directly in writing that decision to be given within **20 school days** of the receipt of the written complaint. The Head will also give reasons for her decision.
- If the complaint is against the Head, the Chairman of Governors will call for a full report from the Head and for all the relevant documents. The Chairman 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 Chairman 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 Chairman will give reasons for his/her decision.
- If the complainants remain dissatisfied, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3 - Panel Hearing

- If the complainants seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they will be referred to the Chairman of the Board of Governors who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel.
- The matter will then be referred to a Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint; two will be Governors and one will be independent of the management and running of the school. For clarity, the independent person cannot be a current or past employee, a current or past governor, a current or recent past parent, or a current or recent past pupil. The Chairman of the Board will appoint one of the Governors to act as Chairman of the Complaints Panel who, on behalf of the panel, will acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and within **15 school days** after the referral to the Chairman.
- 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 **3 school days** prior to the hearing. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out and, if necessary, appoint an investigator
- The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person, if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation is not permitted.
- After consideration of all facts that the Panel considers to be relevant including hearing from any investigator appointed by the Panel, the Panel will make findings and may make recommendations. The Panel's findings will be made available for inspection on the school premises by the Governing Board and the Head. If applicable, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head (or Bursar), the Governors and, where relevant, the person of whom the complaint has been made within **10 school days** of the hearing. The Panel will give reasons for its decision.

The decision of the Panel is final.

NOTES:

1. A written record will be kept of all complaints that are made and;
 - (i) whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and
 - (ii) action taken by the school as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld)

At the school's discretion, additional records may be kept which may contain the following information:

- 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 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)

2. Parents can be assured that all complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except in so far as is required of the school by the Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, by the Secretary of State, where disclosure is required by the ISI in the course of the school's inspection or under any other legal authority.

Should a parent be dissatisfied with the school's complaints procedure they may contact the following body:

Independent Schools Inspectorate
CAP House
9 - 12 Long Lane
London
EC1A 9HA

Email info@isi.net

Number of formal complaints dealt with under this policy in 2014 – 2015 0

Jessica Miles
Head

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