



33a. Complaints Procedure for Parents	
Owner:	Head
Approved by:	Governing Body
Policy is available from:	Website and intranet
Review cycle:	Yearly
Review date:	September 2024
Linked documents:	6b. Exclusions Policy

Complaints Procedures

Complaints Procedure for Parents

This procedure is available to the parents of current pupils (day and boarding) and to all staff, on the website and in the *Parent and Pupil Handbook*. The School welcomes suggestions and comments from parents and takes seriously concerns and complaints which they may raise. If parents have any complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with the following procedure and timescales.

Rye will make available to parents of pupils and of prospective pupils and provide, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate, details of the complaints procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If a parent has a complaint, the parent should normally contact the member of staff concerned, for example, a subject teacher (concerning a particular subject) or a Housemistress (concerning a boarding matter). In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means. If the member of staff cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for the member of staff to consult a colleague, for example a Head of Department or a member of the Senior Leadership Team. Contact can be made in person or by telephone, email or letter.
- A complaint made directly to a Head of Department or a member of the Senior Leadership Team will usually be referred to the relevant member of staff unless the recipient of the complaint deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.
- A complaint about the Head should be referred directly to the Chair of Governors, c/o Rye St Antony, Pullen's Lane, Oxford OX3 0BY.
- A complaint, at this stage, will normally be resolved within 7 working days¹.
- The recipient of the complaint will make a written record of the complaint and the response, including the dates of receipt and response. An acknowledgement of such a complaint in writing will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within two working days of receipt during term time or within two working days of the first day of term or half term.
- Should the matter not be resolved satisfactorily, then the parent is advised to proceed with the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2: Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parent will be asked to submit a completed Formal Complaint form (Appendix 1) to the Head. After considering the complaint, the Head, with the Deputy Heads, will decide the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head will speak with the parent concerned to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

¹ A working day is deemed to be Monday to Friday during term time only

- It may be necessary for the Head to carry out further investigations.
- 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 the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and the parent will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head will also give reasons for her decision.

- A complaint, at this stage, will normally be resolved within 14 working days. Please note that any complaint received within one month of the end of term or half term is likely to take longer to resolve owing to the presence of school holidays and the unavailability of personnel and the aim would be to inform any complainant of the outcome of an investigation and the resolution to the complaint within 14 working days of the first day of term or half-term on site.
- If the parent is still not satisfied with the decision, the parent should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.
- 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 their decision.
- All complaints, informal or formal are recorded in a central record which is reviewed termly by the Chair of Governors and the Head. This enables patterns of low level concern to be monitored.

Stage 3: Panel Hearing

- If the parent seeks to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), the parent will be referred to the Convener (normally the Chair of 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 at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the School. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Board of Governors. The Convener on behalf of the Panel, will acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and 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 not later than 7 working days prior to the hearing.
- The parent may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parent's complaint immediately 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 the Panel considers relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make findings and recommendations, which it will present in writing within 14 working days of the Hearing. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and recommendations, if any, will be (i) sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person about whom the complaint has been made and (ii) made available for inspection on the school premises by the Chair of Governors on behalf of the Governing Body (Proprietor) and the Head.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially, although it should be understood that anonymous complaints will not necessarily be pursued. The School will keep a written record of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the Stage 2 or proceed to a panel hearing. The School will also keep a record of any action taken by the School as a result of those complaints, regardless of whether they are upheld or not. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State for Education or a body conducting an inspection under Section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them. Knowledge of most complaints will be limited to the Head and those directly involved, with the Chair of Governors being informed should circumstances require.

Vexatious Complaints

In the first instance the School will communicate either in writing or verbally (confirmed with a letter) to inform the complainant his/her behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable/unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this policy.

If the behaviour is not modified the School will take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:

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- Inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this policy;
- Inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties;
- Inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the School should be by letter only;
- In the case of physical, or verbal aggression or other forms of intimidating behaviour, take appropriate advice and consider warning the complainant about being banned from the School site; or proceed straight to a temporary ban;
- Consider taking appropriate advice on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation;
- Consider taking advice from the HR/Legal Services about putting in place a specific procedure for dealing with complaints from the complainant, i.e. the complainant will not be able to deal directly with the Head but only with a third person, to be identified by the governing body of the School, who will investigate, determine whether or not the concern / complaint is reasonable or vexatious and then advise the Headteacher accordingly.

If a complaint is found to be vexatious, the School reserves the right to decide whether the parent contract can be upheld and whether the family and School can continue to work together for the benefit of the child.

The School complies with Standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. Thus, the School, in addition to complying with the Independent School Standards Regulations, the School complies with the following further requirements.

- The complaints procedure is available not only to parents but also to all staff and boarders.
- Boarders and their parents are informed by the School of how they can contact the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) regarding any complaints concerning boarding welfare: ISI, Ground Floor, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA (telephone: 0207 6000 100; www.isi.net) and the Children's Commissioner for England, <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk>; The Office of the Children's Commissioner, Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT (telephone: 0207 7838 330/0800 528 0731; info.request@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk).
- A written record is kept of all formal complaints and their outcomes for regular review by the Head.
- Complaints are resolved either to the complainant's satisfaction or with an otherwise appropriate outcome which balances the rights and duties of pupils.
- Pupils are not penalised for making a complaint in good faith.

Written complaints about the fulfilment of EYFS requirements will always be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days.

Parents of pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage may make a complaint to Ofsted and/or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) if they wish: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school> (enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or 0300 123 4666) / Independent Schools Inspectorate, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA (telephone: 0207 6000 100; email: concerns@isi.net; www.isi.net).

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The record of any complaint will be kept for at least three years, and will be made available to both Ofsted and ISI on request.

The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure (Stage 2 or beyond) during the preceding calendar year was one.

Return to School, September 2021

The School returned to normal routines in September 2021 and so, the extended deadlines, operating during the pandemic no longer apply. If the school returns to a Covid lockdown, then the revised timings will come into force.

Revision of the complaints policy during Covid-19 lockdown

The School has reviewed the time periods in their policies during the period of the pandemic to ensure they have any added flexibility they may need as a consequence of disruption or staff absence.

For an informal complaint, the school will respond to any complaint within 10 working days. For a Stage 2 complaint, it might take a little longer as many staff are working from home. In most cases the School will make every effort to respond within the 14 working day timescale. However, should there be difficulties gathering all the necessary information, the School will consult with parents on an agreed response date.

Given the regulations surrounding Covid-19 lockdown, holding a Panel hearing will pose considerable challenges. The hearing will have to take place using online conferencing. In such cases, the School will work with the parents to agree a reasonable timescale.

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Formal complaint form

1. Name of complainant	
2. Date of complaint	
3. Nature of complaint	
4. Name of other person(s) involved	
5. Actions taken so far to resolve the complaint	
6. Person to whom the initial complaint was made	
7. Signature of complainant	

This form will be retained in the 'Complaints folder' and available for inspection by Governors and the Independent Schools Inspectorate

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