



## Complaints Policy

### Key Points on the handling of parental concerns and complaints

<b>Purpose</b>	All schools are required to provide guidelines for handling concerns and complaints received from parents of children at the School. This policy aims to resolve a concern or complaint in a positive way as soon as possible and to do so sympathetically, efficiently, at the appropriate level and being fair to those concerned. The policy distinguishes between a concern or difficulty which can be resolved informally and a formal complaint which requires further investigation.
<b>The Process</b>	There is a 3-stage process: (1) the informal resolution of a concern or difficulty notified orally or in writing to a member of staff; (2) a formal complaint in writing to the Headmaster; and (3) the Complaints Panel.
<b>Stage 1: Concerns and Difficulties</b>	A concern or difficulty is expected to be resolved informally by the appropriate member of staff. A concern or difficulty raised will be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within three (3) working days during Term time or if received during a School holiday then as soon as practicable and no later than within three (3) working days of the start of the following Term. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing. An informal complaint should be resolved within seven (7) working days of the date of receiving the informal complaint in Term time or as soon as practicable if the informal complaint is received either during or immediately before a School holiday. A concern or difficulty that is not resolved informally and which is agreed by the person raising it to be a formal complaint will be dealt with under Stage 2.
<b>Stage 2: Formal Complaint</b>	A formal complaint will be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within five (5) working days during Term time or if received during a School holiday then as soon as practicable and no later than within five (5) working days of the start of the following Term. A formal complaint will be investigated, and the findings will be reported to the Headmaster who will notify the parent in writing of the decision and the reasons for it. The investigation and notification of the decision will be made within twenty-eight (28) working days of the date of receiving the written complaint in Term time or as soon as practicable if the written complaint is received either during or immediately before a School holiday.
<b>Stage 3: Reference to Complaints Panel</b>	A parent who is dissatisfied with the Headmaster's decision under Stage 2 may request a hearing before a Complaints Panel by writing to the Clerk to the Governors within seven (7) working days of the decision. The Clerk will acknowledge the request in writing within seven (7) working days. The Complaints Panel will comprise a minimum of two Governors and one independent member who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint. An independent member is someone who is independent of the governance, management and running of the School. The Complaints Panel should meet within twenty-eight (28) working days of the date that the written request was received, not including School half terms or holidays. The parent may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, teacher or friend. Those present at the hearing will have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is a private proceeding, not a legal proceeding. The Complaints Panel is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. The decision of the Complaints Panel will be notified within seven (7) working days of the hearing.
<b>Record keeping</b>	A written record of all informal and formal complaints, regardless of whether they are upheld, shall be kept for a minimum of three years.

The above Key Points are a synopsis and are not intended to replace the policy. The full policy must be read and followed if it needs to be applied. If the Key Points are found to conflict with the wording of the full policy, the policy takes priority.



## **Definitions:**

<b>“School”:</b>	means Aldwickbury School.
<b>“Headmaster”:</b>	means the Headmaster of the School.
<b>“parent”:</b>	means a parent of a pupil at the School at the time that a concern or difficulty is raised and may at the School’s discretion include a parent whose son at that time has recently left the School.
<b>“Stage”:</b>	means a stage of the 3-stage process set out in this policy.
<b>“concern or difficulty”:</b>	means a query or anxiety or dissatisfaction with an aspect of the School or its processes and procedures which is raised or otherwise brought to the attention of the School orally or in writing and which appears to seek intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken by the School.
<b>“formal complaint”:</b>	means a concern or difficulty that is not resolved informally under Stage 1 and which the parent indicates that they wish to be treated as a complaint to be taken forward under Stage 2.
<b>“working days”:</b>	means Monday to Friday when the School is open during Term time.
<b>“Term”:</b>	means a term in the School calendar (dates of which are published on the School’s website).
<b>“Appointed Person”:</b>	means the person appointed by the Headmaster to investigate a formal complaint under Stage 2.
<b>“the Governors”:</b>	means the governors of the School.
<b>“the Clerk”:</b>	means the clerk of the Governors.
<b>“Complaints Panel”:</b>	means a panel convened under Stage 3.

In this policy the singular includes the plural and vice versa and words of any gender include the other genders

## **Introduction**

**Circulation:** This policy is published on the School website and is available, upon request to the School Office, to the parents, pupils and staff at the School.

**Policy Status:** The policy has been approved by the Governors and provides guidelines for handling concerns and complaints. It takes account of Part 7 Paragraph 33 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014 as amended 2020 and has regard to Standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding School (2015). The procedures set out below may be



adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and circumstances of each case. Certain procedures can only be carried out during Term time.

**Application:** This policy applies to all concerns or difficulties and complaints raised with the School. Additional procedures may also apply to a concern or difficulty or complaint, for example in the event of a child protection issue (see the School Safeguarding policy).

**Three Stages:** This policy describes a three-stage procedure:

1. **Stage 1:** Informal resolution of a concern or difficulty notified orally or in writing to a member of staff.
2. **Stage 2:** A formal complaint in writing to the Headmaster.
3. **Stage 3** A reference to the Complaints Panel.

### **Policy aim and statement**

**Aim:** The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or difficulty or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice, it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote parents' and pupils' confidence in the School's ability to safeguard and promote welfare. The School will try to resolve every concern or difficulty or complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, reviewing systems and procedures in light of the circumstances.

**Policy statement:** The School needs to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. The School recognises that a concern or difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, which would be damaging to relationships and also to the School culture. Parents should never feel – or be made to feel – that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or their opportunities at the School. The policy, however, distinguishes between a concern or difficulty which is an informal complaint that can be resolved informally and a formal complaint which will require investigation.

**Management of the complaints policy:** the Deputy Head is responsible for:

- ensuring that all teaching, support, and medical staff are made aware of the procedures for reporting a concern or difficulty or formal complaint
- monitoring the keeping, confidentiality, and storage of written records in relation to concerns or difficulties and formal complaints (except that a record of any concern or difficulty or formal complaint made about the Deputy Head shall be kept by the Headmaster rather than the Deputy Head)
- ensuring that records of concerns or difficulties and formal complaints include details of how they are resolved and the action taken by the School as a result of the concerns or difficulties and complaints, regardless of whether they are upheld (except that responsibility for the details of records of any concern or difficulty or formal complaint about the Deputy Head shall lie with the Headmaster rather than the Deputy Head).



- reporting regularly to the Headmaster with respect to concerns or difficulties and formal complaints
- acting at all times when the School is open with authority to take decisions relating to matters of pastoral care and discipline.

The Deputy Head can be contacted by telephone and e-mail, details of which are provided on the School website.

Records of concerns or difficulties and formal complaints will be kept for a minimum of three (3) years.

**Confidentiality:** Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where disclosure is required in the course of the School's inspection or under other legal authority.

**Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS):** For complaints relating to pupils in Reception (Pre-Prep). where there is provision for the EYFS, the following additional provisions apply to this policy:

- Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements must be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within twenty-eight (28) days.
- The record of complaints must be available to Ofsted and the Independent Schools Inspectorate on request.

### **Complaint against the Headmaster**

If a concern or difficulty is about the Headmaster and reaches Stage 2 and cannot be resolved, then it should be passed to the Chairman of Governors (whose contact details can be supplied by the Clerk). The procedure set out in Stage 3 would then be followed. The Headmaster should not be informed of the complaint until such time as is appropriate.

### **Safeguarding Complaint**

If a concern or difficulty is in a safeguarding context about a boy and/or involving a member of staff it will be shared with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) as set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education.

### **Number of complaints in a School year**

The number of complaints in the previous School year may be obtained by contacting the Headmaster's PA or the School office.

### **Three Stage Complaints Procedure**

#### **Stage 1 – Concerns and difficulties**

A concern or difficulty is an informal complaint. Examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, or about allocation of privileges or responsibilities, or about a timetable clash or some other aspect of the School's systems or equipment, or a billing error. **It is**



**hoped that a concern or difficulty, whether received verbally or in writing (including email), will be resolved quickly and informally to the parent's satisfaction.**

**Notification:** Parents are expected to raise a concern or difficulty initially as follows:

- **Education issues** – if the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs the parent should speak or write to the Form teacher or tutor, subject teacher, relevant Head of Year, Director of Studies, Head of Pre-Prep, Head of Individual Development or Deputy Head.
- **Pastoral Care** – for concerns relating to matters outside the classroom or during after-School provision the parent should speak or write to the Form teacher or tutor, relevant Head of Year, Head of Pre-Prep or the Deputy Head.
- **Disciplinary matters** – for a problem over any disciplinary action taken or sanction imposed at the School the parent should speak or write to the Deputy Head.

**A concern about the safety or welfare of a child should be notified immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (whose details are on the School's website).**

### **Acknowledgement**

The School will acknowledge a notification of a concern or difficulty by telephone, e-mail or letter within three (3) working days of receipt within Term time and if the notification is received during a School holiday then as soon as practicable, and no later than within three (3) working days of the start of the following Term. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing.

### **Informal Resolution**

If a teacher or tutor cannot resolve a concern or difficulty alone, it may be necessary for the teacher or tutor to consult with a senior member of staff, as appropriate, who will then deal with the matter.

The teacher or tutor concerned, or the senior member of staff, will make a written record of the concern or difficulty and the date on which it was received.

An informal complaint should be resolved within seven (7) working days of the date of receiving it in Term time or as soon as practicable if the informal complaint is received either during or immediately before a School holiday.

If an informal complaint is not resolved to the satisfaction of the parent within twenty (20) working days of the date when the concern or difficulty was first raised, the parent will be invited in writing to agree to make a written request to the Headmaster for the matter to be dealt with under Stage 2. If the Headmaster does not receive such written request within fifteen (15) working days of that invitation to the parent to initiate Stage 2, the School may assume that the informal complaint has been resolved and take no, or no further, action in relation to it.



## Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

**Notification:** If a concern or difficulty cannot be resolved to the parent's satisfaction on an informal basis under Stage 1, then the parent should put their complaint in writing to the Headmaster. This is considered to be a formal complaint.

- A formal complaint will be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within five (5) working days during Term time or, if the notification is received during a School holiday, then as soon as practicable and no later than within five (5) working days of the start of the following Term. The acknowledgement of the formal complaint will indicate the action that is being taken in relation to it.

**Investigation:** The Headmaster will appoint a senior member of staff, normally the Deputy Head, to be the Appointed Person who will investigate the formal complaint.

- The Appointed Person may request additional information from the parents and will probably wish to speak to them personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances.
- The Appointed Person will report the outcome of the investigation to the Headmaster.
- The Headmaster may wish to carry out further investigations and/or speak to the parent making the formal complaint.
- Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the formal complaint.
- Once the Headmaster is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, he will make a decision on the formal complaint and inform the parents in writing of that decision, and the reasons for it, within twenty-eight (28) working days of the date of receiving the written complaint in Term time or as soon as practicable if the formal complaint is received either during or immediately before a School holiday.
- If a parent is not satisfied with the Headmaster's decision, they should proceed to Stage 3.

## Stage 3 – Reference to the Complaints Panel

**Notification:** A parent who is dissatisfied with the Headmaster's decision under Stage 2 may request a hearing before a Complaints Panel by writing to or emailing the Clerk within seven (7) working days of the decision complained of. **Such request will only be considered if the procedure at Stage 2 has been completed.** Copies of all relevant documents and the parent's full contact details should accompany the parent's letter or email to the Clerk and the letter or email must include details of the outcome that the parent wants and all the grounds of the formal complaint. Parents should also send the Clerk a list of any documents which they believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Complaints Panel to see. The Clerk will acknowledge the request in writing within seven (7) working days.

**Composition:** The Complaints Panel will comprise members who are Governors and one member who is independent of the governance, management and running of the School and will consist of a





minimum of three (3) individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint.

**Convening the Complaints Panel:** The Clerk will convene the Complaints Panel within twenty-eight (28) working days of the date the Clerk received the written request for a hearing not including School half terms or holidays when the Complaints Panel will not normally sit. A parent may ask the Clerk who has been appointed to sit on the Complaints Panel and if they have a genuine reason for objecting to one or more members of the Complaints Panel then all reasonable efforts will be made to find an alternative member or members. If the period of twenty-eight (28) working days stated above includes a School half term or holiday or an objection raised by the parent to the membership of the Complaints Panel then there may be a delay to the convening of the Complaints Panel which will then be convened as soon as practicable.

**Notice of Hearing:** Within fifteen (15) working days of the date that the Clerk receives the parent's written request for a hearing, the Clerk will send the parent written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing together with brief details of the Complaints Panel members who will hear it. The hearing can take place in person or virtually

**Attendance:** The parent will be asked to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not be permitted at the hearing. Copies of additional documents that the parent wishes the Complaints Panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk at least three (3) clear working days prior to the hearing.

**Chairman of the Complaints Panel ("Chairman"):** The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Complaints Panel (chosen by themselves) and will be conducted in an informal manner.

**Hearing:** 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. The Chairman may direct that the hearing is audio recorded to assist accurate recollection for purposes of the decision. The recording will be shared only with the members of the Complaints Panel and the Complaints Panel will be under no obligation to retain the recording thereafter. The Clerk will take a handwritten minute of the proceedings in any event.

**Evidence:** The Chairman will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding, and the Complaints Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. If the parent or the Headmaster wants oral evidence from a witness to be heard they shall inform the Clerk at least seven (7) working days before the hearing to request the Complaints Panel's permission, giving details of the witness. The Complaints Panel will notify the parent and the Headmaster at least five (5) working days before the hearing as to whether or not oral evidence will be heard from the witness. If the Complaints Panel agrees to hear oral evidence from the witness at the hearing the witness will be called into the relevant part of the hearing to give evidence and will not usually be permitted to listen to the full proceedings.

**Conduct:** 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 Chairman. If the hearing is terminated, the original decision of the Headmaster 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 their comment will be minuted.

**Adjournment:** The Chairman may at their discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue.

**Decision:** After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Complaints Panel shall reach a decision unless there is an agreed position with the parent as to the way forward. The Complaints Panel's decision, and the reasons for it, together with any recommendations, may be notified orally at the hearing or subsequently and shall be confirmed in writing to the parent, the Governors, the Headmaster and, where relevant, to the person complained about, within seven (7) working days of the hearing. **No further appeal is available after the decision has been made by the Complaints Panel**

**Private Proceeding:** 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.

### **Education Authorities**

If at any stage a parent feels that their concern or difficulty or complaint is not being, or has not been, dealt with appropriately and to their satisfaction, they may contact the Independent Schools Inspectorate and/or Ofsted whose details are as follows:

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

Tel: 020 7600 0100

Ofsted  
Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

Tel: 0300 123 1231

### **Review**

This policy shall be reviewed every year

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Last review May 2022

Signed off by The Education Committee 10/5/2022 Approval by Full Board June 2022.

Next Review September 2023 by Nominations and Governance Committee