

Complaints Policy

Aims

- To resolve any concerns effectively and promptly so there is no impact on pupils' well-being or developmental or academic progress
- To ensure that the procedures for dealing with complaints are rigorous, transparent and applied fairly and without bias
- To use feedback from parents to improve the school's provision

Introduction

This policy and procedure is made available to the parents of currently attending pupils. We hope to have positive and productive relationships with parents and/or carers but we understand that there may be occasions when concerns or complaints are raised. We have an open-door policy and we are committed to taking concerns seriously. We encourage our parents and/or carers to share any concerns with us on an informal basis in order to facilitate a prompt and positive resolution.

All formal complaints are recorded and written records are kept for 5 years. Outcomes of formal written complaints will be made available.

The main aim of this Complaints Policy is to resolve any complaint as fairly and promptly as possible. The school will ask the complainant, at the earliest stage, what they think may resolve the issue and when responding will communicate the outcome of each stage of the complaints process. Formal complaints will be dealt with in a sensitive, impartial and confidential manner.

Informal complaints may be made in the following manner:

- in person, by telephone or in writing
- by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

Formal complaints should always be made in writing and addressed to the Head of School and/or proprietor.

Complaints Outside of this Policy

Some complaints fall outside of the school's complaints procedure, for example:

- exclusions
- staff grievances
- disciplinary procedures

Procedures

Brief notes will be taken during the initial informal meeting in order to prevent any later challenge or disagreement about what has been said, the notes will be kept securely. The complainant will receive a copy of the notes and will be asked to sign and date all copies of the document. A copy of any written response will be added to the investigation record. It is not school policy to allow the recording via a mobile device of a meeting with a complainant. Where the complainant requests that the meeting is clerked, this can be arranged with prior notice.

Serial and Persistent Complaints

The school will take all reasonable steps to investigate a complainant's concerns. A copy of the outcome of the investigation and any recommendations made will be given to the complainant following any formal investigations. There may be occasions however when, despite all stages of the complaints procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If a complainant contacts the school repeatedly, making substantially the same complaint each time, this will be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent complaints'. If this is the case the complainant will be informed that the matter has been closed and the school will not respond further. Where complaints are deemed after investigation to be either malicious or unnecessarily time wasting, they may be referred by the named person to the Proprietor and further action will be considered. If an individual persists to the point that may constitute harassment, the school will seek legal advice.

Stage 1 – Informal Discussion with the School

It is always useful to talk through your complaint informally with the relevant person so that any concerns may be addressed. Contact should be made in the first instance to the school in person or by telephone or e-mail. The school will suggest the most appropriate person to speak to at this point and may request that you make an appointment, as this will ensure an appropriate amount of time is allocated to the discussion. Where the concern or complaint relates to pupil with special educational needs, initial contact should be made to the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo).

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint to the Headteacher and Proprietor

If you feel that your complaint has not been resolved by following Stage One, or if you feel that your complaint is too serious for the informal stage, you should confirm your complaint by letter to the Headteacher stating that you are making a formal complaint. Your letter will be acknowledged in writing within 3 working days of its receipt. Copies of the complaint should not be sent to other parties, for example, other members of staff as this may cause a conflict of interest. The Headteacher will then investigate the complaint either directly or by appointing the most appropriate member of staff to investigate on their behalf. The Headteacher will respond to the complainant by letter within 10 working days of the initial complaint being made. Where a complaint is lengthy or complex, or in the case of absence a longer time-scale may be necessary but complainants will receive updates within the above timescales. Any response to the complainant will include the outcome of the investigation and any recommendations. The complainant is entitled to bring a friend or other representative to any meetings with the school but this should not be a legal representative.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher it should be addressed directly to the Proprietor at the following address

FAO The Proprietor
Atelier 21 School
Broadfield Park
Brighton Road
Crawley
RH11 9RZ

Upon receipt of a Stage Two complaint about the Headteacher, the organisations Financial Controller and Business Manager, will within 24 hours, contact a minimum of 3 members of the School Improvement Partners, and make arrangements to convene a meeting of the panel.

The School Improvement Partners are individuals independent of the management of the school, i.e. not the Proprietor or members of staff. The members of this panel are:

Guy Claxton – Author, Cognitive Scientist and Founder of The Learning Power Approach

Joanna Goodman – Cromwell Consulting – Education Improvement Consultant, Ofsted and ISI Inspector

Jill Jordan – Teacher Coach, Education Consultant and ex Headteacher

Dennis Jordan – Teacher Coach, Specialist Improvement Education Consultant and ex Headteacher

Martin Pace – Infant School and Early Years Proprietor – Reflections Small School and Nursery, Worthing.

Matthew Davies – School Proprietor and Headteacher

Fiona Rowden – Proprietor of Old Dairy Farm Nursery, Petersfield

Their contact details are available by request from the organisation's Financial Controller and Business Manager, Danni Hayes. Her email is danni.hayes@atelier21schools.co.uk.

Due to the Financial Controller and Business Manager being available to resolve Stage Two complaints about the Headteacher or Proprietor, the Financial Controller and Business Manager **will not** be involved in the resolution of any Stage One or Stage Two complaints, other than those at Stage Two **relating to the Headteacher or Proprietor**.

The School Improvement Partners have the provision to make findings and recommendations. A copy of these findings and recommendations is:

- 1- provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and
- 2- available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and headteacher.

Stage 3 – Complaint to the Appeals Panel

If a resolution cannot be reached after having followed stages One and Two of the complaints procedure, the next step would be to make a formal complaint to the Complaint Appeals Panel. The

Complaint Appeals Panel is independent and impartial and will consist of at least three people not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom will be independent of the management of the school (i.e. not the proprietor, member of staff or anyone involved in a commercial relationship with the school).

The Complaint Appeals Panel will be convened from members of the School Improvement Partners, provided they were not involved with the complaint during an earlier stage of the complaints process.

If your complaint progresses to the final stage, you should contact the Financial Controller and Business Manager and she will forward your complaint to the Chair of the Appeals Panel. You should make your complaint in writing and attach a copy of your original letter of formal complaint. The complainant is entitled to bring a friend or other representative to the meeting of the Appeals Committee but this should not be a legal representative.

If you feel that a complaint should be escalated to Stage Three, letters should be sent to Complaint Appeals Panel care of the Financial Controller and Business Manager at the school.

FAO Complaint Appeals Panel
c/o Financial Controller and Business Manager of Atelier 21 School
The Orchard,
Cowfold Road,
West Grinstead
West Sussex RH13 8LU

The Financial Controller and Business Manager will forward the Stage 3 Complaint to the Chair of the Complaints Panel within 24 hours. Your request for a Stage Three panel hearing will be acknowledged within 3 working days of the receipt of the letter and you will be advised of a date for the hearing within 10 working days together with information on the panel process.

The procedure to be followed at the hearing will be as follows:-

- introductions to be made and the procedure to be followed will be explained to all attendees by the Chair of the Appeals Panel
- the Headteacher or Proprietor will summarise the actions taken in dealing with the complaint
- the Appeals Panel will be given the opportunity to question the Headteacher about the process of the investigation
- the complainant will then be given the opportunity to summarise the complaint and explain the grounds of their appeal
- the Appeals Panel will then be given the opportunity to question the complainant
- both parties will be given the opportunity to sum up provided no new information is introduced, with the complainant making the final submission
- the Headteacher and parent/carer are then requested to leave the meeting whilst the Appeals Panel consider their decision
- following a panel hearing, complainants will be provided with a written response (within 5 working days) where appropriate.

On hearing a complaint, the panel can decide to:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint

- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur
- The Complaints Appeal Panel is the final stage of the school's complaints process.

Details of this policy will be included on the school's website.

Written records and confidentiality

Written records are kept on each complaint and state whether the complaint was resolved following a formal procedure, proceeded to a panel hearing, and any action taken by the School as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). These records, correspondence and statements relating to individual complaints are kept confidential and in line with GDPR regulations except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection requests access to them.

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Document Review			
Version	Amendment	By	Date
1.0	Initial release	Hayley Peacock	31/12/2019
1.1	Amendments to Stage 2. Removal of duplicate content regarding stages. Minor formatting changes. Updated contact details. Complaints form added Enhanced document control	Debs Hearn	04/06/2020
1.2	Added sentence re availability of complaint outcomes	Debs Hearn	04/08/2020
1.3	Sentence stating procedure is for parents of currently attending pupils. Update on written records, confidentiality on correspondence and records updated.	Danni Hayes	29/04/2021
1.4	Updated names of School Improvement Partners	Hayley Peacock	15/01/2022
1.5	Review and amendments due to organisational role changes	Becci Gooding	09/06/2023

Appendix 1

This form is to be used to document all relevant information about a complaint. A copy is to be completed as necessary and attached to any written complaint received, i.e. letter or printed email.

COMPLAINTS FORM

Complaint made by:
Date complaint made:
Complaint made to:
Details of complaint:
Actions to be followed:
Person responsible:
Ofsted statutory requirements complaint relates to:
Form Completed by:
Signed:
Date:
Other information: