



FAIRSTEAD HOUSE

PARENTAL COMPLAINTS OR CONCERNS POLICY

Whole School	Website: Yes
Statutory?	Yes
Reviewed:	March 2023
Next Review:	March 2024

INTRODUCTION

Fairstead House is committed to offering education, pastoral care and communication of the highest quality. We welcome constructive suggestions or comments from parents about the quality of services which we provide - good or bad.

If you are not happy with any aspect of the school or about your contact with us, we need to know as soon as possible so that we can take action to make improvements. The school receives very few complaints from parents, and we hope that most problems can be resolved through informal, friendly discussions without the need to resort to formal procedures.

The staff take all complaints very seriously because we put the welfare of all our pupils and our service to parents at the top of our list of priorities. In the event of a complaint, it is our aim to:

- manage the complaint or concern sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level;
- ensure a full and fair investigation;
- respect the desire for confidentiality, should it be requested;
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response;
- deal with the matter as quickly as possible and within the timescales set out in this policy;
- correct a matter which may have gone wrong, including reviewing our procedures, processes and systems if appropriate.

This policy sets out the process for dealing with a complaint from parents of pupils. This policy is applicable to a parent who is a current or prospective parent or legal guardian or education guardian of a prospective or current pupil registered at the School. It applies to a parent of a former pupil if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still registered at the School. In addition, the School may at its discretion include a parent whose child has recently left the School.

This policy is available on the School's website for all staff and parents. The policy is also available in hard copy upon request.

This policy sets out the three stages procedure to be followed and the timescales for acknowledging, considering, and resolving complaints and concerns. The timescale is set out in working days which means Monday to Friday during term-time only. The School will endeavour to deal with a complaint or concern raised during school holiday periods in a timely manner but whether this is possible will depend on the nature of the complaint, to whom it is made and who it involves. A concern or complaint received within 1 month of the end of a term or half-term is likely to take longer to resolve owing to school holidays and the availability of staff and pupils. The procedures set out below may be adapted as and when appropriate to meet the aims of this policy and the individual circumstances of the complaint or concern.

Management of Complaints

The Principal has appointed the Executive Officer as the Complaints Coordinator to be responsible for the coordination and administration of this policy and procedure at the School. If the Complaints Coordinator is unavailable or is the subject of a concern or complaint, his/her duties will be carried out by a Head of Section or the COO or DSL as determined by the Principal.

The main responsibilities of the Complaints Coordinator are to:

- coordinate the Complaints procedure at Fairstead House;
- advise staff on the Complaints procedure and support SLT or other Staff responsible for conducting an investigation;
- maintain an on-going training programme for all staff in relation to complaints;
- monitor the keeping, confidentiality and storage of records in relation to complaints;
- ensure that actions taken regarding any findings and recommendations identified by a Complaints Panel are recorded whether or not the complaint was upheld;
- report regularly to the Principal and the Board of Governors with respect to the status and management of complaints, including the effectiveness and efficiency of the procedure as necessary.

PROCEDURE

Fairstead House has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided for its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint about the school they can expect to be treated fairly and without penalty in accordance with the following procedure:

First Stage – Informal Resolution:

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. Any complaint should be raised as soon as a parent becomes aware of any issue, and certainly within fourteen working days of any significant event. The school will acknowledge any complaint within 2 working days during term time and as soon as possible during school holidays. Further contact will be made within six days of receipt of the complaint. The school commits to resolving any concerns or complaints as soon as is practicable and usually within 10 working days (not including the school holidays) of receiving the complaint. Should it not be possible to meet this timescale, regular updates will be provided;
- If parents have a concern or complaint they should normally contact their son or daughter's class teacher in the first instance. If this initial contact fails to resolve the matter it will be referred to a more senior member of the school or, if necessary, the Head;
- Complaints made directly to the Head will normally be dealt with by the Deputy Head in the first instance;
- Complaints made directly to the Principal will normally be dealt with by the Head initially;

- The Head or the Principal may be involved in the informal resolution of a concern or complaint if this is felt appropriate by the School, depending on the seriousness or urgency of the concern or complaint raised;
- If the complaint or concern is about the Head, the parent should contact the Principal;
- If the complaint or concern is about the Principal, the parent should contact the Chair of Governors c/o the Clerk to the Governors;
- The member of staff to whom a concern or complaint is first reported will make a written record of the subject matter and the date on which it was received. This will be sent to the Head for information. Should the matter not be resolved satisfactorily at the informal stage, parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 – Formal Resolution.

Second Stage – Formal Resolution:

- If concerns or complaints cannot be resolved informally then parents should write to the relevant Head, the Principal or the Complaints Coordinator setting out the full details of their concern or complaint and the outcome/s that they are seeking, with all relevant documents and their full contact details. Complaints will be referred to the Complaints Coordinator who will inform the Principal and decide with him the appropriate course of action to be taken.
- The Complaints Coordinator will acknowledge receipt of the concern or complaint by telephone or in writing within 5 working days of receiving the written complaint during term time and as soon as possible during school holidays. This acknowledgement will include an indication of the action to be taken and the likely timescale;
- If the Principal considers it necessary for further investigation of the concern or complaint, an 'Investigator' will be appointed who will be a member of the School SLT. If the concern or complaint is about the Head or the COO or the Vice-Principal (Academic) or the Executive Officer, the Investigator will be a member of the SLT of at least equal status. Where appropriate the Principal may speak to or meet with the parents concerned to discuss the matter, normally within 7 working days of receiving the written complaint during term time and as soon as is reasonably practicable during school holidays. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage;
- The Investigator will be responsible for the conduct of the investigation which will probably include interviews with those who are likely to have relevant information or knowledge about the circumstances of the concern or complaint, including the parent/s who raised the concern or complaint. The Investigator may seek additional documents and information related to the investigation from those involved. The Investigator will keep a written record of all meetings and interviews and copies of all documentation in relation to the concern or complaint being investigated.
- The Investigator will report the outcome of the investigation in writing to the Head and Principal with any relevant information, including notes of meetings or interviews.
- Once the Head/Principal is satisfied that all the relevant facts have been established, so far as is practicable, the Head will consider the matter and a decision will be made and communicated to the parents in writing. The Head

will also give reasons for the decision. The investigation and notification of the decision will be made normally within 28 working days of the date of receiving the Stage 2 written complaint during term time and as soon as is reasonably practicable during school holidays;

- If parents are not satisfied with the Head's decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 – Panel Hearing.
- If the concern or complaint is about the Head or Principal, the Chair of Governors will appoint an appropriate Governor to be the Investigator who will be supported by the Clerk to the Governors. Once the Chair of Governors is satisfied that all the relevant facts have been established, so far as is practicable, the Chair will consider the matter and a decision will be made and communicated to the parents in writing. The Chair will also give reasons for the decision. The investigation and notification of the decision will be made normally within 28 working days of the date of receiving the Stage 2 written complaint during term time and as is reasonably practicable during school holidays. If parents are not satisfied with the Chair of Governors' decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 – Panel Hearing.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- If parents wish to invoke Stage 3 and request a hearing before a Complaints Panel having failed to achieve earlier resolution, they should write to the Chair of Governors (via the Clerk to the Governors, King's Ely, Cambridgeshire, CB7 4DB) setting out the full details of their concern or complaint. The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of the concern or complaint within 7 working days of the concern or complaint being received.
- If the Chair of Governors considers it necessary, a Governor may be appointed to undertake a further investigation of the matter in conjunction with the Principal. If the concern or complaint relates to the Head or Principal, then any further investigation will be undertaken by a Governor who will not have been involved in the Stage 2 Investigation;
- A Complaints Panel will be established, and a hearing will be arranged. A Complaints Panel hearing is a review of the decision of the Head, Principal or Chair of Governors under Stage 2.
- The Complaints Panel will consist of at least two Governors having no direct involvement in the matters detailed in the concern or complaint and one person who shall be independent of the governance, management or running of the school; one Governor member of this Panel will be designated as the 'Convenor' and Chair of the Complaints Panel and will be supported by the Clerk to the Governors;
- The Clerk to the Governors will arrange a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and within 21 working days of receipt of the concern or complaint by the Chair of Governors during term time and as soon as is reasonably practicable during school holidays. The Clerk to the Governors will confirm the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the Panel members and any other persons who will be present at the hearing as soon as

¹¹ Please refer to Appendix One; 'Complaints Procedure – Independent Member of the Panel'

is reasonably practicable, and in any event at least 5 working days before the date of the Panel. A Panel will not normally be held during a School holiday period, including half-terms and Bank holidays;

- The Panel may require further information regarding the concern or complaint or any related matter in advance of the hearing. Copies of any such information will be supplied to those involved in the hearing not less than 3 working days before its scheduled date;
- Parents may be accompanied to the hearing by another person(s) e.g. relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation is not normally appropriate. If a parent wishes to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, acting in their professional capacity, the parent must inform the Clerk to the Governors at least 7 working days in advance of the date of the hearing. The attendance of a child at the hearing is at the sole discretion of the Panel Convener, if a parent wishes their child to attend for part or all of the hearing then a request in writing should be made to the Clerk to the Governors at least 7 working days in advance of the date of the hearing.
- If parents wish to provide additional documents for consideration at the hearing, they should send copies of the additional documents that they wish the Panel to consider to the Clerk to the Governors at least 7 working days in advance of the date of the hearing;
- The Head or Principal shall be entitled to attend the Panel Hearing (unless the complaint directly concerns the Head or Principal when the attendance of the Head or Principal is at the discretion of the Complaints Panel);
- The Panel will try to resolve the parents' complaint without the need for further investigation. Should further investigation be required it will be conducted as directed by the Panel;
- A Complaints Panel hearing is a private proceeding and not a legal proceeding. The hearing will be conducted in an informal manner. All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. The Chair of the Complaints Panel will ensure that all those present at the hearing will have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. Any person attending the hearing who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so at the time that the matter arises. A comment or statement of dissatisfaction will be recorded by the hearing note-taker and considered by the Complaints Panel before the proceedings go any further.
- All those present at the hearing will be entitled to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Clerk to the Governors or the Assistant to the Clerk to the Governors will normally be present as the note-taker for the hearing. An audio recording of the hearing will not be permitted. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed at the hearing or arising from the proceedings shall be made available either directly or indirectly to the press or other media, including social media postings.
- The role of the Complaints Panel is to establish the facts of the concern or complaint made by reviewing the documents presented by the School and the parent/s raising the concern or complaint, consider any issues of procedure and to hear representations by the School and the parent/s raising the concern or complaint. The Panel will not consider any new concern or

complaint which has not been previously investigated or raised as part of Stage 1 or Stage 2 of this procedure. After due consideration of all the facts and information that the Panel considers relevant, the Panel will determine its findings which will be made on the balance of probabilities. In addition to determining its findings and deciding whether to uphold or to dismiss the concern or complaint, the Panel may make recommendations on the matter heard or any other issues arising from the hearing to the Principal or the Board of Governors as appropriate.

- All those present at the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint, and good manners. If not, the Chair of the Complaints Panel may, after due warning, adjourn or terminate the hearing. If the hearing is terminated for such reason/s the original decision of the Principal or Chairman regarding the concern or complaint will stand.
- The Chair of the Complaints Panel may adjourn the hearing at any time at his/her discretion.
- The Complaints Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so if the Panel considers it would inform their deliberations. consider all relevant facts before reaching its decision about the complaint and making any recommendations within 5 working days of the Hearing. The Panel will convey its findings and recommendations in writing, via electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents and, where relevant, to the person complained about. The decision of the Panel will be final. There is no further right to Appeal or a further hearing within the School's procedure;
- The Panel's findings and any recommendations it may make will be made available for inspection on the school premises by the Chair of Governors and the Principal.

If a parent, having invoked Stage 3 and the Clerk to the Governors has acknowledged the concern or complaint, indicates that they are satisfied and do not wish to proceed further, they must do so in writing.

If a parent, having invoked Stage 3, does not attend the Complaints Panel hearing without good reason, such as illness or considering comments concerning the Panel's composition, the Panel may consider the parent's complaint in his/her absence and determine its findings.

Confidentiality

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially.

The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice. When dealing with a concern or complaint the School (and any Complaints Panel member appointed under Stage 3 of this procedure) may process a range of information and personal data, such as the name of the parent/s, the description of the concern or complaint, records of investigation, witness statements copies of correspondence, notes of the hearing and the written decision. The personal data may include sensitive information, such as physical or mental health, where this is considered necessary owing to the nature of the concern or complaint.

The Complaints Coordinator will keep a written record of all formal (Stage 2) complaints and Complaint Panel hearings, including their outcomes, as required by regulation and in accordance with the School's Privacy Notice and Retention of Records Policy and Procedures. These records, correspondence and statements relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under The Education (Independent School Standards)(England) Regulations 2015 or section 109 of the 2008 Act or other legal authority requests access to them.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

At Fairstead House, where there is provision for the EYFS, the following provisions apply to and are specifically detailed within this policy:

- The school will notify parents of the outcome of an investigation within 28 days of having received a written complaint about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements;
- the School will retain a written record of complaints for at least three years, and;
- the action which was taken as a result of each complaint;
- the record of complaints must be available to Ofsted and ISI upon request.

EXTERNAL CONTACTS

Fairstead House is inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). Parents and pupils have the right to contact ISI if they have a complaint concerning any aspect of the School's provision, including the quality of education or the welfare or the health and safety of pupils. ISI will usually expect the parents or pupil to have taken their complaint through the School's complaints procedure before taking their complaint to ISI. ISI will not investigate disputes about fees or specific complaints about pupils no longer at the school.

- Independent Schools Inspectorate, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA. Telephone number – 020 7600 0100. Concerns will be recorded and may be copied to the Department for Education.

Parents of children in the EYFS are entitled to make a complaint directly to Ofsted and/or to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), if they believe the school is not meeting the EYFS requirements:

- Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD. General helpline – 0300 123 1231. About schools – 0300 123 4234.

Details of how to contact Ofsted and/or ISI if parents believe that the EYFS requirements are not being met are made available on the noticeboards in the Nursery. Parents will be notified about an inspection, and once the final inspection report has been provided, it will be supplied to parents. Complaints or concerns of a child protection nature can also be referred to the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officers) Unit, which can be contacted on 01223 727967.

APPENDIX ONE

Complaints Procedure – Independent Member of the Panel

The following guidance comes from a letter sent by the DfE to the ISC General Secretary in 2002. Although dated, the advice is extant:

“Whilst we do not intend to be prescriptive our general view is that suitable people would be those who have held positions of responsibility and who are used to analysing evidence and putting forward balanced arguments/points. It would add credibility if independent panel members had some standing in the local community. In this connection serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background – perhaps retired members of the Police Force – might be considered suitable by schools. Schools will have their own views and may well have other suitable suggestions to make.

You asked if it would be acceptable to appoint former governors or staff of the school as the independent panel member. The regulations do not preclude this since the stipulation is that the person must be independent of the management and running of the school. Clearly former governors or staff would not have any such involvement. However, schools should bear in mind that they may be subject to criticism that such people would remain too close to the school and would not be truly independent.”

This was expanded in the DfE's Registration of Independent Schools Information Pack of July 2011:

“Whilst we do not wish to be prescriptive about who schools should appoint as an independent person our general view is that people who have held a position of responsibility and who are used to analysing evidence and putting forward balanced arguments would be suitable. Examples of persons likely to be suitable are serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background and retired members of the Police Force might be considered by schools. Schools will of course have their own views.”

APPENDIX TWO

Number of complaints registered under the formal procedure (Second Stage – formal resolution) during the preceding academic year:

Fairstead House School - for the academic year 2021-22 the school received 1 formal complaint.

EYFS - for the academic year 2021-22 the school received 0 formal complaints.

The school's record of complaints is monitored and analysed by the Complaints Coordinator whose report is considered by the Senior Leadership Team and reviewed by the Governing Body. Any Child Protection related complaints would immediately be brought to the attention of the designated Child Protection Governor.