

Complaints Procedure

Introduction

Gayhurst prides itself on the quality of teaching and the pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if Complainants do have a complaint, about these or any other area, they can expect it to be treated by the school in accordance with this procedure.

Gayhurst School will ensure that Complainants who request it are made aware that this document is published on the school website and is available from the Bursar.

In accordance with paragraph 32(1)(b) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Gayhurst School will make available to Complainants that are parents of 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 year.

In relation to the requirements under the statutory framework for the EYFS (Early years Foundation Stage), Gayhurst School will provide ISI/Ofsted, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The records of any such complaint will be kept for at least three years.

The Headteacher holds the central complaint register.

What Constitutes a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a Complainant is unhappy and seeks action by the school is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a Complainant believes that the school has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If Complainants are parents and have a complaint they should normally contact their child's Form Teacher. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the Complainants' satisfaction. If the Form Teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary to consult a Head of Department or a member of the Senior Management Team or the Head.

- Complaints made directly to a Head of Department or a member of the Senior Management Team or the Head will usually be referred to the relevant Form Teacher unless the Head of Department or member of the Senior Management Team or the Head deems it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
- The Form Teacher (or any staff member) will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received, a copy of which will automatically go to the Head/Head's PA and any other relevant staff. Should the matter not be resolved within five working days or in the event that the Form Teacher and the Complainant fail to reach a satisfactory solution then Complainants will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with stage 2 of this procedure.
- For complaints relating to non-academic issues, the Complainant should contact the Bursar with appropriate copies to the Head.
- If however the complaint is against the Head, Complainants should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors.

Stage 2: Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the complainant should put their complaint in writing to the Head. The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head will meet and speak with the complainant concerned, normally within five working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- 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 of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and Complainants will be informed of this in writing. The Head will also give reasons for the decision.
- 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 Complainant 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 Complainants will be informed of the decision in writing. The Chair will give reasons for his/her decision.

- If the Complainant is still not satisfied with the decision they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3: Panel Hearing

- If the Complainant seeks to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they should write to the Clerk to the Governors requesting a Complaints Panel hearing. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters of the complaint one of whom shall be independent of the management and the running of the school; currently Mrs Sally Tunstall.
- Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Board of Governors via the Clerk to Governors who will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as is practicable and normally within fourteen 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 two working days prior to the hearing.
- The Complainant may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- If possible the Panel will resolve the 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 they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations. The Panel will write to the Complainant informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, normally within five working days of their hearing (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following the hearing). The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the Complainant, the Head, the Governors and, where relevant, the person(s) complained of.

Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. They will be acknowledged within 5 working days if received during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the school's target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 20 working days. Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further 20 working days.

Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, 'working days' refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time.

Recording Complaints

Following resolution of a complaint, the school will keep a written record of all formal complaints, whether they are resolved at the formal stage or proceed to a panel hearing and any action taken by the school as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is 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 Complainant
- 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)

Complainants and others can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them. These records are normally held by the Bursar.

Should Complainants or others wish to do so, complaints concerning the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements can also be made to the Independent Schools Inspectorate and/or Ofsted. The contact details for both organisations are below.

ISI (Independent Schools Inspectorate)
CAP House,
9-12 Long Lane,
London EC1A 9HA
Telephone 020 7600 0100
Fax 020 7776 8849 or by email: concerns@isi.net

Ofsted (The Office for Standards in Education)
Piccadilly Gate,
Store Street,
Manchester M1 2WD
Telephone 0300 1234 234 or by email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk