



DORSET HOUSE SCHOOL

Complaints Procedure

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1. POLICY STATEMENT

Dorset House School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the school in accordance with this policy. Dorset House School makes its Complaints Procedure available to all parents of pupils and of prospective pupils on the school's website and in the school office during the school day, and Dorset House School will ensure that parents of pupils and of prospective pupils who request it are made aware that this document is published or available, and of the form in which it is published or available. This procedure is not, however, available for use by prospective parents – it may only be used by parents of current pupils.

In accordance with paragraph 32(1)(b) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, **Dorset House School 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.**

Our principle aim is to deal with complaints:

- Openly
- Fairly
- Promptly
- Without prejudice

Our procedures for dealing with complaints will:

- Be publicised on the school's website and available to anyone on request
- Be simple to understand and follow
- Be focused on outcomes
- Have established time limits for action
- Keep people informed at all stages
- Where necessary, respect people's desire for confidentiality
- Be carefully monitored and evaluated

Guidance on Each Stage of the Procedure

There are three stages to this procedure:

- Stage 1 is informal
- Stages 2 and 3 are formal

What constitutes a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem, whether made orally or in writing. 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 parent is unhappy and seeks action by the school is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the school has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly. Complaints are handled using a three-staged approach.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The school is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you or your child raises in good faith.

Where appropriate, the school will always look beyond the immediate complaint to ensure that it does not represent a deeper problem that needs to be redressed.

How does the Staged Approach Work?

The staged approach is designed to ensure that every effort is made to deal with complaints informally at school level in partnership with the complainant. The formal stages should only be triggered in exceptional circumstances. All complaints are recorded initially by the member of staff receiving them. This written record is then passed to the Deputy Head who is responsible for maintaining the Complaints file for informal complaints. (Unless the complaint concerns the Deputy Head, in which case, the details go to the Headmaster). The Headmaster is responsible for recording all formal complaints.

Any person expressing continued dissatisfaction at the end of a particular stage should be advised of the next stage in the procedure.

2. STAGE ONE: INFORMAL

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint they should initially contact the person most closely concerned with the issue. This could be the Form Teacher, the Head of Boarding, the Head of Pre-Prep or the Bursar (for fee-related matters).

- In the majority of cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction, but if the person contacted cannot resolve the matter alone it will be necessary for them to consult the Deputy Head and/or Head of Department or the Head of the Pre-Prep.
- Complaints made directly to the Deputy Head, the Head of the Pre-Prep or the Headmaster will usually be referred to the relevant Form Teacher (or in some cases Head of Department) unless the Deputy Head/Head of the Pre-Prep/Headmaster judges it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
- A record of all telephone calls, meetings and agreed actions should always be kept. Ideally these records should take the form of an email and should be sent to the Deputy Head who will print out complaints and file them in the Complaints file. The Deputy Head will monitor these records and advise on action to be taken where necessary. A record of action taken will also be kept.
- Should the matter not be resolved within 5 working days or in the event that the person receiving the complaint and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.
- Where the complaint is against the Deputy Head or the Head of the Pre-Prep or the Bursar, parents should make their complaint to the Headmaster.
- If however, the complaint is against the Headmaster, parents should make their complaint directly in writing to the Chairman of Governors, who may be contacted via the school office. The Chairman will then decide what process should be followed, depending on the nature and the substance of the complaint.

3. STAGE TWO: FORMAL

- In the event that the informal complaint has not been resolved or in the event that the Form Teacher/Head of Department/Head of the Pre-Prep/Deputy Head and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents should promptly put their complaint in writing to the Headmaster, including any relevant documents together with their full contact details.
- In most cases, the Headmaster will meet/speak to the parents concerned, within 5 working days of receiving the written complaint, to discuss the matter. During holiday periods, the Headmaster will meet/speak to the parents concerned as soon as practicable - and certainly within 5 working days of the start of term. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Headmaster to carry out further investigations.
- The Headmaster will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Headmaster is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing, within 5 working days of the decision having been made. Any agreed actions should also be put in writing.

- If, as a result of the investigation, issues arise relating to staff discipline or capability, details should remain confidential to the Headmaster. However, the complainant should be informed that the school has taken appropriate follow-up action.
- The school complies with Standard 14 of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools in that this Complaints Policy is for parents/guardians of boarders. The school recognises that it is not an appropriate procedure for children and young people for whom there are separate arrangements as detailed in the Boarders' Handbook.

4. STAGE THREE: PANEL HEARING

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they will be referred to the Chairman of Governors who will call a hearing of the Complaints Panel. A Complaints Panel hearing is a review of the decisions taken by the Headmaster. The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the Complaints Procedure. A Complaints Panel will only be convened if Stages 1 and 2 of this procedure have been followed. The Panel's task is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:
 - the documents provided by both parties and
 - any representations made by the parents and the Headmaster
- The Complaints Panel will consist of at least three people, some of whom may be governors but who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. The Chairman will sit on the panel only if he has not been involved in the complaint thus far. The panel will include one member who is totally independent of the management and running of the school. The Panel will meet within 10 working days of receiving the complaint.
- The DfE gives the following guidance on the identity of an independent panel member: 'Our general view is that people who have held a position of responsibility and 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.'
- The Chair of the Panel should notify the Headmaster and the complainant as to the date, time and place of the hearing together with brief details of the Panel members. The parents may attend the meeting and be accompanied to the meeting by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative or friend. This provision does not confer a right for a parent to have a legal representative to make representations on their behalf at the hearing. If a parent does not exercise the right to attend a Panel hearing, this does not remove the school's obligation to hold the hearing.

- If the complaint relates to a staff disciplinary or capability matter about which the Headmaster has already taken action, the Panel should focus on how the original complaint was managed to avoid prejudicing any ongoing disciplinary or capability procedures.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint 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 the facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings and may make recommendations.

The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, within 5 working days of the 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. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents, and, where relevant, the person complained about as well as the Chairman of Governors and the Head. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chairman of Governors and the Head.

- Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, the school will be entitled to regard this as vexatious and outside the scope of this Complaints Policy.

5. TIME-FRAME 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 - certainly within 5 working days of the start of the new term.

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, excluding bank holidays.

The one exception to the timescale set out above is that applying to written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements. Any such complaints will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days. The record of complaints will be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.

6. RECORDING COMPLAINTS

Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all formal complaints, whether they are resolved at the informal stage, 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 parent
- 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)

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.

Following the advice issued by the DfE (September 2020), complaints that do not have a safeguarding implication will be retained for a minimum of 7 years. Where there is a safeguarding overlap, then records concerning allegations of abuse will be preserved for the term of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation if it is longer.

7. EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

Dorset House 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 record of any such complaints will be kept for at least 3 years.

Parents may complain directly to Ofsted or to ISI if they believe the provider is not meeting the EYFS requirements. Schools must make available details of how to contact Ofsted and/ or the ISI:

Ofsted may be contacted on 0300 1234 234 or by email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

ISI may be contacted on 020 7600 0100 or by email: concerns@isi.net

8. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

During the school year 2024 - 2025, 1 complaint was registered under the formal procedure. This was not upheld.

Parents are informed of the number of formal complaints received each year.

This policy will be reviewed annually, and the results of the review will be reported to Governors.