



SEVENOAKS
PREPARATORY SCHOOL

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE POLICY

Introduction

A vital aspect of working in a close partnership with parents is that we want to know when things are, in the view of parents, not going right. If you have any concerns about any aspect of your child's life at school, please contact an appropriate member of staff as soon as possible. We will take all such expressions of concern seriously and follow them up courteously and promptly. In any school things can go wrong but we want to do all we can to sort those things out.

Two things tend to make parents and pupils reluctant to express concerns:

- A fear that the school will not see the issue to be important. Please be assured, if it is important to you, it is important to us.
- A fear that a complaint may lead to repercussions for the pupil. Please be assured that under no circumstances will the school discriminate against a pupil because of expressions of concern or complaints. We are also very experienced in ensuring that, if other pupils are involved (e.g. in an allegation of bullying), there are no repercussions from other quarters.

Sevenoaks Prep 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 procedure.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their son/daughter's Form Teacher or Subject Teacher. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Form Teacher or Subject Teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult the relevant Head of Department, a Pastoral Head, the Deputy Head or the Head of the Junior School as appropriate.

- Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, a Pastoral Head, the Deputy Head, the Head of the Junior School or the Headmaster will usually be referred to the relevant Form Teacher or Subject Teacher unless it is deemed appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally. In this event the 'line manager' will normally attempt to resolve the matter within the working week or as soon as is practicable.
- The relevant member of staff will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within the working week or in the event that the member of staff 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.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Headmaster. The Headmaster will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Headmaster will meet/speak to the parents concerned, normally within two 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 Headmaster to carry out further investigations. These will be completed within the working week or as soon as is practicable.
- 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 a meeting and/or in writing. The Headmaster will also give reasons for his decision.
- The written decision will normally be issued in fourteen days of receiving the complaint. If for any reason this is not possible, the Headmaster will write to the parents within the fourteen day period referred to above, stating the reason or reasons why he is unable to issue his decision and informing the parents when he will do so, which will be within twenty-eight days of receipt of the complaint in any event.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- Upon receipt of the written decision, if parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they are to write to the Headmaster informing him of their decision to do so within twenty-eight days, whereupon the matter will be referred to the Chairman of Governors, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of a Complaints Panel.
- The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. In the event of a complaint against the management of the school, all three persons will be independent to the management and running of the school.
- Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Governing Body. The Bursar, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within fourteen 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 five days prior to the hearing. Any such further particulars received within five days prior to the hearing shall be disregarded and inadmissible to the panel because it will not be possible to provide copies to all parties within that timescale.
- The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.
- Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out and when it should be concluded. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within fourteen days of the Hearing wherever possible, but within twenty-eight days in any event unless otherwise agreed with the parents. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Headmaster, the Governors and, where the complaint relates to an individual, to that individual. A copy will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Governing Body and the Headmaster.
- Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except in so far as is required of the school by paragraph 6(2) j of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2003; where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

Footnotes to Complaints Procedure

- In the event that a complaint involves or relates to a member of staff, then the member of staff will be kept fully informed in writing of the procedure being adopted in relation to the management of the complaint and supplied with copies of all documentation.
- In the event of a Panel Hearing, the member of staff will have the right to make presentations to the Panel.
- Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 162A of the 2002 Act, as amended, requests access to them.

The Headmaster is the person responsible for the Complaints Procedure Policy

Review date: September 2012

Edward Oatley
Chair of Governors

Philip Oldroyd
Headmaster

Appendix: Complaints Procedure – Independent Member of the Panel

The DfES has supplied the following guidance in a letter to the ISC General Secretary:

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.

The regulations do not preclude former governors or staff of the school as the independent panel member, 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.