



SEVENOAKS
PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Complaints procedure

Including EYFS

Status and Review Cycle:	Statutory / Annual
Policy reviewed and amended:	19.8.21 James Ashcroft
Next review date:	30.8.22
Governor Lead:	Mrs Jan Berry
Policy Holder:	Mr Luke Harrison Luke.harrison@theprep.org.uk 01732 762336

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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. 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, Assistant Head, Deputy Head or the Head of Pre-Prep as appropriate.
- Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, an Assistant Head, the Deputy Head, the Head of Pre-Prep or the Head 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 Head. Although all formal complaints will be made in writing, this does not mean that the formal stage is automatically triggered whenever a concern is expressed in writing, for example, by email. Complaints will usually only progress to the formal stage after first being considered at the preliminary stage and only then if the complainant intends to escalate a matter to the formal stage. The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head will meet / speak to the parents concerned, normally within two 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. These will be completed within the working week or as soon as is practicable.
- 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 parents will be informed of this decision in a meeting and / or in writing. The Head will also give reasons for his decision.
- The written decision will normally be issued within fourteen days of receiving the complaint. If for any reason this is not possible, the Head 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.

In the case of a complaint made against the Head, these should be made directly and in writing to the Chair of Governors (at the School's address). The Chair of Governors will then follow the procedures listed in Stages 2 (substituting the title Chair of Governors for Head) and then 3 (if the parents are not satisfied with the decision at the end of Stage 2). The Clerk to the Governors will not be involved at any stage should the formal complaint be against the Head.

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 Head informing him of their decision to do so within twenty-eight days, whereupon the matter will be referred to the Chair 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 Clerk to the Chair of Governors, 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 working days prior to the hearing. Any such further particulars received within five working 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 at the parent hearing if they wish. 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 complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, 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 complainant, the Head, 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 Head.
- 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 in Part 7 – manner in which complaints are to be handled paragraph 643 (j&k) ISSR September 2020; where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

Retention of records

The DfE as regulator has advised that complaints which do not have safeguarding implications should be retained for a minimum of 7 years (a period determined by the 6-year inspection cycle with allowance for unforeseen circumstances). Where

there is a safeguarding angle, 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.

Persistent correspondence

If a parent attempts to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, the School will regard this as vexatious and outside the scope of the policy.

Systemic issues

The School will always look beyond the immediate complaint to ensure that it does not represent a deeper problem that needs to be remediated.

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 kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

The Head is the person responsible for the Complaints Procedure.

A written record is kept of complaints, whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel and action taken by the school as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

EYFS complaints will be made available to Ofsted.

This Complaints procedure is available in the receptions in the Pre-Prep and the Prep schools as well as on the School website.

The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the academic year from September 2020 to July 2021 was 0.

Appendix: Complaints Procedure – Independent Member of the Panel

ISSR 636.

The requirement for a panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school means that the independent member should not only be outside the school's workforce, and not a member of the governing/proprietary body, but also should not be otherwise involved with the management of the school – for example, this might well be the case with a solicitor who regularly acts for a school.

ISSR 637.

The DfE has given 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 scrutinising 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.'

Complaints Policy (EYFS)

Sevenoaks Preparatory School is committed to providing a safe, stimulating, consistent and accessible service to children and their parents/carers. We always aim to provide high quality services for everyone, but accept that sometimes things do not go according to plan. In such circumstances, we want to know so that we can put them right and learn from our mistakes.

This policy constitutes Sevenoaks Preparatory School's formal Complaints Procedure. It will be available in both school receptions and on the school website at all times.

If you have a complaint, the school is committed to:

1. listen and learn
2. put things right
3. improve our service

Under normal circumstances, the Head of Pre-Prep will be responsible for managing complaints. If a complaint is made against this person, the Head will conduct the investigation. All complaints made to staff will be recorded in detail in the Incident Record Book. The Head of Pre-Prep will ensure that each complaint is fully investigated.

If the Head of the Pre-Prep has good reason to believe that the situation has child protection implications, the Designated Safeguarding Lead will be informed who will then ensure that the local social services department is contacted, according to the procedure set out in the Safeguarding Policy. If any party involved in the complaint has good reason to believe that a criminal offence has been committed, then the police will be contacted.

Stage 1

If a parent/carer has a complaint about some aspect of the school's activity, about the service the school provides, or about the conduct of a member of staff, it will often be possible to resolve the problem by simply speaking to the individual concerned. As outlined in the Partnership with Parents / Carers Policy, the school is committed to open and regular dialogue with parents / carers and the school welcomes all comments on its services, regardless of whether they are positive or negative.

In the first instance, parents / carers are encouraged to speak directly to the relevant member of staff, if deemed appropriate. If not, the Head of Pre-Prep should be approached and she will try to resolve the problem. If a satisfactory resolution cannot be found, then Stage 2 of the procedure will formally come into operation.

Stage 2

If informal discussions of a complaint or problem have not produced a satisfactory resolution to the situation, parents / carers should put their complaint in detail and in writing to the Head of Pre-Prep. Relevant names, dates, evidence and any other important information on the nature of the complaint should be included.

Sevenoaks Preparatory School will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within three working days and will give a response to the complaint within ten working days. We shall explain what we are doing to resolve the issues raised if it will take longer than the ten days to do this.

The Head of Pre-Prep will be responsible for sending a full and formal response of the outcome of the investigation to the complaint – within 28 days of having received the complaint.

The formal response to the complaint from the school will be sent to the parent / carer concerned and copied to all relevant members of staff if appropriate. The response will include an account of the findings, any actions taken as a result, recommendations for dealing with the complaint and any amendments to the School's policies or procedures emerging from the investigation.

The Head of Pre-Prep will arrange a time to meet the parent / carer concerned and any other relevant individuals, such as members of staff, to discuss the complaint and the School's response to it. The Head of Pre-Prep will judge if it is best for all parties to meet together or if individual meetings are more appropriate.

If at the conclusion of this process parents/carers remain dissatisfied with the response they have received, the original complaint (along with the School's response) will be passed to the Head, who will adjudicate the case.

Parents / carers may have right of appeal to the Chair of Governors, should they not be satisfied with the procedure.

Records of all complaints and their outcome will be retained for a period of at least three years from when the record was made.

Parents will be allowed access to all written records about their children on request in line with our Privacy Policy and with the exception of Safeguarding information as per GDPR guidance.

Making a Complaint to Ofsted

A record of EYFS complaints will be made available to OFSTED on request.

Any parent/carers can, at any time, submit a complaint to Ofsted about any aspect of registered childcare provision. Ofsted will consider and investigate all complaints received. As part of the registration process of all early years and play provision by OFSTED, parents / carers also have the right to make a complaint to OFSTED.

Registering authority for the Early Years Register (for provision for under 3s)
Tel: 0300 123 1231

OFSTED Early Years
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD

Sevenoaks Preparatory School will also supply a copy of the most recent Ofsted report to parents/carers of children attending.

Making a complaint to ISI

If you wish to raise a concern/complaint with the ISI, you can email concerns@isi.net or call 020 7600 0100 and ask to talk to an appropriate member of staff.

Sevenoaks Preparatory School always welcome suggestions, feedback, and compliments too.