

Complaints Policy

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Author: Stuart Ansell – Chief Operating Officer and Clerk to the
Governors



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Introduction

Box Hill 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 with care and in accordance with this procedure. Box Hill School makes its complaints procedure available to all parents of pupils and of prospective pupils on the school's website and a copy can be requested at any time. Box Hill 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 the form in which it is published or available.***

In accordance with paragraph 24(3)(g) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, Box Hill 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 the ISI for the purposes of section 162A(1) of the Education Act 2002 (as subsequently amended), details of the complaints procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

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. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the school has done something wrong, or failed to do something that it should have done, or acted unfairly.

Note that an appeal against a permanent exclusion will be treated according to the exclusion policy rather than the complaints procedure.

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.

Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. They will be acknowledged as soon as possible but no later than within five working days if received during term time and ten working days during holiday periods. When other constraints (eg staff concerned away on holiday etc) impact the school's ability to process a response, this will be notified to the complainant. 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 28 working days if the complaint is lodged during term-time or Christmas and Easter holidays and 40 working days during the summer holiday.

(Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further 28 working days, if the appeal is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.)

Recording Complaints

Following resolution of a complaint, the school will keep a written record of all complaints that proceed to the formal stage whether or not a panel hearing is convened. 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)
- Written minutes to be available on inspection
- Action taken, outcome and at what stage the complaint was resolved

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except to the extent required by paragraph (k) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required by the ISI under Section 109 of the Education Act 2008 (as amended), or under other legal authority.

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 Tutor/House Parent / Head of Department. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Tutor/House Parent / Head of Department cannot resolve the matter alone it may be necessary for him/her to consult their line manager or Deputy Head/the Headmistress.
- Complaints made directly to the Deputy Head/the Headmistress will usually be referred to the relevant Tutor/House Parent / Head of Department unless the head of the Deputy Head/the Headmistress deems it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
- The Tutor/House Parent / Head of Department will keep a record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within seven days or in the event that the Tutor/House Parent / Head of Department 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.
- If, however, the complaint is against the Headmistress, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chairman of Governors.

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 Headmistress. The Headmistress will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Headmistress will meet the parents concerned, normally within seven 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 Headmistress to carry out further investigations
- The Headmistress will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Headmistress 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. The Headmistress will also give reasons for his decision.
- If the complaint is against the Headmistress, the Chairman of Governors will call for a full report from the Headmistress and for all the relevant documents. The Chairman may also call for a briefing from members of staff, and may in most cases, speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the Chairman is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing. The Chairman will give reasons for his decision.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3 - Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they will be referred to the Clerk to the Governors who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel.
- The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. The Clerk to the 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 14 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 normally not later than seven days prior to the hearing.
- The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person 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 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 make findings and may make recommendations.
- The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision normally within seven days of 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 Headmistress.

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Appendix

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.