

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Introduction

Harrow International School welcomes suggestions and comments from parents (which includes guardians), and takes serious complaints and concerns they may raise; it recognises the entitlement of parents to raise concerns and complaints, and hopes to work with parents in the best interests of the pupils in its care. Concerns and complaints will be treated as an expression of genuine dissatisfaction that needs a response.

The School wishes to ensure that:

- Parents wishing to make a concern and complaint know how to do so.
- It responds to concerns and complaints within a reasonable time and in a courteous and efficient way.
- Parents realise that the School listens and takes concern and complaints seriously.
- It takes action in response to concerns and complaints where appropriate.

The school defines a concern as:

‘An expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought’.

The school defines a complaint as:

‘An expression of specific dissatisfaction about particular actions taken or a lack of action’.

Who to complain to

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. A parent can communicate a complaint to the School verbally, by letter or e-mail. Any member of staff will be happy to help, but it is usually best to start with the House Master/House Mistress in the Upper School and the Class Teacher in the Lower School; they may be able to sort things out quickly, with the minimum of fuss. However, parents may prefer to take the matter to a member of the Senior Leadership Team or the Head.

In the case of formal written complaints about members of staff, the following guidelines apply:

- Complaints about teachers or TAs in the Lower School should be addressed to the Head of Lower School
- Complaints about teachers or TAs in the Upper School should be addressed to the Principal Deputy Head (Curricular).
- Complaints about House Masters/House Mistresses should be addressed to the Principal Deputy Head (Pastoral and Wellbeing).
- Complaints about administrative staff should be addressed to the Head of Administration.
- Complaints about senior members of staff should be addressed to the Head.
- Complaints about the Head should be addressed to the Chair of Governors.

If parents wish to complain about something after their child has left the School, it must be in the form of a letter to the Head within three months of their child leaving the School.

Confidentiality

Every complaint will be treated with respect and in a confidential manner. Knowledge of it will be limited to the person to whom it is addressed, the Head and those directly involved. The Chair of Governors and members of the Board of Governors may also need to be informed. It is the School's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children. However, the School cannot entirely rule out the need to make third parties outside the School aware of the complaint and possibly also the identity of those involved. This would be likely to happen where, for example, a pupil's safety was at risk or it became necessary to refer matters to the police. Parents would be fully informed.

Informal Resolution of Complaints

It may be possible to resolve the matter immediately and to parents' satisfaction if the matter is raised face-to-face or by telephone.

If a complaint is made in writing, the School acknowledges the complaint within 10 working school days and explains how it proposes to proceed. In many circumstances, the initial member of staff contacted by a parent will need to discuss the matter with another colleague and consider it further before responding. If a detailed exploration of the issue is needed, a letter or report will be sent to the parent as quickly as possible. This will explain the conclusion of the investigation into the complaint, the reasons for it and any action taken or proposed. It should be acknowledged that this could take time as it is likely to involve interviews with pupils and staff.

Formal Resolution of Complaints

The School hopes that parents will feel satisfied with the informal resolution of any complaint, or at least that the concerns have been fully and fairly considered. However, if parents feel that a complaint has not been dealt with to their satisfaction, they should put details of their complaint in writing to the Head. It may be necessary for further investigations to be carried out by the Head, who will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint, and respond to the parents concerned within 14 working school days. Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, they will inform the parents of their decision and the reasons for it in writing.

If parents are still not satisfied with the School's response to their complaint, they have the right to proceed to an appeal and can request that the matter is referred to the School's Appeal Panel for consideration. This request should be made in writing to the Chair of Governors within 14 working school days of the decision made by the Head.

The Chair of Governors will appoint a panel of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, at least one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the School, to look at the issues in an impartial and confidential manner.

- The Appeal Panel Chairman will acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as is practicable and normally within 10 working school days. The parents may attend the hearing, and may be accompanied by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend, but legal representation is not appropriate. After due consideration, the Appeal Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations; it will write to the parents within 10 working school days of the hearing to inform them of the decision and the reasons for it. A copy of its findings and recommendations (if any) will be sent to the parents and, where relevant, the person complained about, as well as the Chairman of Governors and the Head. The decision of the Appeal Panel is final.

A written record is kept by the Head's Executive Assistant of all formal written complaints whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a Complaints Panel hearing. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where disclosure is required under any relevant legal authority.

Procedures

The complaints process is divided into three stages:

STAGE	DESCRIPTION
I. Informal	Informal raising of a concern notified orally or in writing to a senior manager.
II. Formal	A formal complaint made in writing to the Head.
III. Review	An unresolved formal complaint, progressed as a last resort to the Governing Body

1. Stage 1: Informal Complaint

Stage 1 aims to resolve the complaint informally, through the appropriate senior manager(s). Examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, a billing error or some other aspect of the school's systems, equipment or operational procedures.

Procedures

- Where a concern (see above) has been made by a complainant who now wishes to raise the issue with senior management, depending on severity, it should be treated as an informal complaint. In the event of a direct informal complaint, it should be addressed to the relevant senior manager. The senior manager will listen to and record in writing the complaint. These notes will be kept on file for at least one year. Copies of any written response to the complaint and related documentation, including copies of all communication between the senior manager/Head of School and the complainant will also be kept on file.
- If possible, the senior manager will offer resolution and/or reassurance at this meeting. If further information is required, the senior manager will investigate, reconvening with the complainant no more than 10 working school days after the initial meeting. In most cases this second meeting should be face-to-face, though a telephone call may be appropriate for smaller issues with positive resolutions.
- If the complainant remains dissatisfied following this informal approach, the complaint should be forwarded to the Head (and becomes a Formal Complaint – Stage II).

2. Stage II: Formal Complaint

In Stage II, formal written complaints are considered by the Head.

- Whether a complainant has previously raised the complaint with a senior manager or not, progression to Stage II requires a formal written letter of complaint, addressed to the Head.
- The Head will acknowledge the complaint in writing as soon as possible after receiving it. This will normally be within 2 working school days.
- The complainant will be asked to supply as much detail regarding the complaint as possible, completing the 'Formal Complaints Form', which will also accompany the acknowledgement.
- The complainant will be invited to meet with the Head within 10 working school days of receipt of the written complaint. If this is not possible the school will write to explain the reason for the delay, giving a date by which the Head is available. Where appropriate, and with due regard to privacy and balance in participant numbers, the Head will invite relevant members of staff to this meeting (for example, if subject-technical or phase-specific expertise is required).
- Where necessary the complaint will be investigated, and a meeting called with the complainant within 10 working school days of the original meeting.
- With the relevant details established, the Head will provide a written response to the complainant. This response will give a full explanation of the Head's decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, this will also be indicated in the response. If not presented in person at the outset, the written

response will also be accompanied by an invitation to meet the Head to discuss the response.

- The Head will keep written, signed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation, including the formal response.
- If the complainant remains unsatisfied with the outcome of the Stage II investigation and the school's findings, the complaint may be progressed to Stage III – Governor Review.

3. Stage III: Governor Review

In Stage III, unresolved complaints (or complaints against the Head) are presented to a Complaints Panel, constituted of three members of the Governing Body. Used as a last resort, the purpose of this stage is to give the complaint a fair hearing in front of a panel of governors who have no prior knowledge of the details of the complaint and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice.

Procedures

- Unless the complaint is made against the Head personally, it will have been through Stage II and received a written response (if this isn't the case complaints addressed directly to the Governing Body that have been Stage II will be reverted to the Head). In the event of the former, or if the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of Stage II, a written request for review, clearly stating the reasons that it is being made, should be sent to the Chair of Governors.
- The Chair will acknowledge receipt of the request for review within 2 working school days. A copy of this document will be enclosed with the acknowledgement.
- The Chair will convene a Complaints Review Panel, constituted of three members of the Governing Body (usually including the Chair). The Head will not be a member of this Panel, though may be invited to sit as a non-voting member, if appropriate. In addition to the panel of governors, a member of the school's administrative staff will act as secretary to the panel with a full record of the process being recorded.
- The complainant will be asked to supply as much detail regarding the complaint as possible. The Panel will also ask the School to supply all corresponding documentation, including a written report detailing procedures followed and actions taken to date.
- The complainant will be invited to meet with the Complaints Review Panel within 10 working school days of receipt of the written complaint. If this is not possible the school will write to explain the reason for the delay, giving a date by which the Panel is available. In the event that a complainant arrives to the meeting with previously undisclosed participants the Complaints Review Panel reserves the right to deny those parties access to the meeting, or to adjourn the meeting.
- With the agreement of the Chair of the Panel, and having informed the complainant prior, the Head may invite members of staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant to attend relevant portions of the meeting.
- As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses previously undisclosed will be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the meeting will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to the new evidence.
- If necessary, the Complaints Review Panel may need to carry out further investigations prior to reaching a conclusion.
- In closing the meeting, the Chair will explain that the Panel will now consider its decision (or requires further information) and that written notice of the decision will be sent to the Head and the complainant within 10 working school days.
- The Panel will then:
 - decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
 - recommend, where appropriate, to the Governing Body changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.
- With a final decision made, the Complaints Review Panel will provide a written response to the complainant. This response, presented within 10 working school days of the last meeting with the complainant, will give a full explanation of the Panel's decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, this will also be indicated in the response.
- The Head will keep a copy of the final decision, all notes and correspondence on file in the school's records for a period of one year from the date of the Panel's review.

- The Complaints Review Panel's decision is to be considered final and binding.

4. Serial and Persistent Complainants

There may be occasions when, despite all stages of the above procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors can inform them that the procedure is completed and that the matter is closed.

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, then the correspondence may be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the school may choose not to respond. However, the decision not to respond must be taken with due consideration of whether:

- the school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs;
- the complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any);
- they are contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time;
- the school has reason to believe the individual is contacting them with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience;
- their letters/emails/telephone calls are often, always or increasingly abusive or aggressive;
- they make insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff.

Moreover, the school will not stop responding to an individual making a complaint. However, where the complainant has been through all three complaint stages the school will consider the matter to be closed.

A complaint may be regarded as 'unreasonable' when the person making the complaint:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to a Complaints Review Panel;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

Before concluding that a complaint is 'unreasonable', the Head / Chair of Governors or member of the Board of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally.

The School does not respond to anonymous complaints.

Author / Reviewer: Head

Date of Last Review: November 2021

Date of Next Review: March 2023



FORMAL COMPLAINTS FORM

I wish to make a complaint about the school; I have already discussed the matter informally, but now wish to invoke the formal complaints procedure.

NAME OF COMPLAINANT			
NAME OF CHILD (if appropriate)		HOUSE/YEAR/CLASS	
MEMBER(S) OF STAFF PREVIOUSLY SPOKEN TO IN REGARD THE COMPLAINT		DATE OF MEETING	
CONTACT DETAILS	E-MAIL:		
	TELEPHONE:		

Please give as much detail about the complaint as possible, using additional sheets as necessary. Please include as many dates, names and specific details as possible. You may also attach to this document any further materials relating to the complaint.

SIGNED:		DATE:	
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