



International School

Parents' Complaints Policy

2021-22

The Complaints Policy applies to all pupils at Park Lane International School, including the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Park Lane International School welcomes suggestions and comments from parents, and takes seriously complaints and concerns that they may raise. This document will show you how to use our complaints system.

A complaint will be treated as an expression of genuine dissatisfaction, which needs a response.

We wish to make sure that:

- parents wishing to make a complaint know how to do so;
- we respond to complaints within a reasonable time and in a courteous and efficient way;
- parents realise that we listen and take complaints seriously;
- we take action where appropriate.

‘How should I complain?’

Parents should always know how they can raise concerns or lodge a formal complaint and so a copy of the policy is published on the School’s website. Parents may request details about the number of formal complaints made in a preceding school year.

You can talk directly to any member of staff, write, email or telephone. Please be as clear as possible about what is troubling you. Any member of staff will be happy to help. It may be best to start with the person most closely concerned with the issue – e.g. your child’s class teacher or form tutor, or to raise concerns over sport or games with the subject leader for PE. They may be able to sort things out quickly, with the minimum of fuss. However you may prefer to take the matter to a more senior member of staff, for example the Head of Primary and EYFS (Joe Eyles), the Head of Secondary (Paul Churchill) or the Principal (Paul Ingarfield). In such instances, you are strongly encouraged to complete and submit the complaints form attached to this policy (Appendix 1).

‘I don’t want to complain as such, but there is something bothering me’.

The School is here for you and your child, and we want to hear your views and your ideas. Contact a member of staff, as described above.

‘I am not sure whether to complain or not’.

If, as parents, you have concerns, you are entitled to express them. If in doubt, you should contact the school, as we are here to help.

Procedures should be as speedy as possible – consistent with fairness to all concerned

Each stage of the procedure has specified time limits. Where it is not possible to meet these, information about progress must be given to the complainant. Care should be taken not to drag things out with unnecessary bureaucracy.

Support for a person complained against

Staff who may be questioned as part of a complaints procedure investigation must feel they are being treated in a fair way and that they too will have an opportunity to put their case. They should be told about the procedure and be kept informed of progress. There is a crucial balance to be maintained between

supporting the individual so that his/her rights and reputation are protected, and investigating a complaint thoroughly and impartially.

The complaints procedure is distinct from formal disciplinary proceedings for staff and this must be made clear to all concerned. There may be occasions where a complaint launches a disciplinary procedure which puts the complaints procedure on hold. If so, the complainant should be informed of this and any non-disciplinary aspects of the complaint should be dealt with by the usual complaints procedures; the complainant should be 'up-dated' every three weeks on the likely further delay. It may be clear after the disciplinary procedures have been completed, that particular responses to the complainant are required (e.g. an apology or an explanation of new policies to avoid a similar problem again).

'What happens about confidentiality?'

Your complaint or concern will be treated in a confidential manner and with respect. Knowledge of it will be limited to the Principal and those directly involved. The Governing Board may also need to be informed. It is the School's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children.

We 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 only be likely to happen very rarely where, for example, a child's safety was at risk or it became necessary to refer matters to the police. You would be fully informed if this were to be the case.

While information relating to specific complaints will be kept confidentially on file, anonymous complaints may not be pursued.

Action, which needed to be taken under staff disciplinary procedures as a result of complaints, would be handled confidentially within the school.

Redress

If the outcome of the complaint procedure shows the School is at fault, it is often sufficient to provide redress in the form of an acknowledgement that the complaint is valid. Alternatively, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of: an apology, an explanation, a promise that the event complained of will not recur, an undertaking to review School policies or practices in the light of the complaint, or, in appropriate circumstances, financial compensation. Fear of litigation should not prevent the School from admitting to parents when mistakes have been made, but the Governors should be made aware of the situation.

Staff awareness and training

School staff, including non-teaching staff, should be familiar with the procedures so that they can advise parents. Potentially a great many staff are involved in handling complaints, especially at the informal level. Their confidence in doing so depends on their having clear information about the procedures, reassurances that senior staff are committed to the procedures and some basic training in the practical interpersonal skills needed in dealing with people who are upset or angry. All school staff should have clear information about which staff have which responsibilities at School so that parents do not get continually passed from one to another.

Record keeping

If complaints are to contribute to raising the quality of education, then they need to be recorded and monitored termly by senior staff and Governors; Park Lane International School commits to doing so.

Recording should begin at the point when a concern or initial complaint has become the kind of complaint that cannot be resolved on the spot but needs investigation and/or consultation with others in the School and will require a later report back (either orally or in writing) to the parent.

Recording at the earliest stages need only be a very basic record of the complaint, giving the date, name of parent and general nature of the complaint.

STAGE 1: THE FIRST CONTACT: GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS INFORMALLY

- 1.1 The vast majority of concerns and complaints can be resolved informally. There are many occasions where concerns are resolved straight away through the Class Teacher or depending on whom the parents first approached.
- 1.2 Parents must feel able to raise concerns with members of staff without any formality, either in person, by telephone, by e-mail or in writing. On occasion it may be appropriate for someone to act on behalf of a parent.
- 1.3 At first it may be unclear whether a parent is asking a question or expressing an opinion rather than making a complaint. A parent may want a preliminary discussion about an issue to help decide whether he or she wishes to take it further.

Procedure: Stage 1

- 1.a Parents have an opportunity for discussion of their concern with the appropriate member of staff who clarifies with the parent the nature of the concern, and reassures them that the School wants to hear about it. The member of staff may explain to the parent how the situation happened. It can be helpful to identify at this point what sort of outcome the parent is looking for.
- 1.b If the member of staff first contacted cannot immediately deal with the matter, he/she makes a clear note of the date, name, contact address (email address) or phone number.
- 1.c Any member of staff will know how to refer, if necessary, to the person with responsibility for the particular issue raised by the parent. She/he will check later to make sure the referral has been successful.
- 1.d On certain major issues, the SMT may decide to deal with concerns directly at this stage.
- 1.e If the concern relates to the Headteacher/Principal, the parent is advised to contact the Chair of the Governing Board (Jan Bebr). He can be contacted c/o The Clerk to the Governors as seen on the school's website under the section Governance.
- 1.f The staff member dealing with the concern makes sure that the parent is clear what action (if any) or monitoring of the situation has been agreed, putting this in writing only if this seems the best way of making things clear.
- 1.g Where no satisfactory solution has been found **within 10 days**, parents are asked if they wish their concern to be considered further. If so they are given clear information, both orally and in writing

about how to proceed and about any independent advice available to them.

STAGE 2: REFERRAL TO SMT FOR INVESTIGATION

- 2.1 At this stage it has become clear that the concern is a definite complaint. In some cases SMT has already been involved in looking at matters; in others it is their first involvement. In either case, it is helpful for SMT (or the person delegated to investigate) to use guidelines to ensure consistency among cases, and to make sure that nothing happens at this stage which could make it difficult for later stages to proceed smoothly.
- 2.2 As SMT is responsible for the day-to-day running of the school, they have responsibility for the implementation of a complaints system, including the decisions about their own involvement at various stages. One of the reasons for having various 'stages' in a complaints procedure is to reassure complainants that their grievance is being heard by more than one person. SMT should make arrangements to ensure that their involvement will not predominate at every stage of a particular complaint. For example arrangements may be made for other staff to deal with parents' concerns at stage 1, whilst the SMT deals with contacts with parents at stage 2. Even at that stage the SMT may designate another member of staff to collect some of the information from the various parties involved. In some cases, the SMT may be so involved at stage 1, that stage 2 has to be carried out by the Chair of the Governing Board.

Procedure for Stage 2

- 2.a SMT (or designate) acknowledges the complaint orally or in writing **within 3 working days** of receiving the written complaint. The acknowledgement gives a brief explanation of the School's complaint procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This should normally be **within 10 working days**; if this proves impossible, a letter is sent explaining the reason for the delay and giving a revised target date.
- 2.b SMT (or designate) provides an opportunity for the complainant to meet to supplement any information provided previously. It is made clear to the complainant that if she/he wishes, she/he may be accompanied to any meeting by a friend, relative, representative, or advocate who can speak on his or her behalf; and that interpreting facilities are available if needed.
- 2.c If necessary, SMT (or designate) should interview witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres around a pupil, the pupil should also be interviewed. Pupils would normally be interviewed with parents/guardians present. In some situations, circumstances may prevent this e.g. where this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious/urgent complaint or where particular circumstances mean that a pupil has specifically said that they would prefer that parents or guardians were not involved. In such circumstances another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable should be asked to attend. If a member of staff is complained against, the needs of that person should be borne in mind.
- 2.d SMT (or designate) keeps written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.
- 2.e Once all the relevant facts have been established, SMT (or designate) should then produce a written response to the complainant, or may wish to meet the complainant to discuss/resolve the matter directly.

- 2.f A written response includes a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, this includes what action the School will take to resolve the complaint. The complainant is advised that should s/he wish to take the complaint further, s/he should notify the Chair of the Governing Board **within five weeks** of receiving the outcome letter.
- 2.g If a complaint is against the action of the SMT, or if they have been very closely involved at stage 1, the Chair of the Governing Board should carry out all the stage 2 procedures.

STAGE 3: REVIEW BY THE GOVERNING BOARD

'What if I am not satisfied with the outcome?'

- 3.1 **Complaints only rarely reach this formal level, but it is important that the Governing Board is prepared to deal with them when necessary.**
- 3.2 **It is important that this review not only be independent and impartial but that it be seen as so.** Therefore, individual complaints should not be considered by the *full* Governing Board as serious conflicts of interest can arise; for example, in exceptional circumstances a complaint may result in disciplinary action against a member of staff and Governors might be required to give an unprejudiced hearing to an appeal by the member of staff concerned. Similarly some Governors might have previous knowledge of the problem which led to the complaint and would be unable to give fair unbiased consideration to the issue.
- 3.3 Many complaints are inevitably seen by parents as being 'against' a particular member of staff and their actions. However, all complaints which reach this stage will have done so because the complainant has not been satisfied by the response from SMT at an earlier stage of the procedure, and it may be appropriate for the Governing Board to consider that the complaint is against the School rather than against the member of staff whose actions led to the original complaint.

PROCEDURE FOR REVIEW BY THE GOVERNING BODY

- 3.a The complainant shall submit a written request ('the Request') to the Clerk to the Governors for the complaint to proceed to stage 3. The complainant shall submit as part of the Request a full written statement of their claim and details of any witnesses it wishes to attend the Meeting (as defined in Clause 3.c.2). Following receipt of the Request and statement by the Clerk to the Governors the procedures set out below will be followed.
- 3.b The Clerk to the Governors will convene the Complaints Panel in accordance with the following requirements:
 - 3.b.1 The Panel shall consist of three people including not less than one independent member with the remainder consisting of one or two Governors nominated from members of the Governing Board.
 - 3.b.2 In convening the Panel, the Clerk to the Governors and the Governing Board shall be sensitive to issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.
 - 3.b.3 The Governors nominated to the Panel shall be Governors who have had no prior involvement with the complaint.

- 3.b.4 The Panel shall be chaired by a member of the Governing Board.
- 3.b.5 The independent member(s) will be selected along the guidelines issued by the DFE. This means suitable people will be those who have held positions of responsibility and who are used to analysing evidence and putting forward balanced arguments/points. It would add standing if this person 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 and people with a legal background may be considered suitable.
- 3.b.6 The Panel will ensure that minutes are kept of all its proceedings.
- 3.b.7 In the event that a member of the Panel becomes ill or is otherwise incapable of continuing to serve on the Panel then the Panel will be entitled to co-opt another Governor or independent member (as may be required).
- 3.c The Clerk to the Governors will write to the complainant (with a copy to SMT) to acknowledge receipt of the Request and statement ('The Acknowledgement!'). The Acknowledgement shall inform the complainant that:
 - 3.c.1 The complaint is to be heard by a Panel constituted in accordance with (Clause 3.b) of this procedure.
 - 3.c.2 All documents on which the complainant wishes to rely at the meeting to hear the complaint ('the Meeting') must be submitted to the Clerk to the Governors **within 28 days** after receipt of the Acknowledgement by the complainant.
 - 3.d The Clerk to Governors shall submit to the Panel members and to SMT copies of the complainant's Request and all supporting documents without delay after receipt. SMT shall be invited by the Clerk to the Governors to submit a written report to the Panel in response to the complainant's Request. SMT may invite members of staff directly involved in If the complainant's Request contains matters that have not been raised previously or which sets out a claim that is substantially different to that which was investigated under stage 1 or stage 2 of this complaints procedure then SMT can request that the stage 2 procedure be repeated. In those circumstances the stage 3 procedure will be suspended until the repeated stage 2 procedure has been concluded. In the event that there is a dispute as to whether the stage 2 procedure should be repeated the Chair of the Governors decision shall be final.
 - 3.d Matters raised by the complainant to respond in writing to the complaint set out in the Request.
 - 3.f As soon as possible after the complainant's Request have been received by the Clerk to Governors, the Clerk to Governors will write and inform the complainant, SMT and members of the Panel at least 10 working days in advance of the date, time and place of the Meeting and the manner in which it is to be conducted. This letter will also notify the parties of the matters set out below in (Clause 3.g).
 - 3.g The following rules shall apply to the hearing of any complaint:
 - 3.g.1 The complainant has the right to be accompanied to the Meeting by a friend/interpreter whose

- identity must be notified to the Clerk to Governors not less than 4 working days before the Meeting.
- 3.g.2 SMT must notify the Clerk to Governors not less than 4 working days before the Meeting of the identity of anyone who will be attending the Meeting at her request. This can include members of staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant.
- 3.g.3 No further documentary evidence can be submitted by the complainant later than 7 working days before the Meeting.
- 3.g.4 The SMT report (referred to in Clause 3.d) and any supporting documentation shall be submitted to the Clerk to Governors not later than 4 working days before the Meeting.
- 3.g.5 The Clerk to Governors shall supply copies of any further documents submitted by the complainant, the SMT report and any supporting documentation to the Panel and to the other party as soon as the same are received. She will also notify the Panel, the complainant and SMT of the identity of everyone attending the Meeting.
- 3.f If the Panel decides that it wishes to hear from any witnesses at the Meeting it shall inform the Clerk to Governors who shall notify such witnesses of the date, time and place of the Meeting and request them to attend.
- 3.g The Meeting will be conducted in two parts. The Panel will first hear from the complainant. Only the complainant, any witnesses notified under (Clause 3.a) and any representative notified under (Clause 3.f) will attend. The Panel will then hear from SMT and any persons notified under (Clause 3.h). Only SMT and any persons notified under (Clause 3.h) will attend. The two parts of the Meeting will be held separately and in private. Except in unusual circumstances, the Panel will hold both parts of the Meeting on the same day.
- 3.h At the Meeting, the Panel shall be free to question the complainant, SMT, any staff in attendance and any witnesses requested by the Panel under (Clause 3.f).
- 3.i The Panel shall issue a report of findings and recommendations within 5 working days of the Meeting. The report will be sent to the Clerk to the Governors who shall send it to SMT, the complainant and Governing Board. The report will either be a final report or an interim report. A copy of this report will be available for inspection on the school premises. The Panel will issue an interim report where it considers that it requires additional documentation or additional witness evidence to enable it to reach a final conclusion. The interim report will confirm what more the Panel requires and:
- 3.i.1 Any additional documentation requested in the interim report shall be supplied to the Clerk to the Governors within 5 working days after receipt of the interim report by the party called upon to produce additional documentation.
- 3.i.2 In the event that the Panel wishes to hear from further witnesses it shall arrange to do so as soon as practicable.
- 3.j In the event that an interim report has been issued under (Clause 3.i), the Panel will issue its final report within 7 working days after the additional documentation requested has been submitted to it or after the Panel has interviewed the further witnesses (as the case may be).

- 3.k The role of the Panel is to determine issues of fact.
- 3.l The final report of the Panel will be considered by the Governing Board, which will agree a response which will be notified to the complainant and SMT within 28 days after the date on which the final report was issued. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about and be available for inspection on the School premises by the proprietor and SMT.
- 3.m In the event that the time limits set out in this [Clause 3] cannot be complied with due to the absence of SMT or the complainant or for any other reason beyond the parties' control, the Clerk to the Governors shall seek to agree a revised timetable with the parties to procure the conclusion of stage 3 of the complaint as quickly as is reasonably possible.
- 3.n All correspondence, statements and records relating to individuals' complaints are to be kept confidential except when Secretary of State (DFE) or a body conducting an inspection under Section 162A of the 2002 Act, as amended, requests access to them. Independent Schools Inspectorate

We hope that we will be able to satisfy your concerns. If we do not, you may wish to seek independent legal advice. There are certain circumstances in which COBIS (Council of British International Schools) has an interest, and you could contact this council directly or through your lawyer; he could then ask the CEO of COBIS, Mr Colin Bell, to investigate the complaint further.

Most importantly though, the school recognises and acknowledges your entitlement to complain and we hope to work with you in the best interests of the children and young people in our care.

The school has received two formal parental complaints in the past four years, neither of which reached the panel stage.

Formal Complaint: Referred to Park Lane’s Governing Board

Name of Pupil:
Names of those with Parental responsibility:
Address of Parents/ Guardians:
Telephone numbers:
I/We, having parental responsibility for the above named pupil, request that a committee of the Board of Governors carries out a review of a formal complaint. I/We understand the referral procedure outlined Parents’ Complaints Policy and we agree to abide by its terms. I/We also agree that the proceedings are and will remain confidential and that this review will be final subject to any legal rights that may exist. The grounds upon which we ask for a review and the matters which we wish to discuss and to ask the sub-committee to take into account are set out in the attached letter. I/We understand that we may be accompanied at the Review Hearing. We also understand that that person attends only to provide support and not to act as a representative.
First signature:
Second signature:
First full name:
Second full name:
Relationship to pupil:
Date: