

Written Complaints Procedure



Complaints Procedure

BETHANY SCHOOL
CURTISDEN GREEN
GOUDHURST
KENT

Pupils' views on why a complaints procedure is needed by the School.

This is to make sure that when complaints are made that they are properly dealt with.

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The current master version is edited by the policy owner and coordinated by the HR Assistant.

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Written Complaints Procedure

1. Introduction

The School will make available to parents of pupils and prospective pupils the details of the policy as outlined below in the policies section of the School website.

To access this procedure, parents must formally contact the School stating that they wish their complaint to be addressed using the complaints procedure as detailed below. This initial contact must be made in writing.

The attention of parents of all pupils including boarders is also drawn to Appendix 1 which is at the end of this document

2. Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

1. It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved quickly and ***informally***.
2. If parents have a complaint they should initially contact their son/daughter's tutor or Teacher or Head of Department or Head of Year/Housemaster/Housemistress who will be the person best placed to resolve the issue. The receipt of this will be acknowledged within 2 working School days. If the Tutor, Teacher, Head of Year or House Staff cannot resolve the matter alone, it will be necessary for them to consult the Head of Department or Head of Year or either one of the two Deputy Heads. It is hoped that the vast majority of complaints will be solved in this way.
3. Complaints made directly to the Deputy Heads or Headmaster will be referred to the relevant Housemaster/Housemistress, Tutor, Teacher, Head of Year or Head of Department unless the Headmaster/Deputy Heads deem it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
4. The Tutor, Teacher, Head of Department, Head of Year or Housemaster/Housemistress will keep a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within two weeks, or in the event that the Tutor, Teacher, Head of Department or Head of Year or Housemaster/Housemistress and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents are advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.
5. A central record of concerns and complaints will be held. This central list will contain the following headings: date of complaint, name of complainant, concern/complaint raised, action taken, outcome of concern/complaint.

3. Stage 2 - Formal Resolution

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1. If the complaint is not suitable for or cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Headmaster. The receipt of this will be acknowledged within two working School days. The Headmaster or, in his absence, one of the two Deputy Heads will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
2. The Headmaster may delegate handling the complaint to a chosen nominee. The Headmaster (or the chosen nominee) will then speak to the parents concerned within three working School days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
3. It may be necessary for the Headmaster/chosen nominee to carry out further investigations. He/she will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
4. Once the Headmaster/chosen nominee is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the Headmaster/chosen nominee will make a decision in relation to the complaint and the parents will be informed of this decision in writing (although a verbal account may precede the arrival of a letter). The Headmaster/chosen nominee will give reasons for the decision. This will be done within two working weeks of receiving the Stage 2 complaint.
5. If parents are unhappy with the decision and feel the matter should be taken further, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.
6. Should the complaint relate to a member of the Senior Management Team it must be made in writing to the Chair of Governors, at the School address, with a copy to the Headmaster. The receipt of this will be acknowledged within two working School days.
7. The Chair of Governors will then initiate such investigations as he or she thinks necessary. This may involve consideration of the complaint by a sub-committee of Governors. A hearing will not normally be held, but the Chair (or sub-committee) may take written or oral evidence from parents or others involved. The Chair of Governors will communicate the findings to all involved as soon as practicable following completion of the investigation and will seek to complete the investigation within two working School weeks. The Chair of Governors will then communicate the outcome of the investigation and the relevant conclusions to the parents in writing. Should parents be unhappy with the conclusions and feel the matter should be taken further, the parents may then proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.
8. Should the complaint relate to a member of the Governing Body, the parents may refer it in writing to the Chair of Governors, at the School address, or to the Headmaster, with a copy to the External Referee (see Appendix 2). The receipt of this will be acknowledged within 4 working School days. This complaint will be handled as a Stage 2 complaint. Should the complaint be made against the Chair of Governors then the procedures outlined in Stage 3 will be followed.

4. Stage 3 – External Decision

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1. If parents wish to invoke Stage 3, the parents must write to the Headmaster confirming that they wish to do so, within 7 calendar days of receiving the Stage 2 outcome. The receipt of this will be acknowledged within 2 working School days. The papers relating to the complaint, together with any further information which the parents or the School wish to supply, will be passed to the School's External Referee (see Appendix 2) who will be either a lawyer or Senior Manager independent of the management or running of the School. The External Referee will determine how the complaint will be heard and may request further information from parents or from the School. Based on the information provided, the External Referee will decide whether a hearing should be held or whether the External Referee can determine the complaint based on information already supplied. The External Referee may request further written or oral evidence in order to determine the complaint.
2. Where a hearing is to be held a complaints panel will be convened, usually within 3 term time weeks, which will consist of the External Referee and at least two other persons, agreed by the External Referee, who are not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. Parents will be notified in writing of the proposed date (or dates) for the hearing.
3. If the panel deems it necessary or desirable, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied, in advance of the hearing, in which case the panel hearing will necessarily be delayed. The complainant will be kept informed of the matter. Copies of the information provided shall be supplied to all parties not later than 3 days prior to the hearing.
4. The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person, who may be a teacher, friend or relative. Legal representation will not be permitted without the prior consent of the External Referee.
5. If the parents do not exercise the right to attend a panel hearing, the hearing will still take place in line with this policy.
6. Within 14 calendar days of the final gathering of evidence, or any hearing, the External Referee will send the External Referee's decision (or in the event of a hearing, the findings of the panel) and any recommendations in writing, to the parents, the Headmaster, the Chair of Governors and, where relevant, the person complained of. The decision of the External Referee or the panel will be final.
7. The above procedure can also be followed if a pupil is seeking an appeal against a permanent exclusion. This Complaints Policy can then be followed.

A written record will be kept of all complaints that are made in according with this procedure and

- (i) Whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and
- (ii) Action taken by the School as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

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The 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 108 and 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

The findings and recommendations will be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair of Governors and the Headmaster.

Records of complaints which do not have a safeguarding implication will be retained for a minimum of 7 years. Where there is a safeguarding angle, records of complaints will be preserved until the accused has reached normal pension age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation whichever is the longer.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The 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 108 and 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

In the last School year there was **no formal** complaint.

Appendix 1. Additional Information For Parents of all Pupils including Boarders.

Parents of boarders are entitled to contact the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) regarding any complaint concerning the welfare of their son or daughter. Within our records of complaints we will clearly state if the complaint is relating to boarding provision. Bethany School, like all boarding schools, is inspected by ISI under the framework of the National Boarding Standards, the most recent Inspection having taken place in 2023. For non-boarding concerns please also contact ISI. Contact details for ISI are as follows:- Independent Schools Inspectorate, Ground Floor, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA; telephone number 020 7600 0100.

Appendix 2. External Referee

There are currently two External Referees: Mr Anthony Cooper and Mrs Gail Hall. If there is need for access to the External Referee a letter should be addressed to 'The External Referee, c/o Chair of Governors, Bethany School, Goudhurst, Kent, TN17 1LB' and marked STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.