



Pilgrims School

Parental Complaints Policy

September 2020

Next review date: September 2021



Please note: 'School' refers to Early Years Foundation Stage (Little Pilgrims and Pre School) and Pilgrims Main School.

Introduction

Pilgrims Pre-Preparatory School prides itself on the quality of its teaching and the pastoral care it provides to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, it will be dealt with by the School in accordance with this Policy. This Policy is available on the website and in hard copy on request.

Policy Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice; it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote parents' and pupils' confidence in our ability to safeguard and promote welfare. We will try to resolve every concern or complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, reviewing our systems and procedures in light of the circumstances. We need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. We recognise that a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, which would be damaging to relationships and also to our school culture. Parents and pupils should never feel (or be made to feel) that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or their opportunities at this school.

Policy Status

This Policy has been approved by the Governing Body of the School and provides guidelines for handling concerns and complaints. It takes account of paragraph 33 of Independent School Standards Regulations 2014 and the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework. The policy applies to all sections of the school [*including Early Years*].

All 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 procedures set out below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and circumstances of each case. Certain parts of the procedures can only be carried out during term time.

Application

The procedure described below is available to pupils and parents of pupils and applies to all pupil and school issues. Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue or if the Headteacher expels or asks a pupil to leave and the parents seek a Governors review of the decision.

Parent

The term parent includes a parent of a current pupil or legal guardian or education guardian, and may at our discretion include a parent whose child has recently left the School.

Management of complaints

The Headteacher will be responsible for the co-ordination and administration of the Complaints Procedure. If the Headteacher is unavailable or is the subject of the complaint, his / her duties will be carried out by a member of the Senior Leadership Team

The main responsibilities of the Complaints Co-ordinator are to:

- *be the first point of contact while the matter remains unresolved and keep records*
- *co-ordinate the complaints procedures in school*
- *arrange assistance for parents who require this, for example, because of a disability*
- *maintain an on-going training programme for all School employees in relation to complaints*
- *monitor the keeping, confidentiality and storage of records in relation to complaints*
- *report regularly to the Headteacher with respect to complaints.*

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

Parents can make a complaint to Ofsted and / or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) although it is expected that complaints will progress through this procedure first. Details of how to contact Ofsted and / or ISI are given at the end of the procedure.

The Procedure

1. Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

1.1 All complaints are taken very seriously, particularly those involving discrimination, harassment or victimisation. Other examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, or about allocation of privileges or responsibilities, or about a timetable clash or some other aspect of the School's systems or equipment, or a billing error. It is hoped that most concerns and complaints will be resolved quickly and informally at this stage.

The School will acknowledge a written notification by email, letter or telephone within two working days¹ of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable during holidays.

¹ When we use the term “working days” we mean Monday to Friday during term time. It may take longer to process complaints received during the last few weeks of term or during holidays due to the availability of staff.

1.2 If parents have a complaint concerning education or pastoral matters they should normally contact the person responsible for a child's pastoral care – e.g. class teacher/keyworker. In many cases, the matter will be resolved quickly by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If this person cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult with their Line Manager who will then deal with the matter.

1.3 A problem over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised first of all with the member of staff who imposed it and, if not resolved, with the Headteacher.

1.4 A query relating to financial matters (fees etc) should be stated in writing to the Finance Manager.

1.5 Complaints made directly to the Head of Year may be referred to the relevant teacher or keyworker unless it is felt appropriate for them to deal with the matter personally.

1.6 On occasions, complaints or concerns may be dealt with by members of the senior leadership team (including the Headteacher) but still be resolved informally and successfully.

1.7 Should the matter not be resolved within 15 working days then parents may proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Policy.

Every complaint notified to a member of staff that has not been resolved informally will be noted, together with the action taken and collated by the Co-ordinator.

2. Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

2.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis as described in Stage 1, or if it has not been resolved within 15 working days, then the parents should put their complaint in writing² to the Headteacher. They will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. This must be done even where the informal process has been conducted with the Headteacher. If parents require assistance with their request, for example, because of a disability, the School will be happy to make appropriate arrangements³.

2.2 In most cases, the Headteacher will meet with or speak to the parents concerned, normally within five working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

2.3 It may be necessary for the Headteacher to carry out further investigations or to ask a senior member of staff to act as Investigator. The

² When we refer to notifications or requests in writing, both letter and email are acceptable

³ Please note that the School will be very happy to arrange assistance if required, through the person coordinating complaints, in the event of any difficulty in submitting any request in writing required by this Policy.

investigator may ask for additional information from parents and may wish to speak to parents personally and to others who may have knowledge of the circumstances.

2.4 Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept.

2.5 Once the Headteacher 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 Headteacher will also give reasons for this decision. The Headteacher's aim will be to inform any complainant of the outcome of an investigation and the resolution of the complaint with 28 working days from the first receipt of the complaint.

2.6 If parents are dissatisfied with the Headteacher's decision under Stage 2 they may proceed to Stage 3 of this Policy.

2.7 Complaints about the Headteacher, when not resolved at Stage 1, will then be dealt with under the Stage 2 - Formal Resolution process. Parents who wish to make a complaint about the Headteacher should put their complaint in writing to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

3. Stage 3 – Reference to the Complaints Panel

3.1 **Introduction and Scope of the Hearing.** A Complaints Panel (Panel) hearing is a review of the actions taken previously. The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint, which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure. The Panel will not seek to substitute its own judgement for that of the Headteacher where the Headteacher's decision falls within the bounds of what a reasonable Headteacher, acting proportionately, might have decided given all the facts. If there has been a complaint against the Headteacher taken to Stage 2, because the Chair of Governors will have already been involved they cannot be on the Complaints Panel.

3.2 **Notification.** If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they should write to the Chair of the Governors, within five working days of receipt of the Headteacher's decision, requesting a Panel hearing. Parents must state in their letter full details of the complaint, the outcome sought, the grounds on which they wish to appeal against the decision of the Headteacher and enclosing all relevant documents and full contact details. Parents should also include a list of the documents which they believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to see. If parents require assistance with their request, for example, because of a disability, the School will be happy to make appropriate arrangements. The parents' letter will normally be acknowledged by telephone, fax, e-mail or letter within five working days, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale.

3.3 Convening the Panel. The Chair of Governors will then convene a Complaints Panel to consider the complaint. Please note, a Panel will only be convened if Stage 2 above has been completed. The Panel will normally consist of at least three members who have no prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint. The Panel shall be comprised of School Governor members (one of whom will be the Chair of the Panel) and one Panel member who will be independent of the governance and management of the School. The School has identified persons of standing within the local community, one of whom will sit as the independent member on the Complaints Panel for any given complaint. The panel hearing will continue unless the complaint is formally withdrawn in writing.

3.4 Notice of hearing. Every effort will be made to enable the Panel hearing to take place within 15 working days of the receipt of a request. As soon as reasonably practical, and in any event at least five working days before the hearing, parents will be sent written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the Panel members who will be present.

3.5 Attendance. Parents will be invited to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, teacher, or friend. Legal representation is not necessary or normally appropriate but if parents do wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, acting in their professional capacity, please notify the School at least seven working days before the hearing. Copies of additional documents the parents wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Panel Chair at least three clear working days prior to the hearing. If parents choose not to attend, the panel may hear the complaint and may reach a finding and conclude the matter in the parent's absence.

3.6 The Role of the Panel. The role of the Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaint by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties
- any representations made by parents, the Headteacher or other members of staff.

3.7 Powers of the Panel. It is not within the powers of the Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils, or parents. The Panel may make recommendations on these or any other issues to the Headteacher or to the full body of School Governors as appropriate.

3.8 Hearing. All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn and all present will be entitled to make their own notes. The Panel Chair will arrange for a person to take hand written minutes of the proceedings.

3.9 **Evidence.** The Panel Chair will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel is under no obligation to hear witnesses but may do so if it wishes.

3.10 **Conduct.** All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the Panel Chair may terminate or adjourn the hearing. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with the conduct of the hearing must say so before the hearing proceeds further and his /her comment will be recorded.

3.11 **Adjournment.** If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. However, the Panel Chair may adjourn the hearing at his/her discretion for further investigation of any relevant issue including taking legal advice.

3.12 **Decision.** After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel shall reach a decision unless there is an agreed position. If, after establishing the facts, the Panel members consider that the complaint is made out, they will uphold the complaint. If they consider that the complaint is not made out, they will dismiss the complaint. They will make these decisions on the balance of probabilities. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations may be notified orally at the hearing or subsequently and shall be confirmed in writing to parents by electronic mail where appropriate within ten working days. If parents do not wish to receive the decision by electronic mail, a copy will be given or posted to them. The decisions, findings and any recommendations will be made available for inspection on the School premises by the Governing Body and the Headteacher. Reasons for the decision will be given. The decision may include recommendations and will be sent to parents, the Chair of Governors, the Headteacher and, where relevant, any person about whom the complaint has been made.

3.13 **Private proceeding.** Any hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding and no records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceedings shall be made directly or indirectly available to the press or other media.

3.14 Records and Confidentiality. A written record will be kept of all complaints and of whether they are resolved at Stage 1, 2 or proceed to a panel hearing.

The record will also include details of action taken by the school, regardless of whether or not the complaint was upheld. The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure (Stage 2 or beyond) during the preceding year will be posted on the school's website. All 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 or under other legal authority.

In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will normally be destroyed following each school inspection. In appropriate circumstances, some details will be retained for a further period as necessary.

3.15 **Early Years Foundation Stage**

The Complaints Co-ordinator will keep a written record of complaints and their outcome and will provide Ofsted and ISI on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. Parents may approach Ofsted or the ISI directly at any stage of this complaints procedure. The relevant contact details are:

*Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD
Tel 0300 123 1231*

*Independent Schools Inspectorate
CAP House
9 - 12 Long Lane
London EC1A 9HA
Tel: 0207 600 0100*

In addition, where there seems to be a possible breach of our registration requirements, Ofsted, as the registering and inspection body with a duty to ensure adherence to the National Standards for Day Care, will be informed.

Number of complaints registered under the Formal Procedure (stage2) during the 2019/20 academic year: 0



**Mrs Sarah Wheeler
Chair of Governors**

Date: 25 September 2020

Date of next review: September 2021