

Title: Complaint Policy			
Ref.:	GEN002	Rev.:20	Date: Dec 2020

COMPLAINT POLICY (33a)

Also applicable to EYFS

Rev.	Date	Amendment	Approved By:	Authorised By:
20	Dec 2020	Policy Reviewed - No fundamental changes	JL	RU
19	Feb 2019	Policy Updated to reflect RI Comments	JL	RU
18	Sept 2018	Review - No Changes	JL	RU
17	Jan 2017	ISI Numbering Updated	JL	RU
16	Jan 2016	Link to parents' complaint policy added	BA	RU

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There are essentially four areas of complaint: parents and guardians, pupils, the public and staff.

Procedures relevant to complaints from members of staff about aspects of their work are detailed in the [Grievance Procedure](#).

This document deals mainly with procedures for parental complaints.

1 The Nature of Complaints

While parents will often wish to raise issues on behalf of their children, there are other issues which pupils may choose to raise on their own behalf and which are best raised by them. Forums for these include Circle Time, Form Tutor time, Year Assemblies and School Council. Other methods are individual meetings with teachers, with matron, or through the use of the Pastoral Deputy's confidential box.

Complaints from members of the public will be treated in a similar way to complaints from parents, although most complaints from the public would be referred directly to the Head or a senior member of staff.

2 An Open Organisation: Climate and Culture

Problems are likely to arise if parents feel that we are not open to their concerns. It is better to have a direct complaint to a member of staff than to have parents sharing their dissatisfaction with others. Parents like to feel valued and involved with the school and they should be encouraged to voice their concerns. This is helped where the culture of the school is open and complaints are received in a positive manner.

- Yateley Manor is an open environment, listening to parents and pupils
- Parents must feel comfortable in contacting the Head, the year head, or other staff
- Staff should feel comfortable in dealing with complaints

An effective complaints procedure can diffuse problems and provide us with helpful information. Complaints treated as constructive suggestions can be used to improve standards and may prevent cause for further complaint. Even an unjustified complaint may indicate an area which can be improved.

3 What constitutes a complaint?

The law requires that all schools have, and make available to parents, a Complaints Policy. However the law does not define a complaint. We regard a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem.

A complaint may be made if a parent thinks that the school has, for example,

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- Done something wrong
- Failed to do something it should have done
- Acted unfairly or impolitely.

A complaint may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific department in the school or about an individual member of staff.

All complaints need to be handled seriously. A gentle expression of concern, or a simple query, may grow into a painful matter if parents feel that they have been brushed aside. Equally, issues with the potential to become acutely difficult may dwindle and fade if they are handled well at the initial stage.

An unresolved problem may become a festering dispute or a confrontation. Procedures are therefore in place for appropriate action when a matter remains unresolved or cannot be resolved quickly.

Procedures are flexible to handle both formal complaints and the informal raising of issues. It does not seem helpful to attempt to differentiate between “formal” and “informal” complaints. One can easily become the other. Serious issues may be raised in an informal and friendly way and apparently trivial issues in an adversarial manner. Complaints against members of staff need particularly sensitive handling.

4 Lines of Approach

All members of staff are encouraged to deal themselves with parental concerns which lie within their areas of responsibility. Staff should follow Yateley Manor’s procedural guidelines for dealing with complaints which follow at the end of this policy statement.

If approached about a matter which lies outside their remit, staff should refer it to the appropriate person and inform the parents.

Matters incapable of resolution at a particular level should be referred to the appropriate senior person, with parents kept informed of the action being taken. This covers, for example, a complaint made to a relatively junior member of staff about a more senior colleague.

Certain parents will wish to go straight to the Head or Deputy Heads with their concerns, and this should be respected. However, it should be explained that they may not be able to respond until they have consulted the staff who can help.

Senior staff will recognize when issues need to go straight to a Deputy Head or the Head, with whom the final responsibility lies.

Serious complaints will be shared with the Chairman of Governors by the Head. There may be certain circumstances, such as complaints about the Head, when the parents will need to write direct to the Chairman, whose address will be supplied on request.

Written responses should always be signed by the person to whom the parent made the complaint, or by a more senior person in the school.

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5 Reducing Anxiety

Because the person who complains may feel vulnerable, the school can reduce anxiety by taking the matter seriously and dispelling uncertainty about how the complaint will be handled.

Information about the complaints procedure should be made clear to the parents.

Complaints should be acknowledged immediately or within five working days. Staff should inform parents what is happening to their concern or complaint and, if a more detailed response is needed, by what date it will be received. The issue should be dealt with as quickly as possible.

The nature of the complaint and what is concerning the complainant should be clear. If it is not immediately obvious parents may need more time to explain.

Parents need to feel that their views matter.

Paradoxically, in some circumstances parents may prefer a response given after 24 hours to one - even the same response - given immediately.

6 Recording

Yateley Manor will keep an effective log of serious complaints and other parental concerns because:

- Inspectors may wish to see the log as evidence of the school's attitude to complaints
- patterns in the record may indicate a need for action
- the Head will be able to check the log and report on it regularly to Governors

The log should contain the following information:-

- date when the issue was raised
- name of parent
- name of pupil
- brief statement of issue
- staff member handling the issue
- brief statement of outcome

There is a [Complaints Log Pro Forma](#) as part of this policy for recording each complaint. Once completed a copy should be forwarded to the headmaster who will hold the central log. Confidential files on all complaints should be maintained and kept together, cross-referenced with other files as necessary. The files should contain simple but clear notes of all conversations with parents about any source of dissatisfaction. This applies to friendly chats and to telephone conversations, as misunderstandings easily arise. There should be a clear statement of what is concerning the complainants. The notes can be agreed with parents.

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Confidentiality is an important issue for pupils, parents and staff. It is essential that any complaint is treated in a confidential manner and with respect.

Parents often seek an assurance of confidentiality before expressing their concerns. If, for example, they wish to discuss a particular member of staff they may fear that their child will suffer in some way because they have complained.

It should be made clear to all concerned that it is the school's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children and similarly that complaints raised by pupils should not rebound on them or on other pupils.

The question of confidentiality should be discussed sensitively and on an individual basis with the parents and the school's policy should be carefully explained.

It may be possible to deal with a problem without naming individuals. However, even if no names are given, the source of the complaint may be clear. Depending on the nature of the complaint and on the circumstances, it may be impractical to investigate without identifying the member of staff or the child. It may also be in the interest of the child to do so.

Staff members are rightly concerned that they should know about complaints which might be damaging to their reputation. Such complaints will be known only to themselves and to those who have to be consulted. Yateley Manor is aware of the need to provide support for staff against whom a complaint is made; this should be provided by a colleague who is not otherwise involved.

If there is a question of the child's safety or a possible situation involving the police, the guidance on confidentiality in the [Child Protection Safeguarding Policy](#) will be followed.

All complaints will be treated as confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

During the academic year 2019/2020 the school received 1 formal complaints (Aug 2020) that were resolved under the Stage 3 Formal Resolution process.

Anonymous Complaints

Complaints from the public about the behaviour of a group of pupils could be dealt with on a general basis, with reminders to all about the school's expectations. Parents and pupils should be encouraged to give their names and should be given reassurance on the issue of confidentiality. If they persist in wishing to remain anonymous, it is at the Head's discretion as to what action, if any, should be taken, depending on the nature of the complaint.

Anonymous complaints should be recorded in the log.

Anonymous allegations about child abuse should be handled under the [Child Protection Safeguarding Policy](#).

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7 Resolution

Sometimes the very acknowledgment of an issue by the school brings relief to parents. Satisfaction for a complainant may come from any of the following:

- knowing that changes have been made, and that matters will be different in future
- knowing that the school is now alert to a possible problem
- feeling that their concern has been considered seriously
- an outcome which may be different from the one they sought, but which they perceive to be well-considered
- a considered letter
- an apology.

If time has been needed to consider matters, parents should receive a report letter. This should cover:

- the issues raised
- how the issues were considered
- the people consulted
- the action that is to be taken
- an apology, if appropriate.

In all circumstances parents will be advised on the action taken by the school regardless of whether a complaint has been upheld or not.

8 Intractable Complaints

There may be a small minority of persistent or aggressive complainants who will never be satisfied, whatever the school does. The school may even discover on investigation that the complaint was without foundation or motivated by malice. Nevertheless, it is wise to treat all complaints seriously and to follow the procedures.

Most complaints can be resolved if approached positively. If a complaint becomes intractable, it may be due to its nature or to the way in which it was handled, or possibly because the parent perceives the school to have 'closed ranks' against him or her.

9 Complaints Procedure to Follow

A [guide to our Complaints Procedure](#) is available to all parents on the School web site.