



## **The Dean Close Foundation**

**Independent, Co-educational, Day and Boarding School**

### **Parent Complaints Policy and Procedure (W007)**

Registered Charity No: 1086829

Date of Issue: Dec 21  
Date of Review: Nov 22  
Owner: Bursar

## THE DEAN CLOSE FOUNDATION

### PARENT COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

- This policy has been authorised by the Trustees of The Dean Close Foundation (the “Charity”) for all of its schools, (the “School”).
- This policy will be reviewed periodically by the Bursar, and submitted to the Board of Trustees for oversight and signing off

#### Introduction

1. The Dean Close Foundation prides itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. We welcome suggestions and comments from students and their parents<sup>1</sup> and take seriously any complaints that are brought to our attention. Many concerns do not warrant a formal complaint but should still be brought to our attention.

#### What Constitutes a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent of a registered pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the School is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly.

2. Parents can be assured that all complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially.
3. The School is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you or your child raises in good faith. You can expect to be treated fairly and in accordance with this policy and procedure.
4. The Foundation will endeavour to deal with all complaints as quickly as possible, having regard to the need for thorough investigation and appropriate consideration. Every endeavour will be made to ensure that complaints received in term time are resolved within 28 days, whilst those received during holiday periods will usually be addressed 28 days from the end of the holiday period.
5. This Complaints Policy and Procedure applies to:
  - Dean Close Pre-Preparatory School<sup>2</sup>
  - Dean Close Preparatory School
  - Dean Close Senior School
  - Dean Close St John’s

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this Policy the term parents means parents of pupils at the School and will include guardians and others acting in a parental capacity.

<sup>2</sup> Including the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

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- Dean Close Services Limited
- Dean Close Airthrie School
- The Dean Close Foundation

6. This document is available on the School's Internet and Intranet websites and printed copies will be made available to staff, students and parents on request. This Policy complies with The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 and The Education and Skills Act 2008. It also has regard to the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools.

7. Separate procedures exist for the handling of employment-related complaints or grievances made by members of staff.

### **The Three-stage Complaints Procedure**

#### **Stage 1 – Informal Resolution**

- It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally and by face to face communication at the school.
- Parents wishing to make a complaint can raise it directly with a member of staff, usually their son's or daughter's form teacher or Housemaster/Housemistress. Every effort should be made to be as clear as possible about the issue. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction.
- Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, a Deputy Head or to the Head of school will usually be referred to the relevant teacher or Housemaster/Housemistress unless the person receiving the complaint deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.
- The Foundation endeavours to acknowledge a written notification by telephone, email or letter, within 5 working days of receipt in term time and as soon as practicable in the school holidays. In the event that a satisfactory resolution cannot be reached within a reasonable period (not exceeding 2 term time weeks), complainants should proceed in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.
- If, however, the complaint is against a Head or Bursar, parents should make their complaint directly to the Warden.
- If the complaint is against the Warden, parents should make their complaint directly to the Bursar, who would act on behalf of the Trustees.
- It is an integral part of this policy that the parent meets the relevant member of staff informally on school property to fully discuss this complaint. The complaint cannot progress to stage 2 unless this informal meeting has been scheduled, held and minuted.

#### **Stage 2 – Formal Resolution – Informal meetings exhausted. Complaint in writing.**

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head of school concerned. After

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considering the complaint, the Head of school will decide on the appropriate course of action to take.

- At this stage, the Head of school will need to notify the Bursar of the complaint for tracking purposes.
- For the following timescales please note there may be a delayed response during holiday periods which are not classified as working days under the complaints policy.
- In most cases, the Head of school will meet with the parents, normally within 5 working days of receiving the complaint, to try and resolve the complaint. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. A written note of the conversation will be taken. Meetings will normally be held on Foundation premises. Where circumstances prevent a face to face meeting, discussions can take place by telephone or, if necessary, by e-mail. A written note will be taken. The preference is for face to face meetings.
- The Head of school will produce written records of all meetings, discussions and interviews or may arrange for another member of staff to attend to make such records. The Head of school may also arrange for other members of staff to attend the meeting if he/she believes that their presence can assist in the resolution of the complaint; parents should be informed in advance if others are to attend the meeting.
- It may be necessary for the Head of school to carry out further investigations before arriving at a decision. Once the Head of school 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 the outcome in writing within 10 working days following the meeting. The Head of school will give reasons for his/her findings and, if appropriate, outline any remedies that are to be put in place.
- If parents are not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure within 28 days of receipt of the written outcome.
- When a complaint has been resolved at Stage 2 the Head of school will record it, and will ensure that all related records and correspondence (including copies of all e-mails) are retained for seven years from the date of the matter being resolved.
- A statement of the decision will be sent to the complainant and an acknowledgement of receipt and confirmation that the complaint has been resolved to the complainant's satisfaction should be obtained, where possible.
- If the complaint is against the Head or Bursar the Warden will call for a full report from the Head/Bursar and others and for all the relevant documents. The Warden may also call for a briefing from members of staff, and may speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the Warden is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing. The Warden will give reasons for his/her decision.
- If the complaint is against the Warden, the Bursar will call for a full report from the Warden and others and for all the relevant documents. The Bursar may also call for a briefing from members of staff, and may speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the Bursar is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, he/she will

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provide all the evidence collected to the Chairman. The Chairman will analyse all the evidence, will make a decision and will then inform the parents of the decision in writing. The Chairman will give reasons for his/her decision.

### **Stage 3 – Panel Hearing**

- If parents wish to take their complaint to Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they should write to the Bursar or Warden who have been appointed by the Board of Trustees to convene hearings of the Complaints Panel. Complainants should explain the grounds for their complaint in writing and what remedy they are seeking.
- This letter needs to be within one month of the date of the letter issued at the end of Stage 2 or the complaint lapses and the procedure ends.
- The Bursar or Warden will then refer the matter to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three individuals who have had no direct involvement in the matters raised in the complaint. These may include Trustees, the Warden, a Senior Manager within the Foundation, the Bursar or a different Head of school.<sup>3</sup> The Complaints Panel will include one external panel member who is completely independent of the governance or management of the School. The Bursar, on behalf of the Panel, will acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable which will normally be within 14 days.
- If the Panel deems it necessary, they may require that further information concerning the complaint, or any related matter, be provided in advance of the Hearing. Copies of such information will be supplied to all parties not later than five working days prior to the Hearing.
- The hearing will be held in Foundation property at the discretion of the Chairman of the Panel.
- Recording of the panel hearing will not be allowed or valid unless agreed by the Panel Chairman.
- Parents may be accompanied to the Hearing by one other person. This may be a relative or friend. The Hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the complaint immediately without the need for further investigation; however if further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.
- After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision; for EYFS cases this will be within 28 days and for other age groups, where possible this process will be completed within 28 days but no more than 40 days of the Hearing. The decision of the Panel will be final.
- The Panel's findings and recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents with reasons for the decision and, if appropriate, an outline of any remedies that are to be put in place. Copies will also be sent to the Head of the School in question, the Warden and the Bursar. In addition, a copy will be available for inspection on the School premises by the Trustees, the Head of school ,

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<sup>3</sup> The Headmaster who dealt with the complaint at Stage 2 will not be involved at this stage.

Bursar or Assistant Bursar (Estates) or Area Manager (DCNL) (or, where the grievance concerns the Bursar, Assistant Bursar (Estates) or the Area Manager (DCNL) a Trustee), the Warden and the Bursar. If the complaint was against a member of staff then the Panel's findings and recommendations will be sent in writing to the staff member with reasons for the decision and, if appropriate, an outline of any remedies that are to be put in place.

- When a complaint has been resolved at Stage 3 the Bursary will ensure that all related records and correspondence (including copies of all e-mails) are retained for seven years from the date of the matter being resolved but as DfE advises, they can be held indefinitely, in the case of child protection records or contentious disputes.

### **Persistent correspondence**

8. Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this may be regarded by the School as vexatious and outside the scope of this procedure.

### **Communication of Findings**

9. Findings will be sent by electronic mail, by post or will be given personally to the parents.

### **Record Keeping**

The Foundation keeps a written record of all formal complaints and of whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or proceed to a Panel Hearing, identifying the action taken by the Foundation as a result of the complaints regardless of whether they are upheld.

The number of formal complaints registered during the preceding school year is published on our web site.

Complaints are regularly reviewed, on a termly basis.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints are treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records are kept confidential except in so far as is required of the Foundation by paragraph 33 of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014; where disclosure is required by the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will be kept for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in the circumstances.

Parents will be given free access to developmental records about their child (for example the EYFS profile) however, a written request must be made for information held on children's personal files and Data Protection rules will be taken into account by the School when considering the release of information that may refer to third parties.

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## Further Actions

10. The School expects that complaints will be resolved without delay either to the complainant's satisfaction or with an otherwise appropriate outcome that balances the rights and duties of pupils, parents and staff. However, if having followed the above procedure complainants remain dissatisfied in relation to a complaint, depending on the nature of the concern they are free to contact the Gloucestershire Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), the Independent Schools' Inspectorate (ISI) or Ofsted (in relation to complaints about the Early Years Foundation Stage) to seek advice or to take their complaint further:

Gloucestershire Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)  
Safeguarding Children Service  
Gloucestershire Public Protection Bureau  
63 Lansdown Road  
Cheltenham  
Gloucestershire  
GL51 6QT

Independent Schools Inspectorate  
CAP House  
9 - 12 Long Lane  
London  
EC1A 9HA  
Telephone: 020 7600 0100  
concerns@isi.net

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD  
Telephone: 0300 123 1231

Complaints regarding children's welfare can also be registered with the Care Quality Commission (formerly the National Care Standards Commission):

CQC National Customer Service Centre  
Citygate  
Gallowgate  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 4PA