

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Owner:	HGH
Reviewed:	March 2022
Approved by Governors:	March 2022
Next Review:	March 2023

INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

1. Lady Eleanor Holles has long prided itself on the quality of its teaching and pastoral care, and the open and constructive dialogue it seeks to establish with parents in order to support their daughter's education and to secure her well-being.
2. Nonetheless, from time to time, parents may wish to raise a concern or complaint; they can expect it to be dealt with in accordance with the procedure set out below, which is divided into three stages. It is expected that the majority of complaints will be resolved at the informal stage.
3. Complaints by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under this Procedure only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil to which the complaint relates was still registered as a pupil at the school. The only exception to this is an appeal against a requirement to leave or expulsion which must normally be lodged within seven working days of the date of the verbal or written decision by the Headmistress.
4. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records relating to a complaint will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 Act requests access to them, or where any other legal obligation prevails. In turn, parents are expected to make complaints courteously, in good faith, in confidence and proportionately.
5. This procedure aims to provide a clear framework for parents, and for the school in dealing with their concerns fairly, constructively and thoroughly. It may be adapted by the school as appropriate according to the circumstances of each case.
6. It encompasses notifications of an actual or perceived problem arising from an event or process under the jurisdiction of the school, which causes parents to be concerned or dissatisfied about their daughter's experience or their own. Parents may not complain on behalf of others, and groups of parents who wish to raise the same matter under this procedure are required to do so separately, as individual families.
7. In order to assist in a speedy and satisfactory resolution, parents are asked, from the beginning, to state clearly the exact nature of their concern and the remedy sought.

It can greatly assist a speedy and satisfactory resolution if the notification is prompt and specific, including examples and factual evidence where this is appropriate and practicable. Anonymous quotes and unsubstantiated hearsay will not be considered as evidence and should not be employed.

8. The pattern of concerns and complaints will be monitored regularly by appropriate members of the senior management team.
9. Definitions for the purposes of this policy:
 - a) A parent is defined as someone having parental responsibility for a pupil currently attending the school.
 - b) When a concern or complaint is first raised with a member of staff, it is defined as an informal notification of dissatisfaction or concern. Should it not be resolved through the first stage of this procedure, but progress to stage 2, the formal stage, it is defined as a 'formal complaint'.
 - c) In this policy 'working days' refers to full school days in term time, excluding, therefore, holidays, half terms, weekends, public holidays and half-days. Where the word 'normally' is used, it is expected that the timescale would only be altered by the school or the parents in exceptional circumstances, such as the illness of a parent or a key member of staff involved in the process. Should the matter progress to an appeal, the availability of the panel members may also be a constraint.

STAGE 1: INFORMAL NOTIFICATION OF DISSATISFACTION OR CONCERN

10. Parents should contact the most appropriate member of staff by telephone, email or letter, or by an arranged meeting, with the aim of resolving the matter on an informal basis. A concern should normally be raised within thirty working days of the event taking place, or of the matter first coming to the attention of the parents, in order to facilitate an effective investigation and a speedy resolution.
11. The member of staff will either investigate the matter themselves, or as they consider appropriate, may ask another colleague to do so. Once the investigation is completed, the school will report back to the parents (orally or in writing), and seek to resolve the issue to the satisfaction of all concerned. Where it is deemed that there are issues to address, the school will take appropriate action.
12. The school will acknowledge receipt of the notification of dissatisfaction or concern, normally within two working days, and normally deal with the matter within ten working days of receipt of the notification.
13. Where resolution is not achieved at the first stage, parents may choose to continue to approach the school informally on the matter, as described above, or may instead decide to make a formal complaint under stage 2 of this procedure. If they choose to continue informally, this does not preclude them from lodging a formal complaint at a later stage.

STAGE 2: FORMAL COMPLAINT

14. A formal complaint must be made in writing, and addressed to the Head Mistress, stating clearly at the beginning that the parents wish to make a formal complaint under the second stage of this procedure.
15. It should state both:
 - a) the nature of the complaint; and
 - b) the remedy soughtand include all relevant information.

The school may seek clarification on this as required.

16. A formal complaint should normally be lodged within seven working days of the date of a verbal or written report to parents under the stage 1 procedure.
17. Parents should note that the complaint at this stage should not change in scope from that presented at stage 1. Should any new matters be presented, parents will be advised that they will be dealt with under stage 1.
18. The Head Mistress will acknowledge in writing receipt of the complaint, normally within two working days. The Headmistress will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
19. According to the nature of the complaint, the Headmistress may speak to and/or meet with the parents concerned to discuss the matter, normally within 10 working days of receiving the complaint. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
20. It may be necessary for the Head to appoint a senior member of staff to investigate the issues raised. Depending on the circumstances, she may appoint her Deputy to determine the complaint in her place.
21. Once the Head Mistress (or Deputy) is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and the parents will be informed of this decision, and the reasons for it, in writing.
22. The school will normally deal with a formal complaint within twenty-eight working days of receipt. Formal complaints received at or after the end of the school day will be deemed to have been received on the next working day.
23. If the complaint concerns the Headmistress, then it should be directed to the Chair of Governors who will appoint another Governor to oversee the procedure.

STAGE 3: APPEAL TO A COMPLAINTS PANEL

24. If a parent is not satisfied with the decision reached at stage 2, s/he may choose to appeal to a panel (a "Complaints Panel"), under the third stage of this procedure. A

Complaints Panel hearing is a review of the decisions taken by the Head Mistress (or Deputy) at stage 2.

25. An appeal must normally be lodged within seven working days of the date of the Head Mistress's (or Deputy's) written response to their stage 2 complaint. Requests to appeal received at or after the end of the school day will be deemed to have been received on the next working day.
26. Parents should make their request in writing to the Chair of Governors c/o the Clerk to the Governors, at the school address, formally stating they are requesting a panel hearing under stage 3 of this procedure, and attaching a copy of their stage 2 complaint.
27. The Clerk will acknowledge in writing receipt of the request, normally within two working days. On behalf of the Chair of Governors, s/he will convene a Complaints Panel consisting of at least three people not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, and ask one of them to act as Chair of the Panel. One of the Panel members will be independent of the management and running of the school. The independent member will be someone who has held a position of responsibility, and is used to analysing evidence and putting forward balanced arguments. Examples of people likely to be suitable are serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background and retired members of the Police Force.
28. Parents should be advised that it is only their stage 2 complaint which will be considered by the Panel. The Panel will not consider any new material or areas of complaint at this stage. They will refer any new material or complaint back to the school for investigation under the appropriate earlier stage of this procedure.
29. It is not the Panel's purpose to re-investigate the complaint, but to consider the matters raised by the parent(s), and the report from the school, and to decide whether the determination reached at stage 2 was reasonable and fair.
30. The hearing will be scheduled to take place as soon as practicable and normally within twenty-three working days of receipt of the parents' request. The parents will normally be notified of the composition of the Panel and of the date, time and location of the hearing no fewer than seven working days in advance.
31. Should it prove impossible, despite the best efforts of the Clerk, to arrange the hearing within the normal timescale because of the availability of the Panel members, the Clerk will write to the parents before the expiry of the twenty-three working day period, setting out the likely timeframe.
32. Normally no fewer than five working days in advance of the hearing the Clerk will send the parents and Panel members a briefing pack containing the stage 2 complaint, and the school's report on the matters raised and the Head Mistress' (or Deputy's) decision at stage 2.
33. The hearing will be attended by the parents and the school representatives. Parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if wished. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. If the parents wish to be

accompanied by someone who is legally qualified, they must notify the Clerk at least seven working days before the hearing.

34. The exact manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel however, the parents will be able to make a statement to the Panel, as will the school representatives. Neither party will be able to ask questions of the Panel. The Chair of the Panel will decide on an appropriate length for each party's submission, and all parties will be informed of this no fewer than five days before the hearing date. The Panel will be able to ask questions of the parents and school representatives.
35. The Chair of the Panel may, at his/her discretion, adjourn the hearing if the Panel decides that further investigation is necessary and the Panel shall decide how that further investigation shall be carried out.
36. After the hearing is completed, the Panel will retire and after due consideration, will reach a decision to allow the complaint, to allow it in part, or to reject it in full. They may if they wish make recommendations. Their decision, findings and any recommendations will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, normally within seven working days of the date of the hearing (either by post or email (and available for inspection in school)). The decision, findings and any recommendations will be made available for inspection on the school premises by the Governing Body and Head Mistress.
37. Parents should be aware that it is not within the remit of the Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils or parents. It has no power to instruct the Head Mistress or a member of staff to implement any recommendation(s) made. Where this is deemed necessary, the matter will be referred to the Chair of Governors for action under delegated powers, or be presented to the Governing Body.
38. The decision and findings of the Panel are final and are not subject to any further right of appeal.
39. A hearing under this procedure is not a legal proceeding, but a private and confidential matter. The Clerk will make a minute of the hearing, but no tape, video or digital recording may be made by any party. Subject to paragraph 3 above, no notes, other records or oral statements about any matter discussed or arising from the proceedings shall be made available directly or indirectly to third parties, including the press or other media.
40. Any complaint of a decision taken by the Headmistress to require a pupil to leave or expel them will be governed by this Stage 3 of the School's Complaints Procedure. In such circumstances, the Panel may only uphold the complaint and ask the Headmistress to reconsider her decision if they consider, having regard to the process followed by the Headmistress that her decision was not a reasonable decision for her to have taken.

RECORD KEEPING

41. A central written record of all formal complaints will be kept in the Head Mistress's office, together with information about whether they were resolved following a formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing. The record will also detail action taken by the school as a result of the complaint(s) (whether or not upheld).
42. The school will keep records of formal complaints and panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Notice and Data Retention Policy. Complaints which do not have safeguarding implications will be retained for at least 7 years. Records concerning allegations of abuse will be preserved for the term of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation if longer.

PERSISTENT CORRESPONDENCE

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