

# The American School in London

## Parent Complaints Policy

*The current version of any policy, procedure, protocol or guideline is the version held on the ASL website. It is the responsibility of all employees to ensure that they are following the current version.*

<b>Responsible Party</b>	Head of School
<b>Approved by</b>	Board of Trustees
<b>Approval date</b>	18 September 2023
<b>Next review date</b>	15 September 2024

### Introduction

The goal of this policy is to present a fair and effective process for handling complaints. ASL believes that respectful interactions comprise a strong school-home partnership and are important to best support our students. As such, ASL pledges to treat all complaints seriously and confidentially, and in accordance with this policy.

### What Constitutes a Complaint?

For the purposes of this policy, a “complaint” is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action taken by the school. It may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter relating to the school program/programming.

### Who Can Make a Complaint?

“Parent(s)” means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for a current student about whom the complaint relates.

Complaints by parents of former students will be dealt with under this policy only if the complaint was initially raised when the student to which the complaint relates was still registered as a student at ASL.

### When Can a Complaint be Made?

Parents are encouraged to voice any concerns as soon as practicable to ensure the most effective and prompt remedy of any complaints. If more than 30 school days have passed since the applicable incident, the school may not be able to adequately investigate or fully address the concern.

### Anonymous Complaints

An open line of communication between parents and the school is essential to enable the school to understand and appropriately engage with any complaints and to achieve resolution. The best resolution involves face-to-face communication and a strong, trusting school-home partnership, with all parties committed to finding a positive and reasonable solution to a complaint that arises. Therefore while it may be appropriate for action to be taken in response to some anonymous complaints (for example, those relating to safeguarding allegations), ASL retains discretion to assess whether or not it is reasonable and appropriate to address anonymous complaints, on a case by case basis.

Further, in the interest of respectful interactions supporting a strong school-home partnership and to best support our students, the school discourages use of group chats or social media to complain about or criticise the school or members of staff. We seek constructive dialogue and the school requests that parents contact the school and speak to the appropriate member of staff per this policy to address issues.

### Stages of the Complaints Policy

When parents wish to make a complaint the School follows these procedures:

#### **Stage 1: Informal Resolution**

It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally; indeed, the overwhelming majority of complaints are well addressed through informal resolution. Complaints at this stage are normally resolved within 15 school days.

- Parents are encouraged to first contact the current student's teacher, advisor or class dean with respect to a complaint. In most cases, this will lead to a resolution.
- In cases where the complaint is not within the current student's teacher, advisor, or dean's purview, they will refer the issue to the relevant employee in the appropriate division or department. In these instances, the responsibility for dealing with the complaint is assumed by that individual, who will work with the parent toward a resolution.

- Complaints brought directly to a member of the Senior Leadership Team, e.g., a divisional principal or the head of school, may be referred to the relevant employee in the appropriate division or department. In these instances, the responsibility for dealing with the complaint is assumed by that individual who will work with the parent toward a resolution.
- In some instances of complaints brought directly to a member of the Senior Leadership Team, the member of the Senior Leadership Team may decide that it is appropriate to deal with the matter directly. In these instances, the responsibility for dealing with the complaint is assumed by that individual who will work with the parent toward a resolution.
- If a parent has a complaint against the Head of School, the parent is encouraged to speak directly with the Head of School in order to resolve the complaint.

If the complaint remains unresolved and a Senior Leadership Team member has not already been involved, the parent may choose to contact a member of the Senior Leadership Team. If the parent feels that their complaint has not been resolved after working with a Senior Leadership Team member, the parent may choose to follow Stage 2 described below.

The senior administrator who receives a complaint will make a written record of it and the date on which it was received. If a parent chooses to engage Stage 2, the Stage 2 written complaint should be submitted within 15 school days of the Stage 1 determination.

### **Stage 2: Formal Resolution**

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the complainant can choose to move to Stage 2 Formal Resolution by submitting the complaint in writing to the Head of School. The Head of School will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action.

In most cases, the Head of School will acknowledge receipt, normally within 5 school days of receiving the complaint. Often, this will be to communicate to whom in the School the matter has been referred. In some cases, the Head of School's communication itself will lead to a resolution of the complaint.

Upon receiving a written complaint, the Head of School may feel it necessary for them or their nominee to carry out an investigation in order to understand the full nature of the concern.

The Head of School will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

Once the Head of School is satisfied that all relevant facts have been established as best they can, a decision will be made regarding the complaint. The Head of School will inform the parent of this decision in writing, usually within 15 school days of

receipt of Stage 2 written complaint. The Head of School will also give the rationale for their decision.

If the complaint is against the Head of School, and the complainant has followed Stage 1 above, parents can move to Stage 2 by making their complaint directly to the Chair of the Board of Trustees at [board\\_of\\_trustees@asl.org](mailto:board_of_trustees@asl.org). In most cases, the Chair will acknowledge receipt of the complaint, normally within 5 school days of receiving the complaint. The Chair or their nominee will ask the Head of School for their response and for all relevant documents. The Chair or their nominee may also call for a briefing from members of staff, and will in most cases, speak to or meet with the complainant to discuss the matter. Once the Chair or their nominee is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, they will inform the parents of the decision in writing, including rationale for the decision, usually within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 written complaint.

Parents who are still not satisfied with the decision of the formal written complaint process may choose to proceed to Stage 3 of this process, a panel hearing.

### **Stage 3: Panel Hearing**

If parents seek to progress to Stage 3, they should do so in writing to the Chair of the Board of Trustees at [board\\_of\\_trustees@asl.org](mailto:board_of_trustees@asl.org). A written formal complaint should set out the grounds of appeal and be submitted by the parent(s) within 5 school days of receiving the written decision at Stage 2. Any supporting evidence which the parents wish to rely on should also be provided with their grounds of appeal. The panel reserves the right not to consider any evidence that was not presented in a timely fashion at the Stage 1 or 2 proceedings. To the extent the parents are unable to provide their appeal within the time period stipulated due to extenuating circumstances which have impeded the parents from taking action, the parents should request an extension in writing. Such a request should be made to the Chair of the Board of Trustees in advance of the original deadline, setting out the further time period requested and the reason for this. This will be considered.

On receipt of the Stage 3 complaint, the Chair of the Board of Trustees (who has been appointed by the Board of Trustees to call hearings of the Complaints Panel) will refer the parents' complaint to the Complaints Panel for its consideration. The Panel will consist of three persons, including members of the Board of Trustees who have been selected by the Chair of the Board of Trustees, plus at least one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school. The Panel will appoint one of the Panel members to act as the Chair of the Panel.

The Chair of the Board of Trustees, on behalf of the Panel, will formally acknowledge the complaint in writing (normally within 5 school days) and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as time allows (normally within 30 school days).

If the Panel feels it is necessary, it may require that additional details connected to the complaint or related matters be supplied in advance of the hearing or further investigation be carried out. Copies of these details should be given to all involved parties at least 4 school days prior to the hearing.

Involved parents may attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person (such as a relative, teacher or friend) to the hearing. The School requests notice of the proposed companion at least 2 school days prior to the hearing. Legal representation at the hearing is not considered to be appropriate.

The remit of the Panel shall be at the discretion of the Chair of the Board of Trustees and the manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel. The Panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint after the hearing without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.

After due consideration of the merits of the complaint and all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and whether to:

- dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and/or
- make recommendations.

The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, normally within 7 school days of the hearing (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following the hearing). The decision of the Panel will be final.

Where relevant, the Panel's findings and any recommendations will also be sent in writing to the Head of School, the Chair of the Board of Trustees, and the person about whom the complaint was made. A copy will also be available on the school premises for inspection by the Chair of the Board of Trustees and the Head of School.

### Complaints Specifically Pertaining to Early Years Foundation Stage

In the case of ASL's program, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) refers only to students in K1. Parents of EYFS children should follow the three stages of this policy. In the case of written complaints about the fulfilment of EYFS requirements, ASL will investigate and notify complainants of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of having received the complaint. If parents remain dissatisfied and their complaint is about the school's fulfilment of the EYFS requirements, then parents may take their complaint to the ISI or Ofsted.

### Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously, sensitively and within clear and reasonable timescales. If the parent does not reasonably cooperate in the school's investigation as requested, then the complaint will be considered withdrawn.

Please note that, for the purposes of this policy, **school days** refer to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays and days school is not

in session. This means that during school holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint, although the school will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay. It may also take longer to resolve a complaint during periods of significant disruption to school life or as a consequence of unavoidable staff absence, however deviation from the normal timescale for resolving a complaint during term time will only occur on an exceptional basis, and the school will take all reasonable steps to limit any such delay.

### Unreasonably Persistent and/or Vexatious Complaints

ASL reserves the right not to address complaints which are otherwise unreasonable and/or vexatious, for example complaints which are:

- obsessive, abusive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive; or
- pursued in an unreasonable manner, e.g. if a parent refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to cooperate with this policy, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this policy and the timeframes it sets out; or
- made specifically to cause unreasonable disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on the school’s administrative time and expenses.

Complaints falling into a category above will be regarded as outside the scope of this policy.

### Record Keeping

Complaints will be treated confidentially. The School will keep a written record of Stage 1 complaints which are raised to the Senior Leadership Team, of complaints raised to Stage 2 or Stage 3 (see table below), and any action taken by the school as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld).

Complaints managed in the twelve months to 30 June, 2023	
Stage 2	Stage 3
1	1

The school processes data in accordance with its [Privacy Notice](#). When handling complaints the school (including any Panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of student
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)

- Name and contact details of member(s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes/minutes of the hearing, and
- The Panel's written decision

This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the school's Privacy Notice, but potentially including, for instance, information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the school's Data Protection Policy.

All documents relevant 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 requests access to them or where any other legal obligation prevails.

ASL makes its Complaints Policy available to all parents of current students on its website. Parents of students and of prospective students may enquire as to the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year. Further, in accordance with paragraph 32(1) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, ASL will, on request and as appropriate, provide details of this policy and the number of complaints registered under the formal policy during the preceding school year to the Department for Education (DfE), Ofsted, or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI).

The Independent Schools Inspectorate can be contacted on 020 7600 0100 or by email at [concerns@isi.net](mailto:concerns@isi.net), or at ISI, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA. Ofsted can be contacted on 0300 123 1231, by email at [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk), or at Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD.

This policy has been developed in accordance with Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations, 2014.