

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Policy Owner PPS Director of Operations and Finance	Applies to Prior Park Schools (Trust Wide)	Superseded documents PPS Complaints Policy v5
Associated documents Admissions Policy Safeguarding Policy Anti Bullying Policy Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Policy Exclusions Policy Retention and Destruction Handbook Policy Behaviour Policy SEND Policy Data Protection Policy	Review frequency Every year (unless the legislation/regulations update before this time) Implementation date 20 September 2024	Legal Framework The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 as amended by the Independent Education Provisions in England (Inspection Fees) and Independent School Standards (Amendments) 2018 (ISS Regulations) National Minimum Standards, September 2022 The Early Years Foundation Stage: Statutory Framework, January 2024 UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 COBIS (Council of British Independent Schools) - PPSG only HM Government of Gibraltar (Department of Education)- PPSG only

This policy is reviewed annually, or more regularly as required, prior to approval by Trustees, where applicable.

Last reviewed by:	Head of Compliance (Miss E Wickham) and Director of Operations and Finance (Ms E Sandberg)
Date last reviewed:	August 2024
Approved by Trustees:	Approved by PEB and ratified by BOT (18 September 2024)
Date last approved:	5 September 2024
Date for next approval:	September 2025

1. Introduction

Prior Park Schools (PPS) is a family of Christian schools based in Bath and Gibraltar. Prior Park College (PPC) and The Paragon School (TP) are incorporated in England as Prior Park Educational Trust Ltd. Prior Park School Gibraltar (PPSG), is incorporated in Gibraltar as Prior Park School Ltd. Both are companies limited by guarantee and registered charities.

The Prior Park Schools mission, underpinned by shared values, is to steward a thriving family of communities with love for the young people they serve at their heart. These vibrant communities cultivate creativity, foster integrity, and transform lives.

Prior Park Schools Values:

Curiosity - Generosity - Courage

2. Scope

PPS is proud of the quality of its teaching, pastoral and boarding care. Nonetheless, complaints from parents or students can and do arise from time to time and they can be expected to be treated with care, in accordance with this policy and procedure.

In accordance with paragraph 32(1)(b) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, PPS will make available to parents of students and of prospective and former students provide, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate, details of the Complaints Policy and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (see section 9).

This policy covers all three schools within the Trust and includes the Early Years Foundation Stage and Boarding. Any complaints should have a direct connection with the one of the three schools within PPS.

This policy and procedure will be relied upon in respect of all complaints by parents and students made against one of the schools **except** in respect of:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- External examinations
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing (Raising a concern at work)

- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Where a complaint is made, following the termination of a place, due to the behaviour of either or both parents, under the Parent Contract (the Acceptance Form - Terms and Conditions), the complaint will be dealt with by a Trustee at Stage 2 of the Complaints Policy. The decision following the review by the Trustee at Stage 2 will be final and no further appeal will be possible under the Complaints Policy.

Complaints made by members of the public (who are not students or parents of students) about one of the schools will normally be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure, though this procedure may not be followed at the discretion of the school.

A complaint by a former student and/or their parents will be dealt with under this Complaints Policy but only if the complaint was initially raised when the student, to which the complaint relates, was still registered as a student at one of the schools at the time.

Written procedures for members of staff to state a grievance are the subject of a separate policy the PPS Grievance Policy.

For the purposes of this Policy:

- any student, parent or visitor making a complaint shall be referred to (individually and collectively where there is more than one person involved in making the complaint) as the **‘Complainant(s)’**.
- **‘Delegated Person’** someone who has been given authority to speak on behalf of the Head e.g. Trade Union Rep, Deputy Head or another Head.
- **‘Working Days’** is used throughout this policy and means Monday-Friday during term time. We will normally complete each stage within the timeframe, however, during school holidays this may not be possible, and will therefore be completed as soon as is reasonable possible.
- **‘Exceptional/Complex Cases’**- There are occasions when further investigation is required when the complaint/appeal is complex in nature, the school reserves the right to extend the timeframes of a Stage 2 complaint or Stage 3 appeal. In these situations, the Clerk to the Trustees will inform the Complainant and keep them updated throughout.
- and for compliance monitoring both a concern and a complaint will be dealt with in the same way, in line with the Independent Schools Standards regulations.
- concerns and complaints will be referred to as a complaint.

3. Complainant’s responsibilities

The Complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Engage with the complaint’s procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- State their preferred outcome(s) and/or resolution
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not approach individual Trustees about the complaint
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

Failure to do so may result in the complaint being investigated without the complainant’s input, additional time being required to handle the complaint, or the complaint being closed.

4. What constitutes a complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction regarding 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 is unhappy and seeks action by the school. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent or student believes that the school has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly.

The school is here for educating young people, and parents and students can be assured that no child will be penalised for a complaint raised in good faith. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to 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.

PPS expects that most concerns can be resolved informally, and it will use its best endeavours to resolve any complaints that are made or any concerns that are raised on that basis. If informal procedures fail to resolve the issue, a formal complaint about any matter not relating to the exceptions above must be stated in writing to the Head or Director of Operations and Finance and will then be dealt with under this policy and procedure. Every complaint shall receive fair and proper consideration and a timely response.

5. The Three Stage Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 - INFORMAL RESOLUTION

The guide below outlines the process involved if you wish to take the matter further.

It is hoped and expected that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally.

Parental and/or Student Complaints, whether written or verbal, should be made in the first instance to either:

- the relevant Housemaster/Housemistress, Head of House, Tutor, class/subject Teacher
- on purely academic matters to the Head of Department (PPC)/Deputy Head Academic (TP)/the Deputy Head Academic (PPSG)
- on purely boarding matters (PPC only) to the House Parent or the Head of Boarding
- on administrative/financial issues to the Prior Park Schools Director of Operations and Finance.

Visitors should make their complaint to the school office, who will pass on the complaint to the appropriate person.

Complaints made directly to a more senior member of the teaching staff (e.g. Head or Deputy Head) will normally be referred back in the first instance to the level described above, unless there is a clear reason not to do so.

If, however, the complaint is against the Head, the Complainant should make their complaint directly to the Clerk to the Trustees whose contact details are available from the School Office on request.

The member of staff receiving the complaint will always make a written record, using the Complaints and Concerns Microsoft Form (link below), and will include the date on which the complaint was received, and any action taken.

[PPC Complaints and Concerns Reporting form.url](#)
[PPSG Complaints and Concerns Recording form.url](#)
[TP Complaints and Concerns Recording form.url](#)

The recipient should make every effort to resolve the complaint informally, seeking more senior guidance as necessary. Except in school holidays, Complainant should expect to receive initial acknowledgement of their complaint within **48 hours** within term time and as soon as reasonably possible during school holidays.

Should the matter not be resolved **within 15 days from receipt of the complaint** (within term time and as soon as reasonably possible during school holidays) or in the event that the person receiving the complaint, and the Complainant fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then the Complainant will be advised that they can choose to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Complaints Procedure.

Stage 2 - FORMAL RESOLUTION

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, and the Complainant remains dissatisfied, they should put their complaint in writing to the Head.

The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

- Complainant should expect to receive initial acknowledgement of their Stage 2 complaint within **48 hours** within term time and as soon as reasonably possible during school holidays.
- In most cases, but not all, the Head, or their nominee, will meet/speak to the Complainant concerned, within **5 days from receipt of complaint** within term time and as soon as reasonably possible during school holidays, of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Head, or their nominee, to carry out further investigations.
- Once the Head, or their nominee, is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made, and Complainant will be informed of this decision in writing.
- The Head will also give reasons for the decision. In most cases, the Head will make their decision and provide the Complainant with reasons within **15 working days** within term time and as soon as reasonably possible during school holidays, of the complaint being put in writing to him/her.

Stage 2- FORMAL RESOLUTION IN CASES WHERE THE COMPLAINT IS ABOUT THE HEAD

- If the complaint is against the Head, the complaint should be made, via the Clerk to the Trustees, to the Chair of the Trustees
- The Chair of Trustees will liaise with the relevant school's Chair of the Local Governance Committee, to nominate a Trustee, who is best placed to handle the complaint.
- The Complainant should expect to receive initial acknowledgement of their Stage 2 complaint within **48 hours** within term time and as soon as reasonably possible during school holidays.

- In some cases, but not all, the Nominated Trustee, will meet/speak to the Complainant concerned, within **10 working days** within term time and as soon as reasonably possible during school holidays, of acknowledgement of the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- The Nominated Trustee will call for a full report from the Head and for all the relevant documents within **10 working days** within term time and as soon as reasonably possible during school holidays of the specifics of the complaint being established.
- It may be necessary for the Nominated Trustee, to carry out further investigations.
- The full report from the Head and or other members of staff should be sent to the Nominated Trustee within **5 working days** within term time and as soon as reasonably possible during school holidays, of them being requested.
- Once the Nominated Trustee is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the Complainant will be informed of the decision in writing. The Nominated Trustee will make his/her decision and give reasons for his/her decision within **15 working days** of all of the relevant facts and documentation being received.
- If the Complainant is still not satisfied with the decision, they will be advised that they can proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3 - APPEALS PANEL HEARING

If the Complainant seeks to invoke Stage Three (Panel Hearing) following failure to reach an earlier resolution and where not satisfied with the Head's or the Nominated Trustee's decision in response to their complaint under Stage Two (Formal Resolution) of this procedure, the Complainant may request that their complaint be further considered by the Appeals Panel ('the Panel') set up for this purpose.

This request for further assessment of the initial complaint will, for the purposes of this Procedure, be known as an 'appeal'. The Panel is only obliged to consider the complaint(s) lodged in this 'initial submission' although they may use their discretion to consider other relevant and related matters that may subsequently arise.

Where the appeal is received by the School during school holidays, or within 2 working days prior to the commencement of those holidays, the School may not deal with the appeal until the commencement of the subsequent school term

- The Complainant must lodge their appeal in writing, addressed to the Chair of Trustees c/o Clerk to the Trustees, within **5 working days of the date of the school's decision** made in accordance with Stage Two (Formal Resolution) of this procedure.
- The receipt of an appeal will be acknowledged by the Clerk to the Trustees, normally within **48 hours** during term time, and as soon as reasonably possible during the school holidays.
- In their appeal, the Complainant should provide full details of their original complaint(s) and reasons for the appeal made against the School and which they believe to have been resolved unsatisfactorily by Stage Two (Formal Resolution) of this Complaints procedure, along with the remedies sought in respect of each.

- The Clerk to the Trustees will inform the Chair of Trustees of the Stage 3 appeal and agree the members of the Panel and date of the hearing.
- The Clerk to the Trustees will circulate all original documentation relating to the Stage 2 Complaint and the Complainant appeal documentation.
- The Clerk to the Trustees will inform the Complainant, within **10 working days** from acknowledging the appeal, of the date for the appeal to be heard.
- The Panel will conduct the Appeal hearing within **20 working days** during term time, and as soon as reasonably possible during the school holidays, of the date being set.

The Panel will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, including two Trustees and one person independent of the management and running of the School. The process used for selecting an independent person will conform to relevant guidance issued by the Department for Education:

“Our general view is that people who have held a position of responsibility and are used to scrutinising evidence and putting forward balanced arguments would be suitable. Examples of persons likely to be suitable are a serving or retired business person, a civil servant, a Head or senior members of staff at other schools, a person with a legal background and/or a retired member of the Police Force might be considered.”

The following are entitled to attend a hearing, submit written representations and address the Panel:

- a) The Complainant (and, if aged 16 or over, the student), who may be accompanied by one other person, usually a friend or relative
- b) The Head, who may be accompanied by the Delegated Person* (if relevant) or another colleague
- c) Any other interested person whom the Panel considers to have a reasonable and just interest in the appeal and whose contribution would assist the Panel in their decision-making.

Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.

The hearing should continue even if the Complainant decides not to attend. If necessary, the Panel should consider the appeal in their absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint, thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion.

The requirement for the Panel to proceed does not prevent the School from accommodating parental availability for dates or considering comments concerning the Panel composition.

Where the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. In such cases all parties will be given the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Panel in support of their position, including:

- a) documents in support of complaint(s);
- b) chronology and key dates relating to complaint(s);
- c) written submission(s) setting out the complaint(s) in more detail.

It is for the Panel to decide how to conduct the proceedings of the appeal, which should be reasonably informal so that all parties present their case effectively. If possible, the Panel will resolve the Complainant appeal immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. (See Complex/Exceptional Cases above).

After due consideration of all the facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision as to whether to uphold or reject the complaint and may make recommendations within **10 working days** during term time, and as soon as reasonably possible during school holidays. The decision reached by the Panel is final, although any recommendations which may have financial implications for the School may be subject to formal approval from the relevant authorities (e.g. the Board of Trustees).

The Panel's findings and recommendations will be sent by the Clerk to the Trustees via electronic mail or otherwise, to the Complainant, Head, the Trustees and, where relevant, the person(s) complained about, within **5 working days** during term time, and as soon as reasonably possible during school holidays. The letter will state any reasons for the decision reached and recommendations made by the Panel. Details of the findings and recommendations will be retained in School as described in the *Provision of Information* section.

6. Unreasonable and Persistent complaints

Unreasonable complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaint's investigation process
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaint's procedure
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint's procedure or with good practice
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be considered and commented on
- Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- Uses threats to intimidate
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- Knowingly provides falsified information
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

Please note: the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It is at the discretion of PPS what is deemed to be unreasonable.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's comments and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

Whenever possible, the Head or Nominated Trustee will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues, the complainant will be written to, informing them that their behaviour is unreasonable, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it.

For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#)
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from school premises and ensuring appropriate measures of support are provided to staff where they are the subject of aggression and/or violence.

Serial/persistent complaints

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. We may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:

- We have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts the school repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

The case to stop responding is stronger if:

- The complainant's communications are often or always abusive or aggressive
- The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff
- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

If we decide to stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will consider any new complaints they make provided the concerns raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern

Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete

If a duplicate complaint is raised which in the view of the school warrants further consideration, the procedure outlined in section 5 will be repeated.

Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

7. EYFS

Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements must be investigated and the Complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within **28 days**. The record of complaints must be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.

8. Provision of information

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection or under other legal or regulatory obligation, or otherwise comes into the Public Domain through no fault of PPS.

Retention - The period for retaining records of complaints will be retained for a minimum of 7 years or until the Complainant's child is 25 years old, whichever is the later. Where there is a safeguarding angle, 'Records concerning allegations of abuse must 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 it is longer.'

Each School will provide ISI/Ofsted or the DfE (UK and Gibraltar), 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.

Each School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice(s). When dealing with 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 Complainant
- If applicable- 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 and/or Data Protection Policy, 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.

PPS will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Notice, Data Protection Policy and Retention of Records Policy. All records relating to complaints shall be treated as confidential. In addition to where requested by the Secretary of State or an inspector (see above), there may be other circumstances where disclosure of the substance of a complaint or particular confidential records relating to it is required, for example, where there is a legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligation (e.g., in response to a subject access request) which prevails over the requirement to maintain the records as confidential.

9. Timescales for handling a complaint

‘Working Days’ here refer to working days during school term time (i.e. term-time days, Monday-Friday)*.

	Acknowledgment of receipt of complaint	Initial response by School / hearing	Decision
Informal (Stage One)	2 days	15 days from receipt of the complaint	Included in the initial response
Formal (Stage Two)	2 days	5 days from receipt of complaint	15 days from when the specifics of the complaint have been established
Formal (Stage Two where the complaint is about the Head)	2 days	20 days to collate evidence and speak with key people	15 days after receiving all evidence
Panel (Stage Three)	2 days	A total of 30 days for the hearing to take place from receipt of appeal	15 days after hearing

**During school holidays or where the complaint is about the Head, it may not be practicable to resolve matters within the above time frames. The Clerk to the Trustees will keep the complainant updated throughout.*

10. Number of complaints

For the academic year 2023-2024, the School(s) received the following number of formal complaints (Stage 2 and 3):

Prior Park College: 0
The Paragon School: 0
Prior Park School Gibraltar: 0

The Complainant may complain directly to ISI/DfE for UK Schools and in respect of PPSG directly to COBIS or the HM Government of Gibraltar Department of Education.

For PPC and TP:

- ISI can be contacted on 020 7600 0100 or by email: concerns@isi.net
ISI, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA
- DfE
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>

For PPSG:

- Department of Education,
23 Queensway,
Gibraltar
Tel: +350 20077486/+350 20078638
Fax: +350 20071564
E-mail: info.edu@gibraltar.gov.gi
- COBIS
<https://www.cobis.org.uk/>