

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint regarding routine matters such as study, lost property, school organisation or information, they should contact their daughter's Form Tutor or Housemistress as soon as practicable. In many cases, the matter can be resolved immediately to the parents' satisfaction.
- If the issue concerns an individual's academic progress, health, welfare or happiness, no matter how small it may seem, the Form Tutor or Housemistress [depending on whether it is a boarding or day issue] should be the first point of contact.
- The Tutor can discuss the matter with the Head of Year or Head of School, as appropriate, to determine if it should be escalated. If the issue concerns academic progress in a specific subject, the Head of Department should be involved. If there are problems with work across multiple areas, the relevant Heads of School should always be consulted, and they will liaise with the Director of Teaching and Learning or the Deputy Head Academic as appropriate.
- If the issue involves bullying, emotional distress, family problems or social integration, the Tutor and staff with pastoral responsibility play a vital role. For Years 7 and 8, these matters are initially addressed by the Head or Deputy Head of Lower School; for Years 9, 10 and 11, by the Head of Year, Deputy Head or Head of Middle School; and for Years 12 and 13, by the Head or Deputy Head of Sixth Form. In all cases, support and guidance may be sought in consultation with the Head of Pastoral Care or the Senior Deputy Head as appropriate.
- If the parents' complaint concerns a particular teacher, they may feel more comfortable with referring it to the Senior Deputy Head or Deputy Head Academic, or, if the issue is pastoral in nature, to the Head of Pastoral or to the Director of Boarding for boarding-related concerns. The Headmistress will always be kept informed. The Headmistress can be involved at any stage if necessary and appropriate, and parents should feel able to consult her. However, it is usually more effective to seek early resolutions by first discussing the matter directly with the relevant members of staff, and **then**, if no solution is reached, with the Senior Deputy Head or the Headmistress.
- In serious matters such as allegations of professional misconduct or competency, parents should approach a member of the Senior Leadership Team [SLT] and, for competency matters, provide a detailed written account of the complaint. In cases of misconduct related to child protection, the nationally recognised guidelines set out in 'Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2024' will be followed. All such matters will be kept confidential or on a 'need to know' basis unless a formal investigation is necessary within the school.

Any such complaint would be referred by the Headmistress to the Local Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub [In East Sussex this is accessed via the Single Point of Access (SPOA)]. Initially, the Headmistress will consult the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for advice. The Local Authority will decide the appropriate form of any investigation and whether the school or outside agencies, including the police, should be involved. The Governors of the School will be kept informed, and may be involved, depending on the investigation's outcome.

Such issues are covered in the Disciplinary Policy, which deals with staff disciplinary matters. (In the event of there being an unresolved complaint against a member of the Senior Leadership Team or the Headmistress, this matter should be taken directly to the Chair of Governors who will convene the independent panel as specified in this document.)
- Complaints made directly to a member of the Senior Leadership Team or the Headmistress will usually be referred to the relevant Form Tutor, Housemistress, Teacher, and/or the Head of Department and Head of

School, unless the Senior Leadership Team member, or Headmistress deems it appropriate to handle the matter at a higher level.

The Form Tutor, Housemistress, or the person to whom the complaint is handled will make a written record of all concerns and complaints including the date they were received and will undertake a full investigation. Should the matter not be resolved within 5 days, [or another reasonable period to allow for reports etc.] or if the Form Tutor or Housemistress and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, the parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, parents should **submit their formal complaint in writing** to the Headmistress at headsoffice@mayfieldgirls.org. The Headmistress will review the complaint and determine the appropriate course of action.
- The Headmistress may, in some circumstances, deem it appropriate to nominate a staff member to hear the complaint and manage the Stage 2 complaint process. The Headmistress (or her nominee) will review the complaint and determine the appropriate course of action.
- Parents will receive written or telephonic acknowledgement of receipt within 2 working days. The Headmistress (or her nominee) will speak with the parents within a reasonable timeframe (generally within 7 working days) of receiving the complaint to discuss the matter. A resolution will be sought at this stage, if possible.
- It may be necessary for the Headmistress to carry out further investigations. If so, these will be completed within eight working days or as soon as practicable. The Headmistress (or her nominee) will determine who will carry out the investigation, which may involve an external party.
- If additional time is needed to gather information for the investigation, the parent will be informed in writing.
- Written records will be maintained of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Headmistress (or her nominee) is satisfied that all relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made, and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Headmistress (or her nominee) will also provide reasons for the decision. In most cases, this will occur within 15 working days of the complaint being submitted in writing.
- If the complaint is against the Headmistress, the complaint should be made to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors will nominate someone to determine the complaint. The Stage 2 process described above will then be followed, with any references to the Headmistress (or her nominee) being replaced by the individual nominated by the Chair of Governors to handle the complaint against the Headmistress.
- **If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3** of this Procedure.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the Chairman of the Governors' Governance Committee, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel. They should do so in writing to the Clerk to the Panel via **bursar@mayfieldgirls.org** within five working days of receiving the decision at Stage 2, setting out their ground of appeal. Any supporting evidence which the parents wish to rely on should also be provided with their grounds of appeal.
- If parents are unable to submit their complaint within the stipulated time period due to extenuating circumstances, they should request an extension in writing. This request should be made to the Clerk to the Panel in advance of the original deadline, specifying the additional time needed and the reason for the request. The request will then be considered.
- If parents are unable to submit their complaint within the stipulated time period (including an agreed extensions), the school reserves the right to conclude the complaint process and not advance the matter to Stage 3.
- The Clerk to the Panel, appointed by the Governors to convene hearings of the Complaints Panel, will refer the appeal to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three members, one Governor and one independent individual chosen by the school, who is not involved in the school's management or operations and one other. The convenor is typically the Chairman of the Governance Committee, or, if unavailable, another member of the Governance Committee or Deputy Chairman of Governors. No one previously involved in the case may sit on the panel. The convenor will acknowledge the complaint within five working days and schedule a hearing to take place within twenty working days of receiving the parents' letter to invoke Stage 3.
- If the Panel deems it necessary, it may request additional details of the complaint or any related matter to be provided before the hearing or may require further investigation. Copies of these details must be supplied to all parties no later than five working days before the hearing.
- Parents may attend the hearing and may bring one other person if they wish. The Stage 2 decision-taker is also entitled to bring one other person, who may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation is not appropriate, and companions should not be lawyers. The Panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend.
- The remit of the Panel is at the discretion of the Chair of Governors, and the manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately 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 all relevant facts, the Panel will determine whether the Stage 2 decision was reasonable and decide whether to:
 - dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part;
 - uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and
 - make recommendations.

- The Panel will write to the parents within five working days of the hearing to inform them of its decision and the reasons behind it. Additional time may be required if further investigations are necessary after the hearing.
- The decision of the Panel will be final. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will be sent to the parents via electronic mail or delivered otherwise, and, where relevant, to the person complained about, the Chair of Governors and the Stage 2 decision-maker.
- A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair of Governors and the Headmistress.
- Disciplinary matters related to pupil behaviour, including consequences and decisions about appropriate action, are addressed in the School's Behaviour, Rewards, Consequences and Pupil Voice Policy.
- A list of school policies and procedures is available on the school website.

Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

- All complaints will be handled seriously, sensitively and within clear and reasonable timescales.
- It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as quickly as possible; the School's target is to complete Stages 1 and 2 of the procedure within twenty working days. Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, will be completed within an additional thirty working days.
- Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, 'working days' refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, as published on the School's website, excluding Bank Holidays and half term breaks. This means that during School holidays, it may take longer to resolve a complaint, although the School will make reasonable efforts to avoid undue delays.
- Resolving a complaint may take longer if statutory agencies are involved (for example, the Local Authority or the Police), during periods of significant disruption to School life, or due to unavoidable staff absence. Therefore, the timeframes set out in this Procedure may change depending on the circumstances of an individual case. Any deviations will be on an exceptional basis, and the School will take all reasonable steps to minimise such delays, informing parents if any revisions to the timeframes are necessary.

Persistent correspondence

- The Procedure should be used as a mechanism for resolving issues in good faith and in a courteous manner. It should not be used in an abusive, threatening or vexatious manner.
- Once a complaint is made by a parent and while it is being addressed under the complaints procedure, we request that the parent refrain from repeated correspondence or contact with staff members that may be considered vexatious.
- If a parent makes repeated attempts to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, the School will regard this as vexatious and outside the scope of this procedure.

Recording Complaints and use of personal data

- Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where access is requested under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, or where the School is

required to share information relating to a child protection concern or to comply with its legal or regulatory obligations.

- Following the resolution of a complaint, the School will maintain a written record of all complaints, whether they are resolved at Stage 1 (informal stage), Stage 2 (formal stage) or proceed to a Panel hearing (Stage 3) as well as any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld.
- The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice. 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 parent
 - Name of pupil
 - 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
 - Third party and internal reports
 - Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
 - Notes/minutes of the hearing
 - The Panel's written decision
- This may include 'special category personal data' (as detailed in the School's Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy), potentially including information relating to physical or mental health, where necessary due to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy
- The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings as required by regulation, in accordance with its Privacy Notice, Data Protection Policy, and Retention of Records Policy. All records related to complaints will be treated as confidential. In addition to requests by the Secretary of State or an inspector (as mentioned above), there may be other circumstances where disclosure of the substance of a complaint or specific confidential records is required, such as in response to legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligations (e.g. in response to a subject access request) that takes precedence over the requirement to maintain confidentiality.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially.

Once invoked, a formal written complaint will be documented and a thorough record will be retained in accordance with the procedure from the initial notification through to the final conclusion, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld.

Records of complaints are retained in the Complaints file held by the Headmistress.

Schools must make available details of how to contact Ofsted and/ or the ISI:

Ofsted can be contacted at: Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD Telephone: 0300 123 1231 or by email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

ISI can be contacted at: ISI, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA Telephone: 020 7600 0100 or by email: concerns@isi.net Register of formal complaints

You may also contact the Children's Commissioner about your concerns:

[Contact us | Children's Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

Children's Commissioner for England, Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT, 020 7783 8330.

The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, in accordance with paragraph 32(1) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014: No complaint was registered under the formal procedure during the academic year 2023 – 2024