

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.

Responsible Party	Head of School
Approved by	Board of Trustees
Approval date	June 2026

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to present a fair and effective process for handling complaints. The American School in London (“ASL” or “the School”) believes that respectful interactions are the foundation of a strong school-home partnership. As such, ASL pledges to treat all complaints seriously and confidentially, and in accordance with this policy.

The School’s complaints procedure is designed to resolve concerns at the earliest possible stage. Each stage builds on the previous one, and parents are encouraged to engage constructively at each stage before progressing further. Where a matter remains unresolved, parents may progress the complaint to the next stage in accordance with this policy.

The School strives to deal with complaints in an open and transparent manner. However, there may be circumstances in which the School is unable to share full details of how a complaint has been handled, the evidence considered, or the action taken. This may be because such information contains sensitive personal data relating to third parties, because legal or regulatory obligations prevent disclosure, or because

disclosure would be contrary to guidance or instructions from a statutory agency. These reasons are not exhaustive.

The School will be mindful of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in the application of 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, where the parent seeks a response or resolution. It may be made about the School as a whole, a specific department, an individual member of staff, or any matter relating to the school program/programming.

Where a complaint relates to a matter for which there is another specific procedure within the School (for example, safeguarding, admissions, exclusions, special educational needs or data protection) the School may determine that the matter is more appropriately dealt with under that procedure, or partly under that procedure and partly under this complaints policy, depending on the circumstances. The School will act fairly in determining the appropriate process.

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 whom the complaint relates was still registered as a student at ASL.

Although this policy is made available to parents of prospective students, the complaint procedures set out in the policy are not available to them before their child starts attending ASL, unless the School determines otherwise in its discretion in a particular case. This policy does not apply to a parent who is aggrieved by a decision not to admit a student to the School.

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. Effective resolution usually depends on face-to-face communication and a strong, trusting school-home partnership, with all parties committed to finding a positive and reasonable solution. Accordingly, anonymous complaints will only be considered if the complaint contains a reasonable explanation as to why it is being made anonymously, or if there is otherwise a compelling reason why the School should consider an anonymous complaint. In all cases, the School must satisfy itself that sufficient information is

provided with the complaint to enable a fair investigation to be undertaken. The School reserves the right to take no action in relation to anonymous complaints that do not meet these requirements.

Further, in the interests 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 in accordance with this policy to address concerns.

Stages of the Complaints Policy

When parents wish to make a complaint, they and the School are expected to adhere to the stages and procedures set out in this policy.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Overview and Initial Contact

The School aims to resolve most complaints quickly and informally. The overwhelming majority of complaints are resolved informally at Stage 1, usually within 15 school days.

Parents are encouraged, as a first step, to contact the student's current teacher, advisor or class dean if they are minded to make a complaint. In most cases, this will lead to a resolution.

In cases where the complaint is not within the purview of the student's current teacher, advisor, or class dean, they will refer the issue to an appropriate employee in the relevant division or department. In these instances, the responsibility for dealing with the complaint is assumed by that individual, who will work with the parent towards a resolution.

Further Support Within the School

Complaints made directly to a member of the School's Senior Leadership Team (for example, a divisional principal or the Head of School) may be referred to an appropriate employee in the relevant division or department. In these instances, the responsibility for dealing with the complaint is assumed by that individual who will work with the parent towards a resolution.

In some cases where complaints are made directly to a member of the Senior Leadership Team, they may decide that it is appropriate for them to deal with the matter directly themselves. In these cases, the responsibility for dealing with the

complaint is assumed by that individual who will work with the parent towards a resolution.

If a parent has a complaint against a member of the Senior Leadership Team, including the Head of School, the parent is encouraged to speak directly with the Head of School to resolve the complaint.

Unresolved Complaints and Next Steps

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 proceed to Stage 2 described below.

Parents should note that Stage 1 is a necessary part of the complaints process. The School expects that reasonable efforts are made to resolve concerns at this stage before escalation.

Where Stage 1 has not been completed, or where the School considers that further reasonable steps could resolve the matter informally, the School may write to the parent requiring that the complaint remains at Stage 1 for a minimum period before it is escalated to Stage 2. As a Stage 2 formal written complaint must normally be made within 30 school days of the incident (see Stage 2 below for more detail), the School may only require the complaint to stay at Stage 1 for a minimum period if that period ends no later than 20 school days after the incident.

Stage 2: Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis at Stage 1, then the parent may progress the matter to Stage 2 Formal Resolution by submitting a formal written complaint to the Head of School.

The formal written complaint must:

- clearly set out the nature of the complaint;
- summarise the steps already taken to resolve the matter at Stage 1;
- identify the specific aspects that remain unresolved; and
- state the outcome sought.

Timing of Stage 2 Formal Written Complaint

If more than 30 school days have passed since the incident to which the formal written complaint relates, the School may not be able to investigate the incident as fully as it could have done had the formal written complaint been made earlier. There

may also be fewer remedies available to the School to resolve a formal written complaint that was not made promptly.

For these reasons, all formal complaints must be submitted in writing either within 30 school days of the incident to which the complaint relates, or within 30 school days of the date by which the parent knew or should reasonably have known of the matter to which the complaint relates. Complaints received after this deadline will only be considered where there is a reasonable explanation for the delay.

Only in exceptional circumstances will the School consider written complaints submitted more than 3 months after the incident to which the complaint relates.

Length of Stage 2 Formal Written Complaint

To assist the fair and efficient handling of complaints, parents are asked to keep formal complaints clear, concise and focused on the key issues. Key issues on which the parents expect the School to respond should be clearly identified in a bulleted list. A complaint must be limited to no more than 5 pages in length (1.5 line spacing, minimum 11-point font), excluding supporting documents. No more than 10 pages of supporting documents should be submitted. Submissions exceeding these page limits may be returned to the parent with a request to revise and resubmit in accordance with the limits. The School reserves the right to disregard content that exceeds the limits.

Where a parent considers that they need to provide more than 10 pages of supporting documents to explain their complaint, they should include the 10 most important pages of supporting material with their complaint and explain briefly why they consider that they need to provide more supporting material beyond those 10 pages. They should then list this additional material in their formal written complaint, without including it, and await further guidance from the School after submitting the complaint.

Complaints should clearly and directly state the relevant facts and concerns. Submissions that are excessively repetitive, unfocused, or not reasonably concise may be returned for revision at the School's discretion.

Each complaint should relate to a single issue or a set of closely related issues. The School may require separate complaints where multiple unrelated matters are raised.

Submission of Evidence

Any supporting evidence should be submitted when the Stage 2 written complaint is made. The School will only consider additional material submitted at a later stage if there is a reasonable explanation as to why it was not provided when the Stage 2 written complaint was made.

Acknowledgement and Initial Review

On receipt of the Stage 2 complaint, the Head of School will acknowledge it in writing, normally within 5 school days.

The Head of School will conduct an initial review to determine:

- whether the complaint falls within the scope of this policy; and
- if so, whether Stage 1 above has been duly completed.

In some cases, the Head of School may determine that it is appropriate for the matter to be addressed under another relevant School procedure, or that further efforts at informal resolution may assist in resolving the matter. The Head of School may also require further information from the parent to clarify the scope and nature of the complaint.

Investigation

Upon formally accepting a Stage 2 formal written complaint, the Head of School may investigate the matter directly, or appoint a nominee to carry out an investigation on their behalf, to understand more fully the matter(s) raised in the complaint and establish the relevant facts.

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

Parents are expected to engage constructively and to provide any requested information in a timely manner. Where a parent does not reasonably cooperate with the process, the School may determine the complaint on the information available, if it is fair to do so.

Outcome

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 or in person, normally within 15 school days of receiving the Stage 2 formal written complaint. The Head of School will also give reasons for their decision. If the decision is likely to be issued more than 15 school days after the Stage 2 formal written complaint was received, the School will write to the parent to advise them of the likely timeframe for the decision and explain briefly why it was not possible to issue a decision within 15 school days.

Complaint Against the Head of School

If the complaint is against the Head of School, and the parent has followed Stage 1 above, the parent may move to Stage 2 by making their complaint directly to the Chair of the Board of Trustees at board_of_trustees@asl.org.

The Chair (or their nominee) will follow a process broadly consistent with Stage 2, including:

- acknowledging receipt of the complaint (normally within 5 school days);
- asking the Head of School for their response and for all relevant documents;
- reviewing relevant documentation and, where appropriate, speaking with those involved, including, where appropriate, calling for a briefing from members of staff or speaking with the parent to discuss the matter; and
- issuing a written decision with reasons, normally within 15 school days of receiving the Stage 2 written complaint.

Proceeding to Stage 3

Parents who are not satisfied with the Stage 2 outcome may choose to proceed to Stage 3 of this process, a panel hearing. Stage 3 is an appeal stage, not a fresh decision on the complaint.

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. The written request must be submitted by the parent(s) within 5 school days of receiving the written Stage 2 decision, and should explain why the parent remains dissatisfied.

If the parents are unable to submit the request within that timeframe due to exceptional circumstances, they should explain this when submitting the request. The School will decide whether exceptional circumstances warrant accepting a late request.

In their request to proceed to Stage 3, parents must:

- clearly identify which part(s) of the Stage 2 decision they challenge;
- explain, in no more than 5 pages (1.5 line spacing, minimum 11-point font), why they take issue with that part/those parts of the Stage 2 decision.

As Stage 3 is an appeal process, no additional evidence will normally be admitted into the process at Stage 3, unless there is a reasonable explanation as to why the evidence could not have been provided by the parent at Stage 2.

Constitution of the Panel

On receipt and acceptance 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 and who are not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, and 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 of receiving the Stage 3 complaint).

Scope of the Panel

The Panel will not seek to duplicate the investigation of the complaint that was undertaken at Stage 2. The role of the Panel is to:

- review whether the Stage 2 process was conducted fairly and in accordance with this policy;
- consider whether the Stage 2 decision was based on a sufficient understanding of the facts (and, if not, to make any additional findings of fact required);
- consider whether the Stage 2 decision was reasonable and should be upheld, or whether a different decision should be substituted; and
- consider whether to make any recommendations to the School.

The Panel will only consider the subject matter of the formal written complaint at Stage 2. If parents want to complain about a new matter or raise issues not previously raised at Stage 2, the appropriate course will usually be for parents to raise those issues separately using the process for Stage 1 outlined above.

Preparation for the Hearing

If the Panel considers it necessary, it may request additional information from the parents and/or the School in relation to the complaint in advance of the hearing. Copies of any additional information obtained by the Panel in response to this request 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). The School requests notice of the proposed companion at least 2 school days prior to the hearing. Legal representation

at the hearing is neither necessary nor appropriate and the companion should not be a lawyer.

The Stage 2 decision-maker shall also be entitled to attend and may be accompanied by one other person if they wish.

A note-taker will usually attend the hearing to take a note. This will not be a verbatim note but an accurate reflection of what was discussed. Notes of the hearing will be shared with attendees as soon as practicable after the hearing. To the extent there is any disagreement about the content of those notes or further comments from the parties, these will be considered by and, where possible, resolved by the Chair of the Panel. A copy of any comments on the notes will be appended to the notes.

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.

In general, the Panel should be able to issue their Stage 3 decision after the hearing without making further enquiries. Where the Panel considers that it needs to make further enquiries after the hearing, the Panel will decide how this process should be managed.

Decision of the Panel

The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, normally within 10 school days of the hearing (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to make further enquiries after the hearing). The decision should include clear conclusions on the four matters set out in bullet points under the heading 'Scope of the Panel' above.

The Panel cannot require that financial compensation be paid or otherwise obligate the School to take any particular step. However, the School will give serious consideration to any recommendations made by the Panel.

The decision of the Panel will be final. There is no further right of appeal within the School.

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) applies only to students in K1. Parents of EYFS children should follow the three stages of this policy. In the case of formal Stage 2 written complaints about the fulfilment of EYFS requirements, ASL will investigate and notify complainants of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of receiving 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; Stage 3 of this policy is not available in those circumstances.

Single Point of Contact

Where a complaint progresses to Stage 2 or Stage 3, the School may nominate a single point of contact for communications regarding the complaint. The complainant must then direct all correspondence regarding the complaint to that individual. The School will not respond to communications by the complainant to other members of staff regarding the complaint when it has nominated an individual to act as a single point of contact.

Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously, sensitively and within clear and reasonable timescales. The School expects parents to engage with the process in a reasonable and responsive manner. Where a complainant does not reasonably cooperate with the School's investigation, the School may, where fair to do so, determine the complaint on the basis of the information available.

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. In those circumstances, the School will take all reasonable steps to minimize any delay.

Unreasonable, Vexatious and/or Unreasonably Persistent Complaints

The School reserves the right to decline to consider or to discontinue complaints which are deemed by the School to be vexatious, unreasonable, or unreasonably persistent. A complaint may be declined or discontinued if:

- it is obsessive, abusive, persistent, harassing, defamatory or repetitive in nature;
- it is pursued in an unreasonable manner, including where 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;

- considering the volume and/or the nature of the material submitted, the complaint would place a disproportionate burden on staff and/or School resources; or
- it has been made with the intention of causing unreasonable disruption or annoyance.

A complaint that falls within any of these categories will be considered to fall outside the scope of this policy.

Further, where concerns have been addressed appropriately through this process, the School may determine that continued correspondence on the same matter will not receive a substantive response.

In considering whether a complaint is unreasonable, the School may also take into account whether the complaint raises matters, allegations or factual circumstances which could reasonably have been raised as part of an earlier complaint concerning the same or substantially related events, but were not.

Where a parent seeks to raise new matters after a complaint has been concluded, or at a later stage of the process, the School may determine that the complaint is unreasonable if there is no reasonable explanation as to why those matters were not raised at the earlier opportunity, and where reopening or revisiting the matter would be unfair, disproportionate or contrary to the efficient operation of this policy.

In exercising this discretion, the School will take account of the particular circumstances of the case, including whether the parent could reasonably have been aware of the information at the relevant time, whether there is materially new information, and whether there are safeguarding, welfare, equality or other considerations that justify the matter being considered.

Confidentiality

Complaints will be treated confidentially. All parties are expected to maintain confidentiality. Information relating to a complaint must not be shared publicly, including on social media. The School reserves the right to take appropriate action in response to any breach of confidentiality.

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 regulatory 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.

Record-keeping

Records of Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints will be retained for seven years in accordance with statutory guidance. Where those records relate, or potentially relate, to safeguarding matters, they will be retained for longer, again in accordance with statutory guidance.

The School will keep a written record of: Stage 1 complaints which are raised to the Senior Leadership Team; 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 2025	
Stage 2	Stage 3
1	0

Availability of Policy

ASL makes this Complaints Policy available to all parents of current students and of prospective students on its website and from the School on request.

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) or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI).

The Independent Schools Inspectorate can be contacted on 020 7600 0100 or by email at concerns@isi.net, or at ISI, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA.

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