

D.3 Complaints Policy and Procedure

Introduction

Inspiring Futures Education, and its colleges, Bishopstrow College and Padworth College, prides itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its students. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated with care and in accordance with this procedure.

The Colleges make their complaints procedure available to all parents of students electronically on the College’s websites and on request by hard copy from the College offices.

The College will attempt to resolve a complaint either to the complainant’s satisfaction, or with an appropriate outcome which balances the rights and duties of students and any other individuals concerned.

Under the regulations that pertain to handling of complaints, repeated attempts by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages can be regarded as vexatious and are outside the scope of the policy.

Each College will make available to parents, as above, and will provide, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State and the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) details of the complaints policy and of the number of complaints registered under the formal stage of the complaints procedure during the preceding academic year.

Neither College shall discriminate the handling of any complaint on the basis of age, sex, race, religion or belief, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment or pregnancy and maternity.

Confidentiality will be observed so far as it is consistent with proper investigation and effective handling of a complaint.

In this policy working days are defined as Monday to Friday during term time. Outside term time any communication might not be read for a period of time. Outside term-time, parents are advised to seek a ‘read receipt’ for an email or to telephone the College to contact the relevant member of staff. Once a complaint has been received, the same timescales will apply as during term time. However, if this is not possible because an investigation of the particular complaint cannot be carried out during the holidays, parents will be advised of the reasons for and the length of any delays.

What Constitutes a Concern or a Complaint?

A concern or complaint may be an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem or any matter about which a parent of a student is unhappy and seeks action by the College.

For example, the concern or complaint may be made about the College as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the College has done something wrong, or failed to do something that it should have done, or acted unfairly.

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Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. You can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you raise in good faith.

This policy applies to parents of students currently attending the College. This policy does not apply to parents of prospective students. This policy does not apply to parents of former students unless the complaint was initially raised when the student was still attending the College.

Under the regulations that pertain to handling of complaints, no distinction is made between a “concern” and a “complaint”, nor does the regulation distinguish who in the College receives the concern or complaint. In practice, the vast majority of concerns brought to the College’s attention by parents are not matters that they consider a formal complaint that they wish to raise under this policy. Most matters are day-to-day and very easily resolved by whomever parents have asked.

In the interests of clarity therefore, the College asks parents to address more significant issues for informal resolution in the first instance to senior staff as outlined in Stage 1 of this policy. At this stage, where it appears relevant, those senior staff will check whether parents are wishing to invoke the processes of this policy or are simply wishing to get the matter resolved. Any matters that parents wish to be considered under the processes of this policy will be subject to its recording requirements and all other processes as outlined.

Recording Complaints

The Principal of the College will ensure a written record of all formal complaints is held including whether they are resolved following a formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing. A written record will also be kept of action taken by the College as a result of complaints, regardless as to whether or not they are upheld.

The College’s written record may include the following information:

- Date when the issue was raised;
- Name of parent;
- Name of student;
- Name of agent;
- Description of the issue;
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate);
- Witness statements (if appropriate);
- Name 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);
- Any complaint relating to boarding provision.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except to the extent required by the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014, by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required by a body conducting an inspection such as the ISI, or under other legal authority under section 109 of the 2008 Education and Skills Act requests access to them.

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The DfE advises that complaints which do not have safeguarding implications should be retained for a minimum of 7 years. Where there is a safeguarding angle, the records will be kept for longer (currently defined as 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.)

Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

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

1. If parents have a complaint they should normally contact the Head of Boarding (concerning pastoral matters) or the Director of Studies at Bishopstrow or the Deputy Principal (concerning academic matters). In many cases, the matter will be resolved straight away by this means to the parents' satisfaction.
2. The person receiving the complaint will send a response or acknowledgement to the parent as soon as possible and normally within 24 hours of receiving the complaint during term time. At this point they may indicate when the parents can expect a response if this cannot be resolved straight away.
3. Should the matter not be resolved within 5 working days, or in the event that the person receiving the complaint is unable to reach a satisfactory resolution, parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

1. If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Principal.
2. The Principal will acknowledge receipt of the complaint as soon as reasonably practicable and normally within 2 working days. A target date for providing a response will be given. The Principal will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. It may be necessary for the Principal (or a person appointed by the Principal) to carry out further investigations.
3. The Principal may at their discretion appoint a senior member of staff to carry out the investigation for all or part of the complaint as the Principal feels fit. This may include seeking further information from the parent.
4. A written record of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept where possible.
5. Once the Principal is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Principal will also give reasons for their decision. The Principal will confirm the decision together with reasons, as soon as reasonably practicable and normally within 10 working days following acknowledgment of the formal complaint.
6. If parents are not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure within 14 working days of receiving the decision.
7. If the complaint is against the Principal, this should be raised directly with a Director (mark.jeynes@ifedu.com).

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Stage 3 –Panel Hearing

1. If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they will be referred to the HR Coordinator, Amy Keast (amy.keast@ifedu.com) who has been appointed by the Directors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel.
2. The HR Coordinator will refer the matter to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the College. The HR Coordinator, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 14 working days of the complaint being received.
3. If 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. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties normally not later than 7 working days prior to the hearing.
4. The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
5. If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.
6. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings and may make recommendations.
7. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, normally within 7 working days of the hearing. The decision of the Panel will be final. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents, the Principal and the Directors, and where relevant, the person complained about. A copy will also be made available for inspection on the College premises by the Directors and Principal.
8. The College aims to resolve all complaints as speedily as reasonably practicable and the College will take all reasonable steps to ensure that the panel will have considered the complaint and made their findings and recommendations within 28 working days of having received the request for a panel hearing under Stage 3 of this procedure.

Handling of Complaints

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

Where there are delays in collecting information, for example, caused by staff absence, parents will be informed of the reasons why and a likely timeframe for a response.

If parents remain dissatisfied with the College's response and/or feel that intervention at a higher level is appropriate, they may lodge a complaint to external agencies as follows:

- Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI)
- British Council

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Alternative Dispute Resolution

In the event that the College is unable to resolve a complaint with a parent and the internal procedure has been exhausted, the College will write to parents to let them know that they cannot settle the complaint but that parents may, if they wish, contact the Ombudsman Service as a means of alternative dispute resolution. Use of ADR by the College and parents is voluntary; the College is under no obligation to submit to alternative dispute resolution.

Number of Complaints

In the academic year 2022 – 2023 there were 0 complaints made at Stage 2 and Stage 3.

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