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EXETER CATHEDRAL SCHOOL

Nursery | Pre-Prep | Prep

Whole School (including EYFS) Complaints Policy and Procedure for Parents

Last reviewed: May 2021

Next review: May 2022

Governor oversight: Full Board

Any concern about the safety of a child should be notified immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and confirmed in writing to the Headmaster.

This policy applies to the School which comprises the Pre-Prep School (including the EYFS) and the Prep School. It has been approved by the School's Governors and is available on the School's website and from the School Office on request. It takes account of paragraph 33 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (SI 2014/3283) and the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework. The procedures set out below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and circumstances of each case. Unless otherwise indicated, the procedures within this policy can only be carried out during term time.

If you require assistance making a complaint (for example because of disability), please contact the appropriate person as indicated under Stage 1.

i. Introduction

Exeter Cathedral School prides itself on the educational experience that it provides, and we would hope that parents/guardians would not wish to complain. However, we acknowledge that parents/guardians may wish/feel obliged to make a complaint, and this complaints procedure details the ways in which that may be done and the ways in which the School will seek to respond. Parents/guardians ('parents') who do make a complaint, informal or formal, can expect to be treated by the School in accordance with the procedures laid out in this document.

ii. This procedure applies to

Complaints made by parents of current pupils (not prospective pupils) or past pupils where the complaint was made whilst the pupil was a current pupil, including those in the EYFS. This procedure applies to day pupils and boarders.

This policy and procedure will also apply in the case of a legacy complaint. The School will seek the involvement of the relevant external authorities where a crime is reported.

This policy does not apply to pupils who have been permanently excluded or asked to leave. Where parents seek a Governors' Review of this decision, other procedures apply.

Where a legacy safeguarding complaint is made (for instance, a non-recent abuse case), the procedures outlined in this policy will apply (unless overridden by instruction from a relevant authority) and the relevant authorities will be informed. See also the School's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

iii. Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that a complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice, is fair to those concerned and helps to promote parents' and pupils' confidence in the School's ability to safeguard and promote welfare. The School will try to resolve every complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, reviewing its systems and procedures in light of those circumstances.

iv. Policy statement

The School needs to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. It recognises that a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, and can be damaging to relationships and also to the School culture. Parents and pupils should never feel - nor should there ever be any suggestion made - that a genuine complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or his/her opportunities at the School.

v. A three stage process

This policy outlines a three-stage process:

- i. Informal resolution of a complaint notified orally or in writing to a member of staff
- ii. A formal complaint in writing to the Headmaster
- iii. A formal panel hearing with a complaints panel

vi. Timescales

Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. References to "working days" mean Monday to Friday, when the School is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website. Outside of term time, complaints will be responded to as soon as is practically and reasonably possible - this may not be until the beginning of the next term.

It is expected that the management of every complaint will progress in a timely manner. The School aims to resolve all complaints efficiently and promptly, and parents were encouraged to bring any matter of concern to the School as soon as possible. Where there are circumstances causing a delay to the desired timescales, the School will inform the parents.

vii. Record Keeping

The written record of complaints is limited to those made in writing under the formal part of our complaints procedure (stage 2 and stage 3) and the School adheres to the requirement that it records whether the complaint is resolved at the formal stage or if the complaint proceeds to a panel hearing. The formal complaints file is kept by the Headmaster/his PA. The School keeps records of informal complaints, which are treated with due confidentiality. The record of any complaint made will be kept for a minimum of three years within the EYFS and for five years elsewhere in the School, unless the issue is contentious, in accordance with DfE advice. The School will keep a record of action taken as a result of a complaint, regardless of whether it is upheld.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except to the extent required by section 108 or 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 (paragraph 33(k) to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (SI 2014/3283)), that is, where access is required by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of a School's inspection or under other legal authority. Records of complaints relating to the EYFS setting will be made available to Ofsted and the ISI on request.

viii. Complaints in the last academic year

During the academic year 2020-21 the School received one formal complaint.

Management of Complaints

Stage One: Informal resolution

All complaints will be treated seriously and handled sensitively. The School expects that most complaints can be resolved informally. Examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or

pastoral care, or about allocation of privileges or responsibilities, or about a timetable clash or some other aspect of the School's systems or equipment, or a billing error. Complaints should be made orally or in writing to the appropriate member of staff (as set out below). An informal complaint received in writing does not mean that the School will automatically treat the complaint as a stage 2 formal complaint: we will endeavour to resolve the matter informally (as laid out below). Complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation are taken very seriously and may need to be dealt with at Stage 2 without action at Stage 1.

Notification

Informal complaints should be raised initially as follows:

Curriculum matters: If the matter relates to the curriculum, parents should speak or write to the subject teacher, the Head of Department, the Form Teacher, or the Senior Deputy Head.

Pastoral Care: If the matter relates to pastoral care, parents should speak or write to the Class Teacher/Form Teacher, the Head of Section (Nursery, Pre-Prep, Lower Years or Upper Years) or the Deputy Head (pupils).

Staff issues: If the matter relates to a member of the teaching staff, parents should speak or write to the Senior Deputy Head. If the matter relates to a member of the support staff, parents should speak or write to the Director of Finance & Operations.

Disciplinary matters: If the matter relates to disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed, parents should speak or write in the first instance to the member of staff who imposed it; and if not resolved, with the Head of Section, the Deputy Head (pupils) or the Senior Deputy Head.

Financial matters: If the matter relates to fees or extras, please speak or write to the DFO.

Informal complaints made directly to the Headmaster will usually be referred to the appropriate member of staff (as above).

Acknowledgement of informal complaints

The School will acknowledge a written notification by telephone, e-mail or letter **within two working days of receipt**. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing.

Resolution of informal complaints

The School aims to resolve any informal complaint **within 15 working days of receipt**.

Unresolved Informal Complaints

A parent who is dissatisfied with the response to any informal complaint should put the complaint in writing in accordance with the procedure set out in Stage 2 below.

Complaints about the Headmaster

Parents may choose to raise a complaint about the Headmaster directly with the Headmaster if they feel that the matter is capable of resolution informally.

The Headmaster will respond to the complaint **within 3 working days** and will deal with it in line with the stage 1 (informal) complaints procedure outlined above, usually via a direct conversation or meeting with the parents, **usually within 15 working days of the complaint being received**.

If the parents are dissatisfied with the response of the Headmaster to the informal complaint, or in the event that the matter cannot be resolved informally through stage 1, the parent may make a formal complaint under stage 2 of this policy.

Stage Two: Formal Complaint

Notification

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Headmaster.

Acknowledgement

Parents will usually receive a written acknowledgment **within 24-48 hours**. The Headmaster will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate action to take.

Resolution

In most cases the Headmaster will arrange to discuss the matter with the parents concerned, **normally within seven school working days of receiving the complaint.** Alternatively, a written response may be given. Whenever possible, a resolution will be achieved at this stage.

Further investigation

It may be necessary for the Headmaster to carry out further investigations.

Record keeping

The Headmaster will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. Such records will remain confidential as outlined in section **vii** above. The Headmaster will record whether the matter has been resolved through the formal process (stage 2) or whether it proceeds to a panel hearing (stage 3).

Decision

Once the Headmaster is satisfied that, as far as is practical, all relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents informed of the decision in writing. This decision will normally be reached and communicated **within 28 working days of receiving the complaint.**

Unresolved formal complaint

If the parent is not satisfied with response to the complaint, they should proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 3 of this procedure.

Complaints about the Headmaster

A formal complaint about the Headmaster should be put in writing to the Chair Of Governors (via the Clerk to the Governors). The written complaint should include a copy of all relevant documents and full contact details for the complainant and details of all of the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired.

The Chair of Governors (usually via the Clerk to the Governors) will acknowledge the complaint by telephone, email or letter **within 5 working days of receipt** and indicate the action that is being taken and the likely timescale. Such action may include an investigation and/or meeting with the parent. The parents will receive a response to the complaint **within 15 working days of the complaint being received.**

Stage Three: Panel Hearing

If parents seek to invoke Stage Three following a failure to reach an earlier agreement, they should contact the Chair of Governors via the Clerk to the Governors.

Notification

Requests for a hearing before the Complaints Panel must be made in writing to the Chair of Governors, c/o the Clerk to the Governors. Parents should make the request **within seven working days of the decision complained of.** The request will only be considered if the complainant has completed the procedures at Stages 1 and/or 2. The complainant must ensure that a copy of all relevant documents and their full contact details accompany the letter to the Clerk. The letter must state the outcome that the complainant desires and all the grounds of their complaint and must be accompanied by a list of the documents which the complainant believes to be in the School's possession and wishes the Panel to see. The Clerk/Chair will acknowledge the request in writing **within five working days.** If the complainant requires assistance with their request, for example, because of a disability, they should contact the Clerk who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

Complaints Panel

The Chair of Governors will be responsible for (or will delegate responsibility for) convening a complaints panel to hear the case.

The panel will normally comprise three people (usually two Governors, one of whom may be the Chair of Governors), who are not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. One member of the panel will be independent of the management and running of the school.

The DfE gives the following guidance on the identity of an independent panel member:

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

Acknowledgement

The Chair of Governors will, on behalf of the panel, acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as is practical and, under normal circumstances, **within 15 school working days**. The time, date and location of the hearing will be communicated to the parents.

If the panel deems it necessary, it may require further particulars of the complaint and other related matters to be supplied by the complaint in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties **not later than 7 working days prior to the hearing**.

Panel Hearing

The parents may attend the hearing, which will be chaired by one member of the panel (chosen by themselves). One other person may accompany the parents to the hearing. This may be a relative, a teacher or a friend. If that person is legally qualified s/he may attend only with the prior permission of the Chairman of the Panel; their role will be limited to providing advice to the parents if a point of law arises and they will not be permitted to act as an advocate as the hearing is not a legal proceeding. This person will not be permitted to address the hearing unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Panel. The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure.

All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Chair may direct, with the consent of all those present, that the hearing is tape recorded to assist accurate recollection for purposes of the decision. The panel will be under no obligation to retain tapes thereafter. A member of the panel (or the Clerk if present) will be asked to take a minute of the proceedings.

The Chair will conduct the hearing in such a way so as to ensure that the parties have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the panel will be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses, but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. A bundle of documents to be considered by the panel will be circulated to the parties **at least three working days prior to the hearing**.

All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners, or, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the panel. If terminated by reason of the conduct of the complainant, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his/her comment will be minuted.

A panel hearing is a private proceeding and no notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be disclosed directly or indirectly to the press or other media.

Further investigation

If possible, the panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately and without the need for further investigation.

When further investigation is required, the panel will decide how it should be carried out.

Record-keeping

Relevant correspondence with the complainant pertaining to the panel hearing, documents considered at the panel hearing, and minutes of the panel hearing, will be kept. Such records will remain confidential as outlined in section **vii** above.

Decision

After due consideration of all the matters discussed at the hearing, the panel will reach a decision and make recommendations, the process **normally completed within 10 days of the hearing**.

The panel will inform the parents of their findings and recommendations in writing, giving the reasons for it. The findings and recommendations will also be sent to the Headmaster, the Governors and, where relevant, the person (or parent of a pupil) about whom the complaint was made.

The completion of stage 3 represents the conclusion of the School's complaints procedure.

Parents can make a complaint to ISI (or OFSTED in the case of a complaint concerning the School not meeting the EYFS requirements) should they wish, and the contact details are set out below:

Independent Schools Inspectorate
CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane
London
EC1A 9HA
020 7600 0100
concerns@isi.net

OFSTED
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
0300 1234666, textphone 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Where a complaint relates to boarding matters, parents can contact ISI directly concerning child welfare: 0207 7109900 or concerns@isi.net

Additional Notes for Parents Of Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

A written complaint concerning the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation **within 28 days of the complaint being made**.

Records of any complaint concerning the EYFS will be made available to OFSTED and/or ISI on request.

The record of any complaint will be kept for **a minimum of three years**.

The School will notify parents about an inspection once the School has been notified. When the final inspection report has been provided, the School will provide parents of children who attend the setting with the document.