

GRACE DIEU MANOR SCHOOL

POLICY & PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS MADE AGAINST THE SCHOOL

Introduction

The Education Act 2002 and Regulations made under the Act made changes to the statutory requirements for independent schools which came into effect on the 1st September, 2003. These requirements have been amended in 2005, 2007 and 2009. As part of these Regulations, independent schools are required to have a written complaints' procedure. This policy has been produced in order to comply with this statutory requirement, and with subsequent directions from OFSTED and the Independent Schools Inspectorate. This policy applies to all levels of the school, from Early Years to Year 8.

Sometimes, parents do not wish to complain as such, but rather voice a concern or anxiety in an informal manner. In all cases, they must not hesitate to speak to us. Our line is: "if parents are thinking about mentioning something, then please do". Our experience is that parents at Grace Dieu feel that they can easily approach staff to share their anxieties and this is just as it should be.

Aims of the Policy

The aim of this Policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and that it is resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice, it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote parents' and pupils' confidence in the school's ability to safeguard and promote standards and welfare.

Complaints typically emanate from one of 3 sources; parents and guardians, pupils or members of the public. Complaints from members of the public will normally be treated in a similar way to complaints from parents. This Policy, therefore, deals mainly with the procedures regarding informal and formal complaints by parents and pupils. Whilst parents may sometimes wish to raise issues on behalf of pupils, there are other issues which pupils may choose to raise on their own behalf and which are best raised by them.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate directs that the details of all formal complaints be recorded by schools in a complaints log, along with an indication of the action which is taken and the outcome. The Headmaster maintains this log at Grace Dieu Manor School.

Further aims of the Policy

- To promote a culture from EYFS to Year 8 at Grace Dieu that is open and welcoming.
- To demonstrate to parents and pupils that their opinions are valued.
- To encourage parents and pupils to raise any concerns that they might have.
- To enable parents to feel comfortable in communicating with the school.
- To enable members of staff to feel comfortable when dealing with complaints.
- To establish a clear procedure for dealing with formal complaints.

In the case of concerns to be voiced informally:

Parents can always talk directly to a member of staff, write a letter, or telephone. It is helpful if they can be as clear as possible about what is troubling them.

- It is perhaps best to start with the person most closely concerned with the issue in question – for example, it would be normal to raise **routine academic** or **pastoral matters** with the Class Teacher (EYFS – Year 5) or Form Tutor (Years 6 - 8)
- The Head of Department in the Pre-Preparatory Department will also be keen to hear of any concerns that parents might have

These people may be able to sort things out quickly and informally and to everyone's satisfaction. However, if parents are still concerned, they may prefer to take a more serious matter to a senior member of staff, for example:

- the Deputy Head (Pastoral) who is responsible for **disciplinary/pastoral matters throughout the school or**
- the Deputy Head (Academic) whose responsibility covers the **academic life of the school**
- the Bursar who looks after **financial issues**, those relating to **health and safety**, and **catering**, for instance
- Parents can, of course, always contact the **Headmaster**, but, it would be usual to explore the avenues outlined above, rather than contacting the Headmaster in the first instance

Procedure if a parent/guardian wishes to make a formal complaint:

At Grace Dieu, we consider a formal complaint to be a verbal or more usually written statement of protest or remonstrance. It is more than an expression of unease, a statement of concern or a suggestion for improvement, all of which can be handled within the normal channels of communication. A complaint is, unmistakably, a statement which requires a formal response.

If a parent wishes to make a formal complaint about something that has happened in school or about something that has caused concern, then it would normally be expected that such a complaint is made known in writing to a senior member of staff:

- Head of Pre-Preparatory Department
- Deputy Head (Academic)
- Deputy Head (Pastoral)
- Headmaster
- Complaints may, on occasions, be made directly to the Chairman of Governors. Letters of complaint to the Chairman should be addressed to Mrs C Armitage, School Side Farm, Main St., West Leake, Leics., LE12 5RF.

Any other member of staff receiving a formal complaint will make a *written record of all concerns* and the date on which they were received, and then pass the matter on to the Headmaster.

If a complaint has been made in writing, we will contact the parent *within five working days*, to respond to the concern or suggestion, and explain how we propose to proceed.

In many circumstances, the member of staff contacted in the first instance will need to discuss the matter with a colleague and consider it further before responding. If a detailed exploration of issues is needed, a response will be prepared as quickly as it is reasonable to do so, in the particular circumstances, but in any case, the parent will be contacted within five working days, if only to confirm that the matter is being dealt with and to give an update.

Having considered all aspects surrounding the complaint, it is likely that the senior member of staff dealing with the complaint will either write to the complainant to explain what is to be done, OR a meeting will be rearranged to discuss the matter face to face. It is hoped that this process will produce a positive outcome in terms of the complainant being satisfied that his/her views have been taken on board, and the school may well have benefited from the process as well.

If the matter is resolved at this stage to everyone's satisfaction, it will be considered that the complaint has been resolved at an "informal level".

In responding to concerns and complaints, we fully recognise the *importance of confidentiality and fairness*, and the need to ensure that a complaint made by parents cannot rebound adversely on their children.

Confidentiality & Other Issues

Confidentiality is often a crucial issue for parents, pupils and staff. It is essential that any complaint is treated both in a confidential manner and with due respect. If necessary, the policy on maintaining confidentiality may need to be explained to a complainant.

It may sometimes be possible to deal with a problem without naming individuals. However, even if names are not provided, the source of the complaint may be clear. Care may need to be exercised in this situation and the balance between dealing effectively with a complaint on the one hand and maintaining confidentiality on the other may need to be weighed particularly carefully.

Staff members are invariably concerned that they should be informed of complaints which might be damaging to their reputation. The school should be aware of the need to provide support for members of staff against whom a complaint is made; such support could often be provided by a colleague who is not otherwise involved.

If there is a possibility of an issue concerning ***child safety or protection***, or a situation which could involve the police, the Headmaster must be immediately informed (as the Child Protection Officer at Grace Dieu) and appropriate procedures and guidance on confidentiality must be followed particularly carefully.

The relevant Secretary of State, or a body conducting an inspection under Section 162A of the 2002 Education Act, as amended, may have access to correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints; the act of granting access to the Secretary of State, or a body conducting an inspection, does not constitute a breach of the confidentiality of the relevant documents.

Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints occur where there is no indication as to the name or address of a complainant, or where a complainant indicates that he or she does not wish to be identified.

Complaints from members of the public about the behaviour of a group of pupils could, if appropriate, be dealt with on a general basis, with a reminder about the standards and expectations of a school.

Parents and pupils should always be encouraged to provide their names and should be given a reassurance on the issue of confidentiality. If a complainant is adamant that they wish to remain anonymous, it is at the Headmaster's discretion as to what action, if any, should be taken.

Anonymous, formal complaints will also be recorded in the register of complaints.

Where the Complainant is still dissatisfied

In some cases, in spite of best efforts, it may not be possible for the school or the Headmaster to resolve a complaint in a manner which satisfies a complainant.

As long as the Headmaster has been contacted in writing and has had the fullest opportunity to resolve the problem, the complainant may feel that it is necessary to refer a complaint to the Chairman of Governors.

The procedure then would be that the Headmaster would refer the matter to the Chairman of Governors and would inform the parents that this stage has been reached. Alternatively, the parents may write directly to the Chairman of Governors at the address noted above.

Depending on the circumstances, the Chairman may wish to deal with the matter informally or formally. It might be initially appropriate for the Chairman to attempt to deal with the matter informally.

Under an ***informal approach***:

- i. The Chairman may seek to deal with the matter. In such an event, the Chairman would call for a full report and for copies of all relevant documents. The Chairman would advise the complainant that this action is taking place.
- ii. In the interest of natural justice, the Chairman would provide the parents and other parties with an opportunity to add to what has already been said and would provide a date by which the parents may expect a response.
- iii. The Chairman may be able to offer a new approach to the matter, and this may satisfy the parents. The Chairman may offer a meeting if the parents remain troubled.

Under a ***formal approach***:

- i. The Chairman would appoint two governors who have not been involved previously in the matter to a Complaints Panel, and would inform the parents of this action. A third member of such a Panel would need to be a person who is not involved in the governance and management of the school.
- ii. The Complaints Panel may wish to deal with the matter using any written or supplementary submissions which are relevant and could interview all parties or witnesses. The complainants may appear at the panel hearing to provide additional evidence or to clarify any issue and may be accompanied. However, a complainant will not have a right to legal representation at a panel hearing. A Complaints' Panel should reach findings and should make recommendations.
- iii. When a decision is reached, the Chairman will provide the complainant(s), the governors, the Headmaster and, if relevant, any persons complained about, with an electronic mail copy, or otherwise, of the findings and recommendations.
- iv. A copy of the findings and recommendations is to be available for inspection on the school premises by the governors and the Headmaster.

Further Action

Most independent schools have no other body to which they may refer a complaint for arbitration. However, if a complaint has not been resolved satisfactorily at Grace Dieu, a parent may, depending upon the issue, choose to approach their lawyer, their local member of parliament, the Secretary of State for Education, OFSTED or the Independent Schools' Inspectorate.

Timings

A complaint should be acknowledged immediately, or within 5 working days at the most.

A complaint which is referred to a member of staff or the Headmaster should be dealt with within 10 working days of the complaint being received.

A complaint which is referred to the Chairman of Governors or to the Governing Body should be dealt with within 10 working days of the complaint being referred to the governors.

Further Notes

- A record of complaints made is to be kept for at least 3 years.
- A complainant can complain to OFSTED or the Independent Schools' Inspectorate if they so wish. A complaint to OFSTED should be made to

Royal Exchange Buildings, St. Ann's Square, Manchester, M2 7LA, telephone number 08456 014772, e-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. A complaint to the Independent Schools' Inspectorate should be made to 1st Floor, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA.

- There is a requirement to notify a complainant of the outcome of an investigation within 28 days of having received a complaint.
- OFSTED and/or the Independent Schools' Inspectorate, on request, must be provided with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint.

Communication with Parents and Prospective Parents

It is a requirement of the Independent Schools' Inspectorate that a copy of this Policy is to be available on the school website.

Record of Formal Complaints

During the academic year 2010/11, the number of formal complaints received was 2 and both were resolved at the informal stage.

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