



PARK SCHOOL

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Approved by:	Arnet Donkin	Date: 09/2022
	Full Council	12/2022
Last reviewed by:	Arnet Donkin	Date: 09/2022
Next review due by:	09/2023	

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Policy Aims

We want parents who choose to educate their children at Park School to feel that they are listened to and that when things go wrong, their concerns will be taken seriously. We want to improve as a school and actively seek feedback from young people, parents and external people to help us support our pupils to be happy and to achieve. We want parents to feel able to express their views in the full knowledge that they will be dealt with fairly.

The primary aim of this policy is to make clear how Park School takes complaints seriously and makes clear our commitment to resolve the matter as fairly and as quickly as possible.

We believe that it is beneficial to deal with a complaint informally wherever possible

Who Does This Policy Apply To?

This policy applies to parents of children at the school, including those in the EYFS. The policy is limited to the parents of children currently on roll at the school, or parents of ex-pupils of the school if the complaint was first raised whilst the child was on roll at the school.

This policy is intended to set out how the school will deal with general complaints.

If you are worried your child is not safe, please immediately talk to the headteacher or the Designated Safeguarding Lead, if this is not possible, the Chair of Council.

For more information see the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

The Policy Does Not Apply To:

- Exclusions – see the exclusions policy
- Staff grievance or disciplinary matters (dealt with under the staff policies)
- Whistleblowing – see the Whistleblowing Policy
- Complaints about other organisations that use the school site (e.g. Young Dartington)– please refer to these organisations' own complaints procedures

What Is Considered A Complaint?

Any matter concerning the school about which a parent of a child is unhappy and seeks action by the school will be considered as a complaint. A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action' by the school.

It is important to note that concerns are not the same as complaints and it is hoped that any general concerns can be dealt with swiftly and informally without having to invoke the complaints policy and procedure.

Anonymous Complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the headteacher or Chair of Council, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time Scales

A complaint must be raised within twenty-eight days of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within twenty-eight days of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Once the complaint has been responded to at Stage 1 or Stage 2, the complainant will have twenty-eight days to respond and inform the school if they wish to proceed to the next stage. After twenty-eight days the complaint will be deemed to have been resolved.

Indicative time scales are provided below. Where these need to be accelerated (for example because a pupil feels unable to attend school) every reasonable effort will be made to achieve this. If the timescales need to be exceeded (for example due to the complexity of the complaint or availability of a key witness) the person investigating will write to the complainant explaining this and setting new timescales.

Working Days

References to working days apply to Monday to Friday during published term time. Complaints made during the holiday period of the school will be dealt with at the beginning of the following term.

Record Keeping

The school will keep a written record of all complaints whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing. At the school's discretion, additional records may be kept which may contain the following information:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of person making the complaint
- Name of pupil (where relevant)
- 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)

The record of any such complaints will be kept for at least three years.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except a body conducting an Inspection requests access to them or they are required by Education Regulatory Authorities. Park School will provide ISI/Ofsted, on request, with a written record of all complaints made within its EYFS setting during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint.

Three Stage Procedure

Park School hopes that the majority of complaints can be resolved informally, with a restorative and solution-focused approach. However, the procedure provides a formal process through which the complaint can be escalated and further investigated.

STAGE 1 INFORMAL	STAGE 2 FORMAL	STAGE 3 PANEL HEARING
Are unhappy about something that is happening in school?	You have tried to resolve your complaint informally with the school but still feel unhappy.	You have made a formal complaint but are still unhappy about the actions taken to resolve your complaint.
Talk to the class teacher or headteacher. You do not have to fill in complaint form or put your complaint in writing.	Fill out a complaint form using or put your complaint in writing.	Write to the Chair of Governance within 28 days of receiving details of the Stage 2 decision.
Your complaint will be noted in the schools' complaint log.	Send your complaint to the headteacher who will acknowledge receiving this within 5 working days.	You will be told by the Chair of Council that your letter has been received within 5 working days.
We will respond either by talking to you or by email within 7 working days.	If your complaint is about the headteacher, you should address your complaint, in a sealed envelope, to the Chair of Council who will follow the below process.	A date for the panel hearing will be set within 20 working days from when your notification was received.
If we can't do this, we will let you know why and tell you a new date that we will respond to your complaint.	The headteacher (or Chair of Council) will try to arrange a meeting to talk to you about your complaint within 10 working days.	You will be notified of the panel date within 5 days of the panel hearing.
We hope that you will be satisfied by how we dealt with your complaint and any action that we took to resolve things.	In most situations it is hoped that the complaint can be resolved at this stage.	You will be told of the decision of the panel as soon as possible and at least before fifteen working days.
If you are still unhappy, we will give you more information about how to make a formal complaint (stage 2)	It may be necessary for the headteacher or Chair of Council to find out more information.	If, for exceptional reasons, it will take longer than 15 days, we will write to you to tell you why.
	The headteacher or Chair of Council will aim to respond to you within 15 working days. If this is not possible, we will tell you.	The decision of the panel will be final, and the school will consider the matter closed at this point.
	If you are still unhappy about how your complaint has been dealt with, you will be able to request a Panel Hearing (stage 3)	If you are still unhappy because you believe the school is in breach of legislation, you can write to the Independent Schools Inspectorate.

Mediation

At any stage of the complaint process, the school will consider the use of mediation to deal with difficult and sensitive matters involving pupils with different needs.

Serial Complaints

Where a complaint has been fully investigated and responded to at each stage, including stage 3, of the procedure and is raised again by a complainant, the Council may deem this a 'serial complaint' and advise the complainant the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is now closed.

The Council must believe:

- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any); and
- They are contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time

The chair should also consider whether the complainant intends to cause disruption or inconvenience, any abusive or aggressive communication or behaviour and any insulting remarks made.

The school may then choose not to respond to further complaints on the same subject.

Confidentiality

Whether a complaint is made informally or formally, all parties should ensure details are only known to those involved in investigating the complaint. Parents should be assured that making a complaint will not adversely affect their child.

All correspondence, statements and records of complaints relating to individual complaints are kept confidential (except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.)

Monitoring and Review

This policy is monitored by the headteacher and will be reviewed every three years or in the light of changes to legislation, policy or procedure.

The Council of Governance will monitor concerns and complaints termly and will publish the number of complaints made each year on the school website and in the school news.

Detailed Outline of Complaints Procedure:

Stage 1: Informal Complaints

- Where possible, we want to try to resolve any complaints informally. At Park School we believe that working together to find solutions is always the best way to strengthen our community and to resolve differences and concerns.
- If the complaint is about your child's experience at school, please speak to your child's class teacher in the first instance. Most issues can be resolved this way and the class teacher will be happy to talk through your complaint with you. You may involve the headteacher if you feel this will help resolve your complaint.
- Similarly, if there is another issue to do with the school that you are concerned about that does not directly involve your child's class teacher, you can raise this informally with the Head teacher.
- In either instance, where an informal complaint is made, the class teacher or headteacher will briefly record the details, including the date when the complaint was first raised. This will be recorded in the school complaints log.
- Informal complaints will be dealt with as soon as possible and in any event within seven working days of the informal complaint being made. The response may be made verbally or by email.
- If a complainant is still unhappy with the resolution at Stage 1, or wishes to make a formal complaint, a formal complaint can be made. The class teacher, headteacher or school administrator will be able to provide more information about the formal complaints procedure.

Stage 2: Formal (Complaints)

- Complaints will usually only progress to the formal stage after first being considered at the informal stage and only then if the complainant wishes to escalate the matter to the formal stage.
- A formal complaint should be made in writing, using the complaint form, to the headteacher (or the Chair of Council if the complaint is about the headteacher). A form is available via a link on the school website and in the school office for this purpose.
- The school will make a record of the date at which the complaint was received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within five working days of receipt. The acknowledgment will give a brief explanation of the school's complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This should normally be within ten working days; if this proves impossible, a letter will be sent explaining the reason for the delay and giving a revised target date.
- In most cases, the headteacher (or Chair of Council) will meet the parents concerned, normally within ten working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the headteacher (or Chair of Council) to carry out further investigations to establish details relating to the complaint. The headteacher will keep a written record of any meetings and interviews held in relation to their investigation.
- A written response to the complaint will be provided to the complainant usually within fifteen days unless there are exceptional circumstances, for example, information needs to be

gathered from external agencies for professionals. Where appropriate, the response will include what action the school will take to resolve the complaint.

- If the complaint is about the headteacher, a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.
- **Complaints about the headteacher** must be made to the Chair of Council via the school office. The complaint should be in a sealed envelope, addressed to the Chair and marked 'confidential'.
- If the complaint cannot be resolved, the complainant will be advised of the next stage which is to have the complaint heard before a panel appointed by the Council of Governance.

Stage 3: Panel Hearing

- If the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint as dealt with at Stage 2 above, then they will be invited to write to Chair of Governance (at the school address) requesting a panel hearing. Such a request cannot be made by email.
- The request for a panel hearing must be made as soon as possible and in any event within twenty-eight working days of the decision in Stage 2 of the complaint being notified.
- The Chair of Council will acknowledge receipt of your request within five days, and a date given for a panel hearing to happen within twenty working days of receipt of your letter.
- The Council of Governance will appoint a panel which will have at least three people who are not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and include one member independent of the management and running of the school (see note below regarding the appointment of an independent member of the panel). The panel will consider the complaint within twenty working days of the receipt of the notification. The complainant will be notified with at least five working days notice of the date of the panel hearing.
- Parents may attend and be accompanied by someone for support at the panel hearing if they wish. The school should be notified of this at least twenty-four hours in advance. Parents do not have to attend the hearing.
- If possible, the panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. If further investigation is needed, the panel will aim to reach a final decision on the complaint and recommend an appropriate action as quickly as possible, normally within five working days and no more than fifteen working days after the panel hearing.
- The panel will record in writing its findings and recommendations and they will be sent to the complainant and where relevant the person(s) complained about and will be made available to the headteacher for inspection on the school premises.

Appointment of an Independent Panel Member

The independent panel member will be a professional with appropriate expertise in the nature of the complaint. This may include a panel member with relevant Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) experience in the case of a complaint relating to the requirements of the EYFS or with SEN (Special Educational Needs) experience in a complaint relating to the provision of Special Educational Needs.

It is a requirement that the independent panel member will have no connection to the management of the school. This will include independent professionals who may otherwise be occasionally employed by the school, for example, a solicitor who acts on behalf of the school.