

ISI Policy Reference 33 Policy A14: Complaints Procedure

Introduction

Queen Margaret's prides itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils and strives to ensure that high standards are maintained in whatever we do. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be dealt with by the School in accordance with this procedure. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The School is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you raised in good faith.

We make this complaints procedure available to all parents of pupils and to parents of prospective pupils by it being on the School's website and available from the Head's PA during the day.

Examinations

Queen Margaret's has a Complaints and Appeals Procedure which covers general complaints regarding the School's delivery or administration of a qualification as an examination centre.

What Constitutes a Complaint?

Any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the School is a complaint. This complaints procedure applies to parents of former pupils if the complaint was raised initially while the pupil was still registered at the School. This procedure relates to complaints other than those relating to: whistleblowing; staff grievances and disciplinary procedures; matters likely to warrant a child protection investigation; applications for admissions to the School; and complaints about services provided by third parties using School facilities or premises.

Procedure

The procedure that the School will follow has three distinct stages, each of which will be conducted by a different person to ensure fairness.

The three stages are:

STAGE 1: Informal resolution

STAGE 2: Formal resolution

STAGE 3: Panel hearing.

Three Stage Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their daughter's Tutor or Housemistress. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Tutor or Housemistress cannot resolve the matter alone it may be necessary for him or her to consult a more senior member of staff. Complaints made directly to more senior members of staff will usually be referred to the pupil's Tutor or Housemistress unless the more senior member of staff deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.

On receiving a complaint in person, in writing, by email or by telephone, a Tutor, Form Supervisor or Form Teacher will make a written record of the concerns raised and the date on which they were received. If the complaint is made in writing or by email, it will normally be acknowledged within **three** working days. In the vast majority of cases we hope that matters will be resolved quickly to the parents' satisfaction.

We shall, in all cases, investigate the matter fairly and appropriately with any relevant staff. We shall do so as quickly as is practicable without compromising the outcome. If the matter is not resolved within **10** working days, or in the event that the School and the parents fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed to Stage 2, (formal resolution).

Stage 2 - Formal Resolution

If a complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head, within **15** days of the conclusion of Stage 1 above. There may be occasions where the seriousness of the matter (which may include significant safeguarding matters) means that a parent may choose to make a direct formal complaint to the Head. In all cases it should be made clear that it is a formal complaint. The Head, or someone on her behalf, will acknowledge receipt of the written complaint within **three** working days and will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

In most cases but not invariably, the Head, or if appropriate, another senior member of staff not so far involved with the complaint, will meet the parents concerned to discuss the matter. This will be within **10** working days of the receipt of the written complaint. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. It may be necessary for the Head or another senior member of staff to carry out further investigation. In this case, once he or she 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 the decision and reasons underpinning it, normally within **20** working days of the receipt of the complaint.

If the complaint is against the Head, the Chairman of the Board of Governors or her Deputy in her absence will call for a full report from the School and for any relevant documents. The Chair may also call for a briefing from members of staff, and will, in most cases but not invariably speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the Chair is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing. The Chair will give reasons for their decision. This will normally be completed within **20** working days from the receipt of the written complaint).

If the matter is considered unusually complex or if exceptional circumstances require an alteration to the timeframes outlined above the person making the complaint will be informed of that fact and provided with an amended timeframe.

Stage 3 - Panel Hearing

A panel hearing cannot normally be requested unless Stage 2 of this procedure has been completed. If parents wish to request a panel hearing they should write to the Clerk to the Governors at the School who will then contact the Chair of Governors. The parents should state the outcome they desire and all of the grounds of the complaint. The panel will not normally accept any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised during Stages 1 and 2. The matter will then be referred to a complaints panel for consideration. A Stage 3 complaint will be acknowledged within **3** working days and all parties will be kept informed about the arrangements for the convening of the panel. The panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, two of whom will be members of the Board of Governors and one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the School. They will be nominated by the Chairman of the Board of Governors.

The Clerk to the Governing Body, on behalf of the panel, will acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable, and normally within **20** working days of the parent's request for a panel hearing. If the panel deems it necessary, it may require that further details of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such details shall be supplied to all parties not later than **3** working days prior to the hearing. The Head will not discuss the case with the panel beforehand.

The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by the pupil(s) concerned (this should **only** be the case where the pupil is over the age of 16 and with the Chairman of the Panel's consent in advance) and one other person, if they wish, who may speak on their behalf. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not be permitted. All will meet with the panel at the same time and the procedure will be run by the Chairman of Panel. The Chairman of the Panel will set out the procedure to be followed which will normally involve the parent setting out their reasons for dissatisfaction with the School's response to date with the School being given the opportunity to respond. There will be an opportunity for clarification and discussion of the points raised.

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. The hearing may be adjourned for this purpose. On completion of the hearing the panel will consider all of the facts they consider relevant. They will then make findings and may make recommendations.

Findings: the panel may dismiss or uphold the complaint.

Recommendations: the panel may make recommendations to the Head or the full Board of Governors, as appropriate. It is not within the powers of the panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, students or parents, although they may recommend these actions to the Head or the Governing Body. The panel will write to the parents and Head informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, this will be within **10** working days of the hearing. The decision of the panel will be final. A copy of the panel's findings and

any recommendations will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents, and, where relevant, any person who may be the subject of the complaint, as well as the Chairman of Governors and the Head.

Recording Complaints

Following resolution of a complaint, the school will keep a written record of all complaints, whether they are resolved at the informal stage, the formal stage or proceed to a panel hearing and any action taken by the school as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld).

At the school's discretion, additional records may be kept which may contain the following information:

Date when the issue was raised

- Name of parent
- Name of pupil
- 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)

Confidentiality and Data Protection

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

Parents may also complain directly to ISI if they wish. The address is:

Independent Schools Inspectorate
CAP House
9 - 12 Long Lane
London
EC1A 9HA

Email info@isi.net

In accordance with paragraph 32(1) (b) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Queen Margaret's will make available to parents of pupils and of prospective pupils and provide, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate, details of the complaints procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

Number of formal complaints dealt with under this policy in 2020/2021 - 0

Sue Baillie
Head

Date Agreed: September 2020
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