

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS

(Senior and Junior Schools)

(This document is available on the school website or on request)
Reviewed September 2018

QEH recognises that a good partnership with parents is crucial in the successful education of their child. It welcomes feedback from parents, and seeks to establish good relations between home and school to enable pupils to feel supported and to be successful. It is therefore natural that parents will want to share concerns about their child's education, and occasionally might feel the need to go further and complain formally.

This procedure is available to parents of current pupils. A current pupil is defined as a pupil on the school roll, but not one who has left the school unless the complaint commenced when the pupil was still at school. It is however available following expulsion or the required removal of a pupil, but not in respect of admissions to either QEH Senior or Junior School.

This policy allows a 3-stage process for resolving complaints: informal, formal and a review by a panel of Governors. For the sake of clarity, complaints in the Junior School should be referred to the Head of the Junior School and complaints in the Senior School to the Headmaster. Only in exceptional cases (where the complaint covers both schools) would the Headmaster deal with a complaint from a Junior School parent.

Stage 1 – Complaints: Informal Resolutions

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally if parents feel able to voice them as soon as they arise. In most cases, discussion, explanation, further information or an apology, if appropriate, will resolve any issues. Every effort will be made to allay concerns at this stage and, with the least possible formality, achieving through open dialogue a satisfactory resolution.

If parents have a complaint, they should normally contact their child's class teacher or form tutor. In most cases the matter will be resolved straight away by this means to the parent's satisfaction. If the class teacher or form tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary to consult the Head of the Junior School or Head of Year.

The school will normally respond to Stage 1 complaints within ten (10) working days.

Should the matter not be resolved to their satisfaction, parents will be free to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

A summary record of the concern or complaint, its resolution and any action taken as a result will be made.

Where a complaint is directly about the actions or conduct of the Headmaster/Head of Junior School (other than a safeguarding concern in which case the procedures laid down in the Safeguarding Policy must be followed), parents should speak to the

Headmaster/Head of the Junior School directly and informally to try to resolve the matter. If parents remain dissatisfied, they should proceed to stage 3 of the Complaints process.

Stage 2 – Complaints: Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Headmaster/Head of the Junior School who will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

In most cases, the Headmaster/Head of Junior School will speak to the parents concerned, normally on the day of receiving the complaint, so as to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at stage two.

The Headmaster/Head of the Junior School will:

- Establish what has happened so far and who has been involved
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved.
- Meet the complainant or contact them clarifying what the complainant feels would resolve the issue.
- Interview those involved, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.
- Conduct each interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in questioning.
- Keep notes of each interview and meeting.

Normally within five (5) school days of receiving the complaint, the Headmaster/Head of Junior School will complete the investigation and contact the complainant to arrange a meeting. At any point in the process the Headmaster/Head of Junior School may decide to agree to commission a further investigation. If this occurs, the timescale may be extended by a further five (5) school days and the complainant will be informed in writing of the extension and the reason for it.

When the investigation is complete, the Headmaster/Head of Junior School will meet the complainant to try to resolve the complaint.

Any of the following may be appropriate at this point:

- a) An acknowledgement that the complaint is valid in whole or in part; an apology; an explanation; clarification of any misunderstanding; an admission that the situation could have been handled better or differently.
- b) An assurance that the event complained of will not recur; an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure it will not be repeated.
- c) An undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint. A written record of this meeting will be made.

Once the Headmaster/Head of the Junior School 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 and the reasons for it in writing. This will normally be immediately after the meeting specified above. The parents will also be informed at this point if they are dissatisfied with the outcome they should proceed to Stage 3 of the complaints process.

Normally the Headmaster/Head of the Junior School will write to parents with his decision on a formal Stage 2 complaint within ten (10) school days (or fifteen (15) school days if any further investigation is required) of the receipt of the formal Stage 2 complaint.

A summary record of the concern or complaint, its resolution and any action taken as a result will be made. This record will be made available to the governors.

Stage 3 - Complaints: Action by the Governors

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution of this procedure) they will be referred to the Panel Convener (Bursar) who has been appointed by the Chairman of Governors to call Review Hearings of the Complaints Panel. This should be in writing using the form at Annex A within ten (10) working days of receipt of the written notification of the decision in question and, in addition, include statements of the nature of the complaint, how the school has handled it so far and the desired outcome.

The governors are obliged to investigate the matter and will do everything possible to resolve the issue through a dialogue with the school.

The Chairman of Governors may contact and speak to the complainant directly should there be any need for clarification of the nature of the complaint.

The Panel will consist of at least three people appointed by the Chairman of Governors not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. The Panel may therefore include at least two members of the Board of Governors.

The Panel Convener, on behalf of the Panel, should agree with all parties the date of the Review Hearing within five (5) school days of receipt of the written referral of the complaint. The hearing itself will normally be held within fifteen (15) school days of the receipt of the referral. If the complainant or Headmaster/Head of Junior School wishes to submit information in writing to the Panel this should be sent to the Panel Convener at least five (5) school days before the date of the hearing. Complainants are encouraged to attend the meeting of the panel personally rather than put their complaint in writing. The person making the complaint may be accompanied. That person will attend to provide support, and not to represent the complainant(s) in any legal capacity.

Each member of the Review Panel will be supplied with a copy of any relevant documents, including copies of all correspondence relating to the case. The parents shall be entitled to copies of all those documents save any which, in the opinion of the Headmaster/Head of Junior School, should not be disclosed for the protection of the student or other students or members of staff and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

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 not later than five (5) school days prior to the hearing.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.

Where further investigation is required, the Complaints Panel will decide how it should be carried out. Any possible delay in reaching a decision arising from the need for further investigation will be communicated to the complainant.

After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Complaints Panel will, on the basis of its findings, reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete normally within three (3) school days of the Hearing.

Hence, normally, the decision should be reached within eighteen (18) school days of the receipt of the stage 3 complaint.

A copy of the Panel's decision, findings and any recommendation and the reasons for them will be:

- Sent immediately after the hearing by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person or persons complained about; and
- Available for inspection on the school premises by the Chairman of Governors and the Headmaster/Head of Junior School.

As far as possible, the meeting should not be delayed if the referral comes at the end of term, especially at the end of the Summer Term. Since the aim of the procedure is to resolve the issue and effect reconciliation if necessary, it will be best if the matter can come to the Panel as quickly as possible and so a panel hearing may need to take place during the school holiday period.

The role of the Panel Convener is to:

- a) Confirm to all parties in writing the date, time and venue of the hearing; to receive and distribute any documentation to be read before the hearing; to meet and welcome all parties as they arrive at the hearing.
- b) Make a fair summary record of the proceedings, noting any specific details requested by the complainant or panel.
- c) Notify all parties of the Panel's decision. The wording of any letters will be agreed with the Chair of the Panel.

The role of the Chair of the Panel is to ensure that:

- Appropriate procedure to allow a full and fair hearing is properly followed.
- The procedure for the hearing of the complaint is explained to all parties and that they have the opportunity to put their case without undue interruption.
- The issues are addressed; all parties are put at ease; especially those who are unfamiliar with such a hearing.
- Proceedings are kept as informal as possible and that everyone treats each other with respect and courtesy.
- The Panel operates in an open-minded and independent way and time is given for all parties to consider 'new' evidence.

The Panel may decide upon one or more of the following actions:

- A. Uphold the complaint in whole or part.
- B. Dismiss the complaint in whole or part.
- C. Decide on an appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint or recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not re-occur.

After the Panel has come to a decision, the Chair of the Panel agrees with the Panel Convener the wording of the letter to be sent to both parties.

The Panel Convener will: provide the written record of the meeting for the Chair of the Panel; ensure that the letter of decision will normally be sent out within three (3) school days of the hearing and in accordance with the agreed time scales and procedures as stated above; and ensure that any consequent recommendations to change school policies or procedures is put on the agenda for the next meeting of the Board of Governors. However, if a hearing takes place in the school holidays then the decision will be sent to parents as soon as possible after the meeting.

A summary record of the concern or complaint, its resolution and any action taken as a result will be made regardless of the outcome.

There is no further internal stage or complaint should a parent remain dissatisfied with the outcome.

Confidentiality, records and other matters

Parents are assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Such correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 162A of the 2002 Act requests access to them; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

A written record of all Stage 2 and 3 complaints and of whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or 3, is kept by the Headmaster/Head of Junior School. The record regardless of the outcome of the complaint includes, at least: the person making the complaint, the date of the complaint, the nature of the complaint, any action taken and the outcome of the complaint. The written record will include the date when a final outcome was reached. The governors examine this written record on an annual basis. The school will provide, on request to the Independent Schools Inspectorate or to any other inspectorate carrying out an inspection on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education, a written record of all complaints made during a specified period and the action that was taken as a result of each complaint.

Any concern or complaint which involves a potential child protection or safeguarding issue must be made in accordance with the school's Safeguarding Policy immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, the Headmaster/Head of Junior School or the Chairman of Governors. Any appeal against the exclusion of a pupil may be made to the Chairman of Governors with reference to the school's Behaviour Policy. More general or other concerns or complaints relating to the application of the Behaviour Policy should be made in accordance with the procedures set down above.

Important Note: These procedures are non-contractual in nature. They have been prepared for the information and guidance of all who may become concerned in reviewing a formal complaint or a formal review hearing.

Parents are also entitled to be informed of the number of formal complaints registered during the preceding school year: *there were no formal complaints in the Junior or Senior School during the academic year 2017-18.*

Appendix A

REQUEST FOR A REVIEW

To: the Bursar

Name of Pupil:

Names of those with Parental responsibility:

.....
.....

Address of Parents/Guardian:

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.....

Telephone numbers: (daytime) (evening)

I/We, having parental responsibility for the above named pupil request that a sub-committee of the Board of Governors carries out a review of a formal complaint.

I/We have received with this form a copy of the Policy Statement on Review Procedures and we agree to abide by its terms.

I/We also agree that the proceedings are and will remain confidential and that this review will be final subject to any legal rights that may exist.

The grounds upon which we ask for a review and the matters, which we wish to discuss and to ask the sub-committee to take into account, are set out in the attached letter.

I/We understand that we may be accompanied at the Review Hearing. We also understand that that person attends only to provide support and not to act as a representative.

(Two signatures are required where practicable)

First signature: Second signature:

Full Name: Full Name:

Relationship to Pupil: Relationship to Pupil:

Date: Date: