

TORMEAD

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE POLICY

This whole school policy also applies to the Early Years Foundation Stage

Introduction

- 1 **Policy status:** This policy has been approved by the Headmistress and the Governing Body of Tormead School, Guildford. It provides guidelines for handling concerns and complaints. It takes account of Regulation 7 of the *Education (Independent School Standards, England) Regulations 2003*. The procedures set out below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and circumstances of each case. Certain of the procedures can only be carried out during term time.
- 2 **Application:** Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue or if the Headmistress expels or asks a girl to leave and the parents seek a Governors' Review of that decision.
- 3 **"Parent/s"/ "You"** includes a current or prospective parent or legal guardian or education guardian, or a girl aged 16+, and may at our discretion include a parent whose child has recently left the School.
- 4 **Three stages:** This policy describes a three stage procedure:-
 - Stage 1: An informal complaint
 - Stage 2: A formal complaint in writing to the Headmistress
 - Stage 3: A referral to the Complaints Panel

A concern about the safety of your child should be notified immediately to the person you believe is best placed to take urgent action and should be confirmed in writing to the Headmistress.

NB Anonymous complaints will not be investigated.

Policy aim and statement

- 5 **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 all concerned and helps to promote parents' and girls' confidence in our ability to safeguard and promote welfare. We 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 our systems and procedures in light of circumstances.
- 6 It is always best if any issue can be resolved informally in the first instance. Any pupil or parent with a concern is encouraged to discuss it informally with the appropriate Head of Year or to contact the Deputy Head Academic or Deputy Head Pastoral. The matter will be discussed and every attempt will be made to find an informal resolution to the issue. Should this approach be impractical or unsuccessful, the formal Complaints Procedure should be followed. Any parent may, of course, use the Complaints Procedure in the first instance.

- 7 Even within the formal Complaints Procedure, attempts at resolving the issue informally will be made initially.
- 8 **Policy statement:** We need to know **as soon as possible** if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. We recognise that a concern which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, which would be damaging to relationships and also to our School culture. Parents and girls should never feel – or be made to feel – that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a girl or her opportunities at this School.
- 9 We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. When we refer to working days, we mean Monday to Friday, when School is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website.
- 10 Superseding the possible timescales involved at each stage of this process is our aim to conclude all complaints within half a school term.
- 11 Complaints received within the last week of term may take longer than the published schedule as it is not always possible to complete a full investigation due to school holidays.

Management of complaints

- 12 **Designated Person:** The Headmistress has appointed the Deputy Head Academic/Deputy Head Pastoral ("**Designated Person**") to be responsible for investigating and resolving complaints. If the Designated Person is unavailable or is himself or herself the subject of the complaint, the duties will be carried out by the Headmistress or another senior member of staff. The main responsibilities of the Designated Person are to -
 - 12.1 Be the first point of contact while the matter remains unresolved and to keep records
 - 12.2 Co-ordinate the complaints procedures in the School
 - 12.3 Monitor the keeping, confidentiality and storage of records in relation to complaints
 - 12.4 Report regularly to the Headmistress with respect to complaints
- 13 **Heads of Year:** At all times when the School is open, the Heads of Year have authority within their respective sections to take decisions relating to most academic, pastoral or discipline matters. The relevant Head of Year can be contacted by telephone or email, details of which are published on the School website.
- 14 **Junior School:** Authority for decisions pertaining to most academic, pastoral or discipline matters within the Junior School is held by the Head of Junior School.
- 15 **Complaints:** Every complaint notified to a member of staff must be noted in writing, together with the action taken, on the appropriate standard consultation form.

Stage 1 – Informal Complaint

- 16 **Complaints:** We expect that most complaints, where a parent or girl seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other course of action to be taken, 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.

17 **Notification:** Please raise the complaint initially as follows:-

- 17.1 **Education issues** – if the matter relates to the classroom, the (curriculum) or Special Educational Needs, please speak or write to the relevant Form Tutor, Head of Department, Head of Year or Deputy Head Academic.
- 17.2 **Pastoral care** – for concerns relating to matters outside the classroom, please speak or write to the relevant Form Tutor, Head of Year or Deputy Head Pastoral. If the matter relates to the EYFS curriculum please speak or write to The Head of the Junior School.
- 17.3 **Disciplinary matters** – a problem over disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised first of all with the member of staff who imposed it and, if not resolved, with the Head of Year or Deputy Head Pastoral.
- 17.4 **Financial matters** – a query relating to fees or extras should be stated in writing to the Bursar.

18 **Acknowledgement:** We will acknowledge any notification of a complaint by telephone, e-mail or letter within two working days of receipt during term time and within two weeks in the holidays. During the holidays complaints raised must be addressed directly to the Headmistress. The acknowledgement will indicate the action that is being taken and the likely timescale. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing, but a written consultation form will be completed and a copy sent to relevant staff and the Designated Person.

19 **Unresolved concerns:** Should a matter not be resolved within 10 working days, or fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, parents are advised to proceed with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

20 **Notification:** An unresolved complaint under Stage 1, or a complaint which needs investigation, or a complaint regarding some aspect of the School's policies, procedures, management, administration or fulfilment of the EYFS requirements should be set out in writing with full details and sent with all relevant documents and your full contact details to the **Headmistress**. The complaint will be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within two working days during term time and within two weeks in the holidays. The acknowledgement will indicate the action that is being taken and the likely timescale. The Headmistress will contact the complainant within 7 working days of the acknowledgement to discuss and if possible resolve the complaint.

21 **Investigation:** The Headmistress may ask a senior member of staff to act as “**investigator**” and/or may involve one or more Governors. The investigator/s may request additional information from you and will probably wish to speak to you personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. The outcome of the investigation will be reported to the Headmistress who will then notify you in writing of her decision and the reasons for it. The Headmistress must inform the complainant of her decision within 26 working days of a formal complaint being lodged. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to your complaint.

Stage 3 – Referral to the Complaints Panel

- 22 **Composition:** We will constitute a Complaints Panel comprising School Governors and members who are independent of the governance, management and running of the School.
- 23 **Notification:** To request a hearing before the Complaints Panel, please write to the Clerk to the Governors **within seven working days of the disputed decision**. Your request will only be considered if you have completed the procedures at Stages 1 and 2. Please ensure that a copy of all relevant documents and your full contact details accompany your letter to the Clerk. Please state in your letter the outcome that you desire and all the grounds of your complaint. Please also send the Clerk a list of the documents which you believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to see. The Clerk will acknowledge your request in writing within four working days of receipt.
- 24 **Convening the Panel:** The Clerk to the Governors will convene the Complaints Panel as soon as reasonably practicable but the Panel will not normally sit during half terms or school holidays. The Panel will consist normally of **up to three individuals** who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint. One member of the Panel shall be **independent of the management and running of the school**. You may ask the Clerk to tell you who has been appointed to sit on the Panel. If you have a genuine reason for objecting to one or more members of the Panel, then all reasonable efforts will be made to find alternative members; otherwise the Panel may be reduced to two or one in number.
- 25 **Notice of Hearing:** Within four working days during term time, and up to 21 days (excluding weekends) during the holidays, the Clerk will send you written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing together with brief details of the Panel members who will hear it.
- 26 **Attendance:** You will be asked to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, teacher, or friend, who should not be legally qualified. The hearing will take place notwithstanding your decision not to attend, unless you have stated that you are in agreement with the findings by the Chair, in order to ensure that a conclusion to the matter is reached. Your child aged 13+ may attend part or all of the hearing at the discretion of the Chair. Copies of additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk at least **three clear days** prior to the hearing. All relevant material will be distributed to the complainant and members of the panel two days before the hearing.
- 27 **Chair:** The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Panel (chosen by themselves) and will be conducted in an informal manner.
- 28 **Hearing:** All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Chair may direct that the hearing is recorded to assist accurate recollection for purposes of the decision. The Panel will be under no obligation to retain tapes thereafter. The Clerk will be asked to take a hand-written minute of the proceedings in any event.
- 29 **Evidence:** The Chair will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel shall be under

no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or take written statements into account

- 30 **Conduct:** 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 Chair. If terminated, 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.
- 31 **Adjournment:** The Chair may, at his/her discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue.
- 32 **Decision:** After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel shall reach a decision unless there is an agreed position. The Panel's decision may be notified orally at the hearing or subsequently and shall be confirmed in writing to you within seven working days. Reasons for the decision will be given. The decision may include recommendations and will be sent to you and to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Headmistress and, where relevant, any person about whom the complaint has been made.
- 33 **Private proceeding:** A hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.
- 34 **Confidentiality:** 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 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.
- 35 **Early Years Foundation Stage:** With regards to complaints that relate to girls in the Early Years Foundation Stage (Reception) the following apply:
- The record of EYFS complaints is made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.
- 36 **Clerk to the Governors:** The Clerk to the Governors is the School Bursar, Miss Helen Davies, who can be contacted at the school address:

Tormead School
Cranley Road
Guildford
Surrey
GU1 2JD

- 39 **More Serious Complaints:** Contact details for the external regulatory bodies are:

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

Tel: 020 7600 0100
www.isi.net

OFSTED
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 1231
www.ofsted.gov.uk

40 **Records:** A written record of complaints is kept by the Headmistress. This records whether complaints are resolved at Stage 1, Stage 2 or proceed to a panel hearing. Each record also notes any action taken because of the complaint, whether or not it is upheld. Records of complaints at Stage 2 are published on the School's website via this policy:

In the academic year 2015-16 we received 0 complaints that were not resolved at Stage 2.

Date of Last Review: April 2017

By Resolution of the Governing Body:

MRS R HARRIS
Chair of Governors

MRS C FOORD
Headmistress

7 December 2016

