

## **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE POLICY**

### **The Nature of Complaints**

*There are essentially four areas of complaint: parents, pupils, the public and staff.*

- This policy document deals with procedures for **parents and public**. Complaints from members of the public will be treated in a similar way to complaints from parents, although most complaints from the public would be referred directly to the Headmistress.
- While parents will often wish to raise issues on behalf of their **children**, there are others which pupils may choose to raise on their own behalf and which are best raised by them.
- Complaints by the **staff** are handled in accordance with the normal operating procedures of the School and staff contracts.

### **Port Regis: An Open Organisation: Climate and Culture**

Problems are likely to arise if parents feel that the School is not open to their concerns. It is better to have a direct complaint to a member of staff than to have parents sharing their dissatisfaction with others. Parents like to feel valued and involved with the School and they should be encouraged to voice their concerns. This is helped where the culture of the School is open and complaints are received in a positive manner.

An effective complaints procedure can defuse problems and provide the School with helpful information. Complaints treated as constructive suggestions can be used to improve standards and may prevent cause for further complaint. Even an unjustified complaint reveals a perception which needs changing and it may also indicate an area that can be improved upon.

### **What constitutes a complaint?**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem.

A complaint may be made if a parent thinks that the School has, for example,

- done something wrong
- failed to do something it should have done
- acted unfairly or impolitely

A complaint may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department in the School or about an individual member of staff.

**All complaints need to be handled seriously.**

A gentle expression of concern, or a simple query, may grow into a painful matter if parents feel that they have been brushed aside. Equally, issues with the potential to become acutely difficult may dwindle and fade if they are handled well at the initial stage.

An unresolved problem may become a festering dispute or a confrontation. Procedures must therefore be in place for appropriate action when a matter remains unresolved or cannot be resolved quickly.

Procedures need to be flexible to handle both formal complaints and the informal raising of issues. It does not seem helpful to attempt to differentiate between "formal" and "informal" complaints. One can easily become the other. Serious issues may be raised in an informal and friendly way and apparently trivial issues in an adversarial manner.

Complaints against members of staff need particularly sensitive handling.

***All complaints need to be recorded. Complaints about Early Years provision should be recorded on the Early Years Provider complaints record.***

**Lines of Approach**

- All members of staff should be encouraged to deal with parental concerns that lie within their area of responsibility. The Headmistress should be informed of any complaint.
- If approached about a matter that lies outside their remit, staff should refer it to the appropriate person and inform the parents.
- Matters incapable of resolution at a particular level should be referred to the Headmistress, with parents kept informed of the action being taken. This covers, for example, a complaint made to a relatively junior member of staff about a more senior colleague.
- Certain parents will wish to go straight to the Headmistress with their concerns, and this should be respected. However, it should be explained that the Headmistress may not be able to respond until she has consulted with the staff that can help.
- Serious complaints will be shared with the Chairman of Governors by the Headmistress. There may be certain circumstances, such as complaints about the Headmistress, when the parents will need to write direct to either the Head of the Prep school or to the Chairman, whose address should be supplied on request.

**Reducing Anxiety**

- Because the person who complains may feel vulnerable, the School can reduce anxiety by taking the matter seriously and dispelling uncertainty about how the complaint will be handled.
- Information about the complaints procedure should be clear.

- Complaints should be acknowledged **at once**. Staff should inform parents what is happening to their concern or complaint and, if a more detailed response is needed, by what date it will be received. The issue should be dealt with as quickly as possible.
- We are required by law to provide parents with an account of the findings of the investigation within 28 days of receiving the complaint.
- The nature of the complaint and what is concerning the complainant should be clear. If it is not immediately obvious, the parents may need more time to explain. They could be asked to put their complaint in writing and it may be helpful to discuss possible outcomes. Parents need to feel that their views matter.

### **Recording**

- The School should keep an effective log of complaints and other parental concerns because:
  - HM Inspectors may wish to see the log as evidence of the School's attitude to complaints. Patterns in the record may indicate a need for action
  - Parents are entitled to request to see information from the record of complaints where appropriate
  - The Headmistress should be able to check the log, look out for any discernible patterns, take appropriate action and report regularly to Governors. The log should contain the following information: the date when the issue was raised, name of parent (or member of the public), brief statement of issue, staff member handling the issue, to whom the issue was reported (as appropriate), brief statement of outcome (including date of reply sent) and location of more detailed information (as appropriate).
  - See also 'Early years provider complaints record'
- A *Complaints Record* pro-forma template is available for staff in the Pre-Prep Handbook.
- The record would be handed in to the School Office as soon as possible after the outcome of the issue (normally by the last member of staff handling the issue) together with any supporting or additional information (as appropriate).
- Such additional information would typically include simple but clear notes of all conversations with parents (including friendly chats and telephone conversations, as misunderstandings easily arise) as well as written communication.
- This log should be maintained and kept confidentially in the School Office under the control of the Headmistress, cross-referenced with other files as necessary. Supporting information would be kept confidentially in a file also in the School Office.
- If staff are in doubt about what constitutes a complaint they can either check with a senior colleague or err on the side of safety and fill in one of the record forms.

## **Confidentiality**

- Confidentiality is an important issue for pupils, parents and staff. It is essential that any complaint should be treated in a confidential manner and with respect.
- Parents often seek an assurance of confidentiality before expressing their concerns. If, for example, they wish to discuss a particular member of staff they may fear that their child will suffer in some way because they have complained.
- It should be made clear to all concerned that it is the School's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children and similarly that complaints raised by pupils should not rebound on them or on other pupils.
- The question of confidentiality should be discussed sensitively and on an individual basis with the parents, and the School's policy should be carefully explained.
- It may be possible to deal with a problem without naming individuals. Even if no names are given, the source of the complaint may be clear. However, depending on the nature of the complaint and on the circumstances, it may be impractical to investigate without identifying the member of staff or the child - it may also be in the interest of the child to do so.
- Staff members are rightly concerned that they should know about complaints that might be damaging to their reputation. Such complaints will be known only to themselves and to those who have to be consulted. There is a need to provide support, as appropriate, for staff against whom a complaint is made; this should be provided by a colleague who is not otherwise involved.
- If there is a question of the child's safety or a possible situation involving the police, the Headmistress who is the Pre-Prep Child Protection Officer will follow the guidance of the Child Protection Policy in the Handbook.

## **Resolution**

- Sometimes the very acknowledgment of an issue by the School brings relief to parents.
- Satisfaction for a complainant may come from any of the following:
  - knowing that changes have been made, and that matters will be different in future
  - knowing that the School is now alert to a possible problem
  - feeling that their concern has been considered seriously
  - an outcome which may be different from the one they sought, but which they perceive to be well-considered
  - a considered letter of apology.

If time has been needed to consider matters, parents should receive an interim report letter. This should cover: the issues raised, how the issues were considered, the people consulted, the action that is to be taken, an apology if appropriate.

## **Intractable Complaints**

There may be a small minority of persistent or aggressive complainants who will never be satisfied, whatever the School does. The School may even discover on investigation that the complaint was without foundation or was motivated by malice. Nevertheless, it is wise to treat all complaints seriously and to follow the procedures.

Most complaints can be resolved if approached positively. If a complaint becomes intractable, it may be due to its nature or to the way in which it was handled, or possibly because the parent perceives the School to have 'closed ranks' against him or her.

Parents may also complain to Ofsted by telephoning The Early Years Complaints Line on 0845 640 4040 or by writing to the regional centre at: South Region, Freshford House, Redcliffe Way, Bristol, BS1 6LX.

## **Referral to the Chairman of Governors**

- In most cases the procedure will be that the Headmistress refers the matter to the Head of the Prep school and Chairman of Governors, and informs the parents that this stage has been reached.
- If parents go straight to the Head of the Prep school or the Chairman without following the procedures suggested to them, the Chairman will normally refer the matter to the Headmistress in the first instance and tell the parents he has done so.
- However, a situation may arise where the complaint seems to the parent to have been mishandled by the Headmistress. In those circumstances the parent should be able to write directly to the Head of the Prep school or the Chairman.
- The Head of the Prep school or the Chairman would normally call for a full report from the

Headmistress, and for all relevant documents. On the basis of these, the Head of the Prep school or Chairman may decide to call for a briefing from individual members of staff.

- The Head of the Prep school or the Chairman may be able to offer a new approach to the matter, and this may satisfy the parents. The Head of the Prep school or the Chairman's response should be clear and detailed, and might offer a meeting if the parents remain troubled.

### **Further Action**

If a complaint has not been resolved within the School, the parent can choose to go to their lawyer.

## **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE - FOR PARENTS**

*All parents are provided with a copy of this document.*

Port Regis welcomes suggestions and comments from parents, and takes seriously complaints and concerns they may raise. This leaflet will show you how to use our complaints system.

**A complaint will be treated as an expression of genuine dissatisfaction that needs a response.**

*We will ensure that:*

- parents wishing to make a complaint know how to do so
- we respond to complaints promptly and in a courteous and efficient way and with a view to reaching a fair resolution
- we will provide you with an account of the findings of the investigation within 28 days from the date the complaint was made
- parents feel confident that we listen and take complaints seriously
- we will tell you about any action we have taken or intend to take as a result of our findings
- parents can request confirmation of these findings by writing or e-mail
- we keep a record of all complaints and will share appropriate information on request

### **“How should I complain?”**

- You can talk directly to a member a staff or the Headmistress, write a letter, or telephone. Be as clear as possible about what is troubling you. If you raise your concern orally, we will carefully note what you say.
- Any member of staff or the Headmistress will be happy to help. It may be best to start with the person most closely concerned with the issue e.g. the class teacher. They may be able to sort things out quickly, with the minimum of fuss. However, you may prefer to take the matter to the Headmistress.

### **“I don't want to complain as such, but there is something bothering me”**

The School is here for you and your child, and we want to hear your views and your ideas. Please contact a member of staff or the Headmistress, as described above, if you have any concerns.

### **“I am not sure whether to complain or not”.**

If as parents you have concerns, you are entitled to complain. If in doubt, you should contact the

School, as we are here to help.

**“What will happen next?”**

- If you raise something face-to-face or by telephone, it may be possible to resolve the matter immediately and to your satisfaction.
- If you tell us you are not satisfied or have made a complaint or suggestion in writing, we will contact you within seven days to respond to your concerns and explain how we propose to proceed including, if appropriate, arranging a meeting with you. If it is not possible to respond within the specified time period, we will contact you to give you an explanation for the delay and tell you when a response can be expected.
- In many circumstances, the person you contact will need to discuss the matter with a colleague and consider it further before responding. You will be assured of a more detailed response. If a detailed exploration of the complaint is needed, you will be informed and a letter or report will be sent to you as quickly as possible. This will tell you of the outcome of your complaint. It will explain the conclusion, the reasons for it, and any action taken or proposed.

**“What happens about confidentiality?”**

- Your complaint or concern will be treated in a confidential manner and with respect.
- Knowledge of it will be limited to the Headmistress and those directly involved. The Head of the Prep school and Chairman of Governors may also need to be informed.
- It is the School's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children.
- We cannot entirely rule out the need to make third parties outside the School aware of the complaint and possibly also the identity of those involved. This would only be likely to happen where, for example, a child's safety was at risk or it became necessary to refer matters to the police. You would be fully informed.
- While information relating to specific complaints will be kept confidentially on file, we would point out that anonymous complaints may not be pursued.
- Action which needed to be taken under staff disciplinary procedures as a result of complaints would be handled confidentially within the School.

**“What if I am not satisfied with the outcome?”**

- We hope that you will feel satisfied with the outcome, or at least that your concerns have been fully and fairly considered.
- If you are not satisfied you can make a complaint in writing, by telephone, fax or in person to any Ofsted staff. You can contact the Early Years Complaints Line on 0845. 640 4040.
- Otherwise the Headmistress will offer to refer the matter to the Head of the Prep school or the Chairman of Governors. Alternatively, you may wish to write directly to the Head of the Prep school or the Chairman. If you wish to do so, please send your letter to Mr Benedict Dunhill (Head of the Port Regis Prep School) or if writing to the Chairman, c/o “The Clerk

to the Governors” at the School address.

- The Head of the Prep school or the Chairman will call for a full report from the Headmistress and will examine matters thoroughly and impartially before responding. This may result in a positive solution, but if it does not, the Head of the Prep school or the Chairman may invite you to a meeting.
- We hope that we will be able to satisfy your concerns!

A copy of the Ofsted publication,

***Concerns and complaints about childminders and day-care providers***

is available from the Headmistress on request.

**The School recognises and acknowledges your entitlement to complain, and we hope to work with you in the best interests of the children in our care.**

## **COMPLAINTS RECORD**

This record should be handed in to the School Office, with any additional information, as soon as possible after the outcome, normally by the person last handling the matter.

**Date issue raised**

**Name of complainant (with further detail if necessary)**

**Brief Statement of Issue**

**Staff member handling issue in first instance**

**Reported to (and any other action taken in the first instance)**

**Brief Statement of outcome including date of reply sent**

**Location of more detailed information, as appropriate**

**Signature .....**

**Name** .....

**Date:** .....