



COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. Downe House has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint about any matter of School policy or administration not involving a decision to permanently exclude or remove a pupil, they can expect it to be dealt with by the School in accordance with this Procedure.

2. **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:

- 2.1 Done something wrong.
- 2.2 Failed to do something it should have done.
- 2.3 Acted unfairly.

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.

3. **Dealing with Complaints.** All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively.

If you are in any doubt about whether a complaint should be passed on, please do contact either your daughter's Housemistress, her Tutor, or her Head of Section in the first instance.

4. **Recording of Complaints.** A written record of all concerns and complaints will be made and, where applicable, will contain the following information:

- 4.1 Date when the issue was raised.
- 4.2 Name of parent.
- 4.3 Name of pupil.
- 4.4 Brief statement of issue.
- 4.5 Location of detailed file.
- 4.6 Staff member handling the issue.
- 4.7 Brief statement of outcome

STAGE 1 PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS MADE BY PARENTS - INFORMAL RESOLUTION

MAKING A COMPLAINT

5. It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
6. All members of staff are encouraged to deal with a parental concern that lies within their area of responsibility. However, if parents have a complaint they should normally contact their daughter's Housemistress, her Tutor or her Head of Section in the first instance. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway to the parents' satisfaction.
7. If the person contacted initially is unable to resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult the most appropriate senior member of staff. In the case of a complaint being made to a member of staff that lies outside their remit, they will refer it to the appropriate person having informed the parents that they will be doing so.
8. Parents making a complaint should be aware that they cannot be guaranteed confidentiality as members of staff receiving a complaint are expected to notify the Headmistress, wherever possible, prior to taking action. The Headmistress will share serious complaints with the Chairman of Governors. If, however, the complaint is against the Headmistress, parents should make their complaint direct to the Chairman of Governors.

PROCESS

9. Complaints will be acknowledged as soon as practicable and, at the latest, within 5 working days. Parents will be told what is happening to their concern or complaint and, if a more detailed response is needed, by what date it will be received.
10. After a complaint has been lodged, it will be investigated, and the relevant department or member of staff against whom the complaint has been raised will be given the opportunity to respond. Following investigation, the action plan, which may include an apology, if one has been found to be appropriate, will be explained to the parents and implemented. The results should be reviewed after an appropriate interval.
11. Should the matter not be resolved totally; or if a satisfactory action plan is not in place within 2 working weeks; or in the event that the Housemistress, Tutor or Head of Section and the parents fail to reach a satisfactory resolution; then the parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

STAGE 2 PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS MADE BY PARENTS – FORMAL RESOLUTION

12. It is hoped that most complaints can be resolved at Stage 1. However, if a complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, parents should put their complaint courteously in writing to the Headmistress, and complaints will normally be acknowledged within 5 working days of the written complaint being received.

13. On receipt of the written complaint, the following procedure will be followed:

13.1 If she has not been involved at Stage 1, the Headmistress (or her appointed representative) will, in most cases, speak to the parents within 3-5 working days of receiving the complaint to discuss the matter and, after considering the complaint, attempt to reach a resolution.

13.2 If the Headmistress has been involved at Stage 1, the procedure will be that she refers the matter to the Chairman of Governors (and informs the parents that this stage has been reached), in which case the Chairman of Governors (or his appointed representative) will, in most cases, speak to the parents within 3-5 working days of receiving the complaint to discuss the matter and, after considering the complaint, attempt to reach a resolution.

13.3 In circumstances where the complaint seems to the parents to have been mishandled by the Headmistress, the parents will be able to write directly to the Chairman of Governors, who will follow the same steps set out above.

It may be necessary for the Head/Chairman of Governors to carry out further investigations, and written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept.

14. Once the Headmistress/Chairman of Governors 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 in writing. The Headmistress/Chairman of Governors will also give reasons for the decision.

15. If the complaint is against the Headmistress, the Chairman will call for a full report from the Headmistress, and for all relevant documents. On the basis of these, the Chairman may decide to request a briefing from individual members of staff and will, in most cases, speak to the parents to discuss the matter. Once the Chairman 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 in writing, with reasons given for the decision.

16. If, following receipt of the Headmistress's or the Chairman's decision, the parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they may request a meeting with the Headmistress or the Chairman at a mutually convenient time. If, after the meeting with the Chairman or the Headmistress, parents remain dissatisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

STAGE 3 PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS MADE BY PARENTS – APPEAL PANEL HEARING

17. If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the appropriate Governor who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Appeal Panel. A Governor, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 2 working weeks. The matter will then be referred to the Appeal Panel for consideration.

18. The Panel will normally consist of: a Governor other than the Chairman, who is the Convenor; and two other members of the Board, excluding the Chairman, none of whom will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and one of whom will be independent of the management and running of the School. All of the Panel members will be appointed by the Board of Governors.

19. The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative or friend. Legal representation is not appropriate.

20. The parents and the Headmistress/Chairman of Governors will be asked in advance of the meeting whether there are any papers they would like to have considered at the meeting, bearing in mind the need for all to keep the proceedings confidential. The papers will be copied and distributed before the meeting. A sufficient amount of time will be committed to the meeting and, if possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.

21. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, within 5 working days of the Hearing the Panel will reach a decision and may also make recommendations. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The Panel's findings and, if appropriate, any recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Headmistress, the Governors and, where relevant, the person against whom the complaint has been made.

22. The decision of the Panel will be final.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except: in so far as disclosure is required of the School by paragraph 6(2)(j) of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2003; where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS

Downe House welcomes suggestions and comments from parents, and takes seriously complaints and concerns they may raise. **A complaint will be treated as an expression of genuine dissatisfaction that needs a response.** We wish to ensure that:

- Parents wanting to make a complaint know how to do so.
- We respond to complaints within a reasonable time and in a courteous and efficient way.
- Parents are reassured that we listen to them and take complaints seriously.
- We take action where appropriate.

How should I complain?

Please follow the Procedure set out above.

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, as outlined above.

I am not sure whether to complain or not. If, as parents, you have concerns, you are entitled to raise them. If in doubt, you should contact the School in accordance with the above Procedure to discuss your concerns. This will hopefully help you to decide if you wish to make a formal complaint.

What will happen next? If parents have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with the above Procedure.

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. In some cases (as referred to above), the Chairman of Governors may also need to be informed. It is the School's policy that complaints made by parents should not adversely affect their children, but 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, in which case 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 needs to be taken under staff disciplinary procedures as a result of complaints will be handled confidentially within the school.

The School recognizes and acknowledges your entitlement to complain and we hope to work with you in the best interests of the children and young people in our care.

Review Leader: Finance and Administration Bursar
 Reviewed: December 2009
 Next Review: December 2010