

# COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS OF CURRENT PUPILS

## PURPOSE

1. Downe House has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if current 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. A copy of the Permanent Exclusion and Removal Policy and Procedure is located on the Downe House website.

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 of a current pupil 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. No pupil or parent will be penalised for making a complaint in good faith.

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

4. **Recording of Complaints.** A written record of all complaints which progress to Stage 2 or 3 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 that identifies whether the complaint was resolved following the formal stage or proceeded to a panel hearing
- 4.8 The action taken as a result of the complaint regardless of whether the complaint was upheld or not

## **STAGE 1 PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS MADE BY PARENTS INFORMAL RESOLUTION**

### **MAKING A COMPLAINT**

5. It is hoped that most complaints 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/Housemaster, 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 Chair of Governors. If, however, the complaint is against the Headmistress, parents should make their complaint direct to the Chair of Governors.

### **PROCESS**

9. Complaints will be acknowledged as soon as practicable and, at the latest, within 48 hours. Parents will be told what is happening to their complaint and, if a more detailed response is needed, by what date it will be received. The School would, following the acknowledgment of the complaint, expect to make a response within a further 14 working days during term time and 20 working days during the school holidays. In exceptional circumstances, the response may be delayed. Where this is the case, the delay will be explained.
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 14 working days.
11. Should the matter not be resolved totally; or if a satisfactory action plan is not in place, or in the event that the Housemistress/Housemaster, 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. Complaints will be acknowledged within 48 hours 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 normally within 14 working days of acknowledging the complaint during term time (20 working days during the School holiday) 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 Chair of Governors (and informs the parents that this stage has been reached), in which case the Chair of Governors (or his appointed representative) will speak to the parents in most cases within 14 working days of acknowledging the complaint during term time (and 20 working days during the School holiday) 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 may choose to escalate the matter to Stage 3.

It may be necessary for the Head/Chair 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/Chair 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/Chair of Governors will also give reasons for the decision. The School would, following the acknowledgment of the complaint, expect to make a response within a further 14 working days during term time and 20 working days during the school holidays. In exceptional circumstances, the response may be delayed. Where this is the case, the delay will be explained.

15. If the complaint is against the Headmistress, the Chair will call for a full report from the Headmistress, and for all relevant documents. On the basis of these, the Chair 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 Chair 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 Chair's decision, the parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they may request a meeting with the Headmistress or the Chair at a mutually convenient time. If, after the meeting with the Chair or the Headmistress, parents remain dissatisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

17. The School would, following the acknowledgment of the complaint, expect to make a response within a further 14 working days during term time and 20 working days during the school holidays. In exceptional circumstances, the response may be delayed. Where this is the case, the delay will be explained.

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

18. 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 within 48 hours and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 14 working days (20 working days during the School holiday). The matter will then be referred to the Appeal Panel for consideration.

19. The panel hearing will take place unless the parent later indicates that they are now satisfied and do not wish to proceed further. The panel hearing should, therefore, proceed notwithstanding that the parent may subsequently decide not to attend. If necessary, the panel should consider the parent's complaint in his/her absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion.

20. The Panel will consist of three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. This will normally be a Governor other than the Chair, who is the Convenor; one other member of the Board, and one independent person who will be independent of the

management and running of the School. All of the Panel members will be appointed by the Board of Governors in accordance with DfE guidance.

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

22. The parents and the Headmistress/Chair 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.

23. The School will accommodate parental availability for dates and for considering comments concerning panel composition as far as practically possible.

24. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts, they consider relevant, and normally within 14 working days (20 working days during the School holiday) of the Hearing, the Panel will reach a decision and may also make recommendations. 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. A copy of the findings of the panel and recommendations will be available for inspection on the school premises. The Headmistress holds these findings, which will be retained for five years.

25. The decision of the Panel will be final.

26. An electronic complaints register will be held on the School's MIS system. A record of the number of formal complaints registered in the preceding academic year will be made available to parents, along with the number that have progressed to Stage 3. in line with the National Minimum Boarding Standards (2022), details of complaints made but later withdrawn are also recorded."

27. The Headmistress and Deputy will review the complaints registered at the end of each term.

28. The Board of Governors will monitor the number and type of complaints received and the operation of the procedures set out in this policy. They will also review the policy at least annually to ensure it meets statutory requirements and continues to reflect best practice.

29. If they are dissatisfied with this procedure, parents do have the option to contact a representative from ISI (the Independent Schools Inspectorate) on 0207 600 0100 or email at [info@isi.net](mailto:info@isi.net)

## SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS

Downe House welcomes suggestions and comments from parents and takes seriously complaints 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 do not 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 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 Chair 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.

It should be noted that the Secretary of State or body conducting an inspection may request access to the records of complaints made. Please note that information on the total number of formal complaints received in the preceding academic year is located on the School website.

**The School recognises 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.**

**Revision History:**

Revision	Date	Description of changes	Requested By
	November 2017	Reviewed	Areti Bizior
	November 2018	Reviewed	Areti Bizior
	November 2019	Reviewed	Areti Bizior
	November 2020	Reviewed	Michelle Scott
	November 2021	Passes to Mr M Godfrey, new DH	Matthew Godfrey
	November 2022	Reviewed	Matthew Godfrey
	November 2023	Fully reviewed and updated	Matthew Godfrey

Review Leader: Deputy Head  
 Reviewed: November 2023  
 Next Review: November 2024

Review Date: November 2024 – DH