



COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Our Mission

Farnborough Hill welcomes all into our community, where we aim to live Christ's Gospel values joyfully and wholeheartedly, forming each individual to fulfil her potential and face the future with wisdom, strength and dignity.

Introduction

Farnborough Hill ('the School') provides a clear, transparent and professional process for dealing with complaints. We aim to work collaboratively with parents and guardians, however, it is recognised that issues may arise which are not resolved to the satisfaction of parents, and that they will wish to raise a formal complaint. If parents or pupils do have a complaint, it will be treated in accordance with the procedures detailed below.

Legal Framework

The policy has been approved by the Governing Body of the School and it takes account of the *Education (Independent School Standards (England) Regulations 2024, part 7)*. Separate procedures apply in the event of a safeguarding or child protection issue (see *Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy*) or if the Headmistress excludes a pupil or asks her to leave and the parents seek a Governors' Review of that decision (see *Exclusions Policy*). A copy of the *Complaints Policy* is available on the website or upon request from the School.

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Exclusions Policy

Definition

A complaint is a matter in which a parent or guardian of a pupil is unhappy about a real or perceived problem and seeks action by the School. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff. Any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School falls within the scope of this procedure.

A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done, or has acted unfairly.

Parents or guardians can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially.

The 'days' specified in this policy refer to those days that the School is in session, ie 'term time'. Complaints will be acknowledged within five working days if received during term time and as soon as is practicable during holiday periods. The target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 28 days, if the complaint is lodged during term-time, and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. During times of lockdown or closure due to COVID-19, these timeframes may be extended but will be dealt with as soon as practically possible.

Process

This policy describes a three-stage procedure

- Stage 1 Informal Resolution
- Stage 2 Formal Resolution
- Stage 3 Panel Hearing

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. If parents or guardians have a complaint, they should normally contact their child's Head of Year, in the first instance. In many cases, the matter will be resolved quickly, by this means.

If the HoY cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary to consult a member of the Senior Leadership Team. Informal complaints made directly to the Headmistress or other members of Senior Leadership Team will usually be referred to the relevant HoY, unless it is deemed it more appropriate to deal with the matter personally.

Complaints made directly to the Senior Leadership Team will usually be referred to the Headmistress if they cannot be resolved satisfactorily.

The member of staff dealing with the informal complaint stage will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be satisfactorily resolved within seven working days, or in the event that the member of staff and the parent or guardian fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of the procedure.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, the parents or guardians should put their complaint in writing to the Headmistress. The Headmistress will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Headmistress will meet with the parents concerned, within seven working school days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. Where possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Headmistress to carry out further investigations, in which case a definitive answer will be given within 10 further working days.
- The Headmistress will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. Once the Headmistress is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made, and parents or guardians will be informed in writing. The Headmistress will give reasons for her decision and indicate what action the school will take. At this stage a written record is required on whether the issue is resolved or whether it needs to proceed to a panel hearing.
- Written records will be kept securely, and it will be noted whether the issue has been resolved or whether it has moved to Stage 3.
- If the complaint is against the Headmistress, the Chair of Governors, or their nominee, will call for a full report from the Headmistress and for all the relevant documents. The Chair of Governors, or their nominee, may also call for a briefing from members of staff, and will in most cases, speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the Chair of Governors, or their nominee,

is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing within ten working days. The Chair of Governors will give reasons for the decision.

- If parents or guardians are still not satisfied with the resolution, they may proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure, which they must do within seven working days of being informed of the Stage 2 outcome.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- If parents or guardians seek to invoke Stage 3, following a failure to reach a satisfactory earlier resolution, they will be asked to contact the Clerk to the Governors. The Headmistress will explain the process to the parents or guardians and will contact the Chair of Governors.
- Parents or guardians should ensure that a copy of all relevant documents and full contact details accompany their letter to the Clerk to the Governors. Parents or guardians are asked to set out in their letter the grounds of their appeal and their specific desired outcome. The Clerk to the Governors will acknowledge the request for a hearing within seven working days, during term time. (During holiday periods time scales may need to be extended depending on the availability of relevant staff.)
- The Clerk to the Governors will call a hearing of the Complaint Panel and the Chair of Governors will select the members of the that panel. The Complaint Panel will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom must be independent of the governance, management or running of the School. If any of these people have had prior direct involvement trying to resolve the complaint (eg contact with the parents or guardians), then they will be excluded from the Complaints Panel.
- The parents or guardians may be accompanied to the Complaints Panel hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation is not permitted.
- The Headmistress shall also be entitled to be accompanied to the hearing by one other person, if they wish.
- If the parent or guardian does not exercise the right to attend the panel hearing, this does not remove the School's obligation to hold the hearing in conformity with its Complaints Policy. The School's arrangements for the panel hearing should be reasonable in order to facilitate the parents or guardians exercising the right of attendance.
- The Clerk to the Governors will acknowledge the Stage 3 complaint on behalf of the Panel and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable but within 10 school working days.
- 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 four working days prior to the hearing.
- The Chair of the Panel 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. The Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' or guardians' complaint immediately, without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should proceed.

- After due consideration of all facts considered relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within five school working days of the hearing. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it.
- The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings, actions and recommendations will be sent in writing to the complainant, the Headmistress and, where relevant, the person regarding whom the complaint was made.
- The final decision of the panel will be whether to:
 - dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
 - uphold the complaint in whole or in part; and
 - may make recommendations
- A copy of any complaint and findings/recommendations will be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair of Governors and the Headmistress, and also made available to Inspectors, on request. These documents are stored securely in the Clerk's office.

Complaints Register

- All complaints which have reached Stages 2 or 3 are recorded in the Complaints Register. The register records the outcome of the individual complaint and any actions taken as a result, regardless of whether they are upheld, and the Stage at which the complaint was concluded, whether at Stage 2 (Formal Resolution) or Stage 3 (Panel Hearing), in accordance with the Independent School Standards (England) Regulations 2019.
- Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially, in accordance with its Data Protection Policy. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential; the exceptions to confidentiality are the Secretary of State and an inspection body under section 109 of the 2008 Education and Skills Act; where disclosure is required in for the School's inspections or where any other legal obligation prevails.
- When dealing with complaints, the School (including any Panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process), may process a range of information, in accordance with its Privacy Notice, which is likely to include:
 - date when the issue was raised
 - name of parent or guardian
 - name of pupil
 - description of the issue
 - records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
 - witness statements (if appropriate)
 - name of member of staff handling the issue at each stage
 - copies of all correspondence on the issue
 - notes of the hearing
 - the Panel's written decision

The School will provide OFSTED and ISI, on request, with a written record of any complaints made during a specified period and the action that was taken as a result. Records of complaints will be retained for seven years after findings have been made. If a complaint is regarding a Safeguarding issue the documentation will be held for 10 years.

Repeat or Vexatious Complaints

Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, the School will not investigate beyond the first instance.

Duty of Care

As an employer, the School has a duty of care towards its employees and will, therefore, seek to ensure that any employee who is the subject of a complaint will be treated fairly and with respect, and given appropriate opportunity to explain their viewpoint.

Number of Complaints

Information regarding the number of formal complaints received in the previous academic year is available by contacting the Headmistress's PA, via the contact details on the School website.

Referring a complaint to ISI

The School is inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), an independent organization which reports to the Government on schools. Parents or others who wish to complain about an independent school should contact the Department for Education using the form available on the ISI website. ISI will usually expect parents to have followed the School's formal complaints procedure, as outlined in this policy, before contacting them.

Policy Review

The Headmistress will report to the Governing Body annually on the number and type of complaints received, and their outcomes.

This policy is reviewed annually by the Headmistress and Governors. The next review is due in September 2026.