

WS.008 Parental Complaints Policy

Introduction

Circulation: This policy is addressed to the Senior Management Teams of all five parts of the school and to parents.

This policy can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required. If you require assistance with making a complaint, for example because of a disability, please contact the relevant Complaints Co-ordinator who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

It is available for parents on the school web-site.

Policy status: The policy has been approved by the Headmaster of Taunton School and approved by the Governing body. It provides guidelines for handling concerns and complaints and is drafted in accordance with Part 7 of Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Certain parts of the procedures can only be carried out during term time.

Application: Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue (refer to the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy) or if the Headmaster expels or asks a student to leave and the parents seek a Governors' Review of that decision (refer to Expulsion or Required Removal from School Policy). The policy also applies for parents whose child has recently left the School if the complaint refers to an issue when the student was registered at the School.

Three stages: This policy describes a three stage procedure:

- Stage 1: informal raising of a complaint notified orally or in writing to a member of staff
- Stage 2: a formal complaint in writing to the Headmaster
- Stage 3: a reference to the Complaints Panel

Timescales: 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 the School is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website.

Policy aim and statement

Aim: The aim of this policy is to ensure that a complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate stage, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice, it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote parents' confidence in our ability to safeguard and promote welfare.

We will try to resolve every concern 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 the circumstances.

Definition: TS does not make a distinction between 'concerns' and 'complaints'. Any matter will be treated as a complaint if an unhappy parent seeks action by the school.

Policy statement: We need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. We recognise that a difficulty 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 should never feel - or be made to feel - that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a student or his/her opportunities at this school.

We believe in working in partnership with parents and we understand that at times the school, its governors and employees will make mistakes which need to be highlighted and action taken to address these shortcomings. We therefore appreciate the importance of an open and honest relationship with parents in which they feel able to raise complaints and that they will be taken seriously.

Confidentiality

At all times, all the parties involved with answering a complaint will treat any information they receive as confidential. They will only discuss the matter with those who need to know.

Management of complaints

The Headmaster of Taunton School has appointed the following to act as Complaints Co-Ordinators within the various parts of the school:

- Taunton School (Senior School) – Ed Burnett (Deputy Head)
- Taunton International School (TSI) - Adrian Hallworth (Principal of TSI)
- Taunton School Internal Middle School (TSIMS) - James Duncan (Head of TSIMS)

- Taunton Prep School - Andrew Edwards (Headmaster of the Prep School)
- Taunton Nursery and Pre-Prep – Louise Leah (Head of the Pre-Prep and Nursery)

The Complaints Co-Ordinator is to be responsible for the co-ordination and administration of the Complaints Procedure. Aspects of this role may be delegated by the Complaints Co-ordinator to other senior members of staff to ensure that the complaint is investigated properly. For example, if the complaint occurs in the Nursery or the Pre-Prep then aspects of the matter may be delegated to the Head of Nursery and Pre-Prep. Furthermore, this may occur because the Complaints Co-ordinator is unavailable or is the subject of the complaint. In these scenarios his/her duties will be carried out by another senior member of staff. This will be explained by the Headmaster in writing. The main responsibilities of the Complaints Co-ordinator are to:

- be the first point of contact while the matter remains unresolved and keep records
- co-ordinate the complaints procedures in school
- arrange assistance for parents who require this, for example, because of a disability
- maintain an on-going training programme for all school employees in relation to complaints
- monitor the keeping, confidentiality and storage of records in relation to complaints
- report regularly to the Headmaster with respect to complaints

Duty Officer: The Deputy Headmaster of the Senior School is designated the Duty Officer at all times when the School is open. The Duty Officer has authority to take decisions relating to most matters of pastoral care and discipline and deputises should the Headmaster be absent. The Duty Officer can be contacted: 01823 703703 or by email: ed.burnett@tauntonschool.co.uk

Record Keeping:

Stage 1 complaints. Every complaint notified to a member of staff will be noted, together with the action taken. The record keeping will vary according to the nature of the complaint and the area of the school in which it takes place. Eg In the senior school it would typically will appear in academic or house minutes, in email files or on the school database.

It will be the responsibility of the relevant middle manager (eg in the senior school the HM or HOD) to identify any trends and to then discuss these with their line manager.

The key is that the person handling the complaint is open and transparent with parents and also open and transparent with their line managers. In this way, it is hoped that the majority of complaints will be dealt with at Stage 1 because all stakeholders are aware; they are able to offer appropriate feedback to the parent concerned and the parent feels that the school has taken their complaint seriously by consulting with them

but also with other colleagues. This will also help to ensure that a fair decision is reached about whether the complaint has been resolved.

Stage 2 and 3 complaints. These complaints will be recorded using the form in Appendix 1. Once the matter is resolved the files will be stored with the Headmaster’s PA (Kate Short). The Governor responsible for managing Complaints (Mr Henry Keeling : henry.keeling@tauntonschool.co.uk) will be informed when a Stage 2 complaint occurs and all Governors will be briefed annually as to the nature, number and any trends within the complaints at Stage 2 and 3.

Stage 1: Informal resolution of a complaint

Informal Complaints: We expect that most complaints, where a parent seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken, can be resolved informally. Examples might include a 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.

Notification: Please raise the complaint initially as follows:

Issue	Examples	Who to notify
Education	If the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum, special educational needs, access arrangements in exams	Senior School – Deputy Head (Academic, Damian Henderson), Tutor, Head of Department TSI – Deputy Principal (Camilla Bryden) TSIMS – The Head (James Duncan) Prep School – Assistant Head Academic, Hannah Seymour or the Form Tutor <i>Nursery and Pre-Prep – Key person / teacher, Room Leader, Nursery Manager</i>
Pastoral Care, Relationships, Wellbeing	For matters outside the classroom, in the House or relationships	Senior School – Deputy Head, Tutor, Housemaster / Housemistress TSI – Deputy Head (Lyndsay White) TSIMS – The Head (James Duncan) Prep School – Deputy Head (Chris Coleman) or the Form Tutor <i>Nursery and Pre-prep – Key person / teacher, Room Leader, Nursery Manager</i>

Discipline	For matters relating to school discipline	Senior School – Deputy Head, Housemaster / Housemistress TSI – Deputy Principal (Camilla Bryden) TSIMS – The Head (James Duncan) Prep School – Deputy Head (Chris Coleman) Nursery and Pre-prep – Key person / teacher, Room Leader, Nursery Manager
Extra-Curricular	For matters relating to co-curricular matters such as Drama or Sport	Senior School – Assistant Head Co-Curricular and Outreach (Hayley Mortimer), the Tutor, Housemaster / Housemistress or the Head of Department TSI – Assistant Principal (Lyndsay White) TSIMS – The Head (James Duncan) Prep School – Deputy Head (Chris Coleman), the Form Tutor or the Head of Department Nursery and Pre-prep – Key person / teacher, Room Leader, Nursery Manager
Financial Matters	Query relating to fees or extras	Chief Operating Officer (Nicola Miller)
Head of the Prep School, Head of TSIMS, Principal of TSI, Head of the Nursery	For matters relating to leadership in these particular parts of the school	The Headmaster, Mr Lee Glaser
The Headmaster, Mr Lee Glaser	For matters relating to leadership of the senior school or relating to leadership of the whole school	Elaine Waymouth, Deputy Chair of the Governors elaine.waymouth@tauntonschool.co.uk

To contact any of the people above, please call the school: 01823 703703

Acknowledgement: We will acknowledge a written notification by telephone, e-mail or letter within 2 working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable in the holidays but normally within 10 working days. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing but a formal record will be made via an email or recorded in department minutes or on the schools database, and a copy sent to the appropriate Complaints Co-ordinator.

Unresolved concerns: A complaint which has not been resolved by informal means within 15 working days should be notified in writing to the Headmaster (in the case of EYFS the Head of Nursery and Pre-Prep) as a formal complaint which will be dealt with in accordance with Stage 2 below.

Stage 2: Formal complaint

Notification: An unresolved complaint under Stage 1 based on a dissatisfaction with some aspect of the School's (Senior School, TSI, TSIMS, Prep School) policies, procedures, management or administration should be set out in writing with full details and sent with all relevant documents and your full contact details in an envelope or email addressed to the Headmaster, Mr Lee Glaser: kate.short@tauntonschool.co.uk

Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the School's EYFS and Pre-Prep policies, procedures, management or administration should be set out in writing with full details and sent with all relevant documents and your full contact details in an envelope or email addressed to the Headmaster, Mr Lee Glaser:

kate.short@tauntonschool.co.uk

If your formal complaint is against the Headmaster, Mr Lee Glaser, please contact Elaine Waymouth, Deputy Chair of the Governors

elaine.waymouth@tauntonschool.co.uk

Your complaint will be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within two working days during term time, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale. During the holidays a response may take longer but nevertheless a reply will normally occur within 10 working days. Details of the Formal Complaint will be sent to the relevant Complaints Co-Ordinator.

With EYFS, it will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome within 28 days.

Investigation: The Headmaster may ask a senior member of staff to act as "investigator" (usually the Complaints Co-Ordinator) and/or may involve one or more Governors but not the Chair of Governors who can only be directly involved should the complaint reach Stage 3. 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 Headmaster who will then notify you in writing of his decision and the reasons for it.

Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to your complaint.

Outcome: The Headmaster's aim would be to inform any complainant of the outcome of an investigation and the resolution to the complaint within 20 working days from the receipt of the complaint. Where there

are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay, the parents will be notified of this and informed of the new timescales as soon as possible especially during holiday time. Please note that any complaint received within one month of the end of term is likely to take longer to resolve owing to the presence of school holidays and the unavailability of personnel required for the investigation to be properly undertaken. As a result, the time frame for a formal complaint which falls within one month of the end of term, may last the duration of the school holidays.

If the parents are dissatisfied with the Headmaster's decision, the parent may request that the complaint is referred to the Complaints Panel using the procedure set out below.

Stage 3: Reference to the Complaints Panel

A Panel hearing is a review of the decision taken by the Headmaster. The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure.

The role of the Panel: the Panel's task is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties and
- any representations made by you or the Headmaster

If, after establishing the facts, the Panel consider that the complaint is made out, they will uphold the complaint. If the Panel consider that the complaint is not made out, they will dismiss the complaint. They will make these decisions on the balance of probabilities.

It is not within the powers of the Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, students, or parents. The Panel may make recommendations on these or any other issues to the Headmaster or to the full body of Governors as appropriate.

Notification: To request a hearing before the Complaints Panel please write to the Clerk to the Governors (Nicola Miller: Nicola.miller@tauntonschool.co.uk) . Your request will only be considered if you have completed the procedures at Stages 1 and 2. It is expected that the complaints procedure will progress in a timely manner and parents should make the request within seven working days of the decision complained of. 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 five working days.

Convening the Panel: The Clerk to the Governors will convene the Complaints Panel as soon as reasonably practicable and every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within 15 working days of the receipt of the request. The Panel will not normally sit during half terms or school holidays. The Panel will consist of a minimum of three individuals, including School Governor members, who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint and one member who is independent of the governance, management and running of the School.

You may ask the Clerk to tell you who has been appointed to sit on the Panel.

Notice of hearing: As soon as reasonably practicable, and in any event at least seven working days before the hearing, 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.

Attendance: You will be asked to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative or friend. The Panel Hearing is not legal proceedings and so legal representation is not necessary. If you do wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person please notify the School of this at least five working days before the hearing and note that the panel will wish to speak to you directly and this person will not be permitted to address the hearing unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Panel.

Documents: Copies of additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk at least five working days prior to the hearing. The Clerk will circulate a copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the Complaints Panel to all parties at least three days prior to the hearing.

Chairman: The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Panel (chosen by themselves) and will be conducted in an informal manner.

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 Clerk will be asked to take a handwritten minute of the proceedings.

Evidence: The Chairman will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that the parties 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 may take written statements into account.

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 Chairman. 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.

Adjournment: The Chairman may, at his/her discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue. This may include an adjournment to take legal advice.

When the Chairman considers that all the issues have been sufficiently discussed, they will conclude the hearing.

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, findings and any recommendations shall be confirmed in writing to you and, where relevant, any person complained about by electronic mail where appropriate within seven working days of the hearing. If you do not wish to receive the decision by electronic mail, a copy will be given or posted to you.

The decisions, findings and any recommendations will be made available for inspection on the school premises by the Governing Body and the Headmaster. Reasons for the Decision will be given.

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.

The completion of Stage 3: this represents the conclusion of the School's Complaints Procedure.

Record Keeping and Confidentiality: A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at Stage 1, Stage 2 or proceed to a panel hearing, including the action taken by the School as a result of the complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

Records of complaints resolved at Stage 1 will be kept by the person to whom the complaint was addressed. Eg if the complaint was about a pastoral matter and the complaint was addressed to Housemaster / Housemistress, they would keep a written record of this complaint.

The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure will be kept by the Complaints Co-ordinators during the preceding school year (using the form in Appendix 2) and will be provided to Governors at the Annual Review Meeting by the Deputy Head of the Senior School who will liaise with the School Governor and produce the report.

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. In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will be kept only for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in the circumstances.

The number of formal complaints each year will be made available to parents.

Appendix 1: Formal Complaints Form

What is the nature of the complaint? (Please tick)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff conduct	<input type="checkbox"/> Parental conduct
<input type="checkbox"/> Teaching standards	<input type="checkbox"/> Pastoral care
<input type="checkbox"/> Condition of premises	<input type="checkbox"/> Time tabling
<input type="checkbox"/> Matters of regime and routine	<input type="checkbox"/> Access to or regulation of extra-curricular activities
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please give details)	
Please give details of your complaint	
Date/s of incident	Time/s
If you are complaining about someone's behaviour please give the names of any witnesses to the incident/s	
Action taken	
Name	Position
Signed	Date

Appendix 2: Recording Formal Complaints

Taunton School

September 2021-August 2022

Number	Date	Complaint from:	Nature of Complaint	Formal	Action	Location of paperwork

Appendix 3: Contacting ISI and OFSTED

Parents may decide to contact the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) if they have a complaint that has not concluded to their satisfaction through the School's Complaints Procedure. It is expected that complaints will go through the School's Complaints Procedure before ISI is contacted.

Parents in EYFS can contact ISI but only once the complaints procedure has run its course through all 3 stages.

The record of complaints within EYFS must be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.

Contact details for ISI

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House

9 - 12 Long Lane

London

EC1A 9HA

All references to the Early Years Foundation Stage are in Green Text

September 2021

Telephone: 020 7600 0100

Contact details for Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

0300 123 1231

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk