



SOMERHILL

# **PARENTAL COMPLAINTS POLICY**

**Owner: Headmaster**  
**Reviewed: September 2024**  
**Next Review: September 2025**



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## **Parental Complaints Procedure Policy**

### **Introduction**

The school prides itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the school in accordance with this procedure (if at any stage parents wish to withdraw the complaint, this should be done in writing).

This policy applies to all areas of the Somerhill Charitable Trust including Yardley Court, Derwent Lodge, Pre-Prep and the EYFS setting.

It aims to ensure that current pupils and parents of the Trust are able to raise a concern, air a grievance, or make a formal complaint following a process that is fair, transparent, timely and designed to maximise the chance of a positive resolution. This procedure applies to parents of pupils currently on the School roll. It does not apply in respect of past pupils unless the complaint was initially raised whilst the pupil was still on roll. This procedure does not apply to complaints by prospective parents, including those who have accepted a place in the Trust in respect of their child but where that child has not yet started in the Trust.

The Trust will not normally investigate any anonymous complaints. However, the Headmaster or Bursar, as appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Whilst the Trust is fundamentally committed to providing the best possible education for all children within a safe and accommodating environment, we accept that unhappiness about that provision may occur from time to time. We are a large, complex, human organisation; mistakes can occur, and differences of opinion arise. We are also a learning community, and it is important that the Trust is seen to practice self-reflection and a determination to improve that we seek to instil in our pupils.

Accordingly, this policy endorses openness towards listening to suggestions, addressing concerns and dealing seriously with complaints raised. Those with grievances are encouraged to mention these as soon as possible, allowing us the opportunity to try to rectify a problem or to explain the Trust's position before a matter becomes intractable.

At the heart of this policy is a belief that both parents and staff share the same desire to see pupils flourish in our care. Educational research makes it very clear that an important component of a successful education is a strong partnership between parents and teachers.

Therefore, regardless of the nature of any complaint, this policy encourages the presentation of a united front to pupils whilst a matter is resolved, so as to avoid mixed messages damaging and undermining the authority of either party.



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## **Timescales**

The Trust aims to resolve all complaints efficiently and promptly and parents are encouraged to bring any matter causing concern to the Trust's attention as soon as possible. Whenever possible, a complaint should be raised within three months of the incident, or where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. However, the School will consider complaints made within 12 months if exceptional circumstances apply.

Therefore, a complaint raised after three months should include details of the reasons for the delay.

- I. Timescales for each stage of the School's complaints procedure are set out below. It is expected that the management of every complaint will progress in a timely manner. Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay to the timescales for a stage of the complaints procedure (such as other bodies investigating aspects of the complaint), the School will notify the parent and inform them of the new timescales as soon as possible.
- II. Complaints which are raised in the school holidays will usually be deemed to have been received on the first working day after receipt.
- III. If a Parent commences legal action against the School in relation to their complaint, the Headmaster or Chair of Governors will decide whether or not to suspend the complaints procedure until those proceedings have been concluded.

**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, preferably the Form teacher.

**Stage 2:** a formal complaint in writing to the Headmaster

**Stage 3:** a reference to the Complaints Panel

### **Stage 1 – Informal Resolution**

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. The Form teacher will acknowledge the concern, normally on the same day, and will aim to resolve the issue within 2 days.
- If parents have a complaint, they should normally contact their son/daughter's Form teacher. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Form teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for the teacher to consult with others including the Headmaster.
- Complaints made directly to the Headmaster will usually be referred to the relevant Form teacher unless the Headmaster deems it appropriate for it to be dealt with personally.
- The Form teacher will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. In the event that the Form teacher and the parents fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed



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with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

## Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Headmaster, with a clear statement that they are making a formal complaint. The Headmaster will then decide the appropriate course of action to take.
- Written Stage 2 complaints will be acknowledged by telephone, email or in writing within **two working days** during term time, indicating the action that is being taken and confirming that a response will be provided within **fifteen working days**, unless a lengthier investigation is required. Written complaints received during holiday breaks will be addressed as soon as is practicable.
- In most cases, the Headmaster will speak to the parents concerned, normally within ten days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Headmaster to carry out further investigations.
- The Headmaster will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Headmaster 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 Headmaster will also give reasons for the decision.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure. This should be done within **10 working days** of receiving the decision letter from the Headmaster.

## Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to an appointed Governor to call hearings of the Complaints Panel.
- The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The panel will consist of *at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint*, one of whom will be independent of the management and running of the school. Each of the panel members shall be instructed by the appointed Governor, who, on behalf of the panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within **fourteen working days**.
- If the panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter may be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than one day prior to the hearing.
- The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. This hearing is not a legal meeting and so legal representation is not appropriate.



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- If possible, the panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.
- Where further investigation is required, the panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within seven working days of the hearing. The panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The panel's findings, and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Headmaster, the Governors and, where relevant, the person complained of.
- A copy of the findings and recommendations will be available for inspection on the school premises.
- A written record will be kept of all formal complaints and whether these have been resolved following a formal procedure, or have proceeded to a panel hearing, including what action has been taken by the school as a result of those complaints [regardless of whether or not they are upheld].
- In the absence of a significant procedural irregularity which might lead to a re-hearing, 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 is required of the school by section 109 of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Act 2008; where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

Whilst it is not anticipated that pupils invoke this procedure there is the legal provision for this should any matter arise.

This policy applies to Somerhill including the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation **within 28 days**. Complaints will be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request. Parents of EYFS children may only complain direct to Ofsted/ISI if they believe that Somerhill is not meeting EYFS requirements (contact details below).

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**In the last academic year (2023-24), Somerhill addressed 4 formal complaints.**