



COMPLAINTS AND CONCERNS POLICY

Includes Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

Policy reviewed: January 2025

Next review: January 2026

POLICY STATEMENT

This policy applies to Palmers Green High School ('the School' or 'PGHS').

PGHS has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, the School wishes to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. The School recognises that a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly could become a cause of resentment, which would be damaging to relationships and also to the school culture.

If parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the school with care and in accordance with this Complaints Procedure. The Procedure is available on the School's website; a printed copy is available from the school office during the school day.

In accordance with paragraph 32(1) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulation 2014, PGHS will also make available, on request, to Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE) or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), details of this Complaints Procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

POLICY AIMS

The aims of this policy and related procedures are to provide a framework for the resolution of complaints which:

- allows for their resolution informally and sets out the School's formal procedures where this is not achievable;
- is easily accessible and publicised, simple to understand and use and impartial and non-adversarial;
- enables a full and fair investigation where appropriate;
- respects people's desire for confidentiality;
- addresses all the points at issue and provides an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
- provides information to the School's Senior Leadership Team so that services can be improved and any systemic issues can be identified and addressed; and
- helps to promote a culture of safety, equality and protection.

There may be occasions when it is necessary or reasonable to deviate from this Complaints Procedure if this is reasonable and justified. Complainants will be notified of the changes.





WHO CAN USE THIS POLICY?

This policy is for the use of current PGHS parents only. 'Parents' means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for a current pupil about whom the complaint relates.

Complaints by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil to which the complaint relates was still registered as a pupil at the School. The only exception to this is if the complaint is a review of the decision taken by the Head to exclude or require the removal of a pupil under Clause 7 of the School's Terms and Conditions (Parent Contract) in which case such a review must be requested by no later than 5 working days from the date of the decision to exclude or require the removal of a pupil.

The School will not normally investigate anonymous complaints.

The School encourages anyone else with any concerns about the School's operation to raise them with the School. They are asked to do so by writing to the Head or Chair of Governors, setting out their concerns and the action sought.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A COMPLAINT?

A concern or complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School is 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 can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously. The school is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you raise in good faith.

If appropriate, the School will acknowledge that a complaint is upheld, wholly or in part. In addition, it may offer:

- an explanation;
- an admission that it could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the School will try to ensure that the event complained of will not happen again and an explanation of the steps taken in this respect;
- an undertaking to review policies and/or procedures;
- an apology.

Parents should be aware that if multiple complaints are received from parents within the School that are all based, on the same subject, the School may decide to send a uniform response to all complaints or to publish a single response.





Requests for financial awards, such as claims for compensation, damages or fee refunds, are beyond the scope of the School's Complaints Procedure.

All parents should be aware that regardless of the nature of a complaint and whether or not it is upheld, parents are not entitled to details of any related sanctions imposed on staff, pupils or parents for reasons of data protection and confidentiality.

THE THREE-STAGE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The School's procedure allows for complaints to be considered at three stages:

- Stage 1 Informal resolution of a concern or difficulty notified orally or in writing to a member of staff.
- Stage 2 Formal Complaint. A concern that is not resolved informally but is made formally in writing to the Head and considered under the formal procedure as described in this policy or is raised directly to a member of the senior leadership team, and which required investigation, or other significant input, by a member of the senior leadership team. A record will be made of such formal complaints.
- Stage 3 A referral to the Complaints Panel

STAGE 1 – CONCERNS AND DIFFICULTIES – INFORMAL RESOLUTION

It is hoped that most concerns, where a parent seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken, can be resolved quickly and informally.

Notification

- Education Issues, including the delivery or administration of pastoral care or disciplinary matters: If parents have a concern or complaint, they should contact their child's Class Teacher, Subject Teacher, or Form Tutor at the earliest possible opportunity either orally or in writing. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straight away by these means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Class Teacher or Form Tutor cannot resolve the matter alone it may be necessary for them to consult with another member of staff, for example, a Head of Department, Assistant Head, or the Deputy Head.
- Financial matters including queries relating to fees or billing should be sent to the Bursar.

Complaints made directly to the Deputy Head, the Bursar or the Head will usually be referred to the relevant Class Teacher or Form Tutor unless the Deputy Head, Bursar or Head deems it appropriate for them to deal with the matter personally.

To facilitate timely resolution of concerns, a parent must notify the School of their concern within 10 working days of the matter first coming to their attention or where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 10 working days of the last of these incidents.





Acknowledgement

The School will acknowledge a notification by telephone, e-mail or letter within three (3) working days of receipt within term time and if the notification is received during a school holiday then as soon as practicable, and no later than within three (3) working days of the start of the following term. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing but a Complaint Form will be completed and a copy sent to the Head (Complaints Co-ordinator).

Informal Resolution

We aim to investigate and resolve an informal complaint within 10 working days of the receipt of the complaint. Wherever appropriate, the School will ask the parent at the earliest stage what they think might resolve the issue.

Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days or in the event that the member of staff and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents may make a formal complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Complaints Procedure. This formal complaint must be made in writing.

Where a complaint is made against the Head, parents may choose to raise complaints directly with the Head if they feel that the matter is capable of resolution informally. The complaint may be raised orally or in writing. If in writing, the school will not automatically treat the complaint as a formal (Stage 2) complaint and the Head will endeavour to resolve the complaint informally under Stage 1. Alternatively, parents may choose to make their complaint about the Head to the Chair of Governors whose contact details are available from the school website or from the school office. In this case, the complaint will be treated as a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this Complaints Procedure (see below). Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governors via the School office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

STAGE 2 – FORMAL COMPLAINT

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis under Stage 1, if a parent remains dissatisfied after the completion of stage 1, if a complaint needs formal investigation, or if there is dissatisfaction with some aspect of the School's policies, procedures, management or administration, then parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head within 10 working days of receiving the outcome at Stage 1. The communication should include:

- the complainant's name and full contact details;
- details of the complaint and who it has previously been raised with;
- a copy of any relevant documents;
- and the outcome desired.

Acknowledgement

The School will acknowledge a notification by telephone, e-mail or letter within five (5) working days of receipt within term time and if the notification is received during a school holiday





then as soon as practicable, and no later than within five (5) working days of the start of the following term. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

Investigation

The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. It may be necessary for the Head, or their nominee, to carry out further investigations in the most appropriate manner. The Head, or their nominee, may request further information from parents and may wish to speak to them personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. Written records of all meeting and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept.

Once the Head 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 Head will also give reasons for their decision. In most cases, the Head will make their decision and provide the parents with reasons within twenty-eight (28) working days of receiving the complaint or as soon as practicable if the written complaint is received during or immediately before a school holiday. On occasion, the Head may engage an independent consultant to investigate a complaint. If so, every effort will be made to keep to the stated timeframe but the complainant will be kept informed of any potential delays.

If the complaint is against the Head, the complaint should be made to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors or their nominee may request a full report from the Head 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. The Chair of Governors or their nominee will give reasons for their decision within 28 working days of the receiving the complaint.

STAGE 3 – COMPLAINTS PANEL HEARING

If parents are dissatisfied with the Head's decision under Stage 2 they may request a hearing before a Complaints Panel.

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 they should do so in writing to the Clerk to the Governors within 10 working days of receiving the decision at Stage 2, setting out their grounds of appeal. This request will only be considered if Stage 1 and Stage 2 procedures have been completed. Any supporting evidence which the parents wish to rely on should also be provided with their grounds of appeal. Parents must state in their letter or email the outcome that they desire and all the grounds of their complaint. Parents must also state a list of documents which they believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to see.





Acknowledgement

The Clerk to the Governors will acknowledge receipt of the Stage 3 request by telephone, email or letter within seven (7) working days of receipt within term time and if the notification is received during a school holiday then as soon as practicable, and no later than within seven (7) working days of the start of the following term.

Complaints Panel

The Complaints Panel ("Panel") will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. One member of the Panel will be independent of the management and running of the School. The Complaints Panel will appoint one of the Panel members to act as the Chair of the Panel. The Head will not be part of the Panel.

Convening the Panel

The Clerk to the Governors, on behalf of the Panel, will then schedule a hearing to take place within 28 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. Should the period of twenty-eight (28) working days include a school half term or holiday there may be a delay to the convening of the Panel which will then be convened as soon as practicable. If the parents cannot attend the date offered by the panel for the hearing all reasonable efforts will be made to find an alternative date within the 28 days.

Notice of Panel Hearing

The Clerk to the Governors will send the parents written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with the names of the Panel members within twenty-one (21) working days of the date of the complaint acknowledgement and at least seven (7) working days before the date of the Panel Hearing. The Chair of the Panel will decide if the hearing will take place in person or virtually.

Attendance

The parents will be asked to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, or friend to provide support. If a companion is to attend the hearing, the parents must notify the Clerk of his or her name and relationship with the parents as soon as possible, and no later than three (3) working days in advance of the meeting. At the discretion of the Chair of the Panel, the companion can make representations but may not answer questions on behalf of the parents. Legal representation will not be permitted. The Head shall also be entitled to be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Pupils are not permitted to attend the hearing, unless deemed appropriate by the Chair of the Panel on a case-by-case basis. The Panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend.

Documents

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 or further investigation be carried out. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than 5 working days prior to the hearing.





Chair of the Panel

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

Hearing

The agenda for the hearing will be determined by the Chair. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Clerk or other nominated person will take minutes of the proceedings. The role of the Complaints Panel is to consider any documentation provided by the parties and representations made to the Panel at the hearing to establish the facts surrounding the complaint and to decide whether to uphold each complaint in whole or in part. When the Chair of the Panel is satisfied that sufficient consideration has been given to the documentation provided and any representations made by the parties, they will conclude the Hearing.

Unless prior to the commencement of the Hearing, a parent confirms that they are satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, the Hearing will proceed notwithstanding that the parent may decide not to attend. In these circumstances, the Complaints Panel will consider the parent's complaint in their absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint.

Evidence

The panel will usually hear representations from the Stage 2 decision-maker and the Parent(s). However, the manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel. The Chair will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity of raising questions with the Panel relevant to the complaint and making comments in an appropriate manner. If the Chair believes that the questions are not relevant to the complaint, he/she has the right to withdraw the question. The Hearing is not a legal proceeding and the complaints panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses to the issues complained of, but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.

Conduct and Adjournment

All those present are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners. If they fail to do so and after due warning, the Hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. 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 their comment will be minuted. The Chair may, at their discretion, otherwise adjourn the Hearing if they consider it appropriate to do so. This may include an adjournment for welfare reasons, to enable additional information to be obtained and/or considered or for the parties to take legal advice on a specific issue arising.

Decision

After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings on the balance of probabilities as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and accordingly decide whether to:

- dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part;





- uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and
- may make recommendations.

The Panel's findings and any recommendations shall subsequently be confirmed in writing to the parents, the Chair of the Court of Governors, the Head and, where relevant, to the person complained about, within ten (10) working days. Reasons for the Decision will be given. A copy of the minutes will be shared with the parents, the Chair of the Court of Governors and the Head. The Decision and any recommendations will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Court of Governors and the Head.

It is not within the powers of the Complaints Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff or pupils. The Complaints Panel may make recommendations to the School on these matters or any other issues as appropriate.

No further appeal is available after the decision has been made by the Panel. The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the School's Complaints Procedure.

Private Proceeding

A Hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements relating to the complaint or any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be published or otherwise made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.

PERSISTENT CORRESPONDENCE

Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this may be regarded by the School as vexatious and outside the scope of this procedure.

CONFIDENTIALITY

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 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

RECORDING COMPLAINTS AND USE OF PERSONAL DATA

Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all formal complaints, whether they are resolved at the formal stage (Stage 2) or proceed to a Panel Hearing (Stage 3) and any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld). The record of complaints shall be kept for a period of 25 years from the pupil's date of birth or indefinitely if the matter relates to a safeguarding concern.

USE OF PERSONAL DATA

The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice. When dealing with complaints, the School (including any Panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:





- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of pupil
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name and contact details of member(s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes/minutes of the hearing
- The Panel's written decision

This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the School's Privacy Notice and/or Data Protection Policy, but potentially including, for instance, information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy.

The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Notice, Data Protection Policy and the Storage and Retention of Records and Documents Procedures but in most cases for a period of 25 years from the pupil's date of birth or indefinitely if the matter relates to a safeguarding concern.

REQUIREMENTS UNDER THE STATUTORY FRAMEWORK FOR THE EYFS

At PGHS there is provision for the EYFS, therefore, the following additional provisions apply to this policy:

- The School will retain a written record of all complaints for period of 25 years from the pupil's date of birth or indefinitely if the matter relates to a safeguarding concern and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint.
- Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements must be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days. The record of complaints must be available to Ofsted and ISI on request.

COMPLAINTS TO OFSTED AND THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE (ISI)

Parents of children in the EYFS are entitled to make a complaint about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements directly to Ofsted and/or to the Independent Schools' Inspectorate (ISI):

- The number for the Ofsted helpline is 0300 123 4666 or 0300 123 1231 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. Details about procedures for complaints can be found here: <https://complain.ofsted.gov.uk/>
- Parents can also raise concerns related to the quality of education or the welfare health or safety of pupils, by writing to ISI directly to: The Independent Schools Inspectorate, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA at email concerns@isi.net. Their phone number is 0207 600 0100. Concerns will be recorded and may be copied to the





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Department for Education (DfE). However, ISI will not investigate disputes about fees or specific complaints about pupils no longer at the school.

PGHS will provide ISI/Ofsted, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaints will be kept in accordance with the Privacy Notice and the Storage and Retention of Records and Documents Procedures.

NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS

There was one complaint that proceeded beyond the informal stage during the 2023-2024 academic year.



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