**Complaints Policy (School)**

**Introduction**

Gracefield School is committed to child protection and safeguarding children and young people and expects all staff, visitors and volunteers to share this commitment.

**Aim**

Gracefield School children benefit from the excellent working relationships and partnerships that are established with our parents and carers. This common understanding of working together is central in the successful education of our children and young people.

Parents are encouraged to work closely with the school and timely communication is important. It is natural that parents will have, at times; concerns that they will want to express and share with the school. From our experience, face-to-face meetings are, in the main, the most successful in resolving matters of concern or informal complaints quickly.

Occasionally parents or others might feel the need to go further and complain formally. This policy describes a staged process for resolving matters of concern, informal complaints, formal complaints and a review by a panel and follows Department for Education best practice[[1]](#footnote-1).

**What Constitutes a Complaint?**

A complaint is an expression of dis-satisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action. It may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific area or about an individual member of staff. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent/complainant believes that the school has done something wrong, or failed to do so something that it should have done or acted unfairly. The procedure does not apply to prospective pupils, but it does cover exclusions or a combination thereof.

**Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints**

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. A complaint may be made in person, by telephone or in writing. The complaint will be acknowledged within five working days if received during term time and within twenty working days during the school holiday.

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|  | Meeting Type  | Resolution, Term Time  | Resolution, School Holiday  |
| Stage 1  | Informal  | 5 Working Days  | 38 Days  |
| Stage 2  | Formal  | 10 Working Days  | 38 Days  |
| Stage 3  | Panel hearing  | 15 Working Days  | 38 Days  |

**Recording Complaints**

Gracefield School will keep a record of all complaints, their progress and the final outcome. These records will provide the Head Teacher with management information so that patterns of concern can be monitored and the quality of leadership and management assessed.

At the School’s discretion, additional records may be kept which may contain the following information

* Date when the issue was raised
* Name of parent/complainant
* Name of pupil
* Description of the issue
* Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
* Witness statements (if appropriate)
* Name of all staff handling the issue at each stage
* Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution – Complaint Heard by Staff Member

* It is likely that the teacher or office staff should receive complaints in the first instance. Due to the small nature of the school, the Head Teacher may also receive an informal complaint. It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally with the member of staff involved, to the parent’s satisfaction
* However, if the member of staff cannot resolve the matter alone or if there are further concerns it may be necessary for them to consult formally with the Senior Leadership Team of the School
* The member of staff will ensure a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date of communication is made. Should the matter not be resolved within five working days or in the event that the member of staff and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution – Complaint Heard by Headteacher

* Formal complaints should be made in writing to the Head Teacher. She will investigate the formal complaint, review all the information and discuss the findings along with any recommendations with the complainant. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage, within ten working days in term time and thirty-eight days if in the School Holiday of the Head Teacher receiving the written letter of complaint although it may be necessary for her to carry out further investigations
* The Head Teacher will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint, the resolution and any actions taken by the School. Once the Head Teacher 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 Teacher will also give reasons for her decision

Stage 3 –Complaints Board Hearing

* If the complainant wishes to proceed to Stage 3, following a failure to reach an earlier resolution the school will convene a Board Hearing to investigate and consider the complaint. Parents should invoke Stage 3 by putting their complaint in writing to the Chair of the Complaints Appeal Board, c/o Gracefield School, 266 Ovendale Road, Fishponds, BS16 2RG.
* The matter will then be referred to the Board Hearing for consideration. The Board will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. The Panel will then acknowledge the complaint within five working days if received during term time and within twenty working days during the School Holiday and schedule a hearing to take place, so a resolution can be given to the parents within 15 working days in term time and thirty-eight days in the School Holiday
* In appointing an independent member of the panel, the School will give due regard to guidance from the DfE, who advise that a suitable person will have held a position of responsibility, preferably within the local community, and will have experience of analysing evidence and putting forward balanced arguments. The School may consider serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools or professionals with a legal background and retired members of the Police Force
* If the Board deem 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 normally not later than seven days prior to the hearing
* If possible, the Board will resolve the complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Board will decide how it should be carried out
* After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Board will come to a decision and may also make recommendations. These will be provided to the complainant, Proprietors and Head Teacher. And where relevant the individual being complained about.
* If the complaint is against the Head Teacher a complaint can be made to the DfE by filling in a school complaints form.

**Record of Formal Complaints** During the academic year 2018-2019 no formal complaints were made to the school.

Complies with schedule, paragraph 7 of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2010

**Appendices:** 1. Flowchart

2. Checklist for a Panel Hearing

**Appendix 1 School Complaints Procedure Flowchart**

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| Complaint heard by the staff member* Ensure Head Teacher informed of outcome
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| Issue resolved |  | Issue not resolved |

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| Complaint heard by Head Teacher* Acknowledge receipt of complaint
* Write to complainant with outcome of investigation.
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| Issue not resolved |
| Issue resolved |

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| Complaints Appeal Boardmeeting arranged* Issue letter inviting complainant to meeting.
* Issue letter confirming Panel decision
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**Appendix 2 Checklist for a Board Hearing**

The Board needs to take the following points into account:

* The hearing, while structured, is conducted as informally as possible.
* Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
* After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.
* The Head Teacher may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
* The Head Teacher is then invited to explain the school’s actions and be followed by the school’s witnesses.
* The complainant may question both the Head Teacher and the witnesses after each has spoken.
* The Board may ask questions at any point.
* The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
* The Head Teacher is then invited to sum up the school’s actions and response to the complaint.
* Both parties leave together while the Board decides on the issues.
* The Chair explains that both parties will hear from the Board within a set timescale.
1. [Best Practice Advice for School Complaints 2016](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/489056/Best_Practice_Advice_for_School_Complaints_2016.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)