

## **PARK SCHOOL – COMPLAINTS POLICY**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 **Circulation:** this policy is addressed to all members of staff. Parents are informed that the Policy is available to them upon request.
- 1.2 **Policy status:** the policy has been approved by the Headteacher and the School Board of Governance of Park School and Park School Nursery (the "School"). It provides guidelines for handling concerns and complaints raised by parents. It takes account of the current Independent School Standards Regulations and the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage ("EYFS"). The procedures set out below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and circumstances of each case. The policy is reviewed annually.
- 1.3 **Application:** separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection (safeguarding) issue or if the Headteacher expels or asks a pupil to leave and the parents seek a School Board Review of that decision.
- 1.4 **Parent(s) / You:** includes a current parent or legal guardian or education guardian, and may at our discretion include a parent whose child has recently left the School, provided that the complaint was originally raised while the pupil was on the school roll
- 1.5 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 School is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website.
- 1.6 **Three stages:** this policy describes a three stage procedure:
- Stage 1:** informal raising of a concern or difficulty notified orally or in writing to a member of staff
  - Stage 2:** a formal complaint in writing to the Headteacher
  - Stage 3:** a reference to the Complaints Panel chaired by a member of the School Board
- A concern about the safety of your child should be notified immediately to the person you believe is best placed to take urgent action and should be confirmed in writing to the Head.**

### **2. POLICY AIM AND STATEMENT**

- 2.1 **Aim:** the aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice, it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote parents' and pupils' confidence in our ability to safeguard and promote welfare. We will try to resolve every concern or complaint 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.
- 2.2 **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 and pupils should never feel - or be made to feel - that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or his/her opportunities at this school. The policy however distinguishes between a concern or difficulty which can be resolved informally and a formal complaint which will require investigation and a written decision.

### **3. MANAGEMENT OF COMPLAINTS**

- 3.1 **Complaints Officer:** the School has appointed a senior member of staff (the "Complaints Officer") to

be responsible for investigating and resolving complaints. At present the Complaints Officer is the School Bursar. If the Complaints Officer is unavailable or is the subject of the complaint, his/her duties will be carried out by the Headteacher or another senior member of staff. The main responsibilities of the Complaints Officer are to:

- 3.1.1 be the first point of contact while the matter remains unresolved and to keep records;
  - 3.1.2 co-ordinate the complaints procedures in School;
  - 3.1.3 maintain an on-going training programme for all School employees in relation to complaints;
  - 3.1.4 monitor the keeping, confidentiality and storage of records in relation to complaints;
  - 3.1.5 regularly review concerns and complaints with the Headteacher
- 3.2 **Concerns & complaints Log:** Formal concerns or complaints notified to a member of staff will be noted, together with action taken, in an electronic log kept by the Headteacher and Bursar.
- 3.3 Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements are always investigated under the formal complaints process and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days.
- 3.4 All parents in the School are provided with notification that this Complaints Policy is available to them and this policy is available on the School website .Parents are also given details of how to contact Ofsted and ISI if they have a complaint that has not concluded to their satisfaction through the School's complaints procedure.

#### 4. STAGE 1: CONCERNS AND DIFFICULTIES

- 4.1 **Concerns:** we expect that most concerns, 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.
- 4.2 **Notification:** please raise the concern initially as follows:
- 4.2.1 education issues - if the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, please speak or write to the Class Teacher or Headteacher as appropriate.
  - 4.2.2 pastoral care - for concerns relating to matters outside the classroom, please speak or write to the Headteacher or School Bursar.
  - 4.2.3 disciplinary matters - a problem over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised first of all with the member of staff who imposed it, and, if not resolved, with the Headteacher.
  - 4.2.4 financial matters - a query relating to fees or extras should be addressed to the Bursar.
- 4.3 **Acknowledgement:** we will acknowledge concerns raised by telephone, e-mail or letter within two working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable in the holidays. We will always endeavour to resolve a concern amicably and promptly.
- 4.4 **Unresolved concerns:** a concern which the complainant feels has not been resolved by informal means within 15 working days should be notified in writing as a formal complaint which will be dealt with in accordance with Stage 2 below.

#### 5. STAGE 2: FORMAL COMPLAINT

- 5.1 **Notification:** an unresolved concern under Stage 1, or a complaint which needs investigation, or a dissatisfaction with some aspect of the School's 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 addressed to the Headteacher. 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. A Complaints Form will be completed and sent to the Complaints Officer.

- 5.2 **Investigation:** the Complaints Officer will ask a senior member of staff to act as "investigator" and/or may involve one or more of the School Board. 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 Headteacher who will then notify you in writing of her decision and the reasons for it within 10 working days of 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. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to your complaint.
- 5.3 Please note that any complaint received within one month of the end of a term or half 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 undertaken properly.
- 5.4 If a parent is dissatisfied with the Headteacher's decision, the parent can request the complaint be referred to the Complaints Panel under Stage 3.

## 6. STAGE 3: REFERENCE TO THE COMPLAINTS PANEL

- 6.1 If you are dissatisfied with the Headteacher's decision under Stage 2, you may request in writing that your complaint be reviewed by the Complaint's Panel. We have constituted a Complaints Panel ("the Panel") comprising two School Board members and a member who is independent of the governance, management and running of the School.
- 6.2 A Complaints Panel hearing is a review of the decisions taken at Stage 2 by the Headteacher. 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 is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:
- (a) the documents provided by both parties and
  - (b) any representations made by the parents and the Headteacher

and to reach a decision on the balance of probabilities as to whether each complaint is made out in whole or in part.

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

- 6.3 **Notification:** to request a hearing before the Complaints Panel please write to the Chairman of the School Board within seven working days of the decision complained of. Your request will only be considered if you have completed the procedures at Stages 1 & 2. Please ensure that a copy of all relevant documents and your full contact details accompany your letter to the Chairman. Please state in your letter the outcome that you desire and all the grounds of your complaint. Please also send the Bursar copies of any documents you hold which relate to the complaint and a list of documents in the School's possession and wish the Panel to see. The Chairman will acknowledge your request in writing within four working days.
- 6.4 **Convening the Panel:** Chairman of the School Board will convene the Complaints Panel as soon as is reasonably practicable, usually within 15 working days of receipt of the request, but the Panel will not normally sit during half terms or School holidays. The Panel will consist normally of a minimum of three individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint. One

member of the Panel shall be independent of the management and running of the School. You may ask who has been appointed to sit on the Panel.

- 6.5 **Notice of hearing:** as soon as is reasonably practicable, the Chairman of the School Board 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. Copies of any additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Bursar at least five working days prior to the hearing.
- 6.6 **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 a legal proceeding and so legal representation is not necessary. If you do wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, you must notify the Bursar of this at least seven days before the hearing. Parents should note that the Panel will wish to speak to the parents directly and this person will not be permitted to act as an advocate. The Chairman of the School Board will circulate a copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the Panel to all parties at least three working days prior to the hearing.
- 6.7 **Chairman 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.
- 6.8 **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 Chairman may direct that the hearing is minuted by the Clerk to the Board of Governance. The Panel will be under no obligation to retain these minutes thereafter, nor will these minutes be circulated after the meeting
- 6.9 **Evidence:** the Chairman 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 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.
- 6.10 **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.
- 6.11 **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.
- 6.12 **Decision:** after due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel shall reach a Decision. The Panel's decision shall be confirmed in writing to the parties within seven working days of the hearing. Reasons for the Decision will be given. The Decision may include recommendations and will be sent to you, the Chairman of the School Board, the Headteacher and, where relevant, any person about whom the complaint has been made. The decisions, findings and any recommendations will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Proprietor (Park School Bournemouth Ltd and its Directors) and Headteacher. The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the School's complaints procedure.
- 6.13 **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.
- 6.14 **Confidentiality:** a written record will be kept of all complaints and their resulting actions whether they were resolved at Stage 1, 2 or 3. The number of formal complaints registered during the preceding School year will be supplied to parents on request. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints along with a record of action taken by the School as a result ( whether or not the complaint is upheld) will be kept confidential except where disclosure is required in the course of a school's inspection or under other legal authority.

**7. COMPLAINTS TO OFSTED AND THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

- 7.1 Although the School is inspected by ISI, an independent organisation which reports to the Government on schools, additional regulatory requirements apply to written complaints regarding the fulfilment of the EYFS curriculum and parents of children in Reception and Nursery have the right to contact Ofsted if they have a complaint regarding the EYFS curriculum that has not concluded to their satisfaction through the School's procedure. Such parents can report their concerns to Ofsted on 0300 123 1231. The record of complaints shall be made available to Ofsted on request.
- 7.2 It is expected that complaints will go through the School's complaints procedure before Ofsted or ISI is contacted.

**8. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED**

- 8.1 The numbers of complaints received under the formal procedure can be requested from the Bursar.