
Complaints Procedures for Parents



This Policy applies to the parents of existing pupils and to the parents of past pupils if the complaint was raised whilst the pupil was still registered with the School.

Benenden School aims to create an atmosphere in which a diverse range of people can work together openly and in a spirit of mutual respect and trust towards a common purpose. Nevertheless we recognise that it is possible for misunderstandings and disagreements to arise or for mistakes to happen. Our Complaints Procedure is designed to help parents and pupils to resolve such concerns or misunderstandings at an early stage and thereby limit the confusion and upset which they often cause.

This Policy applies to the parents of existing pupils and to the parents of past pupils if the complaint was raised whilst the pupil was still registered with the School.

We treat as a complaint any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy. The Complaints Procedure is laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate and is a three-stage process:

1. Informal complaint
2. Formal complaint
3. Panel hearing

Whilst we would normally seek to resolve a complaint at the informal stage, parents may proceed straight to the formal process if they wish to. It should be noted that all time scales indicated are for complaints received during term time. Any complaints received close to, or during, a holiday period may take longer to resolve due to the availability of staff.

Stage One: Informal Complaints

Any parent with an informal complaint is encouraged to discuss it informally with their Housemistress/master (Hm) or to contact the Deputy Head Boarding and Pastoral Care, Deputy Head Academic or Assistant Head: Head of Co-curricular. The matter will be discussed and every attempt will be made to find an informal resolution to the issue.

Informal complaints may be made in person or via telephone, email or letter. The School endeavours to respond to the parent on weekdays during term time within 48 hours. This might be with an acknowledgement email in the first instance. Follow-up contact will be made within ten working days.

Any informal complaint sent to staff who are away on holiday will be responded to once term begins again.

If a parent is not satisfied with the response to an informal complaint, the complaint may be escalated to the formal process.

Stage Two: Formal Complaints

When making a formal complaint, parents should use the phrase 'formal complaint' so we are clear their concern relates to Stage Two of the Complaints Procedure. Complaints should be made to the Headmistress in the form of a letter which comes either as an attachment to an email or by post. They will be investigated by either an appropriate member of the Senior Management Team (SMT) or a member of the School's Governing Council. The investigator will respond to the complainant by letter within five working days and attempt to complete the investigation within two weeks. The investigator will record their findings in the Complaints Log along with all correspondence from and to the complainant.

Stage Three: Panel Hearing

In the event that the complainant is not satisfied with the response to their complaint made in stage two above, the matter can be referred to the Chair of Governing Council at the address given below. Any such request for a panel hearing should be received within two weeks of the receipt of a decision from a stage two investigation. There is provision for an appeal hearing by three individuals, none of whom were directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. It is intended that this hearing will normally be held within three weeks of the Chair of Governing Council receiving the request for an appeal.

The membership of the appeals panel will be determined by the Chair of Governing Council and will include one person independent of the management and day to day running of the school. Parents making an appeal may be accompanied by a friend (not a legal representative). If it is appropriate for a pupil to appear before the panel she may be accompanied by her parents or guardian, if they so choose.

The appeal panel will consider the complaint and the grounds for the appeal and make appropriate findings and any necessary recommendations. These will be made available to the complainant and, where relevant, the person(s) complained about. These findings may be given in person during the hearing or up to two weeks afterwards should the panel need to undertake any further investigations.

Panel hearings will take place even if the parent indicates they do not wish to proceed further and will be held even if the parent decides not to attend.

Chair of Governing Council: The Hon. Anna Birkett
Address: Benenden School, Kent, TN17 4AA

External Complaints Organisations

Parents and pupils are advised that they may also take their complaints to the Independent Schools Inspectorate. Current contact details are available from the ISI website at [concerns for parents](#).

Alternatively, parents and pupils are advised that for matters in respect of the Safeguarding of children they may contact Claire Ray, the Area Safeguarding Adviser at 30 Kings Hill, West Malling, ME19 4AE or call her office on 03000 412284.

Record Keeping

The First Deputy keeps a full record of all informal and formal complaints and any appeals. This record states whether complaints are resolved by formal procedure or proceed to a panel hearing as well as the action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether it is upheld). This file is reviewed termly to monitor any pattern in the complaints.

All paperwork in respect of complaints is confidential, except where access is required by an appropriate body, for example one conducting an inspection of the School's complaints procedure.

During the 2016 – 2017 academic year, 1 Formal Complaint was received
During the 2017 – 2018 academic year 0 Formal Complaints were received
During the 2018 – 2019 academic year, 1 Formal Complaint was received

Note to Staff

Staff who deal with complaints should always keep the appropriate member of SMT informed of the issues and the proposed solution. They should also pass a copy of the correspondence and/or their notes to the Deputy Head Boarding and Pastoral Care, for the consolidated record of complaints. Staff who have any questions about a complaint or the way forward should speak with the Deputy Head Boarding and Pastoral Care at the earliest opportunity.

AST 12 October 2018

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STM 10 October 2019

STM January 2020