

	Policy Name: Complaints Policy
	Owner: Headmistress
	Date Last Reviewed: Sept 2022
	Date of Next Review: Sept 2024
Policy revised as regulations or review demands	

1. POLICY STATEMENT

This policy is equally applicable to current Boarders and Day girls and their parents. This policy is written for the parents of current registered pupils (i.e., those pupils on the current school roll), and parents of past pupils if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still registered. It is equally applicable to current Boarders and Day girls and their parents. The policy does not include parents of prospective pupils (i.e., those who have yet to join the school.). It is available on the School website and on request from the Headmistress's PA, at headmistress@mayfieldgirls.org. It is also available to all staff in the School's network J Drive Policies and Procedures folder.

Mayfield has a long tradition of excellence, both in academic provision and pastoral care. It is important for us to work closely with parents, be they at home or abroad, to ensure that we are providing the best possible education for each girl, inside and outside the classroom. We want to encourage academic rigour and nurture individuals pastorally and spiritually; to allow each girl to be herself, 'but make that self is what Our Lord wants it to be' thus ensuring that she is ready and prepared, to respond to the needs of the age'. However, we know that some days do not run as smoothly as one might wish; misunderstandings arise, and mistakes happen.

Communication is crucial to ensure that minor concerns can be addressed promptly; in this way they can be rectified and do not become more serious. If any member of the school community has a complaint, s/he should expect the school to listen and respond and to be treated in accordance with the procedure outlined below. It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. If parents have any queries or worries about their daughters, they are encouraged to discuss these, in the first instance, with relevant members of staff over the telephone, by arranging a meeting at school, or during the Parent Consultations. We recognise that the first indication of concerns may be communicated by email, but it is usually helpful to discuss matters in person, wherever possible.

If parents have an issue concerning routine matters such as study, lost property, school organisation or information, they should contact their daughter's Form Tutor or Housemistress as soon as is practicable. In many cases, the matter can be resolved straight away, by us.

The following is a list of possible red flags that may arise during the course of you working for us and which may raise concerns under various anti-bribery and anti-corruption laws. The list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for illustrative purposes only

2. STAGE 1 – INFORMAL RESOLUTION

Academic issues

- If the issue involves concern over an individual's academic progress, health, welfare and happiness, however small it may seem, the Form Tutor or Housemistress [depending on whether it is a boarding or day issue] should be the first port of call
- The Tutor can discuss with the Head of Year or Head of School, where appropriate, then decide if the matter should be passed on. If it concerns academic progress in one particular subject, the Head of

Department should be involved. If there are problems with work in a number of areas, then the relevant Head of Year and Head of School should always be consulted

- In more serious cases, the Deputy Head (Academic) should be approached
- Parents are always welcome to contact the Headmistress directly on all matters

Pastoral issues

- If it is an issue that may involve bullying, emotional distress, family problems or social integration, similarly, the Tutor and Housemistress are the first point of call, followed by the Head of Year then the Head (or Deputy Head) of School
- In more serious cases, the Senior Deputy Head should be approached
- Parents are always welcome to contact the Headmistress directly on all matters
- Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, either the Deputy Head, Director of Studies or the Headmistress will in most instances be referred to the relevant Form Tutor, Housemistress or Teacher unless the Head of Department, the Deputy Head or the Headmistress deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally
- Should the parents' complaint refer to a particular teacher, then they may feel more comfortable with referring it to the Deputy Head Academic, or to the Senior Deputy Head, who has responsibility for boarding matters. The Headmistress will always be kept informed. The Headmistress can, if necessary and appropriate, be involved at any stage, and parents must feel able to consult her. However, it is nearly always the case that early resolutions can be reached if parents talk directly to the relevant members of staff and then, if no solution is possible, to the Deputy or Headmistress.

Allegations of professional misconduct

- In serious matters such as allegations of professional misconduct or competency, parents should approach a member of the Senior Management Team [SMT] and, on matters of competency, provide a detailed written account of the complaint
- In cases of child protection and when dealing with allegations of abuse against teachers and other staff, then the nationally recognised guidelines set out in 'Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2022' will be followed. Any such complaint would be referred by the Headmistress to the Local Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub [In East Sussex this is accessed via the Single Point of Access (SPOA).] In the first instance the Headmistress will consult the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for advice. The Local Authority would decide what form any investigation should take and whether the school or outside agencies, including the police, should be involved. The Governors of the School would be kept informed and may be involved, depending on the outcome of the investigation. Such issues are covered in the Disciplinary Policy, which deals with staff disciplinary matters. [In the event of there being an unresolved complaint against the Headmistress, this matter should be taken directly to the Chair of Governors who will convene the independent panel as specified in this document]

Procedure

- The member of staff who receives the complaint will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Complaints will be acknowledged as soon as possible, and at the latest within five working days

- The complaint will be investigated, and the relevant department or member of staff will be given an opportunity to respond. Following investigation, appropriate action will be taken, and this will be explained to the parents and those concerned
- All such matters will be kept confidential or on a 'need to know' basis unless it is necessary to launch a formal investigation within the school. Parents making a complaint should be aware that they cannot be guaranteed confidentiality as members of staff receiving a complaint are expected to notify the Headmistress, wherever possible, prior to taking action
- The Headmistress will share serious complaints with the Chair of Governors
- Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.

3. STAGE 2 – FORMAL RESOLUTION

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their formal complaint in writing to the Headmistress. The Headmistress will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take
- Parents will receive a written or telephoned acknowledgement of receipt within 2 working days. In most cases, the Headmistress will meet or at least speak to the parents concerned as soon as reasonably practicable, but within a reasonable timeframe (generally within 7 working days) of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage
- However, it may be necessary for the Headmistress (or her appointed representative) to carry out further investigations
- The Headmistress will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint
- Once the Headmistress is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made, and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Headmistress will also give reasons for her decision. This decision and any action taken as a result, will be recorded, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld or not
- If the Chair of Governors is handling the complaint, she or her appointed representative will handle the complaint according to the same procedure as the Headmistress
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision and should the matter not be resolved within four weeks, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

4. STAGE 3 – PANEL HEARING

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the appropriate Governor, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel
- The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three people, one of whom should be a Governor and one of whom should be independent of the management and running of the school but chosen by the school. The convenor of the panel would usually be the Chairman of the Governance Committee. Failing that, it should be another member of the Governance Committee or either Deputy Chairman of Governors. No-one who has previously been involved in the case may sit on the panel. The convenor of the Panel will, on behalf of the Panel, then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 14 days (this may take longer during School holidays)

- 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. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than 7 days prior to the hearing
- One other person may accompany the parents to the hearing. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate
- If a parent does not exercise the right to attend a panel hearing, this does not remove the School's obligation to hold the hearing in conformity with this complaints policy
- 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 14 days of the hearing. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parent, the Headmistress, the Governors and, where relevant, the person about whom the complaint has been made
- Once invoked, a formal written complaint will be documented and a thorough record retained according to procedure from first notification through to final conclusion, regardless of whether the complaint has been upheld or not
- The findings and recommendations will be available on the school premises for inspection by the Chair of Governors and the Headmistress. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access to them is requested to the extent stated in Part 7, paragraph 33(k) of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, by the Secretary of State (also covered under Section 109 of the 2008 Education and Skills Act), or where disclosure is required in the course of the School's inspection or under other legal authority

Complaints regarding boarding or the welfare of boarders

- Boarders and their parents who have a complaint about their welfare, which they feel has not been answered by the School's normal complaints procedures may contact ISI (Independent School Inspectorate), CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA, or via concerns@isi.net. They may also contact the Children's Commissioner for England, Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT, T: 020 7783 8330 - [Children's Commissioner for England \(www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk).

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- This policy is written for the parents of current registered pupils (i.e., those pupils on the current school roll), and parents of past pupils if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still registered. The policy does not include parents of prospective pupils (i.e., those who have yet to join the School.)
- Complaints must be raised within three months (in the absence of mitigating reasons) of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. Complaints made outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.
- The School will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period
- Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all complaints, for a minimum of 7 years, unless it is a safeguarding complaint (see below) and it will be recorded if they are resolved

following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and the action taken by the School as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). Where there is a safeguarding concern about a member of staff, records must be preserved for the term of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation if it is longer

- Less serious complaints are all recorded and stored centrally. These are monitored regularly by the Headmistress, Deputy Head (Academic) and the Senior Deputy Head
- A list of School policies and procedures is made available on the School website to all parents, staff and to pupils
- Disciplinary matters to do with pupil behaviour; sanctions and decisions about appropriate action are dealt with in the School's disciplinary codes of conduct for pupils and the Rewards and Sanctions Policy
- Pupils will not be penalised as a result of any complaint from their parents

COVID-19 and beyond

- It is recommended that all schools review the time periods in their policies during the period of the pandemic and immediately thereafter to ensure there is sufficient flexibility, should it be needed, as a consequence of disruption or staff absence. Therefore, this policy will remain under review in this regard (as noted above regarding timescales) during the Academic Year 2022-23.

Note: There was 1 formal complaint received by the School during the Academic Year 2021 -2022