

	Policy Name: <b>Complaints Procedure</b>
	Owner: <b>Headmistress</b>
	Last Reviewed: March 2022                      Next Review date: March 2023
	This policy will be revised as regulations or review demands

This policy is equally applicable to current Boarders and Day girls and their parents. It is available on the School website and on request from the Headmistress's PA, at [headmistress@mayfieldgirls.org](mailto:headmistress@mayfieldgirls.org). It is also available to all staff in the School's network J Drive Policies and Procedures folder.

## Introduction

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 what Our Lord wants it to be' thus ensuring that she is ready and prepared 'to respond to the needs of the age'.

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. However, 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.

## Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and **informally**.
- If parents have a complaint to do with 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 will be resolved straight away by this means to the parents' satisfaction.
- 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 Heads of School should always be consulted.
- If it is an issue that may involve bullying, emotional distress, family problems or social integration, then the Tutor and Pastoral Managers have a vital role; for Years 7 and 8 these matters are dealt with, in the first instance, by the Head or Deputy Head of Lower School, and for Years 9, 10 and 11 by the Head of Year or Head of Middle School, with the support of the Deputy Head and the Headmistress, where necessary. The Year 12 and 13 Tutors and the Head of Sixth Form will handle, initially, both pastoral and academic matters, again with the appropriate support.
- Should the parents' complaint refer to a particular teacher, then they may feel more comfortable with referring it to the Director of Studies, or if 'pastoral' in nature to the Deputy Head, who has special 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.

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. On the issue of misconduct, if it is a matter of child protection 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 2021' will be followed. 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. 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 a member of the Senior Management Team or the Headmistress, this matter should be taken directly to the Chair of Governors who will convene the independent panel as specified in this document.

- 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.

**The Form Tutor or Housemistress [or person to whom the complaint is brought] will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received and a full 'investigation' will be undertaken. Should the matter not be resolved within 10 days, [or a reasonable period to allow for reports etc.] or in the event that the Form Tutor or Housemistress 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 this Procedure.**

## **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 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 parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3** of this Procedure.

### 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 Chairman of the Governors' Governance Committee, 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 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, to whom the complaint has been made.** A copy of the findings are available on the School premises for inspection by the Chair of Governors and the Headmistress.
- 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
- A list of school policies and procedures is available on the school website.

If a Complaint arises during a holiday a practical timetable will be put in place to take account of possible absences.

**Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except in so far as is required of the school by paragraph 6(2)(j) of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2003; where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection; or where any other legal obligation prevails.**

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.

Records of complaints are retained in the Complaints file held by the Headmistress. Details of the Complaints Policy, and the number of complaints registered under the stage 3 formal procedure during the preceding school year, will be made available to parents of students and of prospective students and provided, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate. This information may be requested from the Clerk to the Governors.

### **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 procedures may contact ISI (Independent School Inspectorate), **CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA**, or via [concerns@isi.net](mailto:concerns@isi.net).

You may also contact the Children's Commissioner about your concerns:

[Contact us | Children's Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](https://childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

Children's Commissioner for England, Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT, 020 7783 8330.