



Guidelines for Staff on Dealing with Complaints from Parents

Introduction

It is both good practice and a legal requirement for schools to have written guidelines for handling concerns and complaints. This document should be read in conjunction with F02 Complaints Procedure for Parents and C05 Guidance Note for Pupils with a Concern.

If in doubt at any stage members of staff should consult a member of the Senior Management Team (SMT).

The aim of the policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and that it is resolved as soon as possible. To do so is good practice, it is fair to those concerned and helps to promote both parents' and pupils' confidence in our ability to safeguard and promote our pupils' welfare.

As a School, we wish to be a community that listens and is able to respond in a positive, appropriate and sympathetic fashion when concerns are raised. This is helped where the culture of the School is open and complaints are received in a positive manner.

The Nature of Complaints

Whilst parents will often wish to voice concerns on behalf of their children, there are other issues which pupils may choose to broach on their own behalf and which may best be raised in such fashion.

Separate procedures apply in the event of the following: a Safeguarding (Child Protection) issue; if the Headmaster expels or asks a pupil to leave and the parents seek a Governors' Review of that decision; if you are the recipient of a complaint from another member of staff.

Parental Complaints

An Open Organisation: Climate and Culture

Problems are likely to arise if parents feel that the School is not open to their concerns. It is better to have a direct complaint to a member of staff than to have parents sharing their dissatisfaction with others. Parents like to feel valued and involved with the School. As such they should be encouraged to voice concerns if these exist. This process is helped if the culture of the School is open and if complaints are received and dealt with in a positive manner.

- The School should be open and willing to listen to parents and pupils.
- Parents should feel comfortable in contacting the Headmaster, the Head of Year, the Form Tutor, or any member of staff.
- Staff should feel comfortable dealing with complaints.

Effective management of complaints can defuse problems and can provide the School with helpful information. Complaints, if treated as constructive suggestions, can be used to improve standards and may prevent cause for further complaint. Even an unjustified complaint may serve to indicate an area that can be improved.

Date updated	May 2018	Date ratified by Governors	June 2018
Date for next review	May 2020	Reason for review	Biennial review

What Constitutes a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem about which the parent seeks the School to take action.

A complaint may be made if a parent or pupil thinks that the School has:

- done something wrong;
- failed to do something it should have done;
- acted unfairly or impolitely.

A complaint may be directed towards the School as a whole, at a specific department within the School or at an individual member of staff.

All complaints need to be handled seriously and according to due process.

It is important that a complaint should not be taken personally.

A gentle expression of concern, or a simple query, may grow into a painful matter if parents feel that they have been brushed aside. Equally, issues with the potential to become acutely difficult may dwindle and fade if they are handled well at the initial stage. An unresolved problem may become a festering dispute or a confrontation.

Staff should not think of complaints as either "formal" or "informal". Parents sometimes raise serious issues in an informal and friendly way; equally, apparently trivial issues may be raised in an adversarial manner. Complaints against members of staff need particularly sensitive handling.

All complaints need to be recorded.

Lines of Approach

The Complaints Procedure for Parents (Staff Handbook, section F2 Hampton School; Staff Handbook, page 29 Hampton Prep) sets out a three-stage process:

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

Stage 2 - Formal Resolution

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

Every member of staff is expected to familiarise himself/herself with this procedure. If you have any questions about it then please ask either the Headmaster or any member of the SMT.

If a member of staff is approached about a matter that lies outside their remit, he/she should refer it to the appropriate person and should inform the parents that he/she has done this. Some parents may wish to go straight to the Headmaster with their concerns, and their right to do this should be respected. However, it should be explained that the Headmaster might not be able to respond until he has consulted the relevant staff. Written responses to complaints must be cleared either by a member of the SMT or by the Headmaster. If in doubt, play safe.

Reducing Anxiety

Because the person who complains may feel vulnerable, the School can reduce anxiety by taking the matter sensitively and by dispelling any uncertainty about how seriously their complaint will be handled.

- Information given to parents about the complaints procedure should be clear. On request, parents should be given a copy of the document “F02 Complaints Procedure for Parents”, which is available from the School Offices (Hampton School or Hampton Prep), the Bursary, or on Firefly F02 Complaints Procedure for Parents 2018.
- The School should endeavour to acknowledge a written notification by telephone, fax, e-mail or letter within five working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable in the School holidays. Should the matter not be resolved within a reasonable period (one not normally exceeding two term-time weeks) or in the event that the relevant staff and the parents fail to reach a satisfactory resolution within three working days, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of the Procedure.
- Complaints should be acknowledged immediately if possible and always within five working days. Staff should inform parents what is happening with their concern or complaint; if a more detailed response is needed, then parents should be given notice of the date by which a response will be received. The issue should be dealt with as quickly as possible.
- The nature of the complaint and the concern(s) of the complainant should be clear. If it is not immediately obvious then:
 - i) the parents may need more time to explain;
 - ii) they might be asked to come into School to discuss their concern;
 - iii) they could be asked to put their concern in writing.
- It may be helpful to discuss possible outcomes.
- Parents need to feel that their views matter and that the issue they have raised is being taken seriously.

Recording

Members of staff should keep careful summary notes of all that is said and done. These notes should be contemporaneous or at least made as soon after the correspondence/meeting with parents has taken place; notes should be dated.

The School keeps a formal log of all such complaints:-

- Patterns in the record may indicate a need for action.
- The Headmaster should be able to check the log and be able to report on it regularly to the School Governors.
- School inspectors will wish to see the log as evidence of the School’s approach to complaints.

The log should contain the following information:-

- date when the issue was raised
- name of parent
- name of pupil
- brief statement of issue
- location of detailed file
- staff member(s) handling the issue and with whom it was discussed
- brief statement of outcome
- action taken by the school (regardless of whether the complaint was upheld)

Files on complaints should be maintained and kept together, and be cross-referenced with other records as necessary. The files should contain simple but clear notes of all conversations with

parents about any source of dissatisfaction. This applies to friendly chats and to telephone conversations, as misunderstandings easily arise. There should be a clear statement of what is concerning the complainants.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important issue for pupils, parents and staff. It is essential that any complaint is treated in a confidential manner and with respect and shared on a need to know basis. It should be noted, however, that a Safeguarding (Child Protection) issue cannot involve a guarantee of confidentiality if the matter needs to be referred to the relevant agencies.

Parents often seek an assurance of confidentiality before expressing their concerns. If, for example, they wish to discuss a particular member of staff they may fear that their child will suffer in some way because they have complained.

The question of confidentiality should be discussed sensitively and on an individual basis with the parents and the School's policy should be carefully explained.

It should be made clear to all concerned that it is the School's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children and similarly that complaints raised by pupils should not rebound on them or on other pupils.

It may be possible to deal with a problem without naming individuals. However, even if no names are given, the source of the complaint may be clear. Depending on the nature of the complaint and on the circumstances, it may be impractical to investigate without identifying the member of staff or the pupil – it may also be in the best interests of the pupil to do so.

Staff members are rightly concerned that they should know about complaints that might be damaging to their reputation. Such complaints will be known only to themselves and to those who have to be consulted. The School is aware of the need to provide support for staff against whom a complaint is made; a senior colleague who is not otherwise involved can provide such assistance if it is required.

Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints may occur where there is no indication of either name or address, or where the complainants say that they do not wish to be identified. They may come from members of the public, from parents or from pupils.

Parents and pupils should be encouraged to give their names and should be given reassurance on the issue of confidentiality. If they persist in wishing to remain anonymous, it is at the Headmaster's discretion as to what action, if any, should be taken, depending on the nature of the complaint.

Anonymous allegations related to a Safeguarding (Child Protection) issue should be handled under the Safeguarding (Child Protection) guidelines.

Resolution

Sometimes the very acknowledgement of an issue by the School brings satisfaction to parents. Satisfaction for a complainant may come from any, some or all of the following:

- knowing that changes have been made, and that matters will be different in future;
- knowing that the School is now alert to a possible problem;
- feeling that their concern has been considered seriously;

- an outcome which might be different from the one they sought, but which they perceive to be well-considered and fair;
- a considered letter;
- an apology.

At the conclusion of matters, parents should receive a summary. This should cover:

- the issues raised;
- how the issues were considered;
- the people consulted;
- the action that is to be taken;
- an apology, if appropriate.

Intractable Complaints

Most issues can be resolved if approached in a positive fashion. If a complaint becomes intractable, it may be due to its nature or to the way in which it was handled, or possibly because the parent perceives the School to have 'closed ranks' against him or her. There may be a small minority of persistent or aggressive complainants, whose concerns cannot be successfully resolved. The School may even discover on investigation that a complaint was without foundation or motivated by malice. Nevertheless, it is necessary to treat all complaints seriously and to follow the procedures as set out in the School's Complaints Procedure for Parents (Staff Handbook, section F2 Hampton School; Staff Handbook, page 29 Hampton Prep).

APPENDIX 1 – Early Years Foundation Stage

EYFS settings must investigate written complaints relating to their fulfilment of the EYFS requirements and notify complainants of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of having received the complaint. The record of complaints must be made available to Ofsted upon request.

It is, therefore, our duty to inform parents of Ofsted's address. Accordingly, we have included their contact details in the document F02 Complaints Procedure for Parents.

Ofsted's contact details are as follows:

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester M1 2WD

General helpline : 0300 123 1231; textphone number : 0161 618 8524.