



OLD BUCKENHAM HALL

A leading co-educational preparatory school for children aged 2-13 years

Complaints Policy OBHP05

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Policy owner: Headmaster

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Statement of intent

Old Buckenham Hall has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a Concern or Complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the school in accordance with this policy. It is the school's wish to be a community that listens and is able to respond in a positive, appropriate and sympathetic fashion when Concerns and Complaints are raised.

All Concerns and Complaints need to be handled seriously. An expression of Concern, or a simple query, may grow into a contentious matter if it is perceived that the issue has been brushed aside. Equally, issues with the potential to become acutely difficult may be resolved if they are handled well at the initial stage.

General Principles

Complaints which are made anonymously will generally not be considered under this Policy.

Wherever possible, complaints should be made within three months of the relevant incident or circumstances. Complaints may be considered after this timescale in exceptional circumstances.

Where this policy provides for a particular stage to be undertaken by a particular member of staff of the school and that person is unavailable for whatever reason, the school shall delegate or transfer the responsibilities to such member of staff as it deems appropriate to undertake such stage.

Where this document refers to parents of a pupil, it shall be deemed to include guardians or other persons given responsibility for the welfare of a pupil, as appropriate.

Timescales, in this policy, are set out in terms of days. Days shall mean Monday through Friday, excluding public holidays, in term time.

The Complaints Policy for Old Buckenham Hall is intended to apply solely for parents of current registered pupils of the School. The policy does not apply to parents of prospective pupils and only applies to past pupils if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still registered. The Policy does not cover exclusions which are governed by the Behaviour Policy.

What Constitutes a Concern or Complaint

A Concern is an instance where a parent informs the school, whether orally or in writing, that school has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done, or where it has acted unfairly in its dealing with a pupil. A Concern may be raised about the school as a whole, a specific department or activity, or an individual member of staff. This list is not exhaustive, and the school shall treat any expression of dissatisfaction, whether real or perceived, as a Concern. The Concern should be raised with a member of the Senior Management Team. A Concern is dealt with under Stage One of this policy and is considered to be an informal complaint.

A Complaint is any instance where a parent notifies us, in writing to the Headmaster, that the school has done something wrong or failed to do something that it should have done. It is anticipated that in most cases any Complaint will have first been raised as a Concern and Stage One of this policy will have been completed.

Overview

The procedure for raising a Concern or bringing a Complaint to the school is set out below and comprises

of three stages:

- Stage One: Informal resolution for Concerns
- Stage Two: Formal resolution
- Stage Three: Panel hearing

Stage One - Informal Resolution for Concerns

It is hoped that most Concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.

If parents wish to raise a Concern about an educational issue (relating to the classroom, the curriculum, or provision for learning difficulties and disabilities / special educational needs) or a pastoral or co-curricular issue (relating to matters outside the classroom) they should contact their pupil's Form Tutor. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway.

If the Form Tutor cannot resolve the matter, it may be necessary to consult the relevant Head of Department, Head of Section or one of the Deputy Heads.

A Concern relating to a financial matter should always be made in writing and addressed or personally delivered to the Director of Finance & Operations.

A Concern raised directly with a Deputy Head will usually be referred for further action to the pupil's Form Tutor unless the Deputy Head deems it appropriate for the Concern to be otherwise dealt with.

When dealing with any Concern the school will make a written record to include the essential details and the date on which it was raised. Wherever possible the school will acknowledge a written Concern by telephone, email or letter within five 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 if the Concern cannot be brought to a satisfactory resolution, then the parents will be advised to proceed with a Complaint in accordance with Stage Two of this Policy.

Stage Two - Formal Resolution

If a Concern cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should make a Complaint in writing to the Headmaster. Full written details of the nature of the Complaint, any relevant materials or documents and full contact details should be sent by the parents in an envelope addressed to the Head and posted or personally delivered to the correspondence address detailed on the school's website. The Headmaster will acknowledge the Complaint within five days of receiving it. In most cases and wherever possible, within ten days of receiving the Complaint, the Head will contact the parents concerned to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

The nature of the Complaint may require the Head to carry out further investigations. The Head may ask any member of staff to act as investigator and/or may involve one or more of the school's Governors. If a Complaint is received within two weeks of term ending, the Complaint is likely to take longer to resolve owing to school holidays and the unavailability of personnel.

After full consideration of the Complaint, including discussions with all relevant parties and the completion of any necessary investigations, the Headmaster will determine the course of action to be taken by the school.

The School will keep a written record of all meetings and interviews held in relation to any Complaint. Wherever possible, the parents will be informed in writing of the decision of the Headmaster within twenty days of the Complaint being made. The Headmaster will give reasons for the decision.

If a Complaint is made against the Headmaster, the complaint should be put in writing to the Chair of Governors, c/o the Clerk to the Governors, at the School's principal address. Such a Complaint will be dealt with under Stage Two of this Policy with the Chair adopting the role identified for the Headmaster. Where there is any written Complaint relating to EYFS (meeting requirements) the school will notify parents of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days.

If the parents are not satisfied with any decision reached under Stage Two of this Policy, they should proceed to Stage Three.

Stage Three - Panel Hearing

If the parents seek to invoke Stage Three, they will be referred to the Clerk to the Governors for a Panel Hearing. Requests will normally only be considered if the parents have completed Stage Two of this Policy and then have made a request in writing to the Clerk to the Governors within ten days of receiving the Stage Two decision from the Headmaster. The parents should clearly set out the detail of their dissatisfaction with the Stage Two decision and the grounds of their Complaint. The parents should include with their letter a list of documents or materials that they believe the school is in possession of and that they wish the panel to see.

The Clerk will acknowledge the parents' request in writing within five days of receipt and will call a Panel Hearing on behalf of the Chair of Governors. A Panel Hearing will be called as soon as is reasonably practicable, normally within twenty days of receiving the parents' request. The Panel will not normally sit during the school holidays.

Save in exceptional circumstances, the Panel will not consider any new area of Complaint which has not been raised previously as part of the Complaint.

The Chair of Governors may nominate members of the Panel ensuring that no Panel member is themselves subject of or in any other way related to or conflicted by the Complaint. The Panel will consist of at least three people not involved in the matters detailed in the Complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. The Chair shall nominate the chairmanship of the Panel.

If the Complaint is made against the Chair of Governors, the Vice Chair of Governors shall adopt the role set out for the Chair of Governors in Stage Three of this policy.

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 no later than five days prior to the hearing.

The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend, for example. As this Policy is conducted under the auspices of the School's Policies and Procedures, legal representation is not thought to be necessary. However, should the parents wish to be accompanied by a legal representative the school must be notified in writing at least five days before the hearing and the School will then be entitled to have its own legal representative in attendance at the hearing.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the Complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. If the Panel decides that further investigation is necessary, the hearing may be adjourned.

Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.

After due consideration of all facts, it considers relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which shall be completed within ten days of the hearing or as soon as reasonably practicable.

Having reached a decision, the Panel (through the Clerk to the Governors) will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it as soon as practically possible. The Panel's findings and any recommendations will also be sent in writing to the Headmaster, the Governors and, where relevant, the person(s) about whom the Complaint was made. Such findings and recommendations shall be available for inspection on the School premises by the proprietor and the Headmaster.

The decision of the Panel will be final.

Confidentiality

Parents can be assured that all Complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. It may, from time to time, be necessary for the School to disseminate details of a Complaint to members of the School community to facilitate a full and thorough investigation, by making a Complaint the parent(s) agree to this dissemination. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential by the Headmaster's office and will only be made available, as and when required, to the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection in line with the School's obligations under the Education and Skills Act 2008; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

A summary of Complaints, in a format which ensures confidentiality, is brought to the attention of the Governors at the termly meetings.

Records of Complaints

The school maintains a 'Complaints & Concerns Log' which will be managed by the Headmaster. This log will be an electronic record of key Complaint and Concern information and brief details of the procedure followed and will state whether the matter was resolved. The log will also record any action(s) taken by the school as a result of those Complaints or Concerns.

As well as the aforementioned log, full written records will be kept of all Complaints, to include all correspondence, statements, and other documents or materials. These written records will be kept for three years after the determination of the Complaint and will be kept confidential except when the School is required to disclose information by:

- the Secretary of State for Education under paragraph (k) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2014;
- the Independent Schools Inspectorate under Sections 108, 109 and 110 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, as amended;
- other legal authority

Review

The Senior Management Team of the School will review the Complaints & Concerns log at least once in each academic year. Stage One concerns are kept under on-going review by the Headmaster.

APPENDIX 1: Time Scales (for Guidance Only)

Timescales of each stage of the procedure are set out below. It should be noted these are the maximum time scales that the school would reasonably expect a Concern or Complaint to be resolved or otherwise determined.

Timescales, in this policy, are set out in terms of days. Days shall mean Monday through Friday, excluding public holidays, in term time. Complaints received during the School holidays may be expected to take longer.

Stage One - Informal Resolution for Concerns

Day 1 - Concern made

Day 5 - school acknowledges the Concern in writing

Day 10 - Concern resolved or parents advised to proceed to Stage Two

Stage Two - Formal Resolution

Day 1 - written Complaint received by the Headmaster

Day 5 - Headmaster acknowledges receipt of Complaint

Day 10 - Headmaster has been in contact with parents to discuss Complaint

Day 20 - Headmaster writes to parents to confirm decision

Parents have 10 days from receipt of the Headmaster's Stage Two decision letter to request a Stage Three Panel Hearing.

Stage Three - Panel Hearing

Day 1 - Appeal request received by the Clerk to Governors

Day 5 - Clerk acknowledges receipt of appeal request

Day 20 - Panel Hearing completed

Day 30 - Panel will write to parents informing of the decisions