

THE ARTS EDUCATIONAL SCHOOLS, LONDON DAY SCHOOL AND SIXTH FORM

COMPLAINTS POLICY

STATEMENT OF INTENT

At the Arts Educational Schools, London, we pride ourselves on our openness and approachability as an educational organisation. The school welcomes the expression of opinions, ideas and suggestions, and, in particular, recognises the right of parents, pupils, students and staff to air a grievance, express a concern or make a formal complaint. Concerns and complaints are always taken seriously and it is our aim to resolve them in the most satisfactory manner possible.

In the event of a parent, pupil or member of staff wishing to express a concern or make a complaint, we encourage the complainant to bring the matter to our attention as early as possible. This gives us the opportunity to try and rectify a problem or to explain the school's position before a matter escalates. If you are in any doubt as to whether or not to raise a concern, we encourage you to contact us for further advice.

Policy aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sensitively, efficiently and at the appropriate level so that it may be resolved as soon as possible. Parents, carers and pupils should never feel that a complaint will be taken lightly or that a complaint could adversely affect their opportunities at this school. However, the policy distinguishes between a difficulty that can be resolved informally and a formal complaint that requires investigation.

Introduction

Policy status

The Headteacher, the Principal and the Chair of the Secondary School Sub-committee of the Arts Educational Schools, London, have approved the policy. It provides guidelines for handling concerns and complaints. The procedures, set out below, may be adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and the circumstances of each case. Certain procedures can only be carried out during term time and it may, therefore, be the case that a complaint made during the school holidays will not be resolved within the timeframes that are referred to in this policy (usually because some instrumental/relevant people are unavailable).

Application

This policy does **not** apply to any matter relating to child protection/safeguarding (see our Safeguarding Policy). Similarly, any complaints that emerge from a situation whereby a pupil has been permanently excluded or has been asked to leave are covered by our Exclusion Policy rather than in this Complaints Procedure.

Coverage

This policy covers current pupils and parents/legal guardians. The Complaints Procedure also applies to past pupils if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still registered, and it does not cover exclusions (refer to the Exclusions Policy).

The stages of the Complaints Procedure: this policy describes a three-stage procedure

Stage 1: An informal raising of a concern or difficulty, made orally or in writing to a member of staff.

Stage 2: A formal complaint made in writing to the Headteacher.

Stage 3: A renewed complaint in writing to the Principal, who has been appointed by the Governors/Trustees to call hearings by the *Complaints Panel*.

If a parent wishes to raise a complaint against the Headteacher, they should proceed directly to Stage 3 of the procedure.

A concern about the safety of a child should be brought immediately to the attention of the Headteacher or the Designated Safeguarding Lead (Claire Parker-Wood), who will usually bring the concern to the Headteacher.

Confidentiality

A written record will be kept (by the Headteacher) of all complaints made in writing under the formal part of the Complaints Procedure. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be considered confidential, except to the extent required by paragraph 7 (k) of the *Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003*, as amended – that is, where access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of an inspection or under another legal authority. In accordance with data protection principles, the details of individual complaints will normally be destroyed following each school inspection. In exceptional circumstances, some details will be retained for a further period as necessary.

STAGE 1: INFORMALLY RAISING A CONCERN OR COMPLAINT ORALLY OR IN WRITING

Introduction

Our aim is to ensure that concerns are dealt with quickly and effectively. We expect that most concerns, where a parent or pupil/student seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken, can be resolved informally.

Examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, a billing error or a matter regarding school equipment.

Who should you send your informal complaint to?

- *Academic and Pastoral Matters:*

If a parent has a concern or an informal complaint, they should normally contact their daughter/son's Form Tutor. The latter can be contacted via the School Secretary or via email. In many cases, the matter will be resolved quickly by this means to the parent's satisfaction. If the Form Tutor (in consultation with the subject teacher, if necessary) cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult the relevant Head of Key Stage/Department, who may also involve a member of the Senior Leadership Team, depending on the nature of the complaint.

These staff members are as follows:

- Natalie Bareham (Director of Performing Arts)
- Julia Collura (Director of CPD and Careers Education)
- Thamir Elzubaidi (Director of Curriculum and Data Management)
- Mark Ferrington (Director of Sixth Form)
- Claire Parker-Wood (Deputy Headteacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead)

Stage 1 complaints made directly to the Headteacher will usually be referred to the relevant Form Tutor or their line manager, unless the Headteacher deems it appropriate for them to deal with the matter personally.

The Form Tutor/subject teacher or the relevant member of the Senior Leadership Team will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Once the matter has been looked into, the member of staff will contact the parent, explain their findings and discuss appropriate courses of action. These would be acted upon if necessary; the matter might be reviewed at a further date, or be closed. Documents relating to the investigation will be given to the relevant Head of Key Stage and placed in the pupil's file, if appropriate.

Should the matter not be resolved within 15 working days, whenever possible, or in the event that the Form Tutor/subject teacher or their line manager 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 the Complaints Procedure. If the informal complaint is made during school holidays, the school will aim to resolve the matter within 15 days of the return to school.

- *Concerns about Financial Matters:*

A query relating to fees or disbursements should be stated in writing to the Finance Director.

Acknowledgement

We will acknowledge a written expression of concern by telephone, fax, email or letter within two working days of receipt during term time and as soon as possible in the holidays.

A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing but the parent will be urged to follow up the conversation in writing to the staff member involved and the School Secretary, if appropriate.

Record of informal complaints

The School Secretary will keep a record of general informal complaints regarding academic and pastoral matters received via email/letter. Parents who raise a concern orally will be urged to follow up the conversation with an email/written letter to the School Secretary/Form Tutor.

If the concerns raised are about a particular staff member, the Deputy Headteacher will keep a record of the matter as the content may be more sensitive.

Unresolved concerns

A concern that has not been resolved by informal means within 15 working days should be expressed in writing as a Formal Complaint, which will be dealt with in accordance with Stage 2 below.

STAGE 2: MAKING A WRITTEN COMPLAINT TO THE HEADTEACHER

Notification

Complaints will usually only progress to the formal stage after being considered at the preliminary informal stage.

If your concern still remains unresolved under Stage 1 or if the nature of your concern was more significant (concerning, for example, some aspect of the school's policies, procedures or management), resulting in the need for it be taken directly to Stage 2, please submit your complaint in written form. Full details and all accompanying documents should be submitted in an envelope addressed to the Headteacher.

Your complaint will be acknowledged via telephone or in writing within two working days during term time (otherwise within 28 working days), with the communication indicating the action that is being taken and confirming that a response will be provided within five working days. A Complaints Form will be completed (by the Headteacher alone or with assistance from the member of staff who has carried out the investigation). The Headteacher will then keep a record of this on file in his office.

Investigation

The Headteacher may ask a member(s) of the Senior Leadership Team to act as the investigator/s (if they were not involved in any aspect of the Stage 1 concern). They may ask for the person (pupil or parent) who has made the complaint for additional information and will probably want to speak personally to this person, and to others who know about the situation, in order to gather as much relevant information as possible.

The outcome of the investigation will be reported to the Headteacher, who will then notify (in writing) the person who initially raised the concern of the decision and its reasoning. This will be done within five working days in term time (otherwise within 28 working days) from the time of the complaint being acknowledged. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to a complaint.

If parents are still not satisfied with a decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Complaints Procedure.

The number of formal complaints from pre-ceeding school year can be found in **Appendix 1**.

STAGE 3: FORMAL COMPLAINT TO THE PRINCIPAL

The involvement of the Principal

If parents/carers seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the Principal, who has been appointed by the Trustees to call hearings by the *Complaints Panel*. The Headteacher will pass on all the information of the complaint to the Principal. The Principal will acknowledge to the complainant that this has happened by telephone or in writing within five school days during term time. During holidays, an acknowledgement will be provided as soon as is reasonably possible.

The Principal will then refer the matter to the *Complaints Panel* for consideration. The Panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the

school. The Principal, on behalf of the Panel, will then schedule a hearing to take place as soon as possible and within 28 working days.

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 will 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. It is not necessary for that person to be legally qualified, but if you do wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, acting in their professional capacity, it is important that you notify the school at least seven school days before the hearing.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. The Panel's decision may be expressed orally at the hearing, or subsequently, and will be confirmed in writing to you within seven working days. The reasons for the decision will be given. The decision of the Panel will be final. The decision may include recommendations and these will be sent to you, the Chair of the Governing body, the Headteacher and, where relevant, any person about whom the complaint was made. A copy of the findings and recommendations will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the relevant authorities, such as OFSTED and ISI.

The Workings of the *Complaints Panel*

The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Panel (usually the Principal) and will be conducted in an informal manner.

During the hearing, all the statements made will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Chairperson may direct that the hearing is tape-recorded to assist accurate recollection for the purposes of the decision. The Panel will be under no obligation to retain tapes thereafter. A member of administrative support will be asked to take handwritten minutes of the proceedings in any event.

The Chairperson will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel will be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses, but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.

All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners; if not, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chairperson. If the meeting is terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way in which the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his/her comment will be noted in the minutes.

The Chairperson may, at his/her discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue.

A hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in, or arising from, the proceeding will be made available, directly or indirectly, to the press or other media.

Review of Complaints Policy

Policy written:	August 2010
Policy written by:	Adrian Blake
Date policy reviewed by Trustee:	November 2016 (Diana Maine)
Next review date:	December 2017

Circulated to the Principal, Governing Body, and teaching staff. The policy will be made available to parents and pupils on the website and on request.

Appendix 1

Record of Formal Complaints 2015.2016

Number of formal complaints	How many proceed to a panel hearing?
1	0

Records relating to complaints made are confidential and recorded as per the policy protocol.