

Complaints Policy

Whole School & EYFS

Regulation ISSR: Part 7, 33
Reviewed and updated by: Mrs C Wood
Approval: Full Governor Board
Last Review: Autumn 2024
Next Review: Autumn 2025



This policy will be amended before the review date if necessary.

Introduction

Alderley Edge School for Girls has always been proud of its positive, friendly and supportive ethos and of the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. There are many people available and willing to help with any worries and difficulties that pupils might experience during their time at the School. We regard parents as essential and valued members of our community and aim for open and easy communication between home and school.

Where concerns are raised (a concern being an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought), we would hope to act upon it and provide the necessary reassurances as quickly as possible. A concern can be addressed in the as a complaint where a parent wishes their concern to be addressed formally. In such circumstances, the complaints procedure will be followed.

A ‘complaint’, throughout this policy, is defined as any matter about which a parent of a current registered pupil is unhappy, or expresses dissatisfaction about actions taken, or a lack of action, by the School and seeks action by the School.

If parents of current pupils have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with the following procedure. This Procedure applies to all parts of the School including the Preparatory School and the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The aims of this policy and related procedures are to provide a framework for the resolution of complaints which:

- allows for their resolution informally and sets out the School's formal procedures where this is not achievable;
- is easily accessible and publicised, simple to understand and use and impartial and non-adversarial;
- enables a full and fair investigation where appropriate;
- respects people's desire for confidentiality;
- addresses all the points at issue and provides an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
- provides information to the School's senior leadership team so that services can be improved and any systemic issues can be identified and addressed; and
- helps to promote a culture of safety, equality and protection.

The Board of Governors, as the proprietor of the School, has overall responsibility for all matters which are the subject of this policy.

This policy is published on the School's website and is available in hard copy on request. This policy can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required and the School will make other reasonable adjustments required to enable complainants to access and complete this procedure, such as holding meetings in accessible locations. The number of formal complaints registered under the formal procedure of this policy during the preceding academic year is published at the end of this policy.

There are also separate policies and procedures relating to the following:

- The Headmistress's decision to expel or require the removal of a pupil from the School, to which the School's Expulsion, Removal and Review Policy applies;
- Admissions decisions - please refer to the School's Admissions Policy;
- Subject Access Requests. Please see the School's Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notices;
- Safeguarding and welfare issues. Please refer to the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

This policy applies to complaints from a parent or parents of current pupils and to a parent or parents of former pupils if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was registered at the School. Anyone can make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that a school provides, unless separate statutory procedures apply (such as exclusions or admissions). The School will not normally investigate anonymous complaints.

References to a 'Parent', in relation to a child or young person, includes any person who is not a parent but who has parental responsibility, or who has care of a pupil. The process does not apply to complaints made by pupils.

If appropriate, the School will acknowledge that a complaint is upheld, wholly or in part. In addition it may offer:

- an explanation;
- an admission that it could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the School will try to ensure that the event complained of will not happen again and an explanation of the steps taken in this respect;
- to review policies and / or procedures;
- an apology.

All parents should be aware that it is not within the powers of those involved in the complaints process to make any financial award, such as claims for compensation, damages or fee refunds, or to impose sanctions on staff, pupils or parents.

All parents should be aware that regardless of the nature of a complaint and whether or not it is upheld, parents are not entitled to details of any related sanctions imposed on staff, pupils or parents for reasons of data protection and confidentiality.

Please note that there may be occasions when it is necessary or reasonable to deviate from this complaints procedure if this is reasonable and justified. Complainants will be notified of the changes.

Parents should raise any complaints directly and we reserve the right to modify the procedures in this policy as necessary to address complaints raised by more than one set of parents together.

Attention is drawn to the information included in the Appendix which is drawn from the Department for Education's Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2020 (updated Jan 2021).

Timescales

The School aims to resolve all complaints efficiently and promptly and parents are encouraged to bring any matter causing concern to the School's attention as soon as possible. Whenever possible, a complaint should be raised within three months of the incident, or where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. The School may consider complaints made after three months, but parents should be aware that most complaints will require the School to conduct an investigation and the ability to carry out a full and fair investigation, particularly where pupils may need to be interviewed, becomes increasingly difficult as time elapses. A complaint raised after three months should therefore include details of the issues which led to the delay.

When we refer to working days in this policy, we mean Monday to Friday, when School is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website. Complaints may be submitted during school holidays; timescales may vary but School will agree a timescale with parents as soon as possible during holiday periods.

Timescales for each stage of the complaints procedure are set out below in the relevant paragraphs.

- It is expected that the management of every complaint will progress in a timely manner.
- The School aims to resolve all complaints efficiently and promptly and parents are encouraged to bring any matter causing concern to the School's attention as soon as possible.
- Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay to the timescales for a stage of the complaints procedure (such as other bodies investigating aspects of the complaint), the School will notify the parents and inform them of the new timescales as soon as possible.

This policy has been prepared to meet the School's responsibilities under:

- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs);
- Education and Skills Act 2008
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR); AND
- Equality Act 2010.

The School's parent contract is also relevant to this policy.

Expected standards of behaviour

It is the intention of the School to deal with concerns and complaints fairly and work constructively with parents towards resolving them. As complaints will be dealt with confidentially, the School requests that complaints are not to be discussed publicly, including via social media.

There are three stages to the Complaint procedures, as follows:

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

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

- If parents have a complaint, they should normally contact their daughter's Head of Year in the Senior School or class teacher in the Prep School. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Year Head or class teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for her to consult a Head of Department / the Deputy Head etc.
- Complaints made directly to a Head of Department / the Deputy Head / Deputy Head of Prep/ Headmistress will usually be referred to the relevant Head of Year or class teacher unless the Head of Department / the Deputy Head etc. deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.
- A complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within 3 working days of receipt, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely timescales. Such action may include an investigation and/or a meeting with the parent.
- Wherever appropriate, the School will ask the parent at the earliest stage what they think might resolve the issue.
- The school will normally deal with the matter within **10 working days** of receipt of the complaint.
- The member of staff who has dealt with the complaint will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received on the appropriate Stage One Complaint Form. Details of the complaint and resolution will be also recorded on the School's Management Information System (CPOMS). The completed Stage One Complaint Form should be forwarded to the Head's PA to be recorded centrally.
- Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days, or in the event that the Year Head or class teacher 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.

Complaints about the Headmistress

The procedure for dealing with an informal complaint about the Headmistress is the same as any other matter. Alternatively, parents may choose to make their complaint about the Headmistress in writing to the Chair of Governors via the Clerk to the Governors (or their appointed stand in). In this case, the complaint will be treated as a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure (see below).

Complaints about the Governors

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole Board of Governors should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governors via the School office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential. Different procedures may apply.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- Complaints will usually only progress to Stage 2 after first being considered at the informal stage and only then if the parent indicates that they intend to escalate a matter to the formal stage.

- A formal complaint should be in writing addressed to the Headmistress usually within 15 working days from receipt of the response to their complaints and should include: the complainant's name, a copy of any relevant documents, full contact details of the complainant and details of the complaint and who it has previously been raised with and the outcome desired.
- The complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within 3 working days, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely timescales. The Headmistress will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Headmistress will meet with the parents concerned, normally within 10 working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for further investigations to be carried out and the Headmistress which may include some or all of the following steps:
 - Delegation of the investigation to a senior member of staff or third party. Where the investigation is conducted by someone else they will prepare a report on the investigation which will usually then be considered by the Headmistress.
 - Involvement of one or more Governors. request for additional information from the parents, including what they think might resolve the issue (if not already request under Stage 1)
 - A request for a conversation to speak to them personally and/or others with relevant knowledge of the circumstances to define the scope of the complaint and/or assist in the investigation.
- Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. Personal data may be redacted and names anonymised or cyphered in line with data protection principles.
- Once the Headmistress is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of 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. The Headmistress will notify the parents with her decision within 20 working days of receipt of the formal complaint.
- If parents are dissatisfied with the Headmistress's decision, they should request that the complaint be referred to a Complaints Panel under Stage 3 of this Procedure.

Complaints about the Headmistress

The procedure for dealing with a formal complaint about the Headmistress is as follows:

- The complaint should be put in writing to the Chair of Governors (via the Clerk to the Governors). The complaint should include the same information referred to above.
- The Chair of Governors (via the Clerk to the Governors) will acknowledge the complaint by telephone, email or letter within 3 working days of receipt and indicate the action that is being taken and the likely timescale. Such action may include an investigation and/or a meeting with the parent. The parent will usually receive a response to the complaint within 20 working days.

- If the parent is dissatisfied with the response to the complaint, the parent can request that the complaint be referred to a Complaints Panel under Stage 3 of this procedure.
- The Headmistress will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. These records will be logged on CPOMS.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If a parent is dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response, the parent can request a Complaints Panel Hearing. A Complaints Panel Hearing is a hearing to review those elements of the decision made at Stage 2 about which the parent remains dissatisfied. The panel is not obliged to consider any new complaints at this stage.

How to request a Hearing

A request for a Hearing must be put in writing to the Clerk to the Governors. It is expected that the complaints procedure will progress in a timely manner and parents should make the request within 5 working days of the decision complained of. The request will usually only be considered if the procedures at Stages 1 and 2 have been completed.

The written request should include:

- the complainant's name and full contact details
- copies of any relevant documents which the parent would like the panel to consider
- details of those aspects of the complaint about which the parent remains dissatisfied
- the desired outcome
- whether the parent wishes to attend the hearing and, if so, whether they propose to be accompanied; and
- whether the parent wishes to attend in person or remotely

If assistance with the request is required, for example because of a disability, please inform the Clerk to the Governors who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

The Clerk to the Governors will acknowledge the request for a Hearing within 3 working days of receipt and will convene the Panel. Every effort will be made to enable the Hearing to take place within 15 working days of receipt of the request.

Parents may withdraw their request for a Hearing at any point up to and including the intended date of the Hearing.

Planning the Hearing

- The Clerk to the Governors will send written notification to each party of the date, time and place of the Hearing at least 10 working days before the date of the Hearing.
- Copies of additional documents that the parent wishes the Panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk to the Governors to be received at least 7 working days prior to the Hearing.
- 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. The Clerk will circulate a copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the Panel to all parties not later than 3 working days prior to the Hearing.
- The parent may be accompanied to the Hearing by a relative or friend. The Hearing is an internal proceeding, not legal proceedings, and so legal representation is not necessary. The Clerk to the Governors must be given 5 working days' notice if the friend or relation is legally qualified. The parent should note that the Panel will wish to speak to him/her directly. The

legally qualified person will not be permitted to act as an advocate or to address the Hearing unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Panel.

- A person will be appointed to take a minute of the Hearing.

Composition of the Complaints Panel

- The Complaints Panel will comprise at least three individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint, including at least one Panel member who is independent of the management and running of the School. The other two members of the Panel will be Governors.
- The parent may ask the Clerk to the Governors to inform them who has been appointed to sit on the Complaints Panel ahead of the Hearing. Fair consideration will be given to any reasonable objection to a particular member of the panel.
- The Panel members will choose one of themselves to be the Chair of the Panel.

Role of the Complaints Panel

The role of the Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that remain in issue by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties; and any representations made by the parties
- to review the process and the decision reached at stage 2, and to consider, on the balance of probabilities, whether or not to uphold each complaint.

The Hearing

- Unless prior to the commencement of the Hearing, a parent confirms that they are satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, the Hearing will proceed notwithstanding that the parent may decide not to attend. In these circumstances, the Complaints Panel should consider the parent's complaint in his/her absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint.
- The Hearing will be conducted in an informal manner. The parties shall have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. The Hearing is not legal proceedings and the Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses to the issues complaints of but may do so and / or may take written statements into account.
- All statements made at the Hearing will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes.
- All those attending the Hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners. If they fail to do so and, after due warning, the Hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the Hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his / her comment will be minuted.
- The Chair may, at his / her discretion, adjourn the hearing if he/she considers it appropriate to do so. This may include an adjournment for welfare reasons, to enable additional information to be obtained and/or considered or for the parties to take legal advice on a specific issue arising.
- 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 shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.

Decision

- The Complaints Panel will make findings about each complaint on the balance of probabilities and may make recommendations about these issues.
- It is not within the powers of the Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils or parents. The Panel may make recommendations on these matters or any other issues to the Headmistress and / or to the Board of Governors.
- The minutes of the complaints panel Hearing, together with the Panel's findings and any recommendations will usually be provided in writing to the parents and, where relevant, the person complained about, within 7 working days of the Hearing.

Next steps

- The decision of the Panel is final. There will be no further opportunity within the School for consideration of the complaint. The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the School's complaints procedure.
- The School will however ensure that the panel decision is recorded appropriately and that any recommendations made in the course of a complaint are properly considered and actioned as appropriate.
- The complaints panel's findings and any recommendations including any actions taken to implement them will also be made available for inspection on the School premises by the Board of Governors and the Headmistress.

Record keeping and confidentiality

- All records created in accordance with this policy are managed in accordance with the School's policies that apply to the retention and destruction of records.
- A written record will be kept of all formal complaints and of whether they have been resolved at the Stage 2 or have proceeded to a Panel Hearing including the action taken by the School as a result of the complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).
- Parents can be assured that all complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a Body conducting an Inspection under section 108 or 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, requests access to them or where disclosure is required under other legal authority or court order.
- The records created in accordance with this policy may contain personal data. The School has a number of privacy notices which explain how it will use personal data about pupils and parents. The privacy notices are published on the School's website.
- School staff will ensure that they follow the School's data protection policies and procedures when handling personal data created in connection with this policy. This includes the School's information security policy.
- In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will be kept only for as long as is reasonably necessary in the circumstances.
- Complaints which do not have safeguarding implications will be retained for a minimum of four years (a period determined by the three-year inspection cycle with allowance for unforeseen circumstances).

Complaints to the Independent Schools Inspectorate

- ISI can be contacted at concerns@isi.net or on 020 7600 0100.

Training

- The School ensures that regular guidance and training is arranged on induction and at regular intervals thereafter so that staff and volunteers understand what is expected of them by this policy and have the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out their roles.
- The level and frequency of training depends on the role of the individual member of staff.

Appendix 1 - Unreasonable complaints

We are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with us. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this can be regarded as vexatious and outside the scope of the policy.

Unreasonable complaints are taken seriously by the School as they put a strain on valuable resources and hinder the progress of proper investigations.

We adopt the Department for Education definition of unreasonable behaviour which hinders our consideration of their or other people's complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the School, such as if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where our complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate;
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- knowingly provides falsified information;
- publishes unacceptable information social media websites and other public forums.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if it is manifestly unjustified, inappropriate, or an improper use of formal procedure. In assessing this, the School shall have regard to all the

circumstances of the case and the nature of the complaint itself rather than the nature of the complainant.

In assessing all of the circumstances of the case the School will consider a range of factors including:

- whether a complaint has reasonable foundation;
- the history and context of the complaint (and any evidence where relevant);
- whether the time and cost of investigating the complaint is proportionate to the issue(s) complained of;
- whether an investigation of the complaint is likely to cause a disproportionate or unjustified level of disruption, irritation or distress;
- unexplained delay in raising a complaint or issue;
- if the complainant is seeking an outcome which is unavailable via the complaints policy, such as a claim for compensation, damages or a refund of fees paid;
- any evidence of a complaint being brought for an improper purpose.

Whenever possible, the Headmistress will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before dismissing a complaint as unreasonable. The Headmistress will normally only do so after consultation with the Chair of Governors. If the behaviour continues, the School will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, the school may specify methods of communication and limit number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after 6 months. In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the School will immediately inform the police and communicate its actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the School.

Appendix 2 - EYFS – Additional requirements applicable for EYFS setting beyond those which apply to the main school.

- Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days. The record of complaints will be available to Ofsted and ISI on request.
- If parents believe the School is not meeting EYFS requirements, then ISI and/or Ofsted can be contacted as follows:

Independent Schools’ Inspectorate, Ground Floor, CAP House, 9-12
Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA
Telephone: 020 7600 0100 Email:
concerns@isi.net

Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1
2WD General Helpline 0300 123 1231 Textphone
0161 618 8524 Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Appendix 3 - Record of formal complaints received

Academic Year	Number of Stage 2 (Formal) Complaints	Number of Stage 3 Complaints (Panel Hearing)
2020 – 2021	9	1
2021 - 2022	1	0
2022 – 2023	2	0
2023 – 2024	4	0

Appendix 4: Complaints Procedure – Independent Member of the Panel

The DFE has supplied the following guidance in a letter to the ISC General Secretary:

Whilst we do not intend to be proscriptive our general view is that suitable people would be those who have held positions of responsibility and who are used to analysing evidence and putting forward balanced arguments / points. It would add credibility if independent panel members had some standing in the local community. In this connection serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background – perhaps retired members of the Police Force – might be considered suitable by schools. Schools will have their own views and may well have other suitable suggestions to make. ISI Regulations also make clear that the panel member should be independent of the management and running of the School.