



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE (Parents)

Introduction

Shrewsbury School aims to deliver excellence in the quality of teaching and pastoral care provided to all pupils. However, if parents do have a concern or complaint, they are encouraged to contact the school. Shrewsbury School always welcomes suggestions and comments from parents. It takes seriously any complaints raised by them and they can expect the issue to be treated with care and respect by the school.

Shrewsbury makes its complaints procedure available to all parents of pupils, prospective pupils and former pupils on the school website. A copy can be requested from the school reception or directly from the Headmaster's Office at any time.

In accordance with paragraph 32(1)(b) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Shrewsbury School will make available to parents of pupils and of prospective pupils and provide, on request, to the Chief Inspector, The Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate, details of this complaints procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the previous school year.

This Complaints Procedure explains how to express a complaint and how complaints will be addressed.

We wish to ensure that:

- parents wishing to make a complaint know how to do so;
- the school responds to complaints within a reasonable timeframe and in a courteous and efficient way;
- parents know that we will always listen and take complaints seriously;
- we take action where it is deemed appropriate to do so.

This Policy applies to complaints from parents of current pupils, prospective pupils and to parents of former pupils as well as former pupils themselves if the complaint was raised when the pupil was registered at the School.

Defining key terms

A concern (informal) is understood to be a query over the actions and practices of the school (in any area and at any level) expressed either in writing or in person to a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

A complaint (formal) is understood to be an expression of serious dissatisfaction made in writing to the Headmaster. A complaint is most likely to arise if a parent believes that the school has done something wrong, failed to do something it ought to have done or acted unfairly.

The term **working days** refers to term time, not the school holidays, and should be interpreted as Monday to Friday, when the School is open. The dates of terms are published on the School's website.

Concerns Procedure

The Concerns Procedure offers a way for parents to resolve concerns informally and, hopefully, quickly by discussing an issue with an appropriate person at school, usually a member of staff, and, through such discussion and any resultant outcome, being reassured that the matter has been, or is being, satisfactorily dealt with and need not be taken further.

Most queries can be dealt with at a local level by contacting tutors or HSMs and this is often the route to an efficient and effective resolution. However, if a parent feels that the issue is of a more serious nature – or that it has not been resolved satisfactorily through this first avenue – then they are welcome to raise a concern either in writing or in person to a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

Parents should be as clear as possible about the nature of their concern and they are probably best advised to communicate, in the first place, with a member of staff most closely involved. Being a house-based school, the HSM would normally be the first point of contact to listen to the concern and may then refer it to the most appropriate person.

Concerns expressed directly to a member of the Senior Leadership team will usually be referred to a HSM, tutor, or Head of Faculty who will often be best placed to provide a speedy and effective resolution.

While parents are always welcome to contact any member of the Senior Leadership Team about any issue, areas of particular responsibility are as follows:

- Concerns over the school's general academic provision, pupil progress, the delivery of qualifications, the options process, the timetable and the administration of public exams.
(Deputy Head Academic)
- Concerns relating to the teaching and learning of particular teachers or faculties.
(Director of Teaching and Learning)
- Concerns relating to sports, drama, music and other co-curricular activities.
(Deputy Head Co-Curricular)
- Concerns relating to the school's pastoral provision, house life and the wellbeing of pupils.
(Deputy Head Pastoral)
- Concerns relating to the conduct of particular members of the school community (including teaching staff, support staff and pupils).
(Second Master)

The School will endeavour to respond to informal complaints within five working days, and resolve the issue as quickly as possible.

When a concern is received, the relevant staff member will log it on a centrally held database, recording the time and date received, the pupils concerned and a concise overview. That member of staff will then arrange for a brief investigation to be carried out.

If further action is needed at this juncture, this will also be recorded in the centrally held database. The person raising the concern will receive feedback on the investigation and the action taken (so long as it is appropriate to do so).

If, however, matters appear not to have been satisfactorily resolved through such informal consultation, or if it is felt that, given the nature of the concern, this procedure is inappropriate, parents may wish to consider making a formal complaint, the procedure for which is explained below.

Should the matter not be resolved satisfactorily within five working days, the parent is advised to proceed with the matter as a complaint (described in the second section of this procedure).

The SLT will review the log of concerns at the end of every term to ensure that there are no persistent patterns of behaviour in particular areas and to monitor the general level of concern among the pupils, staff and parents.

If a parent has a concern about the Headmaster, this will constitute a complaint and should be made directly to the Chairman of Governors.

Formal Complaints Procedure

This procedure is designed to enable parents to express a complaint in writing and to receive a formal response, within a reasonable and clear time-scale, from the school. It also represents the continuation of the concerns procedure above in such circumstances as a complaint has not been satisfactorily resolved.

How to use the formal complaints procedure

If a parent is dissatisfied with the results of the Concerns Procedure, or feels that informal discussion is inappropriate to his or her complaint, he or she may send a formal written complaint to the Headmaster either by hand or via electronic mail. If the complaint concerns the Headmaster directly, the parent should write to the Chair of Governors whose details can be found on the school website or supplied by the School Reception.

Any complaint formally expressed in writing by a parent will receive a reply from the school within five working days of the school having received the parental letter. The school's reply will explain the proposed course of action in response to the expressed complaint and the likely time-scale. Most complaints can be speedily resolved in this manner.

If appropriate, the Headmaster will ask a senior member of staff to act as investigator and may involve one or more Governors. The investigator may request additional information from you and may wish to speak to you personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. The investigator will prepare a report on the investigation which will be considered by the Headmaster.

If the complaint is made against the Headmaster, the Chairman of Governors will call for a full report from the Headmaster and for all relevant documentation. The Chairman may also carry out his own investigation and will, in most cases, speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further.

When a complaint is made against a member of staff, or members of staff, those individuals have the right to understand its nature and origin.

Decision

The Headmaster will respond within 28 working days from the day when a formal complaint is received, explaining the outcome of the complaint and the conclusion to which the Headmaster has come in response to it, including any proposed action.

In cases where the complaint is against the Headmaster, once the Chairman is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision and

proposed actions in writing within 28 working days from the date of the formal complaint having been received. The Chairman will provide reasons for the decision.

Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay, the parents will be notified of this and informed of the new timescales as soon as possible.

If a parent is dissatisfied with the decision, the parent can request that the complaint be referred to the Appeal Committee.

Appeal Committee

An Appeal Committee hearing is a review of the decision taken under the formal complaints procedure by the Headmaster (or the Chair of Governors where the formal complaint concerns the Headmaster). The Appeal Committee will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure.

The role of the Appeal Committee is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:

- a) the documents provided by both parties and
- b) any representations made by the parents and the Headmaster

and to reach a decision, on the balance of probabilities, as to whether to uphold each complaint in whole or in part.

It is not within the powers of the Appeal Committee to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils or parents. The Appeal Committee may make recommendations to the School on these matters or any other issues as appropriate.

How to request a hearing

If the formal complaints procedure does not bring about a resolution, the parents may request an Appeal Committee hearing. The request must be put in writing to the Clerk to the Governors (the Bursar).

The Clerk to the Governors will acknowledge the request within three working days. The hearing will take place as soon as is practicably possible and, in any case, within 21 working days of receipt of the request.

Composition of the Appeal Committee

The Appeal Committee is appointed by or on behalf of the Chair of Governors and consists of at least three people, who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, and one of whom is independent of the management and running of the school.

The Appeal Committee members will appoint one of themselves to be the Chair throughout the proceedings.

Planning the hearing

It is the task of the Appeal Committee to assess the complaint in an impartial and confidential manner and to consider all relevant evidence. Copies of any documents the parents wish the Appeal Committee to consider should be sent to the Clerk to the Governors (the Bursar) to be received at least five working days prior to the hearing.

If the Appeal Committee deems it necessary, they may request that additional materials are supplied or further investigation undertaken in advance of the hearing. Such information should be supplied to the committee not less than five working days prior to the hearing.

The complainant will be welcome to attend the hearing by the Appeal Committee and may be accompanied by a relative or friend. The hearing is not a legal proceeding, so legal representation would

not be appropriate. If the complainant does wish to be accompanied by someone who is legally qualified, the Clerk to the Governors should be notified of this at least five working days prior to the hearing and the parents should note that the Appeal Committee will wish to speak to the parents directly. This person will not be permitted to act as an advocate or to address the hearing unless invited to do so by the Chair.

The Clerk to the Governors will circulate a copy of the documents to be considered by the Appeal Committee to all parties at least three working days prior to the hearing.

The hearing

The parties shall have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. 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. A clerk appointed by the Appeal Committee will take a minute of the proceedings.

All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, 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 for further investigation of any relevant issue. This may include an adjournment to take legal advice.

When the Chair of the Panel considers that all the issues have been sufficiently discussed, he/she will conclude the hearing.

The decision

The Appeal Committee will reach a decision on the balance of probabilities unless there is an agreed position.

The decision of the Appeal Committee will be final, and a copy of its findings, together with any recommendations, will be despatched within three working days of the hearing by electronic mail or otherwise to the complainant and, where relevant, to the person complained about. Also, a copy of the findings of the Appeal Committee, together with any recommendations, will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Governing Body and the Headmaster.

The completion of the Appeal Committee stage represents the conclusion of the School's Complaints Procedure. Failure of the parents to attend a Hearing without good cause or due notice shall not invalidate the proceedings or any decision that the Panel may reach.

Written record of complaints

A written record of all formal complaints, including a record of whether or not they were resolved at the formal complaint procedure stage or proceeded to a hearing of the Appeal Committee, the actions taken by the school as a result of the complaint (whether or not it was upheld) and whether the complaint related to the school's boarding provision is kept by the school in the Headmaster's office for regular review by the Headmaster and his senior staff.

The following details will be included in this record: the date the issue was raised, the name of the parent, the name of the pupil, a description of the issue, a record of any investigation (if appropriate), witness statements (if appropriate), the names of members of staff handling the issue at each stage, copies of all correspondence including emails and records of any telephone conversations.

The number of formal complaints registered during the preceding school year will be supplied to parents on request and is published on the school website.

Confidentiality

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of an inspection or under other legal authority under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008.

In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will be kept only for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in the circumstances.¹

Wider Considerations

It is the school's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children. Similarly, pupils at the school should be reassured that they will not be penalised if they or their parents lodge a complaint in good faith.

We cannot entirely rule out the need to make third parties outside the school aware of a complaint or of the identity of those involved. This would happen where, for example, a pupil's safety is at risk or where matters need to be referred to the police. In such a circumstance, parents would be kept fully informed subject to the School's safeguarding obligations.

Complaints will be resolved either to the complainant's satisfaction, or with an otherwise appropriate outcome which balances the rights and duties of pupils.

As a school we recognise and acknowledge the entitlement of parents and pupils to complain and wish always to work in the best interests of the pupils under our care, bearing in mind their rights and duties.

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¹ In accordance with the terms of reference of the Goddard Inquiry all Schools are required to retain information which relates to allegations (substantiated or not) of organisations and individuals who may have been involved in, or have knowledge of child sexual abuse or child sexual exploitation; allegations (substantiated or not) of individuals having engaged in sexual activity with, or having a sexual interest in, children; institutional failures to protect children from sexual abuse or other exploitation. Records of any relevant complaints should be retained indefinitely.