



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Responsible member of SLT: **Susie Brooks**

Review date: **September 2023**

Next review: **September 2024**

Alton School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have any concerns or complaints, the School will deal with them using the following procedures.

What Constitutes a Complaint?

A complaint is (a) any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the School or (b) an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff and is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, or failed to do so something that it should have done, or has acted unfairly.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially.

The Complaints Procedure applies to all parents of (a) current pupils, (b) prospective pupils, and (c) former pupils but only where the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still registered. This procedure is available to download on the School's website and is available from the School Office during the School day. This procedure may not apply to the Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS), which adheres to the Early Years Welfare Regulations and has its own complaints procedure, see Appendix 1. Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue or if the Headmaster excludes a pupil or asks a pupil to leave. Please refer to the Behaviour and Discipline Policy and Safeguarding policies.

In this procedure "working day" means Monday to Friday inclusive during term time except a day on which the School is closed, e.g. a bank holiday or half term.

The School requires all stages of the complaints procedure to be followed in the order set out below. It is hoped that matters will be resolved at the earlier stages, however, each stage is described in what follows.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution: School

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint or concern, they should contact their child's form or class teacher. In most cases, the matter will normally be resolved within 5 working days, by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the teacher considers that he/she cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult with other staff, ie Head of Department or Director of a School within the school, who will work with the teacher in trying to resolve the complaint. At this point, normally within a further 5 working days.
- Whoever deals with the concern or complaint will make a written record of the issue and the date on which the complaint was received, and also a written record all discussions with the parents. Should the matter not be resolved as soon as reasonably practicable, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution: School

- Where any concern or complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis then the parents should write to the Headmaster. It may be necessary for the Headmaster to carry out further investigations.
- In most cases, the Headmaster will meet or speak to the parents, normally within 5 working days of receiving the complaint under Stage 2 if in term time, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- The Headmaster will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the concern or complaint. These will include any action taken by the school as a result, and whether they were resolved at the informal or formal stage or proceeded to a Panel Hearing.
- Once the Headmaster is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, he will inform the parents of his decision in writing normally within 10 working days of the complaint being made under this stage. The Headmaster will also give reasons for his decision.
- Complaints about the Headmaster should be made to the Clerk to the Governors at the School, who will pass the complaint to the Chair of Governors, who will appoint a suitable representative.
- If parents are not satisfied with the decision, they may proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the School's target is thus to complete the first two stages of the procedure normally within 20 working days if the complaint is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable at other times, but in any event within eight weeks.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If, following a failure to reach a resolution under Stage 2, parents wish to invoke Stage 3, they should write to the Clerk to the Governors at the School, asking them to refer the complaint to a Panel. At the request of the Clerk, the Chairman of Governors will convene the Panel and refer the complaint to it.

- Where practicable the timescales set out above will be observed. However, if a delay is unavoidable, for example in seeking information from a third party during any investigation, parents will be informed of the delay and updated appropriately.
- Where a parent is not satisfied with the School's response to their complaint at stage two and indicates a wish to continue to stage three, for compliance purposes a panel hearing should take place unless the parent later indicates that they are now satisfied and do not wish to proceed further. The panel hearing should, therefore, proceed notwithstanding that the parent may subsequently decide not to attend. If necessary, the panel should consider the parents' complaint in his/her absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion. The requirement for the panel to proceed does not prevent the School from accommodating parental availability for dates or considering comments concerning panel composition.
- Stage 3, the Panel Hearing, will normally be completed within a further 20 working days, if the appeal for a Panel hearing is lodged during term-time, and as soon as practicable at other times but in any event within eight weeks after receipt by the School of the parents' request under this stage.
- The Panel will consist of at least three people 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 Panel members will be appointed by the Chairman of Governors who will appoint one of them to be its chairman. The Chairman of the Panel will then schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 15 working days after receipt by the School of the parents' request under this stage, if within term time.
- 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 normally be supplied to all parties not later than 5 working days before the date of the hearing.
- The parents may be supported at the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. The identification of any proposed companion should be confirmed to the Panel in advance of the hearing.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately, without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out and ensure that the complainants are fully aware of these investigations
- After due consideration of all the facts the Panel consider relevant, the Panel will make its findings and recommendations. The Panel will write to the parents normally within 15 working days of the hearing informing them of its findings and recommendations. The decision of the Panel is final. The Panel's findings and recommendations will also be passed in writing to the Headmaster, the Governors and, where relevant, the person in respect of whom the complaint was made.

Following resolution of any concern or complaint at Stage 2 or 3 of this procedure, the School will keep a written record of the complaint and whether it is resolved at Stage 2 or proceeds to a Stage 3 panel hearing. The school will also record any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint.

At the School's discretion, additional records may be kept which may contain the following information:

- Date when the issue was raised
 - Name of parent
 - Name of pupil
 - Description of the issue
 - Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
 - Witness statements (if appropriate)
 - Name of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
 - Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
 - A copy of the findings will be provided to the complainant and the person complained about.
- These will be available for inspection in the school by the proprietors and headmaster.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except to the extent required by paragraph 33(k) of the Schedule to the Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, whereby disclosure may be required by the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Sections 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008.

All records of complaint will be kept for ten years for inspection by the Governors and the Headmaster.

During the previous academic year, Alton School received no Stage 3 – Panel Hearing complaints.

Signed on behalf of Alton School

Susie Brooks

Deputy Head

Appendix 1 - Early Years Department Complaints procedures (formerly Early Years Complaints Policy, now part of the whole school complaints Policy)

All EYFS providers 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.

Alton Early Years Department (incorporating the Reception Year) believe that children and parents are entitled to expect courtesy and prompt, careful attention to their needs and wishes. We welcome suggestions on how to improve our service and will give prompt and serious attention to any concerns or complaints about the running of the Early Years Department. We anticipate that most concerns or complaints will be resolved quickly by an informal approach to the appropriate member of staff. If this does not achieve the desired result, we have set procedures for dealing with concerns or complaints. We aim to bring all concerns or complaints about the running of our Early Years Department to a satisfactory conclusion for all the parties involved. The complaints procedure, Appendix 1 of the School's complaints policy, is available on the School website or a hard copy may be obtained from the office. Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue, please refer to the Safeguarding policies.

Procedures

The Early Years Department requires all stages of the complaints procedure to be followed in the order set out below.

In this procedure "working day" means Monday to Friday inclusive, except on a day on which the Early Years Department is closed, e.g. a bank holiday, Inset days, or in some instances, school holiday if the complaint were to proceed to stage 4.

These procedures apply to children who are currently attending our Early Years Department. It only applies to children who may have left, if the concern or complaint was raised prior to them having left the Early Years Department.

The Early Years Department is required to keep a written record of all complaints and their outcome. This will be made available to Ofsted or ISI inspectors on request.

Making a complaint

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

(does not form part of the 28-day requirement if in relation to fulfilment of the EYFS unless a formal written complaint)

- Any parent who has a concern or complaint about an aspect of the Early Years Department's provision talks, in the first instance, to the child's key person if appropriate or to the Nursery Manager. In most cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction.

- If the Nursery Manager feels she cannot resolve the matter alone she will inform the Director of Lower School who will work with the Nursery Manager in trying to resolve the concern or complaint as appropriate.
- The person dealing with the concern or complaint will make a written record, the date on which it was received, the discussions with parents, along with details of how the concern or complaint was resolved. Most concerns or complaints should be resolved amicably and informally at this stage within 5 working days. ***This does not form part of our 28 days at this stage unless a formal written complaint.***
- If the complaint is against the Nursery Manager, the complaint should be referred to the Director of Lower School.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution: School

- Where any concern or complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their concern or complaint in writing to the Director of Lower School and the Headmaster (Alton School). It may be necessary for the Director of Lower School and the Headmaster to carry out further investigations, if that is the case, parents will be informed.
- In most cases, the Director of Lower School and the Headmaster will meet or speak to the parents to discuss the matter. This will normally be within 5 working days of receiving the concern or complaint under Stage 2 if during the school term time. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- The Director of Lower School and the Headmaster will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the concern or complaint. These will include any action taken by the school as a result, and whether they were resolved at the informal or formal stage or proceeded to a Governor.
- Once the Director of Lower School and the Headmaster are satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, the Director of Lower School and/or the Headmaster will inform the parents of their decision in writing within 5 working days (if during school term time) of the complaint being made under this stage. The Headmaster and the Director of Lower School will give reasons for their decision.
- If parents are not satisfied with the decision, they may proceed to stage 3 of this Procedure.
- If the complaint is against the Director of Lower School she will not be involved at stage 2 above. If the complaint is against the Headmaster, the Chairman of Governors will appoint another Governor, to investigate the complaint. The procedures stated in stage 2, with the necessary changes, will apply.

Stage 3 - Formal Resolution: Governor

If, following a failure to reach a resolution under Stage 2, parents wish to invoke Stage 3, they should write, within 10 days, to the Clerk to the Governors at the school, who will pass the complaint to the Chair of Governors.

- The Chair of Governors will appoint the most suited Governor to investigate the complaint.
- The appointed Governor will investigate the matter and will respond to the parents within 15 working days of receiving the complaint. Written records will be kept of all complaints received, the steps taken to investigate the complaint and any action taken as a result.
- Where practicable the timescales set out above will be observed. However, if a delay is unavoidable, for example in seeking information from a third party during any investigation, parents will be informed of the delay and updated appropriately.

Stage 4 – Panel Hearing

If, following a failure to reach a resolution under Stage 3, parents wish to invoke Stage 4, they should write to the Clerk to the Governors at the school, asking her to refer the complaint to a Panel. At the request of the Clerk, the Chairman of Governors will convene the Panel and refer the complaint to it.

- After due consideration of all the facts the Panel consider relevant, the Panel will make its findings and recommendations. The Panel will write to the parents within 8 working days of the hearing if during school term time, informing them of its findings and recommendations. The decision of the Panel is final. The Panel's findings and recommendations will also be passed in writing to the Headmaster, the Head of Early Years, and the Governors and, where relevant, the person in respect of whom the complaint was made.
- The timescales set out above will be observed in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework. However, if delay is unavoidable, for example in seeking information from a third party during any investigation, parents will be informed of the delay and updated appropriately.

Recording Complaints

Following resolution of any concern or complaint at Stage 2 or 3 of this procedure, the Early Years Department will keep a written record of the complaint and whether it is resolved at Stage 2 or proceeds to a Stage 3 or Stage 4: panel hearing.

The Early Years Department complaints record will also record the following:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of pupil
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate) including how the complaint was managed
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Any action taken as a result of the complaint

The outcome of all complaints are available for Ofsted and ISI inspectors on request.

The role of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and the Local Safeguarding Children Board

Parents may approach Ofsted or ISI directly at any stage of this complaints procedure. In addition, where there seems to be a possible breach of the Early Years Department's registration requirements, it is essential to involve Ofsted as the registering and inspection body, who have a duty to ensure the Welfare Requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage are adhered to.

- OFSTED can be contacted at: Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD or via their Helpline: 0300 123 4666 or website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/complaints-procedure>
- ISI can be contacted at: Independent Schools Inspectorate, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA or by telephone: 020 7600 0100 or via their website: www.isi.net/contact
- These details are displayed on our Early Years Department's notice board.
- If a child appears to be at risk, our Early Years Department follows the procedures set out in our Safeguarding policies and that of the Local Safeguarding Children Board in our local authority. In these circumstances, both the parent and Early Years Department are informed and the Head of Early Years and the Headmaster Alton School, works with Ofsted, ISI, or the Local Safeguarding Children Board to ensure a proper investigation of the complaint, followed by appropriate action.

Inspection

- Alton School will notify parents when a whole school inspection, or an Early Years Inspection, is to take place once they have been notified. On receipt of the final report, a copy will be provided to parents of all children who attend the school or Early Years Department.