

COMPLAINTS POLICY



Introduction

Birchfield School prides itself on the quality of teaching and pastoral care provided for its pupils. However, if parents have a complaint they can expect the school to follow this procedure. The policy aims to set out the procedure for parents to follow in a clear fashion. It applies to all parents of pupils, meaning current registered pupils, **including the Early Years Foundation Stage**. It does not apply to parents of prospective pupils. It does apply to past pupils but only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still registered. There is no provision for complaints from pupils. A complaint is classed as any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the school.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. If parents have a complaint or concern they should normally contact the relevant form teacher. In many cases the matter will be resolved at this point to the parents' satisfaction. If the form teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult the Head of Pre-Prep, Head of Prep or Head of Senior School, as appropriate. Concerns made directly to the Headmistress or other senior staff will usually be referred to the relevant form teacher.

The form teacher will make a written record of all concerns and the date on which they were received. The written record will be passed to the Head of Prep or Head of Senior School. Should the matter not be resolved within 5 working days or in the event the form teacher and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed to Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution of a Complaint

If the concern cannot be resolved on an informal basis then the parents should put their complaint or concern **in writing** to the Headmistress at which point the school shall treat it as a complaint. The Headmistress will decide, after consideration, the appropriate course of action to take. In most cases the Headmistress will speak with the parents concerned within 5 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 the Headmistress to carry out further investigations.

The Headmistress will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. The Headmistress will use all reasonable endeavours to conclude her investigations within 10 working days of receiving the complaint and will communicate her decision to the complainant in writing within 5 working days thereafter.

If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3.

Stage 3 – Holding of a Panel Hearing

Upon receipt of the written decision, if parents seek to involve Stage 3 of this procedure, they are to write to the Headmistress informing her of their decision to do so within 20 working days, whereupon the matter will be referred to a hearing before a panel appointed by or on behalf of the Advisory Committee.

The panel will consist of at least three persons who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. One of these shall be independent of the management and running of the school and outside of the Advisory Committee as well as not being involved in school life e.g a solicitor who regularly acts for the school. The complaint will be acknowledged on behalf of the panel and a hearing scheduled to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 10 working days.

If the convenor of the panel and/or the panel members deem it necessary, they may require (in writing) that further particulars of the complaint or any other related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than five days before the hearing. Any such further particulars received within five days before the hearing shall be disregarded and inadmissible to the panel because it may not be possible to provide copies to all parties within that timescale.

If the complaint is still unresolved, a panel hearing will be held which allows for a parent (or parents) to attend and be accompanied if they wish. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. A copy of all panel findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, and will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Advisory Committee and the Headmistress.

If possible, the panel will resolve the parent's complaint at the hearing without the need for further investigation. However, should the panel decide at the hearing that further investigation is required, the panel shall decide how such investigations should be carried out and by when they should be concluded. The panel will reconvene and, after due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, will reach a decision and may make recommendations. This procedure will be completed within fourteen days of the first hearing wherever possible but within twenty-eight days in any event unless otherwise agreed with the parents. The panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision together with the reasons. The decision of the panel will be final.

If a parent does not exercise the right to attend a panel hearing, the school will hold the hearing still in conformity with the policy. The panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the Headmistress, Chair of the Advisory Committee and, where the complaint relates to an individual, to that individual.

In the absence of exceptional circumstances, the panel will respond to the complaint in writing within 14 days of its receipt.

All Complaints

All written complaints which fall under the formal part of the procedure will be logged and a note will be made of whether they are then resolved or proceed to a panel hearing. They will be kept for at least three years. Parents can be assured that all complaints and concerns will be treated seriously and confidentially.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential under the ISSRs paragraph 477 (k) except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

The school will supply ISI and/or Ofsted with a written record of complaints and their outcomes on request.

ISI may be contacted on www.isi.net or on telephone number : 020 7600 0100.

The complaints procedure does not cover exclusions.

A complaint against the Headmistress should be put in writing to the Chair of the Advisory Committee who will follow the procedure set out in Stage 2.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

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 made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.

Parents who have a complaint in respect of the School's EYFS provision (Reception Class) may contact the Independent School's Inspectorate (ISI) as above or Ofsted in addition to following the School's procedure in the following ways :

By letter :
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

By email : enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
By telephone : 0300 123 1231/0300 123 4666

A record of any complaint in respect of the EYFS will be kept for at least three years.

Responding to Complaints

Complaints should be brought to the attention of the School within a set period of twelve months from the date of the incident or matter occurring.

The number of complaints for the previous year is available upon request from the school office.