

# COMPLAINTS: POLICY & PROCEDURES

## Documents consulted

- Independent Schools Inspectorate Commentary on the Regulatory Requirements September 2017
- Department for Education Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2016

This policy covers the requirements for Early Years Foundation Stage, Primary and Secondary Schools.

## Definition

Any matter about which a parent/guardian of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the School is considered to be a complaint and is in the scope of the procedures detailed within this policy.

## Introduction

Manchester High School for Girls is an independent school and as such is a self-regulating community independent of the state system of education. It has a culture based on mutual dependence of all its elements. Its integrity depends on everyone working towards the common aims and objectives and adhering to the policies and procedures of the school.

The school aims to work cooperatively and in partnership with parents/guardians. It is recognised, however, that there are times when there will be issues that are not resolved to the satisfaction of parents/guardians, and that they will wish to make a complaint.

If parents/guardians or students do have a complaint, the School will treat it in accordance with the policy and procedures detailed below, which comply with the requirements of the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2014 under the Education and Skills Act 2008. It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly, sensitively and informally. Responding to complaints will be given the highest priority by the School and will be dealt with comprehensively.

## Information to Parents/Guardians

The School makes the complaints policy available to parents/guardians of students and of prospective students

- via the School's website
- as a copy for inspection on school premises during the school day.

Parents/guardians are made aware of this

- via the Parent Handbook, issued in June/July
- if they request the complaints policy.

## Principles

The School takes feedback from all stakeholders very seriously.

The investigation into a complaint should begin on the day of its receipt where possible and practicable.

Staff should listen carefully and patiently to complaints. Even if the complaint is ill-founded, it is a matter of concern to the parent/guardian and/or the student.

Parents/guardians and/or the student/s should be asked to put their complaint in writing. This is to ensure that there is no misinterpretation of the complaint and thus no conflict over the action taken.

If the issue is simple (for example, a student is upset at the insensitive behaviour of one of her peers) and within the competence and authority of the member of staff receiving the complaint to resolve quickly, this should be done and the Head of Year / Head of Preparatory Department informed at the earliest opportunity via an Interview Form.

With regard to more serious complaints (such as a complaint about the quality of teaching or insensitivity by a member of staff), an Interview Form will be completed by any member of staff receiving a complaint. The

parent/guardian/student should be reassured that the complaint will be passed via the Interview Form to the relevant senior staff, in the first instance normally the Head of Year / Head of Preparatory Department, who will follow Stage One of the Procedure overleaf.

If the complaint concerns a Child Protection issue the complaint should be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead: Deputy Head (Pastoral) in Senior School or Head of the Preparatory Department as appropriate. Very serious complaints of other types (for example, racial abuse) should be referred directly to the Deputy Head (Pastoral) or Head of the Preparatory Department as appropriate .

If the complaint concerns an allegation of abuse by a member of the school staff (for example, inappropriate relationships between a student and a member of staff), the complaint should be referred immediately to the Head Mistress. If the Head Mistress is not available or if the allegation involves the Head Mistress, suspicions should be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead who will contact the Chair of Governors.

## **Confidentiality**

All complaints-related documentation, whatever stage the complaint is resolved at (see below), will be stored in a confidential file by the Head Mistress. This will include correspondence from and to the complainant, statements and other records. Information on a complaint relating to a particular member of staff will be stored in the confidential file of that member of staff. A summary list recording the date and nature of the complaint and action taken by the School will be stored by the Head Mistress.

Complaints records and related documentation will be made available to an ISI inspection team on request.

Documentation about a complaint will be stored on school premises for at least three years.

## **Independent Schools Inspectorate**

The School is inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate. (Independent Schools with no Early Years Foundation Stage below the age of three are not required to be registered with Ofsted.)

ISI contact details are available on their website. They may be contacted by telephone by parents/guardians wishing to make a complaint on 020 7776 8849.

# Informal and formal procedures for responding to complaints

## Stage 1 Informal resolution

- If parents/guardians have a complaint, they should normally contact their daughter's Head of Year or the Head of the Preparatory Department. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the Head of Year or the Head of the Preparatory Department will refer the complaint to a more appropriate member of staff; for example it may be necessary to consult the Deputy Head (Teaching and Learning), the Deputy Head (Pastoral), the Director of Co-Curriculum or the Director of Sixth-Form in the Senior Department.
- In many cases, the matter will be resolved quickly by this means to the parents'/guardians' satisfaction. If the complaint involves the quality of teaching in the Senior School, the Head of Department will normally be consulted by the Head of Year prior to any discussion with the subject teacher concerned, and the Head of Department may be involved in any interviews. Parents/guardians may expect to have a response, even if not the final response, to their complaint **within** two working days of having made the complaint.
- Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, Head of Preparatory Department, Deputy Head or the Head Mistress will usually be referred to the relevant Head of Year or Preparatory Class Teacher unless it is felt to be more appropriate that the recipient of the complaint should deal with the matter personally.
- The Head of Year/ Head of Department will make a written record, on a School Interview Form, of all concerns and complaints, the date on which they were received and the action taken. This will be passed, on completion of the investigation, to the relevant member of senior staff who will evaluate the response to the complaint. The Stage 1 Complaints Form will then be completed and forwarded to the PA to the Head Mistress for storing.
- If a student in the Senior School has a serious complaint, she should be advised to discuss her concern with her Head of Year in the first instance. (If the student lacks confidence to do this, she should be advised to ask her parents to contact the Head of Year on her behalf.)

Should the matter not be resolved **within one working week** or in the event that the Head of Year or relevant member of senior staff and the parents/guardians fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents/guardians will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

## Stage 2 Formal resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, the parents/guardians should put their complaint in writing to the Head Mistress. The Head Mistress will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action.
- In most cases, the Head Mistress, following her investigation of the issues, will meet the parents/guardians, normally **within ten working days** of receiving the written complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. It may be necessary for the Head Mistress to carry out further investigations.
- The Head Mistress will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Head Mistress is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents/guardians will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head Mistress will also give reasons for her decision.
- If parents/guardians are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

## Stage 3 Panel Hearing

- If parents/guardians seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be advised to contact the Chair of Governors in writing, via the Clerk to the Governors at the School. The Chair of Governors will set up a Complaints Panel and will call a hearing by this Panel.
- The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three members not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the School. Two of the three members may be Governors of the School.  
The independent member of the panel should be a person who has held a position of responsibility and who is used to analysing evidence and putting forward balanced arguments/points. Serving or retired business people, civil servants, head teachers or senior staff at other schools and people with a legal background might be considered suitable.

Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Governing Body. The Chair of Governors, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint in writing and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally **within 10 working days** of a meeting with the Panel.

- If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter may be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties **not later than 5 working days prior to the hearing**.
- The parents/guardians may be accompanied to the Panel Hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- If possible the Panel will resolve the parents'/guardians' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.
- Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all the facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete **within 10 working days of the Panel Hearing**. The Panel will write to the parents/guardians informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing, and at the same time, to the parents/guardians, the Head Mistress, the Governors and, where relevant, the person complained of. A copy of the findings will be available in the School for inspection by the Chair of Governors and the Head Mistress.
- Parents/Guardians can be assured that all concerns and 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 body conducting an inspection (ISI) requests access to them.

# Responsibilities

## The Governing Body will

- Check against the Regulatory Requirements, approve and advise on the complaints policy and procedures
- Appoint Panel members
- Receive reports on the number of formal complaints
- Appoint one Governor to monitor the implementation of the School Complaints Policy

Mrs Sue Beales (Governor) will monitor the implementation of the School Complaints Policy.

## The Head Mistress will

- Take responsibility for the efficient implementation of the policy and procedures
- Hear parental/guardian appeals from decisions on complaints handled by other staff
- Present the School's case where the parent/guardian appeals to the Governing Body
- Report on complaints annually to the Governing Body
- Make written records of complaints available to Ofsted or ISI on request.

## The Deputy Head (Teaching and Learning) will

- Organise general staff training on how to deal appropriately with complaints
- Support Heads of Department in handling complaints relating to health and safety issues or teaching and learning (course programme/ unsatisfactory teaching/ too much or too little homework/ progress in a particular subject)
- Evaluate the School's response to complaints relating to academic concerns
- Collate records of relevant complaints dealt with at Stage I and submit these on the Complaints Form to the Head Mistress and to the PA to the Head Mistress

## The Deputy Head (Pastoral) will

- Oversee the regular updating of the policy
- Handle complaints relating to Child Protection and complaints about serious matters and discuss these with the Head Mistress
- Support the Heads of Year in handling complaints relating to pastoral and welfare concerns (discipline/ indiscipline/ inappropriate sanctions; bullying; overall academic progress of the student/ unhappiness of the student)
- Evaluate the School's response to complaints relating to pastoral concerns
- Collate records of relevant complaints dealt with at Stage I and submit these on the Complaints Form to the Head Mistress and to the PA to the Head Mistress

## Director of Sixth Form will:

- Support the Heads of Year in handling complaints relating to pastoral and welfare concerns (discipline/ indiscipline/ inappropriate sanctions; bullying; overall academic progress of the student/ unhappiness of the student)
- Evaluate the School's response to complaints relating to sixth form concerns
- Collate records of relevant complaints dealt with at Stage I and submit these on the Complaints Form to the Head Mistress and to the PA to the Head Mistress

## Director of Co-Curricular will:

- Handle complaints relating to transport, trips and extra-curricular activities
- Liaise with relevant members of staff as appropriate in resolving complaints
- Collate records of relevant complaints dealt with at Stage I and submit these on the Complaints Form to the Head Mistress and to the PA to the Head Mistress

## Heads of Year will:

- Deal with, and where possible, resolve complaints about overall student progress, discipline issues and pastoral care
- Liaise with Heads of Department in resolving complaints about academic matters, programmes of study and teaching methods

- Keep a record of each complaint (Stage 1/Informal complaints) and the action taken by the School to resolve the complaints. This should be documented on an Interview Form, submitting the form to the appropriate member of senior staff as soon as the investigation into the complaint is complete.
- Liaise with the student's Form Tutor if appropriate

#### **Heads of Department will:**

- Work with Heads of Year and the teacher about whom the complaint is made to resolve complaints about academic matters, programmes of study and teaching methods
- Keep a record of each complaint (Stage 1/Informal complaints) and the action taken by the School to resolve the complaints. This should be documented on an Interview Form, submitting the form to the appropriate member of senior staff as soon as the investigation into the complaint is complete

#### **The Head of the Preparatory Department will**

- Handle all complaints relating to the Preparatory Department.
- Collate records of complaints dealt with at Stage 1 and submit these on the Complaints Form to the Head Mistress and to the PA to the Head Mistress
- Ensure that written complaints made by parents/guardians about the School's fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within **20 working days**
- Provide parents/guardians with the available details of how to contact Ofsted or ISI if they do not believe that the Preparatory Department is meeting the EYFS requirements

Ofsted	ISI
Piccadilly Gate	CAP House
Store Street	9 – 12 Long Lane
Manchester	London
M21 2WD	EC1A 9HA
0300 123 1231	020 7600 0100
<a href="mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk">enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk</a>	<a href="mailto:info@isi.net">info@isi.net</a>

Make written records of complaints available to Ofsted or ISI on request

#### **The Bursar will**

- Handle complaints relating to finance, accommodation, facilities or contract
- Collate records of such complaints dealt with at Stage 1 and submit these to the Head Mistress and to the PA to the Head Mistress

#### **All staff will**

- Be responsible for hearing any complaints brought to them by parents/guardians or students and for reassuring them that their complaint will be dealt with as soon as possible, and sensitively, by the appropriate member of staff
- Inform the relevant member of senior staff of the complaint, according to procedures outlined above

**There were 16 complaints in writing to the Head Mistress in the 2017-18 academic year, none of which progressed to Stage 3.**

**Policy reviewed by A.C. Hewitt (January, 2018)**

**Approved by Governors at Academic Development Committee January 2018**

## Stage I Complaint form

Name of parent/guardian making complaint .....

Name of daughter ..... Form .....

Member of staff receiving complaint .....

Date and time of receipt of complaint .....

Nature of complaint

*Include names of any members of staff involved* .....

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*Attach any parental/guardian letters of complaint.*

**Action taken / by whom?**

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**Outcome**

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**Complaint passed to** ..... **Date / time** .....

**To be stored in the Head's confidential complaints file**