

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Queen Margaret's School is proud of the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if boarders, parents or staff do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this procedure which is available to all via the school's website. Boarding handbooks, given to all girls at the start of each academic year, detail how concerns can be addressed. In addition, the 'Worries and Complaints' procedures displayed throughout the boarding areas provide contact information for various external agencies.

The Complaints procedure is in three sections:

Stage 1 Informal Resolution

Stage 2 Formal Resolution

Stage 3 Panel Hearing

Most complaints are resolved at stage 1 but if the complainant is not satisfied they can escalate the process to the next stage. If a Panel Hearing is required the decision reached by the Panel is final.

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and **informally**.
- If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their daughter's tutor or housemistress. Concerns about academic matters should be raised with the tutor; concerns about food, behaviour or other pastoral issues should be raised with the relevant housemistress. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the tutor cannot resolve the matter it is then referred to the Year Head and if the housemistress is unable to resolve the issue it is referred to the Head of Boarding. If the Head of Year, Housemistress or Head of Boarding cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him or her to consult the Deputy Head.
- Complaints made directly to a Head of Department/the Deputy Head/the Headmaster will usually be referred to the tutor, Year Head, Housemistress or Head of Boarding in the first instance unless he or she deems it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
- The tutor, Head of Year, housemistress or Head of Boarding will make a **written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received**. Should the matter not be resolved within two weeks or in the event that the Head of Year or Head of Boarding and the parent **fail to reach satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with stage 2** of this Procedure. A written complaint should receive a written reply. Copies of any such correspondence will be sent to the Headmaster.

Stage 2 - Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents will be requested to **put their complaint in writing** to the Headmaster. The Headmaster will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Headmaster will meet or speak with the parents concerned, normally **within 5 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 Headmaster to carry out further investigations. Parents will be given an opportunity to respond to the additional information.
- The Headmaster will **keep written records** of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Headmaster is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will then be made by the Headmaster and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Headmaster will also give reasons for his decision.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

Stage 3 - Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to The Chairman of Governors, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel.
- **The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration.** The Panel will consist of two governors not involved in the procedure and a third person not involved in the running of the school. **Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Board of Governors.** The Chairman of Governors, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally **within 14 days**.
- 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 be supplied to all parties not later than 5 days prior to the hearing.
- **The parents may be accompanied to the 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' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation, by balancing the rights and duties of the pupil without unreasonable delay, to the complainant's satisfaction, or with an otherwise appropriate outcome.
- Where further investigation is required, the panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete **within 7 days of the Hearing. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head, the Governors and, where relevant, the person complained of.**

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except in so far as is required of the school by paragraph 6(2)(j) of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2003; where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

Boarders and their parents may contact Ofsted (telephone: 0300 123 1231 or email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk, or the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), regarding any complaint concerning welfare in accordance with the Boarding Schools National Minimum Standards, Standard 5.4. Further help may be obtained from the Care Quality Commission www.cqc.org.uk.

Pupils will not be penalised for any complaint made in good faith.

A written record is maintained of all complaints and is reviewed regularly by the Headmaster/Deputy Head. The record states at which stage of the procedure, from preliminary through to a Panel hearing, the matter was resolved.

CMC/Jan 2011 (to review Jan 2012)