



## **PARENTAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

A legal requirement, an ISI Reporting Standard, a National Minimum Standard (NMS) for Boarding Schools and an Ofsted Standard for EYFS providers.

This document is available to parents and prospective parents on the School website or on request from the School Office.

### **References:**

- A. ISI Handbook for the Inspection of Schools, Commentary on The Regulatory Requirements, March 2023 – ([www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net)).
- B. Boarding Schools: National Minimum Standards from September 2022 ([www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk)).
- C. Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, DfE September 2023.
- D. ISBA Model Complaints Procedure dated September 2012.

### **Introduction**

The use of the term ‘parent’ in this document refers to any person with parental responsibility.

Vinehall School prides itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this procedure. Vinehall School will make the complaints procedure available to all current parents of pupils on the school’s website or on request from the school office during the school day, and will ensure that parents of pupils who request it are made aware that this document is published or available.

Although this Procedure is made available to parents of prospective pupils, it is not available for use by them; it may only be used by parents of current pupils. Complaints by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil to which the complaint relates was still registered as a pupil at the school. The only exception to this is if the complaint is a review of a decision taken by the Head to exclude or require the removal of a pupil in which case such a review must be requested by no later than five working days from the date of the decision to exclude or require removal of a pupil.

In accordance with paragraph 25(3)(g) of Schedule 1 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, Vinehall 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 the ISI for the purposes of Section 162A(1) of the Education Act 2002 (as subsequently amended), details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

A copy of the complaints procedure is available on the website and, on request, from the School Office.

### **What Constitutes a Complaint?**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be about the school as a whole, about a specific department, or about an individual member of staff. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the school has done something wrong, or failed to do something that it should have done, or acted unfairly.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The school is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you (or your child) raises in good faith.

### **Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints**

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. They will be acknowledged within five working days if received during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the school's target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 28 days if the complaint is lodged during term time and as soon as practicable during the holidays.

Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, will be completed within 15 working days, if the appeal is lodged during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

### **Stage 1 – Informal Resolution**

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. The vast majority of parental concerns are best approached in this way.
- If parents have a complaint, they should normally contact their son/daughter's form tutor or the teacher involved in the complaint causing concern. Form teachers are the normal first point of contact. In many cases the matter will be resolved straight away by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the form tutor or teacher concerned cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him or her to consult the relevant head of department or member of the senior management.
- Complaints made directly to a Head of department / senior teacher / Head of Pre-Prep Department (who is responsible for KS1 and EYFS) / the Deputy Head / or the Head will usually be referred to the relevant Form Tutor or subject teacher unless the Head of department / senior teacher / Head of Pre-Prep Department / Deputy Head / or Head deems it appropriate for him / her to deal with the matter personally.
- The teacher who is dealing with the complaint 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 fourteen days or in the event that the teacher dealing with the complaint and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

- Complaints or concerns (other than minor routine matters) which are received by email should be forwarded to the Head of Pre-Prep Department / Head and kept in the child's file.
- If, however, the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chairman of Governors, [chair@vinehallschool.com](mailto:chair@vinehallschool.com).

## **Stage 2 – Formal Resolution**

- If the complaint was addressed initially by a member of staff and cannot be resolved on an informal basis, the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head of Pre-Prep / Head, making it clear that they were not satisfied with the result of their initial enquiry and that they wish to make a formal complaint.
- If the Head of Pre-Prep / Head received the initial informal enquiry and the parents are still dissatisfied with the response, they should write stating that they are still dissatisfied and the Head of Pre-Prep / Head will then treat the matter as a formal complaint.
- In each of the above situations, the Head of Pre-Prep / Head will consider the complaint and decide the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases the Head of Pre-Prep / Head will meet the parents concerned, normally within fourteen 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 Head to carry out further investigations and to consult the Chairman of Governors, a nominated Governor, or an independent person. If the Head of Pre-Prep has received the formal complaint then she/he will brief the Head and he will continue the process.
- The Head of Pre-Prep / Head will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant factors have been established, a decision will be made and the parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head will also give reasons for his decision.
- If the complaint is against the Head, the Chairman of Governors will call for a full report from the Head and for all the relevant documents. The Chairman may also nominate a Governor or an independent person to oversee the investigation. Whoever is overseeing the complaint may call for a briefing from members of staff, and will in most cases, speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once they are satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing. The Governor or independent person will give reasons for their decision.

- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure by writing to the Head or Bursar within 5 working days of receiving the decision at Stage 2, setting out their grounds of appeal.

### **Stage 3 – Panel Hearing**

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following the failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the Chairman of Governors, who will call a hearing of the Complaints Panel.
- The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school (see Appendix 1). 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 twenty-one 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 all such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than three days prior to the hearing. Likewise, if either the parent(s) or the school decide to submit written information to the Panel, this information will also be made available to all parties not later than three days prior to the hearing.
- The parent(s) may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. The Head (or deputy in the case of absence) will also attend the hearing to represent the School's view concerning the complaint, and may be accompanied by any member(s) of staff who has/have been involved in the case.
- If possible the Panel will resolve the parental complaint 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 that they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings and may make recommendations.
- Once the Panel is in agreement with the drafting of a decision, the Chair of the Panel will write to the parent(s) informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, normally within fourteen days of the hearing. The decision of the Panel will be final. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will be sent by electronic mail, or otherwise given to the parent(s), and, where relevant, the person complained about, as well as the board of governors and the Head.
- The copy of the findings of any panel will be made available for inspection on the school premises by the Head and the Governors.

We acknowledge that with effect from 1 October 2015, we are required by The Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015 ('the ADR Regulations') to provide parents at conclusion of the 3rd stage of the complaints procedure with the name and address of a certified alternative dispute resolution ('ADR') entity. Please note, however, that it is School policy not to engage in ADR. We regard the decision of the School's Complaints Panel as final in all circumstances.

## **Timescales**

Please be aware that the timescales identified in this procedure are relevant to term-time only and are subject to change in the school holiday periods.

## **Confidentiality**

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except to the extent required of the School by paragraph (k) of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2010 (as subsequently amended), by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required by the ISI under Section 109 of the Education Act 2008 (as amended), or under other legal authority.

## **Persistent Correspondence**

Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this may be regarded by Vinehall as vexatious and outside the scope of this procedure.

## **Recording**

A written record is to be kept of all Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints and of whether they are resolved following Stage 2 or proceed to a panel hearing; and action taken by the school as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

Confidential files on all complaints should be maintained by the Head's PA, kept together and cross-referenced with other files as necessary. The files should contain simple but clear notes of conversations with parents about any source of dissatisfaction. This also applies to friendly chats and to telephone conversations, since misunderstandings easily arise. There should be a clear statement of what is causing concern to the complainants. The notes can be agreed with parent(s).

The record should contain the following information as appropriate:

- Date when 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)
- Brief statement of outcome

## **Dissatisfaction with the outcome of a complaint**

Parents should be aware that if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint, they are entitled to make a complaint to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) at:

Independent Schools Inspectorate  
CAP House  
9 – 12 Long Lane  
London  
EC1A 9HA

020 7600 0100

[www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net)

## NOTES

### **Complaints Regarding the Welfare of Boarders**

Whilst complaints by parents of boarders in relation to their welfare should be raised under the above procedure, in accordance with Standard 14 of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools, for boarders and their parents to raise complaints, and which is made available to boarders, their parents and staff for their information.

### **Written Complaints Relating to the Requirements under the Statutory Framework for the EYFS**

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) refers to children between the ages of 2 and 5 years old at Vinehall in our Pre-Nursery, Nursery, Kindergarten and Reception classes. Pre-Prep (KS1 and EYFS) share the Complaints Policy with the whole school.

The School will investigate all written complaints relating to the fulfilment of the requirements under the Statutory Framework for the EYFS and notify complainants of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of having received the complaint. The record of any such complaints, and the action that was taken as a result of the complaint, will be kept for at least 3 years and will be made available to Ofsted on request.

If parents and/or carers believe the School is not meeting the EYFS requirements, they may complain to Ofsted if they wish:

- On 0300 123 4666
- Or download the Ofsted leaflet: 'Complaints to Ofsted about Schools: Guidance for Parents' (reference 080113) from [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The number of Stage 2 complaints received by the school in academic year 2022 – 2023: None