



Bedford Girls' School - Complaints Policy and Procedure

Introduction

Bedford Girls' School prides itself on the quality of its teaching and the pastoral care it provides to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, it will be dealt with by the School with care and in accordance with this Policy.

Policy Aim. The aim of this policy is to ensure that a complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice; it is fair to those concerned, and it helps to promote parents' and pupils' confidence in our ability to safeguard and promote welfare. We will try to resolve every complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, reviewing our systems and procedures in light of the circumstances. We need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction and we respect people's desires for confidentiality. We recognise that a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, which would be damaging to relationships and to our school culture. Parents and pupils should never feel (or be made to feel) that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or her opportunities at this school. We aim to create a culture of safety, equality, and protection.

Policy Status. This Policy has been approved by the Governing Body of the School and provides guidelines for handling complaints. It takes account of paragraph 33 of schedule I to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (SI 2014/3283), the Independent School Standards guidance for independent schools 2019. The policy applies to all sections of the school. The procedures set out below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and circumstances of each case. Certain parts of the procedures can only be carried out during term time.

Application. The procedure described below is available to pupils and parents of pupils and applies to all pupil and school issues. Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue or if the Head expels or asks a pupil to leave and the parents seek a Governors review of the decision.

Parent. The term parent includes a parent of a current pupil or legal guardian or education guardian and may at our discretion include a parent whose child has recently left the School. Parent(s) also includes any person who is not a parent but who has parental responsibility, or who has care for a pupil.

What Constitutes a Complaint? A complaint is 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 any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if

a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, failed to do 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 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 raise in good faith.

Who the Policy applies to. This policy applies to concerns raised and or Complaints from a Parent or Parents of current pupils and will continue to apply to a complaint which is ongoing when a pupil leaves the school. It will apply to a parent or parents of former pupils if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was registered at the school.

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints.

Management of complaints. The Head has appointed the Senior Deputy Head (Complaints Coordinator) to be responsible for the co-ordination and administration of the Complaints Procedure. If the Complaints Coordinator is unavailable or is the subject of the complaint, his/her duties will be carried out by the Head or another senior member of staff. The main responsibilities of the Complaints Coordinator are to:

- be the first point of contact while the matter remains unresolved and keep records
- co-ordinate the complaints procedures in school
- arrange assistance for parents who require this, for example, because of a disability
- maintain an on-going training programme for all School employees in relation to complaints
- monitor the keeping, confidentiality, and storage of records in relation to complaints
- report regularly to the Head with respect to complaints.

If appropriate, the School will acknowledge that a complaint is upheld, wholly or in part. In addition, it may offer an explanation; an admission that it could have been handled differently or better; an assurance that the School will try to ensure that the event complained of will not happen again and an explanation of the steps taken in this respect; to review policies and or procedure and/or an apology.

Requests for financial rewards, such as claims for compensation, damages or fee refunds, are beyond the scope of the School's complaints procedure.

All parents should be aware that regardless of the nature of a complaint and whether or not it is upheld, parents are not entitled to details of any related sanctions imposed on staff, pupils, or parents for reasons of data protection and confidentiality.

There may be occasions when it is necessary or reasonable to deviate from this complaints procedure if this is reasonable and justified; Complainants will be notified of the changes.

Timescales

The School aims to resolve all complaints efficiently and promptly and Parents are encouraged to bring any matter causing concern to the School's attention as soon as possible. Whenever possible, a complaint should be raised within three months of the incident, or where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. The School may consider complaints made after three months, but parents should be aware that most complaints will require the School to conduct an investigation and the ability to carry out a full and fair investigation, particularly where pupils may need to be interviewed, becomes increasingly difficult as time elapses. A complaint raised after three months should therefore include details of the issues which led to the delay.

Timescales for each stage of the School's complaints procedure are set out below. It is expected that the management of every complaint will progress in a timely manner. Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay to the timescales for a stage of the complaints procedure (such as other bodies investigating aspects of the complaint), the School will notify the parent and inform them of the new timescales as soon as possible.

Complaints which are raised in the School holidays will usually be deemed to have been received on the first working day after receipt.

Management of concerns and complaints

The School's policy allows for complaints to be considered at three stages which are set out in "The Procedure" below.

Expected standards of behaviour

It is the intention of the School to deal with concerns and complaints fairly and work constructively with parents towards resolving them.

As concerns and complaints will be dealt with confidentially, complaints are not to be discussed publicly, including via social media.

While the School will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the School, attention is drawn to the information included in Appendix 2 which is drawn from: the Department for Education's Best practice advice for school complaints procedures 2021; and the Department for Education guidance Controlling access to school premises 2018.

The Complaint Procedure

1. Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

1.1 It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally. Examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, or about allocation of privileges or responsibilities, or about a timetable clash or some other aspect of the School's systems or equipment, or a billing error. Complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation are taken very seriously and may need to be dealt with at Stage 2 without action

at Stage 1. The School will acknowledge a written notification by email, letter or telephone within two working days¹ of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable during holidays.

1.2 If parents have a complaint concerning education matters, they should normally contact their daughter's subject teacher or tutor as appropriate. In many cases, the matter will be resolved quickly by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the teacher or tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for the teacher/tutor to consult the Head of Department/member of the Senior Leadership Team as appropriate, who will then deal with the matter.

1.3 If the complaint concerns a pastoral matter, parents should normally contact the appropriate form tutor or Head of Year.

1.4 A problem over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised first of all with the member of staff who imposed it and, if not resolved, with the Deputy Head, Student Engagement and Welfare or Head of Year.

1.5 A query relating to financial matters (fees etc) should be stated in writing to the Head of Finance and Operations.

1.6 Complaints made directly to a Head of Department may be referred to the relevant teacher or tutor unless it is felt appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.

1.7 On occasion, complaints may be dealt with by members of the senior leadership team, including the Head but still be resolved informally and successfully.

1.8 Should the matter not be resolved within 15 working days then parents may proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Policy.

Every complaint notified to a member of staff that has not been resolved informally will be noted, together with the action taken, on a standard form. A sample of the form is attached to this policy in Appendix I.

2. Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

2.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis as described in Stage 1, or if it has not been resolved within 15 working days, then the parents should put their complaint in writing² to the Head. She will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. This must be done even where the informal process has been conducted with the Head. If parents require assistance with their request, for example, because of a disability, the School will be happy to make appropriate arrangements³.

¹ When we use the term "working days" we mean Monday to Friday during term time. It may take longer to process complaints received during the last few weeks of term or during holidays due to the availability of staff.

² When we refer to notifications or requests in writing, both letter and email are acceptable

³ Please note that the School will be very happy to arrange assistance if required, through the person coordinating complaints, in the event of any difficulty in submitting any request in writing required by this Policy.

2.2 The Head or Senior Deputy Head will meet with or speak to the parents concerned, within five working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

2.3 It may be necessary for the Head to carry out further investigations or to ask a senior member of staff to act as Investigator. The Investigator may ask for additional information from you and may wish to speak to you personally and to others who may have knowledge of the circumstances including, if appropriate, your daughter.

2.4 Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept.

2.5 Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head will also give reasons for this decision. The Head's aim will be to inform any complainant of the outcome of an investigation and the resolution of the complaint with 28 working days from the first receipt of the complaint.

2.6 Complaints about the Head will always be dealt with under the Stage 2 - Formal Resolution process. Parents who wish to make a complaint about the Head should put their complaint in writing to the Chair of Governors. The Chair or their nominee will call for a full report from the Head and for all relevant documents. The Chair or their nominee may also call for a briefing from members of staff and/or may speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the Chair or their nominee is 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 Chair or their nominee will give reasons for his/her decision.

2.7 If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they may proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

3. Stage 3 – Reference to the Complaints Panel

3.1 **Introduction and Scope of the Hearing.** A Complaints Panel (the Panel) hearing is a review of the actions taken at Stage 2 of this Procedure. The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint, which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure. The Panel will not seek to substitute its own judgment for that of the Head where the Head's decision falls within the bounds of what a reasonable Head, acting proportionately, might have decided given all the facts.

3.2 **Notification.** If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they should write to the Chair of the Governors, within five working days of receipt of the decision at stage 2, requesting a Panel hearing. Parents must state in their letter full details of the complaint, the outcome sought, the grounds on which they wish to appeal against the decision and enclosing all relevant documents and full contact details. Parents should also include a list of the documents which they believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to see. If parents require assistance with their request, for example, because of a

disability, the School will be happy to make appropriate arrangements. The parents' letter will normally be acknowledged by telephone, e-mail or letter within five working days, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale.

3.3 Convening the Panel. The Chair of Governors will then convene a Complaints Panel to consider the complaint. Please note, a Panel will only be convened if Stage 2 above has been completed. The Panel will consist of at least three members who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. The Panel shall be comprised of School Governor members (one of whom will be the Chair of the Panel) and one Panel member who will be independent of the governance and management of the School. The School has identified persons of standing within the local community, one of whom will sit as the independent member on the Complaints Panel for any given complaint. The Panel hearing will continue unless you formally withdraw your complaint in writing.

3.4 Notice of hearing. Every effort will be made to enable the Panel hearing to take place within 15 working days of the receipt of your request. As soon as reasonably practicable, and in any event at least five working days before the hearing, you will be sent written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the Panel members who will be present.

3.5 Attendance. You will be invited to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, teacher, or friend. Legal representation is not necessary or normally appropriate, but if you do wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, acting in their professional capacity, please notify the School at least five working days before the hearing. In exceptional circumstances and only if agreed by all parties, your child who is the subject of the hearing, aged 13 and above may be allowed to attend part or all of the hearing if the Chair of the Panel considers it would be in the interests of fairness to do so.

Copies of additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Panel Chair at least three clear working days prior to the hearing. If you choose not to attend, the Panel may hear your complaint and may reach a finding and conclude the matter in your absence.

3.6 The Role of the Panel. The role of the Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaint by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties
- any representations made by you, the Head or other members of staff.

3.7 Powers of the Panel. It is not within the powers of the Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils, or parents. The Panel may make findings and recommendations on these or any other issues to the Head or to the full body of School Governors as appropriate.

3.8 Hearing. All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn and all present will be entitled to make their own notes. The Panel Chair will arrange for a person to take written minutes of the proceedings.

3.9 Evidence. The Chair will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel is under no obligation to hear witnesses but may do so if it wishes.

3.10 Conduct. All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the Chair may terminate or adjourn the hearing. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with the conduct of the hearing must say so before the hearing proceeds further and his /her comment will be recorded.

3.11 Adjournment. If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. However, the Chair may adjourn the hearing at his/her discretion for further investigation of any relevant issue including taking legal advice.

3.12 Decision. After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel shall reach a decision unless there is an agreed position. If, after establishing the facts, the Panel members consider that the complaint is made out, they will uphold the complaint. If they consider that the complaint is not made out, they will dismiss the complaint. They will make these decisions on the balance of probabilities. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations may be notified orally at the hearing or subsequently and shall be confirmed in writing to you by electronic mail where appropriate within ten working days. If you do not wish to receive the decision by electronic mail, a copy will be given or posted to you. The decisions, findings and any recommendations will be made available for inspection on the School premises by the Governing Body and the Head. Reasons for the decision will be given. The decision may include recommendations and will be sent to you, the Chair of Governors, the Head and, where relevant, any person about whom the complaint has been made.

3.13 Private proceeding. Any hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding and no records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceedings shall be made directly or indirectly available to the press or other media.

3.14 Records and Confidentiality. A written record will be kept of all formal complaints and of whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or proceed to a panel hearing. The record will also include written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint, as well as details of action taken by the school, regardless of whether or not the complaint was upheld.

Details on how to request the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure (Stage 2 or beyond) during the preceding year will be made available on the school's website.

The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notices [\[Younger Pupils / Older Pupils\]](#). When dealing with complaints the School (including any Panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include 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)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name and contact details 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)
- Notes/minutes of the hearing, and
- The Panel's written decision

This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the School's Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy, but potentially including, for instance, information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy.

The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Notice, Data Protection Policy and Retention of Records Policy.

3.15 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 the School as vexatious and outside the scope of this complaints procedure. The School has a separate policy which it will follow for managing serial and unreasonable complaints (Appendix 2).

Regulatory framework

This policy has been prepared to meet the School's responsibilities under:

Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (**ISSR**); Children Act 1989; Childcare Act 2006; Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation (**UK GDPR**); and Equality Act 2010.

The following School policies, procedures and resource materials are relevant to this policy: parent contract.

Publication and availability

This policy is published on the School website.

This policy is available in hard copy on request.

A copy of the policy is available for inspection from the School office during a working day.

This policy can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required and the School will make other reasonable adjustments required to enable complainants to access and complete this procedure, such as holding meetings in accessible locations.

Information regarding the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure of this policy during the preceding school year is available to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils and, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate.

Tina Beddoes

Chair of Governors

Review date: November 2025

Date of next review: November 2027

Appendices

Appendix 1: Complaint Record Sample

Date Received	Nature of Complaint	Investigated by	Name of pupil	Name of complainant	Outcome	Date Closed	Stage 2?
25.11.25	Example	JMG	A Child	Ms A Sample	Investigation completed and outcome detailed...	15.12.25	No

Appendix 2: Policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints

Bedford Girls' School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

In most cases, the amount of correspondence for addressing a complaint will be reasonable. However, complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

If there are any concerns that the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school is excessive or unreasonable, the Head or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before any further action is taken.

Bedford Girls' School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite several offers of assistance
- refuses on a number of occasions to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales

- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with

Bedford Girls' School would also consider the following to be unreasonable behaviour, which may lead to obstruction or delay of the complaints process:

- use of threats to intimidate
- use of abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly providing falsified information
- publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

If after an informal discussion, any unreasonable behaviour continues, the Head or Chair of Governors will apply an '*unreasonable*' marking to the complaint case. The Head will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Bedford Girls' School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing.