

BROMSGROVE SCHOOL

CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

Author:	Headmaster
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Scope:	All Schools

INTRODUCTION AND POLICY AIMS

This policy applies to the Senior School, Preparatory School, Pre-Preparatory School and Winterfold School including those in the EYFS settings. It has regard to the provisions of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools and the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework.

It aims to ensure that current pupils, parents and staff of the School are able to raise a concern, air a grievance, or make a formal complaint following a process that is fair, transparent, timely and designed to maximise the chance of a positive resolution.

While the School is committed to providing excellent education in a safe and supportive environment, we recognise that concerns and dissatisfaction may arise. As a large, complex community, misunderstandings and mistakes can occur, and differing viewpoints are natural. We are a learning community, committed to self-reflection and continuous improvement.

Accordingly, this policy promotes openness to listening to concerns, addressing issues, and dealing seriously with complaints raised. Those with grievances are encouraged to raise these as early as possible, allowing us opportunity to try to rectify a problem or to explain the School's position before a matter becomes intractable.

At the heart of this policy is a belief that both parents and staff share the desire to see pupils flourish in our care. Educational research makes it very clear that an important component of a successful education is a strong partnership between parents and teachers. Therefore, regardless of the nature of any complaint, the School encourages constructive cooperation between staff and parents while concerns are being addressed, avoiding unnecessary conflict that may adversely affect a pupil's wellbeing.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Concerns and complaints will be managed with sympathy, discretion, efficiency, and respect for all parties' dignity.
- Safeguarding and pupil welfare remain paramount throughout the process.
- Issues will be addressed at the appropriate level and resolved swiftly but without undue haste. Unresolved matters risk resentment and loss of confidence.
- The School aims to resolve concerns positively, rectify issues, and review policies and procedures when necessary.
- Complainants should never feel their concerns are trivial, dismissed, or likely to affect their child adversely.
- The policy distinguishes between informal concerns, which may be resolved quickly, and formal complaints requiring investigation. Issues will be escalated only when necessary, respecting the School's management hierarchy.
- This policy complements other School policies, such as Safeguarding, Exclusions, and the Parent Contract, which may take precedence in specific situations.
- The policy aligns with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations and may be adapted to the circumstances of each case. Some procedures apply only during term time.

TERMS

For the purposes of this policy, the following terms are defined as:

Pupils: refers to all children enrolled (including prior to arrival) in any of the four Bromsgrove Schools.

Staff: refers to all teaching and support staff in any of the four Bromsgrove Schools.

Parents: refers to all current or prospective parents or legal guardian or education guardian, and may, at our discretion, include a parent whose child has recently left the School.

Level of Concern or Complaint:
This policy identifies three levels of concern or complaint, acknowledging that matters can sometimes start at one level and escalate to the next if not satisfactorily resolved:

Level 1: informal raising of a concern or difficulty, notified orally or in writing to a member of staff

Level 2: a formal complaint, made in writing to the Headmaster/Headmistress.

Level 3: a formal complaint, made in writing to the Complaints Panel.

If a parent wishes to raise a complaint directly against the Headmaster, they should commence with Level 3. (A complaint regarding the Headmaster/Headmistress of Bromsgrove Pre-Preparatory and Preparatory Schools or Winterfold School would normally commence at Level 1, and should it reach Level 2, would be received by the Headmaster of Bromsgrove School.)

Safeguarding Concerns: Any concern relating to the safety of a child falls under the School's Safeguarding Children Policy and its processes take priority over the Concerns and Complaints Policy. Such matters should be notified immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and/or the Headmaster/Headmistress of the school concerned.

Complaints Officer: When a Level 2 complaint is raised, a member of the Senior Management Team will be appointed as Complaints Officer to conduct the initial investigation. If a Complaints Officer is unavailable or is the subject of the complaint, their duties will be carried out by the Headmaster/Headmistress or another delegated senior member of staff.

LEVEL 1: INFORMAL CONCERNS

Concerns: We expect that most concerns, where a staff member, parent or pupil seeks intervention, reconsideration, or some other action to be taken, can be resolved 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.

Notification: Concerns should be raised initially as follows:

> **Academic issues:** if the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, it should be raised with the Tutor or House Parent (Senior School) or Class Teacher (Winterfold, Preparatory and Pre-Preparatory Schools) as appropriate.
>
> **Pastoral care:** concerns relating to matters outside the classroom should be raised with the Houseparent (Senior School) or Class Teacher (Winterfold, Preparatory and Pre-Preparatory Schools) as appropriate.
>
> **Disciplinary matters:** a problem over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised with the Houseparent (Senior School) or Class Teacher (Winterfold, Preparatory and Pre-Preparatory Schools), and if not resolved, with the relevant Deputy Head (Pastoral).
>
> **Financial matters:** a query relating to fees or extras should be stated in writing to the Bursar.

Acknowledgement: We will acknowledge a written notification by telephone, e-mail, or letter within two working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable in the holidays. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing but will be recorded.

Records: Given the diverse nature of Level 1 complaints, they are not recorded in a central register but rather, in the respective files of Houseparents, Heads of Department, Deputy Heads or other relevant senior staff managers.

Resolution: The School will do its best to resolve concerns to the satisfaction of all parties. Concerns that cannot be resolved by informal means within 15 working days (3 weeks in term time) should be notified in writing as a formal complaint, which will then be dealt with in accordance with Level 2 below.

LEVEL 2: FORMAL COMPLAINT

Notification: A Level 1 concern that is unresolved, or a complaint which needs investigation, or dissatisfaction with some aspect of the School's policies, procedures, management or administration, should be set out in writing within 15 working days (3 weeks in term time) of the conclusion of the Level 1 process. It should include the complainant's contact details, full explanation of the complaint and all relevant associated documents for consideration. The complaint should be addressed to the Headmaster/Headmistress of their child's School and should state that the complainant requests that the matter be dealt with at Level 2. The complaint should be accompanied by a completed copy of the Complaint Form (Appendix 3).

Acknowledgement: Written Level 2 complaints will be acknowledged by telephone, email or in writing within two working days during term time, indicating the action that is being taken and confirming that a response will be provided within ten working days of the receipt of the Complaint including the Complaint Form, unless a lengthier investigation is required. Written complaints received during holiday breaks will be addressed as soon as is practicable.

Investigation: The Headmaster/Headmistress will appoint a Complaints Officer to act as "investigator". The Complaints Officer may request additional information from the complainant and may also wish to speak to them and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. The outcome of the investigation will be reported to the Headmaster/Headmistress, who will then notify the complainant in writing of their decision and the reasons for it within five working days of the complaint being acknowledged unless a lengthier investigation was required.

Records: Written records will be kept of all Level 2 complaints. These are the responsibility of the Headmaster/Headmistress of the respective Schools. A file in each School will contain a register of all Level 2 complaints and a single record by the Bromsgrove School Headmaster of the salient documentation related to each one. The register will also identify those complaints relating specifically to boarding and EYFS issues.

The record will show whether the complaint was resolved following a formal procedure or proceeded to a Level 3 complaint. It will include details of any actions taken as a result of the complaint, regardless of whether it was upheld. The record will be made available for inspection on the School premises by the Governors and the Headmaster.

Correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential 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. That is, where access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of an inspection or under other legal authority.

The School will provide ISI, on request, a written record of all complaints made during any specified period and the action that was taken as a result. Therefore, records of complaints will be kept for at least three years to accommodate the inspection cycle.

LEVEL 3: REFERRAL TO A COMPLAINTS PANEL

Notification: If a complainant is still dissatisfied with the Headmaster's/Headmistress' decision after a Level 2 investigation, their complaint may be renewed in writing to the Chair of the Governing Body. A letter to the Chair should give full details of the complaint and enclose all relevant documents and full contact details. Such complaints should be sent to the Executive Assistant to the Headmaster, who will forward them to the Chair of Governors. It is not possible to move to Level 3 without first following through the Level 2 procedure, unless the complaint is regarding the Headmaster of Bromsgrove School. The

complainant must request a Level 3 hearing within 10 working days of the receipt of the Level 2 decision, or it will not be considered, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Acknowledgement: Level 3 letters of complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, email or in writing within four School days during term time, indicating the action that is being taken. During holidays, an acknowledgement will be provided as soon as is reasonably practicable.

Action: The Chair of Governors will determine whether a further investigation of the complaint is warranted. If so, a Complaints Panel will be convened. If not, reasons for not pursuing the Level 3 complaint will be communicated in writing.

Complaints Panel Composition: The Complaints Panel ("Panel") will comprise two School Governors who have no detailed prior knowledge of the complaint and a member who is independent of the governance, management and running of the School.

Response: The Clerk to the Governors will convene the Complaints Panel as soon as is reasonably practicable. In term-time, that will be within 15 School days (3 weeks) of the Chair of Governors acknowledging and confirming the request for a hearing. The Panel will not normally sit during half-terms or School holidays. The Clerk will send the complainant written notification of the date, time, and place of the hearing together with brief details of the Panel members who will hear it.

Attendance: Complainants will be asked to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, teacher or friend. The hearing is an internal proceeding and not a legal proceeding. Legal representation is not necessary, will not normally be appropriate and the role played by any legal representative will be at the discretion of the Panel Chair. The Clerk to the Governors must be given at least seven School days' notice if the complainants wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person. The legally qualified person will not be permitted to act as an advocate or to address the Panel unless invited to do so by the Panel Chair. Copies of additional documents that a complainant may wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk at least three clear days prior to the hearing.

Chair: The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Panel (chosen by themselves) and will be conducted in an informal manner.

Hearing: All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Chair may direct that the hearing is recorded to assist accurate recollection for purposes of the decision. The Panel will be under no obligation to retain recordings thereafter. The Clerk will be asked to take a handwritten minute of the proceedings in any event.

Evidence: The Chair will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.

Conduct: All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint, and good manners or, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his/her comment will be minuted.

Adjournment: The Chair may, at their discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue.

Decision: After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing the Panel shall reach a Decision unless there is an agreed position. The Panel's Decision may be notified orally at the hearing, or subsequently, and shall be confirmed in writing to the complainant within seven working days. Reasons for the Decision will be given. The Decision may include recommendations and will be sent to the complainant, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Headmaster, the Headmaster of the Preparatory and

Pre-Preparatory Schools or the Headmistress of Winterfold House School, and, where relevant, any person about whom the complaint has been made.

Private Proceeding: a hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.

Records: As with Level 2 complaints, a written record will be kept in the Complaints register of all complaints that proceed to a Panel hearing. The record will show whether the complaint was resolved following a formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing and will include detail of any actions taken as a result of the complaint, regardless of whether it was upheld. The record will be made available for inspection on the School premises by the Governors and the Headmaster.

Correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential 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. That is, where access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of an inspection or under other legal authority.

The School will provide ISI, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period and the action that was taken as a result. Therefore, complaint records will normally be retained for a minimum of three years from resolution, and longer where required by law, safeguarding considerations, insurance requirements, or ongoing proceedings.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS): Special obligations apply to any complaints about the EYFS provision in both the Pre-Preparatory and Winterfold Schools. As well as following the Complaints procedures detailed in this policy, complainants who remain unhappy may make a complaint to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) or Ofsted. Details of how to contact ISI and Ofsted are given at the end of this policy. All written complaints will be investigated, and the complainant notified by the School of the outcome of the investigation, within 28 days of the complaint being received.

UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS

The School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially. It will not normally limit the contact complainants have with it, but it does not expect its staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening. The School adopts the Department for Education definition of unreasonable complainants as those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the School, hinder consideration of their or other people's complaints. Unreasonable complaints are taken seriously by the School as they put a strain on valuable resources and hinder the progress of proper investigations.

Where a complainant raises an issue that has already been dealt with in accordance with the School's Concerns and Complaints Policy, and where the three levels have been exhausted, the School will not reinvestigate the complaint except in exceptional circumstances. An example might be where new evidence has come to light.

If a complainant persists in raising the same issue, the Headmaster will write to them explaining that the matter has been dealt with fully in line with the Policy and that the matter is closed. In the case of other unreasonable complaints, the Headmaster may choose not to investigate having first agreed that approach with the Chair of Governors.

The School will not investigate anonymous complaints under the procedure set out in the Policy. Anonymous complaints will be referred to the Headmaster who will decide what, if any, action should be taken.

APPENDIX 1: CONTACT DETAILS (SCHOOL)

Mr M Punt (Headmaster, Senior School)	Headmaster@bromsgrove-school.co.uk 01527 579679 ext. 205
Mr M Marie (Head of Pre-Preparatory and Preparatory Schools)	PrepHead@bromsgrove-school.co.uk 01527 579679 ext. 371
Mrs D Toms (Head of Winterfold School)	DToms@winterfoldhouse.co.uk 01562 777234

APPENDIX 2: CONTACT DETAILS (EXTERNAL)

EYFS: Please note that only complaints concerned with the School's failure to meet EFYS requirements can be made to ISI or Ofsted.

Contact Details For ISI

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

Telephone: 020 7600 0100

Contact Details For Ofsted

National Business Unit
Ofsted
5th, 6th and 7th Floors
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 4666
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Staff on the helpdesk will discuss your concerns with you, advise you about whether to put your complaint in writing or suggest other ways to deal with your concerns, or you can fill in an online complaints form at www.ofsted.gov.uk/onlinecomplaints.

APPENDIX 3: COMPLAINT FORM

Please complete this form and return it to the Headmaster/Headmistress of your child's School, who will acknowledge receipt and outline the next steps to be taken.

Your name	
Name of pupil	
School (Senior, Prep, Pre-Prep or Winterfold)	
Your relationship to the pupil	
Details of the complaint	
What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint (who did you speak to and what was the response)?	
What is the reason you remain dissatisfied with the outcome?	
What actions do you feel might resolve the complaint at this stage?	

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
Signature:	Date:

OFFICIAL USE	
Date received	
Complaint reference number.	
Date acknowledgment sent	
By whom	
Complaint referred to	
Date	
Date reported to the Governance Manager	
By whom	