



PRIORY SCHOOL

Complaints Policy

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1. AIMS

1.1 Priory School aims to have clear procedures for dealing with complaints. Priory School endeavours to address the issues quickly and effectively.

Priory School aims to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint and to resolve it through open dialogue and mutual understanding.

Careful consideration will be given to all concerns and complaints and we will deal with them as swiftly as possible. We will provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed.

In all cases we will put the interests of the child above all other issues.

Our procedure is underpinned by the following **framework of principles**: -

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- be easily accessible and publicised;
- be simple to use and understand;
- be impartial;
- be non-adversarial;
- allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress;
- ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- respect people's desire for confidentiality, wherever possible (some information sharing may be necessary to carry out a thorough investigation);
- address all points of issue, providing an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
- provide information to the school's senior management team so that systems and procedures can be reviewed in light of the circumstances of the complaint;
- ensure that any complaint will not adversely affect a student or their opportunities at the school.

1.2 This policy distinguishes between a complaint which can be resolved informally and a formal complaint which will require investigation. This policy covers any complaints made about the school except those covered by our Admissions policy, Exclusions policy, Safeguarding policy and Staff Disciplinary procedures.

1.3 We aim to resolve any complaints as efficiently and quickly as possible. Timescales for each stage are detailed in the policy and are subject to school operational periods. Priory School term times can be found on the school's website.

2. CONFIDENTIALITY

2.1 A written record will be kept of all complaints, and the stage at which they were resolved. The Senior Leadership Team will review the complaints' record termly and the Headteacher will report the number of complaints and the reasons for the complaints to the Full Governing Body. The number of formal complaints registered during the preceding school year will be supplied to parents on request.

2.2 All documents relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where

access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of a school's inspection or under any other legal authority.

- 2.3 In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will be kept only for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in the circumstances.

3. STAGES OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

- 3.1 There are three stages to Priory School's complaints procedure:
- 3.1.1 **Stage 1:** informal Stage – complaint, concern or difficulty raised with a member of staff in writing or verbally.
 - 3.1.2 **Stage 2:** Formal Stage - complaint in writing to the Headteacher .
 - 3.1.3 **Stage 3:** Complaints Panel – complaint not satisfied in Stage 2 can be presented for review by the Complaints Panel.

4. STAGE 1 – INFORMAL STAGE

We expect that most complaints can be resolved informally. Examples would be a concern regarding teaching or pastoral care or an administrative issue that should be able to be resolved by the relevant member of staff.

More complex complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation may need to be dealt with at Stage 2 without action at Stage 1 as they are taken very seriously.

4.1 Who to contact

Where appropriate, concerns should initially be raised as follows:

- 4.1.1 Educational issues: if the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, please speak or write to the relevant Year Leader or the Assistant Head if related to special educational needs.
- 4.1.2 Disciplinary matters: concerns over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised first of all with the member of staff who imposed the sanction.
- 4.1.3 If a concern is more sensitive or complex please contact a member of the Senior Leadership Team or Headteacher.
- 4.1.4 A complaint against the Headteacher should be made directly to the Chair of Governors.

- 4.2 A complaint received in writing will be acknowledged by telephone, e-mail or letter within five working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable during the holidays. A matter raised verbally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing.
- 4.3 A concern which has not been resolved by informal means within 15 working days should be notified in writing as a formal complaint using the procedure set out in Stage 2.
- 4.1 Our school processes personal data relating to parents, pupils, staff, governors, visitors and others, and therefore is a data controller.
- 4.2 The school is registered as a data controller with the ICO and will renew this registration annually or as otherwise legally required.

5. STAGE 2 – FORMAL STAGE

5.1 How to make a formal complaint

- 5.1.1 If a complainant is dissatisfied with the response to the complaint under Stage 1, or the complaint requires investigation or involves dissatisfaction with some aspect of the school's policies or management, the complaint should be made under Stage 2.
- 5.1.2 The full details of the complaint should be set out on the Complaint's Form provided in **Appendix 1** and sent with all relevant documents and full contact details to the Headteacher.
- 5.1.3 The complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, e-mail or letter within five working days during term time, and as soon as practicable during the holidays, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale. Notice of receipt of the formal complaint will be given to the Chair of Governors.

5.2 Investigation

The Headteacher may ask a senior member of staff to act as Investigator. The Investigator may request additional information from you and will probably wish to speak to you personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. The Investigator will prepare a report on the investigation which will be considered by the Headteacher.

5.3 Decision

The Headteacher will then notify the complainant by telephone, e-mail or letter of his/her decision and the reasons for it within 15 working days from the receipt of the complaint. Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay, the parents will be notified of this and informed of the new timescales as soon as possible.

6. STAGE 3 – COMPLAINTS POLICY

6.1 What is a Complaints Panel hearing?

6.1.1 A Complaints Panel hearing is a review of the decisions taken by the Head. The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure.

6.1.2 The role of the Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties; and
- any representations made by the Parents and the Headteacher;

and to reach a decision, on the balance of probabilities, as to whether to uphold the complaint in full, uphold the complaint in part or dismiss the complaint.

6.1.3 It is not within the powers of the Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, students or parents. The Panel may make recommendations on these matters or any other issues to the Headteacher and / or to the Governing Body, as appropriate.

6.2 How to request a Complaints Panel hearing

6.2.1 A request for a hearing before the Complaints Panel must be put in writing (marked Complaints Panel on the envelope) to the Clerk to the Governors within five working days of the decision complained of. The request will usually only be considered if the procedures at Stages 1 and 2 have been completed.

6.2.2 The written request should include:

- a copy of the original complaints form, indicating which matters are unresolved, a copy of all relevant documents and full contact details;
- details of all the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired;
- a list of the documents which the parents believe to be in the school's possession and wish the Panel to see

6.2.3 If assistance with the request is required, for example because of a disability, please inform the Clerk to the Governors of this and she / he will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

6.2.4 The Clerk to the Governors will acknowledge the request for a hearing in writing within five working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable during the holidays.

6.2.5 Every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within 15-30 working days of receipt of the request.

6.3 Planning the hearing

6.3.1 As soon as reasonably practicable, and in any event at least ten working days before the hearing, the Clerk to the Governors will send written notification to each party of the date, time and place of the hearing.

6.3.2 Copies of any additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk to the Governors to be received at least five working days prior to the hearing.

6.3.3 You may be accompanied to the hearing by another person, for example a relative, teacher or friend. The Panel hearing is not legal proceedings and so legal representation is not necessary. The complainant should note that the Panel will wish to speak to them directly and this person will not be permitted to act as an advocate.

6.3.4 The Clerk to the Governors will circulate a copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the Panel to all parties at least three working days prior to the hearing.

6.4 Composition of the Panel

6.4.1 The Panel will normally comprise three members of the Full Governing Body, as agreed with the Chair of Governors, and will have no prior knowledge of the complaint.

6.4.2 The parents may ask the Clerk to the Governors to tell them who has been appointed to sit on the Panel ahead of the hearing.

6.4.3 The Panel members will appoint one of themselves to be the Chair of the Panel throughout the proceedings.

6.5 The Panel hearing

6.5.1 The hearing will be conducted in an informal manner.

6.5.2 All those present at the hearing shall have the opportunity to ask questions and make 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. The Panel may, at the Chair's discretion, take written statements into account.

6.5.3 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. A clerk appointed by the Panel will take minutes of the proceedings.

6.5.4 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, at the discretion of the chair, 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.

6.5.5 The Chair may, at his / her discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue. This may include an adjournment to take legal advice.

6.5.6 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.

6.6 The decision

6.6.1 The Panel will reach a decision on a balance of probabilities unless there is an agreed position.

6.6.2 The decision, findings and any recommendations will be confirmed in writing by post or electronic mail will be given to the complainant, and where relevant the person complained about, normally within five working days of the hearing.

6.6.3 The decisions, findings and any recommendations will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the Governing Body and the Headteacher.

6.6.4 This is the conclusion of the school's complaints procedure.

7. COMPLAINTS TO SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Complaints Panel, you may contact the Chief Executive at Slough Borough Council who will consider your complaint:

Cate Duffy
Slough Borough Council
St Martin's Place
51 Bath Road
Slough
SL1 3UQ

8. VEXACIOUS/ABUSIVE/ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

8.1 Vexatious Complaints

In rare circumstances a complainant might, having exhausted the complaints procedure, persist with the complaint.

Complaints become vexatious when they are:

- repeatedly and obsessively pursued; or
- unreasonable or seeking unrealistic outcomes; or

- reasonable but pursued in an unreasonable manner.

Governors may need to decide whether all future contacts should be:

- directed to, and only be dealt with, a named individual
- restricted, for example, to letter only.

If a conclusion has been reached about a complaint but the complainant continues to pursue it, the school may consider writing:

- to reiterate that the matter is concluded and there will be no further correspondence
- to say that, if correspondence continues, it will be read and filed but will receive no acknowledgment
- to give a short response referring to previous documents that have already dealt with the matter.

8.2 Abusive Complaints

Verbal aggression can be as intimidating as physical aggression. All parties have a right to be treated courteously and with respect. If staff feel threatened, they should report their fears to the Headteacher who will consider:

- writing to the complainant requesting that the behaviour cease
- setting restrictions for further contact with staff
- reporting the incident to the police.

If a telephone caller becomes aggressive or offensive, the person taking the call should explain that they will end the call if the behaviour persists. If they need to hang up, they should record this action and any further incidents.

Repeated abusive or aggressive contacts can be considered as harassment and Headteacher's will need to consider reporting them to police.

8.3 Anonymous Complaints

Generally, schools should not respond to anonymous complaints, nevertheless, the Headteacher or Chair of governors will need to consider whether:

- the issue and the fear of identification are genuine
- the issue is one of child protection.

They should make a decision as to whether to pursue the complaint based on this information and should record how and why a decision was reached.

9. COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

This policy will be communicated via the staff shared drive and will be published on the school's website.

APPENDIX 1: SCHOOL COMPLAINTS FORM

If you are unsure about the procedure, or you need help in completing the form, please contact the Headteacher, who will be happy to assist you.

1.	Your Name :
2.	Your Address :
3.	Your Telephone Number : At Home : At Work : Any other contact phone number:
4.	Does the complaint concern your child? If so what is your child's name
5.	What is your complaint about? (Please say what you think has gone wrong and when this happened. Continue on a separate sheet, and attach copies of any letters, if you feel this will explain your complaint more clearly).
6.	Have you already taken the complaint up with anyone ? If so, who did you raise it with? When was this?
7.	What do you think should be done now to put the matter right ?
	Signed : Dated :

Thank you for filling in this form.

Please send to the Headteacher, Priory School, Orchard Avenue, Slough, SL1 6HE. For details of what happens next, please check in the School's Complaints Procedure.