

# COPTHILL SCHOOL

## PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH PARENTAL COMPLAINTS

**“At Cophill we believe in an 'Open Door' policy, and we welcome the opportunity to talk to Parents at any time. We believe in solving the small problems to prevent the large ones. The Staff will always do their utmost to make every child's time at Cophill happy and successful.”** *Cophill School Prospectus*

Definitions:

**The Parent/s** - those who have parental responsibility for the pupil. This may be a parent or legal guardian or a relative with direct responsibility for the pupil.

**School** – a person employed by, or under contract with Cophill School Ltd or any person acting under authorisation of the Directors of Cophill School Ltd.

Staff are always accessible to and approachable by Parents. Issues raised by Parents are taken seriously and handled professionally and swiftly.

*An effective complaints procedure can diffuse problems and can provide the school with helpful information. Complaints treated as constructive suggestions can be used to improve standards and may prevent cause for further complaint. Even an unjustified complaint may indicate an area which can be improved.*

### **Formal Complaints History**

**2014-5 – No complaints reached Stage 2-Formal Resolution**

**2015-6 – No complaints reached Stage 2-Formal Resolution**

**2016-7 – No complaints reached Stage 2-Formal Resolution**

**2017-8 – No complaints reached Stage 2-Formal Resolution**

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### Introduction

If parents have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with the following procedure. *Failure to adhere may affect any consideration for the waiving of usual terms and conditions.*

### 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 son/daughter's Form teacher or relevant member of staff (ie Subject Leader). In many cases the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Form Teacher / staff member cannot resolve the matter alone, or if approached about a matter which lies outside their remit, staff should refer it to the appropriate person or consult their Department Head and inform the parents of this action.

Certain parents will wish to go straight to the Department Head / Head with their concerns, and this should be respected. However complaints made directly to the Department Head or Head may be referred back to the relevant Form Teacher/Subject Leader unless the Department Head or Head deems it appropriate for him/her to deal with matter personally.

The Form Teacher/Subject Leader/ Department Head / Head will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. An attempt must be made to make immediate contact to acknowledge the concern (within **3** working days) and aiming to resolve the matter completely within **10 working days**. In the event that the staff member 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.

### Stage 2- Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Principal. The Principal will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

In most cases the Principal will meet / speak to the parents concerned, normally within **5 working days** of receiving the complaint to discuss the matter. If possible a resolution will be reached at this stage. This process must be completed within **28** days from receipt of the complaint.

It may be necessary for the Principal to carry out further investigations. The Principal will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

Once the Principal 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 Principal will also give reasons for the decision.

If parents are still not satisfied with the decision they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure. *There may be certain circumstances, such as complaints about the Principal,*

when the parents should write direct to the Directors. Stage 3 of this Procedure will then be invoked.

### **Stage 3-Panel Hearing**

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), the Principal must write to the Parents within 7 working days, confirming that the matter has been referred to the Directors who will call hearings of the Complaints panel.

The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of (at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint), one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school.\* Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Directors. The Chair of the Complaints Panel on behalf of the Panel will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and within 21 days. The Chair of the Complaints Panel should request that a letter be sent by the Parents to the Panel, outlining the complaint and containing any further information. *Copies of such letters or any related matters shall be supplied to all parties not later than 10 working days prior to the hearing.*

*\*Complaints Panel – Minimum of three persons - composed of a members of the Advisory Panel and at least one independent panel member. The directors have contacted a small 'pool' of independent members who have agreed to act as Panel members if required.*

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.

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 5 working days of the Hearing, and at the very latest within 28 days as required under EYFS regulations. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. (The decision of the Panel will be final.)

The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head, the Directors and, where relevant, the person complained of and will be available for inspection on the school premises.

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.

**The Directors will provide Ofsted [and ISI], on request, with a written record of all Early Years complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint.**

If all actions have been taken by the School, and the Parent still feels that the resolution is unsatisfactory, then a formal complaint can also be made to one of the following organizations:

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

**Telephone 020 7600 0100 or Email: concerns@isi.net**

### **EARLY YEARS ONLY**

Applications, Regulatory and Contact (ARC) Team Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street Manchester  
M1 2WD  
**Tel: 0300 123 1231**

[www.ofsted.gov.uk/parents](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/parents)

Reviewed by Advisory Panel / Directors – Mar 2016

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## **Complaints Record**

A formal record of all complaints are kept as follows:

**Stage 1** - Log of all concerns / complaints passed to any SMT member – Secure shared Google Doc

**Stage 2** - Formal complaints record – complaints folder. The record will state whether they are resolved following a formal procedure or proceed to a panel hearing and action taken by the school as a result of these complaints.

Teachers and Dept Heads must also keep their own notes on the concern discussions and the actions which have been taken.

### **Definitions:**

**Stage 1:** Any initial concern/complaint verbally made or via email or letter

Response: Complaint must be handled sensitively and dealt with immediately – either through an appropriate interview / telephone call or email response

**Stage 2:** A formal letter regarding a complaint being made against the school or a member of staff – “where the parent is not satisfied with the response on an informal basis –the complaint will be made in writing and the formal procedure will be invoked.”

Formal Recorded complaints – A formal complaint which is not resolved adequately at stage 1 of the complaints procedure

Formal Resolution – Stage 2: In most cases the Principal will meet / speak to the parents concerned, normally within **5 working days** of receiving the complaint to discuss the matter. This process must be completed within **28** days from receipt of the complaint.

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## **APPENDIX 1 - STAFF GUIDANCE**

### **What constitutes a complaint?**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem by a Parent or Guardian. A complaint by any third party will only be dealt with in exceptional circumstances.

A complaint may be made if a parent thinks that the school has, for example,

- ❑ done something wrong
- ❑ failed to do something it should have done
- ❑ acted unfairly or impolitely.

A complaint may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific department in the school or about an individual member of staff or pupil.

**Any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the school is a complaint.**

### **Reducing Anxiety**

Because the parent who complains may feel vulnerable, the school can reduce anxiety by taking the matter seriously and dispelling uncertainty about how the complaint will be handled. Therefore information about the complaints procedure should be clearly explained to the parent.

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is an important issue for pupils, parents and staff. It is essential that any complaint is treated in a confidential manner and with respect.

Parents often seek an assurance of confidentiality before expressing their concerns. If, for example, they wish to discuss a particular member of staff they may fear that their child will suffer in some way because they have complained.

*It is the school's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children and similarly that complaints raised by pupils should not rebound on them or on other pupils.*

The question of confidentiality should be discussed sensitively and on an individual basis with the parents and the school's policy should be carefully explained. It may be possible to deal with a problem without naming individuals. However, even if no names are given, the source of the complaint may be clear. Depending on the nature of the complaint and on the circumstances, it may be impractical to investigate without identifying the member of staff or the child - it may also be in the interest of the child to do so. Staff members are rightly concerned that they should know about complaints that might be damaging to their reputation. Such complaints will be known only to themselves and to those who have to be consulted.

If there is a question of the child's safety or a possible situation involving the police, the guidance on confidentiality in the Safeguarding Policy must be followed. This Policy also applies to the handling of anonymous allegations about child abuse.

### Resolution

Sometimes the very acknowledgment of an issue by the school brings relief to parents. Satisfaction for a complainant may come from any of the following:

- knowing that changes have been made, and that matters will be different in future
- knowing that the school is now alert to a possible problem
- feeling that their concern has been considered seriously
- an outcome which may be different from the one they sought, but which they perceive to be well-considered
- a letter
- a verbal or written apology.

**All complaints must be handled seriously.** A gentle expression of concern, or a simple query, may grow into a painful matter if parents feel that they have been brushed aside. Equally, issues with the potential to become acutely difficult may dwindle and fade if they are handled well at the initial stage.

*Procedures must therefore be in place for appropriate action when a matter remains unresolved or cannot be resolved quickly.*

Our procedures outlined below are flexible to handle both formal complaints and the informal raising of issues. We do not attempt to differentiate between "formal" and "informal" complaints. One can easily become the other. Serious issues may be raised in an informal and friendly way, and apparently trivial issues in an adversarial manner.

Complaints against members of staff will be handled in a sensitive manner.

**All records and documentation will be kept for a minimum of three years.**

#### Recording Information

The school keeps a record of all complaints and other parental concerns because:

- patterns in the record may indicate a need for action
- written information is available should there be further problems

These are stored electronically with a file of supporting notes / information containing the following information :

- ✓ date when the issue was raised
- ✓ name of parent, name of pupil
- ✓ brief statement of issue and notes of conversations
- ✓ staff member/s handling the issue
- ✓ brief statement of outcome / action taken

All letters of complaint and more sensitive complaints are kept securely by SMT along with any written response and action sheet. The register is carefully monitored by the Directors.

The details must contain simple but clear notes of all conversations with parents about any source of dissatisfaction. This applies to friendly chats and to telephone conversations, as misunderstandings easily arise.