



COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

This policy applies to the whole school, including the EYFS

Definitions

EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
ISI	Independent Schools Inspectorate
PACT	PACT Educational Trust Ltd

Introduction

We strive to provide a good education for all our children. Our Head and staff work very hard to build positive relationships with all parents. However, our school is obliged to have procedures in place in case there are complaints by parents. Our school accepts that all concerns are treated as complaints and therefore fall within the scope of this policy. The following policy sets out the procedures that our school follows in such cases. A copy of this policy is available on our school website and in hard copy from our school office.

For the purposes of this policy, a 'parent' shall include a guardian, carer or any other person with parental responsibility for a child at the school.

If any parents are unhappy with the education that their child is receiving, or have any concerns relating to our school, we encourage them to talk to their child's class teacher immediately.

All parents have the right, as a last resort, to appeal to the PACT governing body if they still feel that their complaint has not been properly addressed.

Aims

The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible.

Our school aims to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint, and we aim to work collaboratively in partnership with parents. We give careful consideration to all complaints, and deal with them as swiftly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding. In all cases we put the interests of the child above all else. We provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed, and then resolved.

We try to resolve every concern or 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. 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 also to our school culture.

The complaints process

The procedures set out below must be followed in each case adapted. Certain parts of the procedures can only be carried out during term time. Timescales included in this policy refer to term time only. If a complaint is received during a holiday period or cannot be resolved because of a holiday period, the time frame common to that particular stage begins from the first day of the following term.

A written record is kept of all complaints made in writing under the formal part of our school's procedures, whether they were resolved at the formal stage or proceeded to a panel hearing and the action taken by our school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). Details of any informal complaints may be kept in the Incidents File for management purposes to enable patterns of concern to be monitored. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where

the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Exclusions are not covered by this policy, those procedures can be found in section 8 of the 'Behaviour & Discipline' Policy.

Our school's procedures only apply to past children if the complaint was initially raised when the child was still registered.

This policy outlines three stages of complaint:

- Stage 1: Informal Resolution
- Stage 2: Formal Resolution
- Stage 3: Panel Hearing

Where timescales are given in 'working days', this is defined as Monday - Friday during term time (the dates of which are available on our website). Complaints received during holiday periods will be dealt with as soon as is practicable but are likely to take longer to resolve due to the unavailability of relevant staff. Under such circumstances the complainant will be notified of any extension to the time scales and the reason(s) why an extension is necessary when the complaint is acknowledged.

Stage One: Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most concerns and complaints are resolved quickly and informally. If a parent is concerned about anything to do with the education that we are providing at our school, they should, in the first instance, discuss the matter informally with their child's class teacher. All teachers work very hard to ensure that each child is happy at school, and is making good progress; they naturally want to know if there is a problem, so that they can take action before it seriously affects the child's progress. Any written notification is acknowledged by email or telephone within 48 hours of receipt during term time and as soon as is practicable during holidays.

On occasion, complaints may be dealt with by members of the SMT (including our Head) but still be resolved informally and successfully. In our experience most of these matters of concern can be resolved positively at this preliminary stage.

A complaint which has not been resolved by informal means to the parent's satisfaction within 10 working days should be notified to the college in writing as a formal complaint which will be dealt with in accordance with Stage 2 below

Stage Two: Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, as described in Stage One, parents should put their complaint in writing to our Head. She decides, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. This must be done even where the informal process has been conducted with our Head. If parents require assistance with their request, for example because of a disability, the school is happy to make appropriate arrangements.

In most cases, the Head meets or speaks to the parents concerned to discuss the matter, normally within 5 working days of receiving the complaint. If possible, a resolution is reached at this stage.

It may be necessary for the Head to carry out further investigations or to ask a senior member of staff to act as investigator. That person may ask for additional information from parents and may wish to speak to parents personally and to others who may have knowledge of the circumstances including, if appropriate, their child.

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

If parents are dissatisfied with the Head's decision under Stage Two, they may proceed to Stage Three of this policy.

Alternative procedure for handling formal complaints about the Headmistress A parent wishing to make a complaint about the Headmistress may do so by writing to Maria Kemp, [Chair of Governors] at the PACT Educational Trust Ltd c/o 147 Central Hill, London SE19 1RS. The Chair of Governors will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within two working days, indicating what action is being taken and the likely time scale. The procedures and time scales that apply to any other formal complaint (see above) will be followed.

Stage Three: Panel Hearing

Stage 3: Panel Hearing If the parent wishes to proceed to Stage 3 (following a failure to reach a resolution earlier in the complaints process) they should write to Mrs Rona Ahmed (the Convenor), who is responsible for making the arrangements for a Panel Hearing, at the school address. In the written request for a Panel Hearing, the parent should state the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired. They should also send a list of all the documents that they believe to be in the School's possession that they consider relevant in the matter and that they wish the Panel to see. Copies of all such documents shall be supplied to all parties not later than five working days before the hearing.

The Convenor will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days and will schedule a meeting of the Panel within 10 working days thereafter. The School will take all reasonable steps when making the arrangements for the hearing to facilitate the parent exercising their right to attend. If, having

indicated they wish to proceed to Stage 3 of this complaints procedure, the parent decides not to attend the hearing, the hearing will take place in their absence. Under these circumstances, the panel will make findings on the substance of the complaint on the basis of the evidence available.

The Panel appointed by the Chair of Governors will consist of at least three people not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the School and not a member of the Governing Body. The role of the Panel is not only to establish that the correct process has been followed but also to establish the merits or otherwise of the complaint(s) by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties and
- any representations made by the parents and the Head
- and to reach a decision on the balance of probabilities as to whether each complaint is upheld in whole or in part.

The complainant may be accompanied by a friend or relative, but legal representation is not usually appropriate. If the complainant wishes to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, acting in their professional capacity, the School must be notified at least seven working days before the hearing.

The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Panel (chosen by themselves) and will be conducted in an informal manner. The Panel Chair will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that the parties have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. All present will be entitled, should they so wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. A handwritten minute of the hearing will be taken.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parent's 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 the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel will reach a decision. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations shall be confirmed in writing to the parent and, where relevant, to the person complained about within five working days of the hearing. The decision of the Panel will be Page 7 (of 9) final. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Head and the Chair of Governors.

Record keeping and confidentiality

A written record will be kept by the Head of all formal complaints, including any action(s) taken by the school as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether it is upheld), and of whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or progressed to a panel hearing.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except as required by the school by paragraph 33 (k) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014; namely, where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them, or where any other legal obligations prevail. Records of individual complaints will be retained for at least seven years thereafter, in accordance with data protection principles, only for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in line with statutory guidance.

Senior leaders and governors will maintain oversight of these records in order to determine the appropriate implementation of this policy and to respond to any patterns of complaints which may be apparent.

Managing serial and persistent complaints

The staff at Oakwood School will do its utmost to be helpful to parents who make contact with a concern, complaint or request for information. However, there may be occasions when, despite all stages of the complaints procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If a complainant attempts to reopen the same issue, the School will inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed. If the complainant contacts the School again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the School may choose not to respond. However, this will not occur until the complainant has completed the three stages of the complaints procedure. The application of a 'serial or persistent' designation for a complaint relates to the subject of the complaint rather than the complainant themselves.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

If parents with children in the EYFS wish to make a formal complaint against our school in writing, they can register their complaint with one of the following organisations:

*Ofsted – Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD
Tel. 0300 123 4666, email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or*

*Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) – Cap House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA
Email: concerns@isi.net*

Complaints must be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days.

Records of complaints involving children in the Early Years are kept for seven years.

If requested by Ofsted and/or the ISI, our school provides a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint.

Monitoring and review of complaints policy and procedures

The Board of Governors will monitor the number and type of complaints received and the operation of the procedures set out in this policy. They will also review the policy at least annually to ensure it meets statutory requirements and continues to reflect best practice.

Signed by: Linda Sanders

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years	
Title	Complaints Policy and Procedure
Version	9
Date of Review	Autumn 2023
Author	Linda Sanders
Approved by SLT	Yes
Approval/Review required by PACT or sub-committee	Yes
Latest Review (state whether changes were made)	Yes

Next Review Date	Autumn 2024
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This policy should be read in conjunction with the following related policies:

Behaviour & Discipline.

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2020 – 21:

None.

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2021 – 22:

None.

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2022 – 23:

None.