

Parental concerns and complaints

(Seniors, Juniors, Infants including EYFS)

This policy is written in accordance with ISI Regulatory Requirements, Part 7, Paragraph 33.

Throughout this policy the use of “parent” includes guardians.

- 1 **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 the School's 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 the School's systems and procedures in light of the circumstances. In this policy, 'complaint' is any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the school.

- 2 **Policy statement:** 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. 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 his/her opportunities at this school.

The Head and Senior Deputy Head review all complaints every half term. A nominated Governor meets with the Senior Deputy Head to monitor appropriate actions.

- 3 **Three stages:** This policy describes a three stage procedure, progressing through the stages as necessary:

Stage 1 - All complaints are normally first dealt with at this informal stage, with notification from a parent either orally or in writing to any member of staff.

Stage 2 - A formal complaint in writing to the Headmaster if the outcome at Stage 1 does not meet with a parent's satisfaction.

Stage 3 - A reference to the Complaints Panel if the outcome at Stage 2 does not meet with a parent's satisfaction.

Please note - A concern about the safety of your child should be notified immediately to the DSL or to the person you believe is best placed to take urgent action or, if you prefer, any member of the Senior Leadership Team or Infant and Junior Leadership Team, and should be confirmed in writing to the Headmaster (or Head of the Infant and Junior School).

Parents have the right to contact an ISI inspector if they have a complaint. Parents of a pupil in EYFS can also contact Ofsted. Details of how to do so are found in [Appendix 1](#).

All times throughout the policy are in terms of “term-time days” – days when the School has pupils attending. These are the days when the School can guarantee that evidence is able to be gathered and when necessary people are available. However, the School will always endeavour to progress a complaint out of term-time as far as particular circumstances allow.

Stage 1 –Informal Complaints

- 4 **Stage 1 procedure:** In the first instance, all complaints raised will be considered on an informal basis. We expect that most informal complaints, for which a 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. Many complaints can be resolved simply by talking to or emailing a

teacher involved with the issue. Discussing with the teacher concerned, or the most appropriate member of staff who can address the issue, will often result in the speediest and most effective response and resolution.

- 5 **Notification:** Please raise the complaint initially as follows (orally, or in a letter or email):

Curricular or learning matter	Class teacher or Head of Subject in the Senior School if it is specific to one lesson; Form Tutor if it is of a more general nature. Form Teacher in the Infant and Junior School.
Co-curricular matter	The member of staff organising the activity.
Pastoral matter	Form Tutor or Head of House in the Senior School. Form Teacher in the Infant and Junior School. A concern about the safety of your child should be notified immediately to the DSL or a person you believe is best placed to take urgent action or, if you prefer, any member of the Senior Leadership Team, and should be confirmed in writing to the Headmaster (or Head of the Infant and Junior School).
Disciplinary Matter	The member of staff involved in the matter or who gave the sanction if it is related to a sanction.
Financial matter	The Bursar
Other matters or if you are unsure	Check with the Senior Deputy Head (Senior School) or Head of Infant and Juniors who will advise who to raise the matter with.

- 6 **Timing and Resolution of informal complaints:** We expect that complaints raised by informal means should be acknowledged within two days and resolved and normally concluded within 10 term-time days. If there is no resolution at the informal stage or you are not satisfied with the response to the complaint made, your complaint should be notified in writing as a **formal complaint** which will be dealt with in accordance with Stage 2 below.
- 7 **Record Keeping:** Records of informal complaints will be logged internally for management purposes to enable patterns to be monitored, including how the matter was resolved. The member of staff involved will also inform their Line Manager who will consider whether any further action is merited. See [Appendix 2](#).

Stage 2 - Formal Complaint

- 8 **Notification:** If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of a Stage 1 complaint, you can notify the school, in a letter addressed to the Headmaster or via email sent to headmaster@bgs.bristol.sch.uk, that you would like your complaint to be dealt with formally at Stage 2. Please include full details and all relevant documents and your full contact details. This usually must be received within 5 days of the receipt of the outcome from Stage 1; if an alert of the intention to move to the formal stage is received within 5 days, the School may consider an extension to 10 days to receive full details and relevant documents in exceptional circumstances. Your complaint will be acknowledged in writing within three term-time days, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale (see paragraph 14 below). If your complaint is about the Headmaster then you should address the complaint to the Chair of Governors, who will then ensure that the matter is investigated

and the report of the investigation will go to him; please contact the Clerk to the Governors (clerktogovernors@BGS.BRISTOL.SCH.UK) who will facilitate your communication with the Chair.

- 9 If a complaint is deemed serious enough by the School, needs extensive investigation or there is dissatisfaction with some aspect of the School's policies, procedures, management or administration, the school may treat it as a Stage 2 complaint without having progressed through the first stage. If you believe this might be the case, you may raise your complaint as outlined in paragraph 8 without going through Stage 1, however, the School may determine the complaint to be at Stage 1 and treat it as such, and you will be notified.
- 10 **Designated Person:** The Headmaster has appointed a senior member of staff ("**Designated Person**") to be responsible for overseeing the investigation of complaints and their resolution. Within the Infant and Junior School the Head (Infant and Junior School) is the Designated Person. Within the Senior School the Senior Deputy Head is the Designated Person. If the Designated Person is unavailable or is the subject of the complaint, his/her duties will be carried out by another member of the Senior Leadership Team, appointed by the Headmaster. The main responsibilities of the Designated Person are to:
- 10.1 Oversee the resolution of any formal complaint.
 - 10.2 Co-ordinate the complaints procedures in School.
 - 10.3 Maintain an on-going training programme for all School employees in relation to complaints.
 - 10.4 Monitor the keeping, confidentiality and storage of records in relation to complaints.
 - 10.5 Report regularly to the Headmaster with respect to complaints.
- 11 The investigation into some complaints will be delegated by the Designated Person as follows:
- 11.1 **Senior School Learning, Teaching and Curriculum:** Deputy Head (Academic)
 - 11.2 **Senior School Pastoral and Discipline Matters:** Deputy Head (Pupil Development)
 - 11.3 **Recruitment Matters and any other Senior School Matters:** Any member of SLT
 - 11.4 **Financial and Premises Matters:** Bursar
 - 11.5 **Junior and Infant** matters will be delegated as the Head of the Junior and Infant School feels appropriate, and parents will be informed.

The Designated Person will be the first point of contact for parents while the matter remains unresolved.

- 12 Every formal complaint will be recorded, using [Appendix 3](#), together with the actions taken.
- 13 **Investigation:** As described in paragraph 11, the Designated Person may ask a senior member of staff to act as "**investigator**" and/or may involve one or more Governors. The investigator(s) may request additional information from parents and may wish to speak to a parent personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. The outcome of the investigation will be reported to the Headmaster by the Designated Person who will then notify the parent(s) in writing of the Headmaster's decision and the reasons for it. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. The member of SLT investigating the complaint will also keep a written log of the process using [Appendix 3](#).
- 14 **Timing and Resolution of Formal Complaints:** The investigation and report back to parent(s) will normally be completed within 10 term-time days of the receipt by the Headmaster of the written notification of complaint. This may be extended by a further 5 term-time days if further investigation is required, and the Designated Person will notify parent(s) if this should need to happen. The report will usually also go to any person about whom the complaint has been made.

Stage 3 - Reference to the Complaints Panel

- 15 Where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the formal complaint made in Stage 2, a Complaints Panel hearing will take place. This is a review of the decisions taken by the Headmaster (or in the case of a

complaint about the Headmaster, by the Chair of Governors) at Stage 2. The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure.

- 16 **Notification:** To request a hearing before the Complaints Panel please write to the Clerk to the Governors at the School address, or via email (clerktogovernors@bgs.bristol.sch.uk) **within five term-time days of receipt of the decision by the Headmaster at stage 2. The School may at its discretion extend the notification period in exceptional circumstances if the intention to request a panel hearing has been made within the five day period.** Your request will only be considered if you have completed the procedures at Stage 2. Please include with the letter:
- 16.1 a copy of all relevant documents you wish the Panel to consider;
 - 16.2 a list of the documents which you believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to see;
 - 16.3 your full contact details;
 - 16.4 the outcome that you desire;
 - 16.5 and the *specific* and *full* grounds of your complaint.
- 17 The Clerk to the Governors will acknowledge your request in writing within three term-time days. In the case of the absence of the Clerk to the Governors another member of the Senior Leadership Team who has not been involved with your complaint at stage 2 will fulfil this role.
- 18 **The Complaints Panel**
- 18.1 **The role of the Panel:** the Panel's task is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints in order to review the decision made, by considering:
 - the documents provided by both parties and
 - any representations made by you or the Headmaster.
 - 18.2 If, after establishing the facts, the Panel considers that the complaint is made out, they will uphold the complaint in part or in full as appropriate. If the Panel considers that the complaint is not made out, they will dismiss the complaint to the extent to which the Panel considers it has not been made out. They will make these decisions on the balance of probabilities.
 - 18.3 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 recommendations on these or any other issues to the Headmaster or to the Board of Governors as appropriate.
 - 18.4 The Panel will not simply check whether process has been followed; rather, they will review whether the Head's decision at Stage 2 was justified given the information available at the time. The Panel will also consider whether it wishes to review any further information or documentation put forward at this stage in the process, in which case it will also consider why this information was not previously available or used at Stage 2.

In the following "you" refers to the parent(s) who wrote to the Headmaster to make a formal complaint.

- 19 **Composition:** The Panel will usually consist of three people, and never fewer, all of whom will not have been directly involved in the detail of the matters giving rise to the complaint. One Panel member will be independent of the management and running of the School. The DfE has given the following guidance on the identity of an independent panel member: *'Our general view is that people who have held a position of responsibility and are used to scrutinising evidence and putting forward balanced arguments would be suitable. Examples of persons likely to be suitable are serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background and retired members of the Police Force might be considered'*. Up to two members of the Panel will be governors of the School; the governors chosen may have superficial knowledge of the complaint, in their role as governors, but will not have been involved in

any detailed way in investigations or discussions that have taken place at earlier stages.

- 20 **Convening the Panel:** The Complaints Panel will normally be created within 10 term-time days of your request letter. The Panel will not normally sit during School holidays.
- 21 **Notice of hearing:** The Clerk to the Governors will send you written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing together with brief details of the Panel members who will hear it, at least five term-time days prior to the hearing. If you have a reason for objecting to one or more members of the Panel then that will be considered by the Chair of Governors and if upheld all reasonable efforts will be made to find alternative members.
- 22 **Chair:** The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Panel (chosen by the Panel) and will be conducted in an informal manner.
- 23 **Attendance:** You will be asked to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, teacher, or friend. If you wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, or by more than one person, please provide details to the Clerk to the Governors in writing at least three term-time days before the hearing. A legally qualified person accompanying you would not have the right to legally represent you without the Panel's explicit agreement. The Chair will have the discretion to limit the numbers of people attending the hearing in the interests of maintaining an informal but orderly atmosphere. Your child aged 13+ may attend part or all of the hearing at the discretion of the Chair if she/he wishes to do so.
- 24 Copies of any further documents you wish the Panel to consider (in addition to documents listed in section 16) should be sent to the Clerk to the Governors at least **three term-time days** prior to the hearing.
- 25 If you decide not to attend, the Panel will still meet and consider your complaint and report its findings unless you indicate that you are now satisfied and do not want to proceed further with the complaint.
- 26 **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 Clerk to the Governors will be asked to be present and to take summary minutes of the proceedings. The suggested procedures to be followed at a hearing are in [Appendix 4](#).
- 27 **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.
- 28 **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 owing to your conduct or that of a person accompanying you, 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.
- 29 **Adjournment:** The Chair may at his/her discretion adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue.
- 30 **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 you within five term-time days. A copy of the findings and recommendations will be made available on the School premises for inspection by the Governors and Headmaster. Brief reasons for the decision may be given but need not be given. The decision may include recommendations and will be sent to you, the Chair of Governors, the Headmaster and, where appropriate,

any other person about whom the complaint has been made.

- 31 **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.
- 32 **Confidentiality:** Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the secretary of the state or a body conducting an investigation under section 109 of the 2008 Act, as amended, requests access to them. These records will be kept in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy.
- 33 Complaints regarding the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) parents may make a direct complaint to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). Should they so wish, details are available on their website at www.isi.net.
- 34 For **EYFS** parents the School will notify them of the outcome of an EYFS-related investigation within 28 days of having received the complaint and will notify them of the outcome of any other investigation within 20 term-time days of having received the complaint.
- 35 On request the ISI will be provided with a written record of all EYFS complaints made during any specified period, and the action that was taken as a result of each complaint.
- 36 The record of EYFS complaints is available to Ofsted on request.
- 37 The record of complaints for EYFS is kept for at least three years.
- 38 **Written Records**
Where a complaint is made in accordance with Stage 2 or Stage 3 of this policy a written record will be kept and that will include:
- Whether the complaint was resolved following a formal procedure or whether it proceeded to a panel hearing
 - Action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether it is upheld).
- 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 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.
- Written records of complaints which do not have a safeguarding implication will be retained for at least seven years. Where there is a safeguarding angle records concerning allegations of abuse will be preserved for the term of the Independent inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation if it is longer.
- 39 Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this can be regarded as vexatious and outside the scope of the policy.
- 40 In the academic year 2023-24, no complaints reached the formal complaints stage and no complaints were heard by a complaints panel.

Policy Details

- A. **Circulation:** This policy is for the attention of the Senior Leadership Team; Governors, all members of staff, and parents. The policy is available in the "Guide for Parents" and on the School's web site.
- B. **Policy status:** The policy has been approved by the Headmaster and the Governing Body of Bristol Grammar

School. It provides guidelines for handling concerns and complaints. It takes account of Part 7 of the *Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2017*, incorporating the changes in wording made in January 2015. The procedures set out above may be adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and circumstances of each case.

- C. **Application:** Separate procedures apply in the event of a safeguarding or child protection issue or if the Headmaster expels or asks a pupil to leave and the parents seek a Governors' Review of that decision.
- D. **"Parent/s" / "You"** includes a current or legal guardian or education guardian, or a pupil aged 16+, and may at the Headmaster's discretion include a parent whose child has recently left the School.

Date	Last material change	Governors' Approval
		Summer 2020
October 2022	Amendment of the policy to clarify and update procedural details	Spring 2024
July 2024	No substantive updates	

Appendix 1

Contacting ISI and Ofsted

The School is inspected by ISI, an independent organisation which reports to the Government on schools. Parents have the right to contact an inspector if they have a complaint. ISI will usually expect parents to have followed the School's formal complaints procedure before contacting them. However, you can report your concerns to ISI as below.

Contact details for ISI

Independent Schools Inspectorate CAP House 9 - 12 Long Lane London EC1A 9HA	Telephone: 020 7600 0100
---	--------------------------

Parents of a pupil in EYFS have the right to contact Ofsted (as well as ISI) if they have a complaint.

Contact details for Ofsted

Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD	Telephone: 0300 123 1231
---	--------------------------

Appendix 2

Stage 1 - Informal Complaints

Log of Informal Complaints

The Informal Complaints form can be accessed from the Staff page on SharePoint or by selecting the icon on all staff iPads.

With the form open, respondents must enter the following information:

- The date that the informal complaint was received
- The date that the informal complaint was resolved and the parent / pupil informed
- The area of concern the informal complaint broadly falls into
- Brief details of the informal complaint and the resolution
- The initials of the staff member dealing with the informal complaint.

Once all fields have been entered, the form will be submitted to a central database that can only be accessed by members of SLT.

Classification of queries/ informal complaints

There is no fixed dividing line between a what is simply a query and an informal complaint. Staff will use professional judgement. The following gives guidance. Certainly if a matter has the potential to escalate to become a formal complaint then it should first have been logged as an informal complaint.

Query	Informal Complaint
There was no Maths homework this week	There has been no Maths homework for three weeks
The coach from Failand was late yesterday and John missed his bus	The coach from Failand is always late and John keeps missing his bus
Sarah's bag was taken from her locker yesterday	Other pupils have often taken Sarah's bag from her locker
There was no vegetarian option left for Mark yesterday	When Mark gets to lunch there is rarely any vegetarian option
Mr X is often sarcastic when he feeds back to Sarah on her homework but I know that Sarah does always try	Ms X shouted at Alfie yesterday until she was red in the face and Alfie burst into tears
I am surprised that the School does not offer an A Level in Food and Nutrition	My son has studied GCSE Food and Nutrition and now there is no A Level for him to continue with

Appendix 3

Stage 2 - Formal Complaints

Log of investigation into a formal complaint

This log is to be completed by any member of staff investigating a formal complaint. It should be passed to the Designated Person together with all supporting documents.

Name of person making the complaint	
Date received by the Headmaster	
Date of acknowledgement	
Person writing to acknowledge	
Person appointed by Headmaster to look into the matter	
Nature of complaint	
Actions to be completed	
Likely timescale of looking into the matter	
People submitting evidence and form of evidence	
Date the findings are presented to the Headmaster	
To be completed by designated person:	
Headmaster's decision	
Date of notification of the Headmaster's decision to parents (must be within 10 term-time days of receipt of the complaint)	
Lessons Learned and associated actions	

Letter to parents confirming the School's actions to be sent by the Designated Person once the actions have been completed.	
---	--

Appendix 4

Stage 3 - Reference to Complaints Panel

Suggested Procedures to be followed at a hearing of the Complaints Panel

- 1 **Introduction:** this is the procedure that will normally be followed by the Complaints Panel and is designed to ensure that all parties have the opportunity to present their views to the Panel.
- 2 **Meeting format:** the meeting will take the form of a "round the table" hearing, where all parties and the Panel are present in the same room throughout. Present in the room throughout the hearing will be:
 - the Panel Members
 - the Clerk to the Panel. The Clerk will take minutes of the meeting. Any minutes produced by the Clerk will not be verbatim and will belong to the Chair. The Chair can authorise the release of the Clerk's notes on condition that they remain confidential
 - the parents who have made the complaint
 - any person that the parents have brought as a supporter, and whose attendance has been approved by the Panel
 - the Headmaster
 - any other appropriate member of staff, whose attendance has been approved by the Panel

Note: any witnesses called by any of the above parties may be asked to make their contribution and then leave rather than staying for the whole proceeding.

- 3 **Suggested agenda**
 - Welcome, introductions and format of the meeting, by the Chair.
 - Parents present their complaints and call witnesses if necessary. Where two parents are present, it is often more helpful if one parent undertakes the responsibility of presentation and answering of questions.
 - The Panel and the Headmaster may ask questions of parents for clarification. Questions should be put through the Chair of the Panel who can intervene if s/he thinks that questions are inappropriate or are straying into cross examination.
 - The Head puts his/her case, explaining the reasons for the decision and consideration and calling witnesses if necessary.
 - The parents and the Panel may ask questions of the Headmaster for clarification. Again such questions should be put through the Chair who can intervene as necessary.
 - The Head is invited to make any further relevant points.
 - The parents are then invited to make any further relevant points.
 - When the Panel is satisfied that it has established facts sufficiently for it to make a decision, the Chair will bring the hearing to a close and inform the parties that they will be notified in writing of the decision, within seven term-time days. In some cases, the decision may be communicated verbally at this time, to those present.
 - The parents and the Headmaster leave together with any witnesses, supporters or representatives.

- 4 **Legal advice:** if, during the hearing, parents introduce legal points on which the Panel feel they will need advice, they will consider one of two options:
- 5 a) the Panel may decide to take a careful note of points made and to consider the advice of the School's lawyers before making their final decision; or
- 6 b) if the Panel feels that an immediate response is required, they may adjourn the hearing to take telephone advice from the School's lawyers.