



## Policy on Parental Complaints

Ardingly College welcomes suggestions and comments from parents, and takes seriously complaints and concerns that may arise. This procedure will show you how to use our complaints system.

### Parental Complaints Procedure

The College undertakes to deal with complaints as sympathetically and expeditiously as possible; and to resolve them, either to the complainant's satisfaction or with an otherwise appropriate outcome, which balances the rights and duties of students.

There is a separate complaints procedure for students, and it may mean that parents wish to invoke the parental complaints procedure if they are dissatisfied with the School's handling of a complaint by a student.

Each housemaster/housemistress or tutor will keep a separate file of the parental complaints which come to them. This file will include a record of their responses, actions and other aspects of the outcome of complaints. Heads of Departments will pass on to the Headmaster their records of complaints. The Headmaster, Deputy Head and Director of Studies will maintain a complaints file similar to that kept by the housemaster and housemistresses. The Headmaster, or someone delegated by him, will review these records of complaints regularly (this will normally be the Deputy Headmaster).

Pupils whose parents make complaints in good faith will not be penalised in any way.

The law requires the College to follow a clear procedure when a complaint is made. Because the investigation and response to a complaint can be so time-consuming, we ask parents who make a complaint to be clear, at the start of any letter or conversation, that they are making a formal complaint rather than an observation about some aspect of administration or welfare.

### Confidentiality

Parents can be assured that all complaints and concerns 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 other legal obligation prevails.

### How to Complain

#### Education Matters

If the complaint relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, please discuss it with your son's or daughter's tutor or housemaster or

housemistress. They will then help you to put your concerns to the appropriate Head of Department or the Director of Studies.

### Pastoral Care

If the concern relates to a matter outside the classroom or in the house, please speak or write to the housemaster or housemistress in the first instance. They will then put you in touch with the Deputy Head, or Headmaster, if necessary, or if you wish.

### Disciplinary Matters

A concern about disciplinary sanctions should be first raised with the housemaster or housemistress, who will put you in touch with the member of staff who imposed the sanction. If not resolved, then you should address your concern to the Deputy Head or Headmaster.

### Financial Matters

A concern or complaint about the matter relating to fees or extras should be stated in writing to the Bursar. If not resolved promptly, please send a copy of the letter of complaint to the Headmaster.

### Stages of Resolution

Stage 1: Informal resolution.

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. An informal resolution is desirable from all points of view, and every effort will be made to achieve this, involving any member of teaching staff. Should the matter not be resolved within five working days, or in the event that the member of staff and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2: Formal resolution.

The Headmaster may delegate at this stage to another senior member of staff (normally the Deputy Head, Director of Studies or Head of VI Form). All references to Headmaster under Stage 2 shall, therefore, automatically be taken to include those named above.

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

In most cases, the Headmaster (or his nominee) will meet or speak with parents concerned, normally within five working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. Every attempt will be made to reach a resolution at this stage.

It may be necessary for the Headmaster (or his nominee) to carry out further investigations.

The Headmaster (or his nominee) will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

Once the Headmaster (or his nominee) is satisfied that, so far as practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made, and the parents will be informed of his decision in writing. The Headmaster (or his nominee) will also give reasons for their decision.

If the parents remain dissatisfied, they should make an appeal in writing to the Chairman of the School Council within fourteen days of receipt of the written outcome. If you wish to do so, please send your letter c/o The Clerk to the Governors at the School's address.

When the Chairman is satisfied that he has all the necessary information, he may give his decision in writing or, at his sole discretion, convene a panel of three people to hear the appeal, two of whom will be members of the College Council, other than the Chairman, and one of whom will be a person of standing, not involved in the School. This person will be independent from the management and running of the School.

### Appeal Hearing

The Chairman of the Council, on behalf of the panel, will acknowledge the appeal, and schedule a meeting to take place as soon as practicable, and normally within fifteen working days of the receipt of the appeal.

Any documents which are to be considered by the appeal panel will be disclosed to both parties, not later than five working days before the hearing.

Parents may be accompanied to the hearing, if they so wish, by the student concerned, and by one other person of their choice. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.

The Headmaster will not be present at the hearing, but may be invited to meet the panel afterwards, before they reach their decision.

At the hearing the appeal panel may consider evidence from any person who was involved in the decision under discussion, and any relevant documents pertaining to this decision.

The panel will try to resolve the parents' appeal immediately without need for further investigation. If further investigation is required, the panel will decide how it should be carried out.

After due consideration of all the facts they consider relevant, the panel will consider its decision and any recommendation it may wish to take. The Clerk to the appeal panel will remain in attendance to record the panel's decision.

The Chairman of the Council will write to parents informing them of the panel's decision and the reasons for it within five working days of the hearing. The decision of the panel will be final.

The panel's finding and recommendations, if any, will also be sent in writing to the Headmaster, and where relevant the person complained about, the matter will be reported to the Council at their next meeting.

If Social Services need to be contacted their telephone number is: 01243 771000. Concerns may also be addressed to ISI (Tel No: 0207 600 0100).

## **Monitoring Complaints**

A formal complaint registered on the College's Complaints Register is one that has been registered by a parent, pupil or third party and is encompassed by the School's Complaints Procedure for pupils or parents. By its nature a formal complaint is more serious and severe than an informal complaint or concern. A complaint will normally, but not exclusively, be focused upon a person or persons associated with the School, their conduct or behaviour or will generally identify a perceived failure, error or breach of contract (in the broadest sense of the term) between the School and the complainant.

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. If parents have a complaint they should normally contact the HoMM. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction.

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

The school keeps a written record of those procedures, should you wish to see these please contact the Headmaster's PA.

There have been NO complaints registered under the formal procedure during the school year preceding the last review date.

### **Monitoring:**

Deputy Headmaster

### **Policy Review:**

Reviewed and revised October 2011

Next review September 2012

### **Person Responsible:**

Deputy Headmaster