

ARGYLE HOUSE SCHOOL COMPLAINTS POLICY



POLICY REVIEWED AND UPDATED – FEBRUARY 2025

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This policy applies to all parents of pupils at Argyle House School including parents of pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and to parents of parents of former students if the complaint was raised when their child was registered as a pupil at the School.

1.2 The School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to their pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the Schools in accordance with this Policy and Procedure. Our aim is to have an open organisation, climate and culture.

1.3 This policy encompasses notifications of an actual or perceived problem arising from an event or process under the jurisdiction of the school, which causes parents to be concerned or dissatisfied about their child's experience or their own and where they are seeking action by the school. Parents should raise any complaints directly and we reserve the right to modify the procedures in this policy as necessary to address complaints raised by more than one set of parents together.

1.4 In order to assist in a speedy and satisfactory resolution, parents are asked, from the beginning, to state clearly the exact nature of their concern and the remedy sought. It can greatly assist a speedy and satisfactory resolution if the notification is prompt and specific, including examples and factual evidence where this is appropriate and practicable.

1.5 A central record will be kept securely of informal complaints, allowing the pattern of concerns and complaints to be monitored regularly by appropriate members of the senior leadership team.

1.6 The number of complaints under the formal resolution process (Stage 2) in the preceding academic year will be made available to parents on request.

2.0 Definitions for the purposes of this Policy

2.1 A parent is defined as a biological parent or any other person with parental responsibility or care for a pupil currently attending the school.

2.2 Working days refers to full school days in term time. This therefore excludes all school holidays, weekends, public holidays and half-days. Where the word 'normally' is used, it is expected that the timescale would only be altered by the school or the parents in exceptional circumstances, such as the illness of a parent or a key member of staff involved in the process. Should the matter progress to an appeal, the availability of the any of the participants including the panel members may also be a constraint. In these circumstances, a note will be sent to complainants to inform them of the proposed length of time it will take to undertake initial enquiries above and beyond the normal time indicated.

3.0 Policy

3.1 In our School, we wish to have a community that listens and is able to respond in a positive, appropriate and sympathetic way to any concerns. It is important that all stakeholders feel valued and involved with the school and are able to voice their concerns. This is helped where the culture of the school is open and where all complaints are received in a positive manner.

3.2 All concerns need to be handled seriously. A gentle expression of concern, or a simple query, may grow into a painful matter if people 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.

4.0 Procedure

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

4.1 It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.

4.2 If parents or guardians have a complaint, they should contact the pupil's Form Tutor / Class Teacher or Subject Teacher in the first instance. If he/she is not the appropriate person to deal with it, he/she will pass it to the person who is. If this individual cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult a member of the Senior Leadership Team or the Head.

4.3 The aim is to resolve the matter promptly to the parents' or guardians' satisfaction.

4.4 Complaints made directly to the Senior Leadership Team or the Head will be referred to the relevant member of staff unless the Senior Leadership Team or the Head deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.

4.5 The member of staff in receipt of the complaint/concern will make a written record of it and the date on which it was received and will normally acknowledge it within 2 working days. The school will normally deal with the matter within 10 working days of receipt of the notification.

4.6 Where an informal resolution is not achieved, parents may make a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure.

Complaints about the Head

4.7 The procedure for dealing with an informal complaint about the Head of the School is set out below:

- parents may choose to raise complaints directly with the Head if they feel that the matter is capable of resolution informally. The complaint may be raised orally or in writing. If in writing, the School will not automatically treat the complaint as a formal (Stage 2) complaint and the Head will endeavour to resolve the complaint informally under Stage 1;
- the Head will acknowledge informal complaints within 2 working days and will seek to resolve the matter under this Stage 1 by means of direct conversation or a meeting with the parents, to be held within 10 working days of the initial complaint;
- if the parent is dissatisfied with the Head's response to the informal complaint or in the event that the complaint cannot be resolved by informal means, the parent may make a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure.

4.8 Alternatively, parents may choose to make their complaint about the Head to the CEO of Forfar Education. In this case, the complaint will be treated as a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

4.9 If the complaint cannot be resolved at Stage 1 (Informal Resolution), then the parents or guardians should put their complaint in writing to the Head stating explicitly that, having been through Stage 1 of the procedure, they remain dissatisfied and now wish to make a "formal complaint".

4.10 In the Formal Complaint, parents should:

- state the nature of the complaint,

- state the remedy sought, and
- include all relevant information.

Parents should note that the complaint at this stage should not change in scope from that presented at Stage 1. Should any new matters be presented, parents will usually be advised that they will be dealt with under Stage 1.

4.11 A formal complaint should normally be lodged within 7 working days of the date of a verbal or written report to parents under the Stage 1 procedure.

4.12 The Head will acknowledge in writing receipt of the complaint, normally within 5 working days, and will normally appoint a senior member of staff to investigate the issues raised (“Investigating Officer”). On some occasions it may be more appropriate for the Head to investigate the complaint.

4.13 The Investigating Officer will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint which will be provided to the Head once collated.

4.14 Once the Head is satisfied, so far as is practicable, that all of the relevant facts have been established, a meeting with the parent(s) will be arranged. At or after that meeting, a decision will be made and the parent(s) will be informed in writing, detailing the reasons.

4.15 The school will normally deal with a formal complaint within 28 working days of receipt.

4.16 If the parent(s) are still not satisfied with the decision, they may choose to proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

Complaints about the Head

4.17 The procedure for dealing with a formal complaint about the Head of the School is set out below:

- The complaint should be put in writing to the CEO of Forfar Education. The complaint should include the same information referred to above.
- The CEO of Forfar Education will acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days of receipt and indicate the action that is being taken and the likely timescale. Such action may include an investigation and/or a meeting with the parent. The parent will usually receive a response to the complaint within 28 working days.
- If the parent is dissatisfied with the response to the complaint, the parent can request that the complaint be referred to a complaints panel under Stage 3.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

4.18 If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach resolution at Stages 1 or 2), they will be referred to the CEO of Forfar Education. The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. A Complaints Panel hearing is a review of the decisions taken by the Head at Stage 2.

4.19 Parents should be advised that it is only their Stage 2 complaint which will be considered by the Complaints Panel. The Panel will not consider any new material or areas of complaint at this stage. They will refer any new material or complaint back to the school for investigation under the appropriate earlier stage of this procedure.

4.20 It is not the Complaints Panel’s purpose to re-investigate the complaint, but to consider the matters raised by the parent(s), and the report from the school, and to decide whether the determination reached at Stage 2 was reasonable and fair.

4.21 The Complaints 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 Forfar Education. The CEO of Forfar Education, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and within 28 working days of the complaint being lodged with the CEO of Forfar Education. The CEO of Forfar Education will provide written notification of the time, date, and place of the hearing. The hearing may proceed in the absence of the Parents if the Parents do not attend.

4.22 If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than 5 working days prior to the hearing.

4.23 The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person who will be present to provide support and not to participate in the discussions. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not be appropriate.

4.24 A hearing under this procedure is not a legal proceeding, but a private and confidential matter. The CEO of Forfar Education will make a minute of the hearing, but no tape, video or digital recording may be made by any party. No notes, other records or oral statements about any matter discussed or arising from the proceedings shall be made available directly or indirectly to third parties, including the press or other media.

4.25 The Panel's aim is to, if possible, resolve the parents' complaint as soon as it has met without the need for further investigation, on the understanding that they already have all the necessary information to conclude matters. Occasionally, it may become necessary to adjourn and reconvene the Panel if further information comes to light that alters the key facts of the case.

4.26 After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations as soon as reasonably possible usually within 10 working days of the Hearing. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it.

4.27 The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head, Forfar Education and, where relevant, the person about whom the complaint was made.

4.28 A copy of those findings and recommendations will be kept by the Heads and is available for inspection on the school premises by Forfar Education.

5.0 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

5.1 Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated and parents will be informed of the outcome of this investigation within 28 days.

5.2 If, following this process, parents believe that the school is not meeting EYFS requirements, they may contact Ofsted and/or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) at the addresses below.

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
MANCHESTER
M1 2WD

Telephone 0300 123 4666
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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

Telephone: 020 7600 0100

Email: complaints@isi.net

5.3 The record of the complaint is available to Ofsted and ISI on request.

5.4 Records of such complaints are kept for at least three years.

6.0 Record-keeping

6.1 Written records of both formal and informal complaints will be kept securely for at least three years, including:

- whether formal complaints were resolved at the preliminary stage or panel hearing stage
- what action the school has taken as a result of each complaint regardless of whether it was upheld.

6.2 Parents or guardians can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially as is required by paragraph 25(k) of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except insofar as is required of the school by paragraph 7(k) of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014; where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

7.0 Reporting

7.1 At the beginning of each academic year, a report will be provided to Forfar Education on the number of Stage 2 complaints made in the previous academic year.

Appendix 1 Unreasonable complaints

1 We are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with us. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

2 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.

3 Unreasonable complaints are taken seriously by the School as they put a strain on valuable resources and hinder the progress of proper investigations.

4 We adopt the Department for Education's definition of unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the School, such as if the complainant:

4.1 refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;

4.2 refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process;

4.3 refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;

4.4 insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the

adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;

4.5 introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;

4.6 makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;

4.7 changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;

4.8 repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);

4.9 refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the School's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed;

4.10 seeks an unrealistic outcome;

4.11 makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;

4.12 uses threats to intimidate;

4.13 uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence;

4.14 knowingly provides falsified information;

4.15 publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

5 A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if it is manifestly unjustified, inappropriate, or an improper use of formal procedure.⁶ In assessing this, the School shall have regard to all the circumstances of the case and the nature of the complaint itself rather than the nature of the complainant. In assessing all of the circumstances of the case the School will consider a range of factors including:

6.1 whether a complaint has reasonable foundation;

6.2 the history and context of the complaint (and any evidence where relevant);

6.3 whether the time and cost of investigating the complaint is proportionate to the issue(s) complained of;

6.4 whether an investigation of the complaint is likely to cause a disproportionate or unjustified level of disruption, irritation or distress;

6.5 unexplained delay in raising a complaint or issue;

6.6 if the purpose of the complaint is to obtain an outcome which is unavailable via the complaints procedure, such as a claim for compensation, damages or a refund of fees paid;

6.7 any evidence of a complaint being brought for an improper purpose.

7 Whenever possible, the Head and / or CEO of Forfar Education will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before dismissing a complaint as unreasonable.

8 If the behaviour continues, the School will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it.

9 For complainants who excessively contact the School causing a significant level of disruption, the School may specify methods of communication and limit number of contacts

in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

10 In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the School will immediately inform the police and communicate its actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the School.

Appendix 2 Past Complaints

Argyle House School received Zero (0) Stage 2 complaints in the 2023-24 academic school year.