



## COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

**REVIEWED: September 2024 (REVIEW DATE: September 2026)**

MISS C BURNHAM (HEADMISTRESS); SLT; BPS MANAGEMENT BOARD

THIS POLICY IS APPLICABLE TO ALL PUPILS, INCLUDING THOSE IN THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE. A SEPARATE EYFS SECTION CAN BE FOUND TOWARDS THE END OF THIS POLICY.

The Belvedere Preparatory School prides itself on the quality of teaching and pastoral care provided to pupils.

### INTRODUCTION

#### AIMS

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

### DEFINITIONS AND SCOPE

#### DEFINITIONS

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A **concern** is defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought". The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible
- A **complaint** is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action"

## **SCOPE**

The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage. There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) about the school's support are within the scope of this policy. Such complaints should first be made to the class teacher/special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO)/Headteacher; they will then be referred to this complaints policy.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **THE COMPLAINANT**

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Not publish details about the complaint on social media

### **THE INVESTIGATOR**

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint, and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the Headteacher or complaints committee which includes the facts and potential solutions

### **THE COMPLAINTS CO-ORDINATOR**

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- The headteacher or their representative
- A Board Member

## **THE BELVEDERE PREPARATORY SCHOOL**

- Any other staff member providing administrative support

The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the headteacher, Board Members
- Keep records
- Be aware of issues relating to:
  - Sharing third-party information
  - Additional support needed by complainants; for example, interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person

## **PRINCIPLES FOR INVESTIGATION**

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

## **TIME SCALES**

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the next school day.

If at any point we cannot meet the time scales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

If parents have a complaint, it will be handled in accordance with this procedure.

## **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 contact their child's class teacher who will respond within 48 hours (during term time). In many cases, the matter will be resolved immediately by this means and to the parents' satisfaction.
- If the class teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). On certain occasions the concern raised may

require investigation, or discussion with others, in which case you will receive an informal but informed response within 48 hours.

- A Complaint made directly to the Deputy Head (Pastoral or Academic) will, in the first instance, be dealt with by the Deputy Head in consultation with appropriate staff. The Deputy Head will contact the complainant within 48 hours (during term time) to discuss the concern.
- A written record will be kept of all concerns and complaints (Blue Class Folders), and the date on which they were received.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the result at Stage 1, they must then contact the school and request that the complaint is escalated to Stage 2.

## **STAGE 2 - FORMAL RESOLUTION**

- If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, then parents should put their complaint, in full, in writing to the Headmistress, who will acknowledge the complaint within 48 hours (during term time).
- The complaint will be logged and dated.
- In most cases the Headmistress will make arrangements to meet parents within five working days of receiving the written complaint. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage and the action the school has taken to resolve the issue will be communicated and recorded.
- It may be necessary for the Headmistress to carry out further investigations.
- The Headmistress will keep records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Headmistress 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. A written response will be communicated within 10 school days (from the date the complaint was received) to the complainant.
- If parents are not satisfied with the Headmistress's decision they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

## **STAGE 3 - PANEL**

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to The Belvedere Preparatory School Management Board.
- The panel will be comprised of at least three people who are not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. Where there is a panel meeting of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school.
- The reasons for referring the matter to the Complaints Panel should be itemised in writing by the parents. This must include the substance of the complaint and the parents' views on why the matter has not been resolved satisfactorily at an earlier stage.
- The matter will be referred to the Management Board's Complaints Panel for consideration. The choice of Panel members will be confirmed by the Chair of the Management Board, in response to the nature of the complaint.
- The Chair to the Management Board will acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable (within 10 working days of receipt of the written complaint).
- 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 no later than three days prior to the hearing.
- A parent can attend and be accompanied at the Panel hearing if they wish.

- If the parent wishes to be accompanied, one other person may accompany the parents to the hearing. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate or permitted at this stage.
- If possible, the panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.
- All parties will be notified of the Panel's decision in writing within three school working days after the date of the hearing.
- Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts considered relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations (within five school working days).
- A copy of the Panel's findings will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise to the complainant and if appropriate, the person who is the subject of the complaint. The findings will also be made available to the Headmistress and the Proprietor. A written record will be kept (for at least three years) of all complaints and will state whether the complaint has been resolved at the preliminary stage or has proceeded to a panel hearing. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be 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.
- The BPS Board Appeal Hearing is the Final Stage of the school's Complaints process.

A written record will be kept of all complaints whether they were resolved following a formal procedure or proceed to a panel hearing, and action taken by the school as a result of those complaints regardless of whether they were upheld.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be 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.

## **THE OUTCOME**

The committee can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld, the committee will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 school days.

## **PERSISTENT COMPLAINTS**

### **UNREASONABLY PERSISTENT COMPLAINTS**

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refused to co-operate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames it sets out
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value

### **STEPS WE WILL TAKE**

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place. We may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as Citizens Advice
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

### **STOPPING RESPONDING**

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

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

### **DUPLICATE COMPLAINTS**

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we had not previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

## COMPLAINT CAMPAIGNS

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

Parents should note that, should they wish, they can refer their complaint to The Independent Schools Inspectorate. [www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net) – 020 7600 0100

**THIS SECTION OUTLINES SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS THAT MUST BE ADHERED TO BY THE BELVEDERE PREPARATORY SCHOOL WITH REGARD TO EARLY YEARS CHILDREN.**

## EYFS CHILDREN

Parents can make complaints also to the **Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI)** and **Ofsted**.

### INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Ground Floor  
CAP House  
9 - 12 Long Lane  
London  
EC1A 9HA  
Telephone 020 7600 0100  
Fax 020 7776 8849  
[www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net)

### OFSTED

Piccadilly Gate,  
Store Street,  
Manchester.  
M1 2WD  
Tel: 0300 123 1231  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

Parents can expect to receive notification of the outcome of an investigation 28 days after the complaint has been received by The Belvedere Preparatory School.



The Belvedere Preparatory School will be required to provide both ISI and Ofsted, on request, with a written record of all formal complaints made during a specified period, and the action taken as a result of each complaint.

#### **EYFS PUPILS**

The role of the Office for Standards in Education, Early Years Directorate (Ofsted):

- Parents may approach Ofsted directly at any stage of this complaints procedure. In addition, where there seems to be a possible breach of our registration requirements, it is essential to involve Ofsted as the registering and inspection body with a duty to ensure the Welfare Requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage are adhered to.
- The number to call Ofsted with regard to a complaint is: 08456 1231231

**IF A CHILD APPEARS TO BE AT RISK, OUR SCHOOL FOLLOWS THE PROCEDURES SET OUT IN OUR CHILD PROTECTION POLICY.**

**There have been ZERO complaints registered that were resolved following a formal procedure, or that proceeded to a panel hearing; and as a result, there has been no actions required to have been taken by the school - Academic School Year 2023-24.**