



Policy on the handling of concerns and complaints

This policy applies equally to EYFS and Key Stage One

Introduction

1 **Policy status:** The policy has been approved by the Head and the Governing Body of the Perse Pelican Nursery and Pre-Preparatory School. It takes account of Regulation 7 of the *Education (Independent School Standards)(England) Regulations 2003* and the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework. This policy covers all sections of the Perse Pelican School, including Early Years. The procedures set out below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and circumstances of each case. Certain of the procedures can only be carried out during term time.

2 **Application:** This policy applies to concerns and complaints arising other than (i) in circumstances covered by the Child Protection Policy or (ii) if the Head has expelled or asked a pupil to leave and the parents seek a Governors' review of that decision.

3 **"Parent/s"/"You"** includes a current or prospective parent or legal guardian and may at the school's discretion include a parent whose child has recently left the School.

4 **Four stages:** This policy describes a four stage procedure -

Stage 1 - Informal resolution of a concern or difficulty notified orally or in writing to a member of staff.

Stage 2 - A formal complaint in writing to the Head.

Stage 3 - A renewed complaint in writing to the Chairman of the Governing Body.

Stage 4 - A reference to the Complaints' Panel.

Timescales : We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. When we refer to "working days" we mean Monday to Friday, when school is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the school's website".

Separate procedures apply if a pupil has been expelled or asked to leave or if a child protection issue has arisen.

A concern about the safety of a child should be notified immediately to the person believed to be best placed to take urgent action and should be confirmed in writing to the Head.

Policy aim and statement

- 5 **Aim:** The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is dealt with 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 our ability to safeguard and promote welfare. We will 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.
- 6 **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, and can 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 policy however distinguishes between a **concern or difficulty** which can be resolved informally and a **formal complaint** which will require appropriate investigation.

Management of complaints

- 7 **Complaints Coordinator:** The Head, Mrs Penny Oates is the Complaints Coordinator responsible for investigating and resolving complaints. She can be contacted on 01223 403940 or by e-mail at pelican@perse.co.uk. If she is unavailable or is the subject of the complaint, her duties as the Complaints Coordinator will be carried out by the Deputy Head, or another senior member of staff nominated by the Head. The main responsibilities of the Complaints Coordinator are to -
- 7.1 Be the first point of contact while the matter remains unresolved.
- 7.2 Co-ordinate the complaints procedures in school.
- 7.3 Maintain an appropriate training programme for all school employees in relation to complaints.
- 7.4 Monitor the maintenance, confidentiality and storage of records in relation to complaints.

Stage 1 - concerns & difficulties

- 8 **Concerns:** We expect that most concerns, where a parent or pupil seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken, can be resolved informally. Examples might include a dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, or about allocation of privileges or responsibilities, or about some other aspect of the School's systems or equipment, or a billing error.
- 9 **Notification:** Please raise the concern initially as follows -

- 9.1 **Curriculum issues** - if the matter relates to the curriculum, please speak or write to the class teacher.
- 9.2 **Pastoral care** - for concerns relating to pastoral issues, please speak or write to the class teacher.
- 9.3 **Staff issues** – for concerns relating to members of the teaching staff, please speak to or write to the Head.
- 9.4 **Disciplinary matters** - a problem over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised first of all with the member of staff who imposed it, and, if not resolved, with the Head.
- 9.5 **Financial matters** - a query relating to fees or extras should be stated in writing to the Bursar.
- 10 **Acknowledgement:** We will acknowledge a written notification by telephone, fax, e-mail or letter within two working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable in the holidays. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing.
- 11 **Unresolved concerns:** A concern which has not been resolved by informal means within 15 working days should be notified in writing as a **formal complaint** which will be dealt with in accordance with Stage 2 below.

Stage 2 - formal complaint

- 12 **Notification:** An unresolved concern under Stage 1, or a complaint which needs investigation, or any dissatisfaction with some aspect of the School's policies, procedures, management or administration should be set out in writing on a complaints form which can be requested from the Head' office. Full details, all relevant documents, and your full contact details should be included on the complaints form, which should be returned in an envelope addressed to the **Head** or to the **Deputy Head**. During school holidays the complaints form should be addressed to and sent to the Head. If a matter involves a complaint about the Head, the complaints form should be addressed and sent to the Head of the Upper School at Perse School (Upper), Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 8QF. Your complaint will be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within two working days during term time and as soon as practical during school holidays, identifying the Complaints Coordinator, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale.
- 13 **Investigation:** The Head 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 you and will probably wish to speak to you personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. The outcome of the investigation will be reported to the Head who will then notify you in writing of her decision and the reasons for it. The Head would aim to inform you within 28 working days from the receipt of the complaint of the outcome of the investigation although complaints received within one month of the end of term or half term are likely to take longer to resolve owing to the presence of school holidays and the unavailability of personnel. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to your complaint.

Stage 3 - reference to the Chairman

- 14 **Notification:** If you are dissatisfied with the Head's decision under Stage 2, your complaint may be renewed in writing to the Chairman of the Governing Body. You should write to the Chair within five working days of receiving the Head's decision. Your letter to the Chairman should give full details of your complaint and enclose all relevant documents and your full contact details. Your letter will normally be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within four working days during term time and as soon as practical during the school holidays, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale.
- 15 **Action by the Chairman:** The Chairman will arrange for your complaint to be investigated following procedures equivalent to those described in Stage 2 (above). When the Chairman is satisfied that he has established all the material facts and relevant policies, so far as is practicable, he will notify you in writing of his conclusion and the reasons for it. He will aim to provide a response within 10 working days of receiving your complaint.

Stage 4 - Reference to the Complaints Panel

- 16 **Composition:** We have constituted a Complaints Panel ("Panel") comprising School Governor members and members who are independent of the governance, management and running of the School.
- 17 **The Panel Hearing:** A Panel hearing is a review of the decisions taken by the Head and the Chairman. The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure.
- 18 **The role of the Panel:** the Panel's task is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:
- the documents provided by both parties and
 - any representations made by you, the Head or the Chairman

If, after establishing the facts, the Panel consider that the complaint is made out, they will uphold the complaint. If the Panel consider that the complaint is not made out, they will dismiss the complaint. They will make these decisions on the balance of probabilities.

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 Head or to the full body of Governors as appropriate.

- 19 **Notification:** To request a hearing before the Complaints Panel please write to the Clerk to the Governors **within seven working days of the decision complained of**. Your request will only be considered if you have completed the procedures at Stages 1-3. Please ensure that a copy of all relevant documents and your full contact details accompany your letter to the Clerk. Please state in your letter the outcome that you desire and all the

grounds of your complaint. Please also send the Clerk a list of the documents which you believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to see. The Clerk will acknowledge your request in writing within four working days.

- 20 **Convening the Panel:** The Clerk to the Governors will convene the Complaints Panel as soon as reasonably practicable but the Panel will not normally sit during half terms or school holidays. The Panel will consist normally of **at least three individuals** who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint. One member of the Panel shall be **independent of the management and running of the School**. You may ask the Clerk to tell you who has been appointed to sit on the Panel.
- 21 **Notice of hearing:** Every effort will be made to enable the Panel hearing to take place within 10 working days of the receipt of your request. As soon as reasonably practical and in any event, at least five working days before the hearing, the Clerk will send you written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the Panel members who will be present.
- 22 **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 that person is legally qualified s/he may attend only with the prior permission of the chairman. Copies of additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk at least **three clear working days** prior to the hearing.
- 23 **Chairman:** The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Panel (chosen by themselves) and will be conducted in an informal manner (and accordingly it would be exceptional for the chairman to permit you to be accompanied by a lawyer).
- 24 **Hearing:** All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Chairman may direct that the hearing is tape recorded to assist accurate recollection for purposes of the decision. The Panel will be under no obligation to retain tapes thereafter. The Clerk will be asked to take a handwritten minute of the proceedings in any event.
- 25 **Evidence:** The Chairman 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. All statements made or used at the hearing will be unsworn.
- 26 **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 Panel. 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.
- 27 **Adjournment:** The Panel may at its discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue.

28 **Decision:** After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, or in the event that a hearing cannot be properly conducted by reason of the conduct of a complainant, the Panel shall reach a Decision unless there is an agreed position. The Panel's decision may be notified orally at the hearing or sent by electronic email and subsequently shall be confirmed in writing to you within seven working days. Reasons for the Decision will be given. The Decision may include recommendations and will be sent to you, the Chairman of the Governing Body, the Head and, where relevant, any person about whom the complaint has been made. It will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Head. Parents can make a complaint to OFSTED and/or ISI should they wish to do so and the contact details are set out below.

Contact details as follows:

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House

9-12 Long Lane

London

EC1A 9HA

Telephone 020 7600 0100

Fax 020 7776 8849

Specifically, Durrell Barnes can be reached on a direct line: 020 7776 8830 or on durrell.barnes@isi.net. He deals with complaints about schools.

Ofsted's helpline is 08456 404040 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

29 **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 disclosed directly or indirectly to the press or other media.

30 **Confidentiality:** A written record of all complaints will be kept for at least three years, and whether it is resolved at the preliminary stage or proceeds to a panel hearing. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except to the extent required by Regulation 7(k) of the *Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003*, that is, where access is required by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of a School's inspection or under other legal authority. In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will normally be destroyed following each school inspection. In exceptional circumstances, some will be retained for a further period as necessary.

31. The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding year was 0.

Penny Oates on behalf of the Governing Body

March 2010