



PARENTAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

INTRODUCTION

1. Halliford School is required by law to have a clear and formal procedure for the handling of any complaints that parents/guardians may have. The School has a long tradition of close, regular, open, frank and, often informal, communication and contact between parents and staff at every level. Parental involvement in the School is actively encouraged and access to the Headmaster and other staff is easily arranged. Although the School justly prides itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils it is not complacent. It appreciates that, from time to time, parents/guardians will have concerns they wish to express or complaints they wish to make. These are followed up as rapidly as possible and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, without the need for any formal procedures.

2. It is not intended that this procedure should interfere with or in any way inhibit the well-established and effective links that already exist. However, if parents/guardians do have a serious complaint they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with the procedures set out below.

STAGE 1 – INFORMAL RESOLUTION

3. It is hoped that most concerns and complaints will continue to be resolved quickly and informally using the many links that already exist between the School and its parents/guardians, with the Form Tutor being the usual first point of contact. The procedures set out below are not intended to be rigid but to provide some general guidance on how best to raise a concern or complaint.

a. If parents/guardians have a concern or complaint they should normally contact their son/daughter's Form Tutor in the first instance. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents'/guardians' satisfaction. If the Form Tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult the Head of Department, Senior House Tutor, Director of Studies, Senior Tutor or other senior member of staff depending upon the nature of the matter at issue.

b. Complaints or concerns raised directly with a head of department, senior house tutor or other senior member of staff will usually be referred to the relevant Form Tutor unless the Head of Department, Senior House Tutor or other senior member of staff deem it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.

c. On some occasions parents/guardians may wish to deal directly with the Headmaster. If this is the case they should make an appointment to see him or, if they prefer, write a letter setting out their concerns or complaint. In the case of a meeting it will be helpful for the discussion if, when making the appointment, an indication is given of the matter or matters they wish to raise. This will enable the Headmaster to make some preliminary inquiries.

d. The Form Tutor or other member of staff approached will be required to make a written record of any serious concerns or complaints and the date on which they were received. He/she will also be required to place this record on file.

e. Should the Form Tutor or other member of staff and parents/guardians fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then the parents/guardians will be advised to proceed with the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure. Should the parents/guardians have already made

contact with the Headmaster and still have failed to resolve the matter they will be advised by the Headmaster to go direct to Stage 3.

f. Staff will be expected, as a matter of course, to keep the Headmaster informed of what is going on, even when his involvement is not deemed necessary.

g. If the complaint or concern involves a member of the support staff - as distinct from the academic staff – parents/guardians should consult the Bursar in the first instance. The Bursar will keep the Headmaster informed and, if he is unable to resolve the matter will then advise the parents/guardians to proceed in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

4. It is essential, even during this informal stage, that parents/guardians are made to feel that their complaint/concern is being treated seriously and that they are kept informed of developments, preferably in writing. Written records should also be made as soon as possible, while the details are fresh in the mind of the record maker.

STAGE 2 – FORMAL RESOLUTION

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

a. In most cases the Headmaster will meet with the parents/guardians concerned, normally within a week of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

b. It may be necessary for the Headmaster to carry out further investigation.

c. The Headmaster will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint as soon as possible while the details are still fresh in his mind. If necessary he may take notes during any such meetings.

d. Once the Headmaster is satisfied that, as far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and the parents/guardians will be informed of this decision in writing. The Headmaster will also give reasons for his decision. The Headmaster will usually be expected to reach a decision within a week of meeting with the parents/guardians or where a meeting does not need to take place within a week of acknowledging receipts of the complaint.

e. If parents/guardians are still not satisfied with the decision, they should then proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

STAGE 3 – PANEL HEARING

6. **Calling the Complaints Panel.** If parents/guardians seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the member of the Governing Body appointed by the Board of Governors to call hearings and act as chairman of the Complaints Panel. He/she will acknowledge their complaint in writing and, at the same time, offer them a meeting with another governor to see if, even at this stage, an informal resolution may be possible. If this offer is refused or an informal resolution proves impossible, the matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will be held within 10 working

days of the acknowledgement of the complaint by the Board of Governors or within 15 working days if there is an attempt at an informal resolution.

7. The Composition of the Complaints Panel. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and always an uneven number. These will usually be the Governor responsible for dealing with complaints, one or other governors as may be appointed for the occasion and one other person independent of the management and running of the School. Each of the panel members will be appointed by the Board of Governors. A secretary shall also be appointed to the panel for the purpose of making a written record of the proceedings.

8. The Functioning of the Complaints Panel. The Chairman of the Panel will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within the timings indicated above.

a. The Chairman, consulting other Panel members as appropriate, will assemble the written evidence that is to be considered by the Panel. 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 three days prior to the hearing.

b. The complainant and all persons who may be affected by or criticised in the decision and any recommendations of the Panel shall be provided with a copy of that evidence, be invited to attend the hearing, or that part of the hearing that affects them, and/or submit observations in writing.

c. The parents/guardians and all other persons who might be affected by the deliberations and recommendations of the Panel, may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. In the event that parents/guardians choose to bring a legal representative the School must be informed in advance.

d. The hearing will be conducted in the presence of the complainant and the other persons who may be affected.

e. At the outset the Chairman of the Panel will introduce the panel and other persons in attendance, explain the purpose of the hearing and the procedure to be followed and ensure that all parties are ready to proceed. In explaining the purpose of the hearing the Chairman will briefly describe the nature of the complaint. In explaining the procedure to be followed the Chairman will outline the burden and standard of proof. In ensuring that all parties are ready to proceed the Chairman will satisfy himself/herself that all relevant documents have been disclosed to the complainant and the persons affected, that they have been given an opportunity to attend, that they have been given sufficient time to prepare for the hearing, produce evidence and obtain witnesses.

f. The procedure adopted by the Panel will be inquisitorial and under the direction of the Chairman. This means that the Panel will inquire into the matters referred to it rather than simply judge between two competing parties. In the event of a dispute over facts, the burden of proof will be on the complainant, the standard of proof being on the balance of probabilities. This is the test used by the civil courts and employment tribunals when dealing with non-criminal cases.

g. The proceedings will be conducted in a calm, polite and constructive manner. The Chairman has the right to exclude persons who do not comply with this requirement.

h. Once the preliminaries are complete the complainant will normally first be asked to explain the complaint and the redress sought. The persons affected and the members of the Panel will have the right to ask questions of the complainant. The persons affected will then be given the opportunity to respond. The complainant and the members of the Panel will have the right to ask questions of the persons affected. Any such questioning will be under the control of the Chairman of the Panel.

i. At this stage the Panel should be able to establish whether there is any dispute as to the facts set out in the written evidence and whether it is necessary to call further witnesses or examine further written evidence to resolve such dispute or to explain or enlarge upon the oral or written evidence. If in the opinion of the Panel, further oral or written evidence is required, the Panel will call and question witnesses to elicit the evidence necessary for the Panel to make its decision and any recommendations. The complainant and the persons affected shall have the right to ask further questions of these witnesses. The Chairman of the Panel, in consultation with the other members, will have the right to adjourn the hearing to a later date if it is considered necessary.

j. When all the evidence has been heard the complainant and the persons affected shall have the right to address the Panel, the complainant being last to speak.

k. If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents'/guardians' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.

9. The Deliberations and Findings of the Complaints Panel.

a. After due consideration of all the facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which process it shall complete within three working days of the Hearing. The Panel will write to the parents/guardians informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents/guardians, the Headmaster, the Governors and, where relevant, the person who is the subject of the complaint.

b. The Chairman will announce to the complainant and other persons affected whether the Panel intends to deliberate immediately on its decision and recommendations or defer its deliberations to a later time or date. In either case, the Panel members will meet in private to reach the Panel's decision and any recommendations, which shall be given in writing. The Panel will endeavour to reach a unanimous decision but, in the event of a disagreement that cannot be resolved, the decision may be taken by majority vote. Unanimous and majority decisions will be indicated in the Panel's written determination.

c. In making findings of fact, the Panel will take account of all the evidence it considers relevant. It will disregard irrelevant information, including speculation and unsupported suspicion. It is not bound by the strict rules of evidence applicable in a court of law, but hearsay evidence will be given less weight than first-hand evidence.

d. If any case or circumstance arises in practice that is not covered in these procedures, the Panel shall take such action as it considers just.

e. The record of the proceedings will be retained and, if necessary, later transcribed. The transcript will be made available to the complainant at his/her request.

CONFIDENTIALITY

10. Parents/guardians can be assured that all concerns and complaints 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 any other legal obligation prevails.