

COMPLAINTS POLICY

- Complaints Handling

Parents can raise concerns by fixing an appointment with the level head. If the concern is not resolved parents may lodge a formal complaint. The procedure for lodging a formal complaint is contained within this policy. The policy is available for all parents in the Admin office of the school.

- Procedures should be as speedy as possible - consistent and fair to all concerned.

Each stage of the procedure will have known time limits. Where it is not possible to meet these, the complainant will be kept informed of progress.

- Support for complainant

At any stage of the procedure parents can be accompanied by a friend, relative or representative and they will be told where they can go for information, advice and advocacy, if required.

- Support for a person complained against

Staff who may be questioned as part of the investigation of a complaint will be treated fairly and they will always have the opportunity to put their case. A representative may accompany them at any stage.

The complaints procedure is distinct from formal disciplinary proceedings for staff and this will need to be made clear to all concerned. However there may be occasions where a complaint leads to a disciplinary procedure which puts the complaints process on hold. If so, the complainant should be informed of this, without going into details, and updated regularly on likely further delay. After the disciplinary process is completed it will be necessary to decide what further response to the complainant is required.

- Confidentiality

All concerns and complaints will be treated with discretion. It will be made clear to parents that making a complaint will not result in their child being penalised. Complainants will, however, be made aware that some information will have to be shared with those involved in order that the complaint can be investigated.

- Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints should not be automatically disregarded. The Level head and Chair of Governors will decide whether the gravity of an anonymous complaint warrants an investigation. A copy of every anonymous complaint and a note of the decision should be kept on file.

- Remedy

If the outcome of the complaints procedure shows the school is at fault, redress will be in the form of an acknowledgement that the complaint is valid. It may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

-an apology; -an explanation;

-a promise that the event complained of will not recur;

-an undertaking to review school policies or practices in the light of the complaint.

- **Staff Awareness and Training**

All staffs are aware of the procedures, as potentially many will be involved with handling complaints, especially at the informal level. Training every two years will take place to ensure that staffs are clear and confident about the procedures. Part of the training includes dealing with people who are upset or angry. Staffs have clear information about which staffs have which responsibilities so that parents do not get continually passed from one to another.

- **Record Keeping**

Complaints are recorded and monitored regularly by staff using a standard proforma. The Level head keeps a central file for complaints which are not resolved immediately and therefore investigated by her/him. This file is reviewed monthly by the Chair of Governors.

A Staged Approach

The Governors at Balsam Academy have adopted a staged approach to the complaints procedure, as follows:

The First Contact

There needs to be clarity as to the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at an early stage will reduce the number that develops into formal complaints. There are many occasions where concerns are resolved straight away through the Class Teacher, Level head or administrative staff, depending on who is approached first. Parents must feel able to raise concerns with members of staff without any formality, either in person, or in writing. On occasion it may be appropriate for someone to act on behalf of a parent and this must be taken into consideration. It may be unclear at first whether a parent is asking a question or expressing an opinion rather than making a complaint. A parent may want a preliminary discussion about an issue to help decide whether he or she wishes to take it further.

Balsam Academy Complaints Procedure

In order to investigate your complaint as fully as possible the Governing Body of Balsam Academy has implemented a staged approach.

Resolving Concerns Informally

Parents are always welcome with a prior permission to discuss any concerns with the appropriate member of staff, who will clarify with the parent the nature of the concern and reassure them that the school wants to hear about it. Parents should be advised from the outset that there is a complaints procedure that they can use if the matter cannot be resolved. The member of staff may explain to the parent how the situation happened. It can be helpful at this point to identify what sort of outcome the parent is looking for.

The member of staff dealing with the concern will make sure the parent is clear what action (if any) or monitoring of the situation has been agreed, putting it in writing if appropriate.

Resolving Concerns formally

Complaints at this stage need to be recorded in writing. A complainant may wish to write in themselves. Complainants may also make their complaint verbally and can expect help to put their complaint in writing. The Level head (or designated person) will acknowledge the complaint in writing within three working days of receiving the written complaint. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the school's complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This should normally be within ten working days. If this proves impossible, a letter will be sent explaining the reason for the delay and giving a revised target date. This will be within a maximum of 20 working days unless it is a particularly complex issue.

The Level head (or designated person) will provide an opportunity for the complainant to meet them to supplement any information provided previously or to record the complaint in writing if it has been made verbally. It will be made clear to the complainant that if s/he wishes s/he might be accompanied to any meeting by a friend, relative, representative or advocate who can speak on his/her behalf or to provide support.

If necessary the Level head (or designated person) will interview other parties and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, the pupil should also be interviewed unless this is judged not to be in the interests of the pupil's welfare. Pupils should normally be interviewed with parents/guardians present, but if this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious/urgent complaint or if the pupil has specifically said that s/he would prefer that parents/guardians were not involved, another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable should be present. If a member of staff is complained against, they must have the opportunity to present their case. The Level head (or designated person) will keep written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.

Once all the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, the Level head (or designated person) will then produce a written response to the complainant, including a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, this will include what action the school will take to resolve the complaint. The complainant will be advised that should s/he wish to take the complaint further s/he should notify the Chair of Governors within 20 working days of receiving the letter.

If the complaint is against the Level head (or designated person), or if the Level head (or designated person) has been closely involved in the issue, the Chair of the Governing Body will carry out all the procedures.

Review by the Governing Body

The Chair of the Governing Body will write to the complainant to acknowledge receipt of the written request for the governing body to review the complaint. The acknowledgement will inform the complainant that three members of the school's governing body will hear the complaint within 20 working days of receiving the complaint. The letter will also explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further documents relevant to the complaint. These must be received in time for the documents to be sent to the three members.

The Level head (or designated person) will be invited to attend the Panel meeting and will be asked to prepare a written report for the Panel in response to the complaint. All attendees including the complainant should receive a set of the relevant documents including the Level head (or designated person) report and the agenda, at least five working days prior to the meeting.

The Level head (or designated person) will be given the opportunity to make a final statement to the panel.

The complainant will be given the opportunity to make a final statement to the panel.

The chair will ask the complainant if he or she feels they have had a fair hearing.

The Chair of the Panel has responsibility to ensure that the meeting is properly minuted.

The Chair of the Panel will explain to the complainant and Level head (or designated person) that the Panel will consider its decision and that a written decision will be sent to both parties within 15 working days.

The complainant, Level head (or designated person) other members of staff and witnesses will then leave.

The Panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and agree a decision on the complaint; Decide upon the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint; and where appropriate, suggest recommended changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

Further Action

Complaints about school problems are almost always settled within schools but if they remain unresolved they can be referred to the Secretary of State for Education.