



Birchfield Independent Girls School

## **POLICY DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS**

### **Introduction**

At Birchfield Independent Girls School, we undertake to provide a friendly and safe environment in which pupils will be helped to achieve their potential, both academically and socially.

We recognise that sometimes things can go wrong and parents/ carers of pupils at the school may need to make a complaint or raise concerns they have with the school.

This policy tells you what to do if this happens.

### **Informal Stage**

Most complaints/issues can be resolved informally and quickly by discussion with the member of staff concerned or the headteacher. Alternatively, parents/carers can write to the member of staff or the headteacher outlining the issue clearly.

Any complaint/issue that is put in writing will be written clearly outlining all the issues and what it is hoped that the preferred outcome will be. All complaints will be acknowledged in writing within three to five working days.

Parent/carers will make an appointment to discuss their concerns through the school office. The headteacher or someone at this meeting will usually take notes during the meeting. Parents/carers can ask for a copy of these notes to be made available to them.

### **Formal Stage**

There are three formal stages:

#### **Stage 1**

If a parent/carer is still dissatisfied after the informal stage, they, or the member of staff can refer the matter to the headteacher. This can be done in writing, as this will often make the situation clear to all involved parties.

The headteacher will offer a meeting (to take place within ten working days of the complaint being put in writing) with the parent/carer or other complainant at a mutually convenient time. At the meeting,

and through discussion, the headteacher will clarify what the issues are. The hopes of what the parent/carer is trying to achieve will also be discussed. Together all parties will agree an acceptable outcome. This will be to the satisfaction of all parties involved. These will be written down and agreed by all parties so there is no misunderstanding. Again parents/carers will be given a copy of this.

If the issue is complex the headteacher may need to speak to other staff and pupils to investigate the concerns. This will happen within 10 school days. If this timescale cannot be met the headteacher will inform the parent/carer that this will take longer, explain the reasons for this and give a timescale for when the investigation will be completed.

## **Stage 2**

After meeting with the headteacher if the complaint is still not resolved to the parent/carer's satisfaction, the complaint can be referred to the governing board. This can either be in writing to the chair of governors at the school address, or alternatively the school can ask the chair of governors to contact the parent/carer direct. The headteacher can also refer the complaint to the chair of governors.

If the headteacher is the subject of the complaint, the complaint will go straight to the governing board and miss out Stage 1. The chair may ask for the complaint to be put in writing (if this has not already happened).

The chair of governors will offer to meet with the parent/carer or other complainant, at a mutually convenient time.

The chair of governors has 15 school days to investigate the complaint. If it cannot be resolved within this time, the chair will inform the complainant and explain why it is taking longer. Reasons for this may be that the complaint is complex and needs more time or someone involved is absent through sickness or holidays. The chair will, however, give a realistic timescale for when the complaint will be resolved. The chair will inform the complainant of when it is expected that the investigation will be completed.

## **Stage 3**

If the complaint is still not resolved to the parent/carer's satisfaction, or the chair of governors feels that it is necessary, he/she can set up a complaints panel to consider the complaint.

If the chair can resolve the complaint there is no need to hold a complaints panel meeting. As far as possible it is recommended that complaints panel are a last resort.

The chair can appoint an investigating officer to gather evidence and conduct preliminary interviews on the chair's behalf. The investigating officer will provide a detailed report of his/her investigation of the complaint parents/carers will be given a copy of this report. It is important that the investigating officer is seen as impartial. So if the investigating officer is another member of the governing board, he/she cannot be a member of the associated complaints committee.

The complaints panel is made up of three members appointed by the chair of governors who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. Sometimes, members may need to be brought in from outside the organisation the school's governors are 'tainted' because they have prior knowledge of the complaint. At least one member of this panel will:

- not be part of the school workforce
- not be a member of the governing/ proprietorial body
- be independent of the management and running of the school.

The complaints panel will meet at a time convenient to all parties. The complainant, the headteacher, the chair of governors and any member of staff the complaint is about will be invited to the meeting. Any person invited can bring a friend or supporter if they wish. The complaints panel will consider any written material, and also give the person making the complaint and the headteacher, chair of governors and staff an opportunity to state their case and to question others present. The panel will ensure that all present are treated fairly. The meeting will be written up through minutes by the clerk to governors and everyone present will be given a copy of the minutes.

The panel will give its decision, in writing, within ten school days after the meeting, along with the reasons for their decision. This report will be made available to the complainant and where relevant, the person complained about. It will also be made available for inspection on the school premises by the chair of governors and the headteacher.

The school undertakes to ensure that the arrangements for a panel hearing will be reasonable in order to facilitate the parent(s) exercising the right of attendance. However, if a parent does not exercise their right to attend a panel hearing, the school will still continue to hold the hearing in conformity with this policy.

### **Record Keeping**

A written record will be kept of all formal complaints. The record will state whether the complaint was resolved by following formal procedures or if it proceeded to a panel hearing. Additionally, the record will state the action taken by the school as a result of the complaint, whether it was upheld or not.

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except whether the secretary of state or a body conducting and inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

### **Further complaints**

If after this school based process the complaint is still not resolved to the parent/carer's satisfaction, the next course of action would be to contact the Department for Education. However, the Department for Education (DfE) can't investigate individual complaints about private schools. But it has certain powers as a regulator if the school is not meeting standards set by DfE for:

- education

- pupil welfare and health and safety
- school premises
- staff suitability
- making information available to parents
- spiritual, moral, social or cultural development of students

DfE will consider any reports of a major failure to meet the standards. It can arrange an emergency inspection to look at pupil welfare and health and safety, and make sure serious failings are dealt with.

DfE can ask the school inspectorates to take minor complaints into account when the school is next inspected.

If a complaint is not from a parent/carer of a pupil of the school (an example being a member of the public) these will be made directly to the headteacher, preferably in writing.

It will be noted that schools do not need to consider complaints made more than one year after the incident/situation.

If a complaint is made about an issue that is over a year old the school will write to the complainant asking why this is the case.

**This document was produced in January 2022 and is due to be reviewed January 2023.**

Signed (Chair)..... Date.....

Print Name..... Date of next review.....

Headteacher Teacher.....