



Complaints Procedure

Bancroft's

Independent Co-educational Day School 7–18

Complaints Procedure

INTRODUCTION

Bancroft's School has always been proud of the quality of its teaching and the pastoral care provided to its pupils. Should parents have cause for complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this Procedure.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly. A parent, in relation to a child or young person, includes any person who is not a parent but who has parental responsibility, or who has care of the child.

This Procedure applies to the Senior School and Prep School. This Procedure applies only to complaints by parents of current pupils and the parents of former pupils if the complaint was initially raised whilst the pupil was registered at the School. For the avoidance of doubt, this Procedure does not apply to prospective parents, however the number of complaints recorded during the preceding School year is made available to them upon request.

The Procedure does not apply to exclusions, to which the School's Behaviour, Rewards and Sanctions Policy refers. The School has separate grievance and whistleblowing policies to cover concerns that a member of staff may have.

No complaint may be brought under this Procedure in relation to the non-payment of any sum(s) owing to the school. If a parent has a complaint regarding any action taken (or proposed to be taken) by the School as a result of his/her failure to pay any sum(s) owing to the School the parent may write to the Clerk to the Governors at the School who will refer the matter to the Chair of the Governors. Similarly, if a parent wishes to make a complaint, their attention will be drawn to the School's Standard Terms and Condition under which a place is accepted; the making of a complaint does not remove the obligation to settle fees due and payable under these terms and conditions.

The School is a busy place and during the academic year, a tremendous number of both educational and extra-curricular activities take place and many pupils are involved. A great deal is achieved with cheerful cooperation from all sides, but we do recognise that conflicts of interest, misunderstandings and disagreements will occasionally occur between pupils, parents and teachers – although such occasions are rare. Under these circumstances we undertake to deal with issues promptly and fairly. They can generally be resolved informally in the first instance. Parents can expect for the complaint to be considered sensitively and with no adverse effect on their child.

Separate procedures apply if a Child Protection issue arises (see Safeguarding (Child Protection) Policy). Any 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.

There may be occasions when it is necessary to deviate from this complaints procedure if this is reasonable and justified. Parents will be notified of the changes and reasons for them will be explained.

STAGE 1 - INFORMAL RESOLUTION

It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally. Under this stage the complaint will usually be made verbally or via email and will be considered an informal complaint.

If parents in the Senior School have a complaint they should normally contact their child's Housemaster or Housemistress (Junior or Senior), or the relevant Head of Department or Deputy Head (Academic) for a complaint about the quality of teaching. If parents in the Prep School have a complaint they should normally contact their child's class teacher or the Deputy Head of the Prep School. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the matter cannot be resolved at the first point of contact it may be necessary for parents to consult the Head of the Senior School or the Head of the Prep School if the matter refers to this part of the School. Again, the aim will be to resolve the issue amicably and informally.

Complaints made directly to the Head of either the Senior School or the Prep School will usually be referred to the relevant teacher unless the Head deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.

If the complaint is against the Head of the Prep School, parents should make their complaint to the Head of the Senior School. If the complaint is against the Head of the Senior School, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors via email to chairman@bancrofts.org.

We aim to acknowledge an informal complaint made by telephone, email or letter within 3 working days of receipt during term time and within 3 working days of a senior member of staff becoming aware of the complaint during school holidays. The acknowledgement will indicate the action that is being taken and the likely timescales. Such action may include an investigation and / or a meeting with the parent.

The Housemaster or Housemistress¹ or Head of Department will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. These will be kept by the respective Housemaster/Housemistress/Head of

¹ In the case of the Prep School, please read "Housemaster or Housemistress" as Class Teacher.

Department. Should the matter not be resolved either in writing or verbally within 14 working days or in the event that the Housemaster/Housemistress or Junior Housemaster/Housemistress or Head of Department and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.

STAGE 2 - FORMAL RESOLUTION

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis with the relevant member of staff, then the parents should put their complaint in writing (including email) to the Head of either the Senior or Prep School as appropriate. The respective Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. In cases of complaints received by the Head of the Prep School, the Head of the Prep School will inform the Head of the Senior School that a formal complaint has been received before taking further action.

If the complaint is against the Head of the Prep School, parents should make their complaint directly to the Head of the Senior School who will inform the Chair of Governors on receipt of the complaint. If the complaint is against the Head of the Senior School, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors using chairman@bancrofts.org. The Chair of Governors or a Governor nominated by the Chair of Governors will review the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.

A complaint received will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within 3 working days during term time and within 5 working days of a member of the senior staff becoming aware of the complaint during school holidays. The acknowledgement will indicate the action that is being taken and the likely timescales.

In most cases the Head of either the Senior or Prep School, or a senior member of staff designated by the Head of either the Senior or Prep School to investigate the complaint, will meet or speak to the parents concerned, normally within 14 working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

It may be necessary for the Head to carry out further investigations. The Head of either the Senior or Prep School will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

Once the Head of either the Senior or Prep School 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 of this decision in writing. The Head of either the Senior or Prep School will also give reasons for the decision. Wherever possible, the Head of either the Senior or Prep School will endeavour to meet with parents to better understand their complaint and/or inform them of the Stage 2 outcome in addition to writing to them.

If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 (The Panel Hearing) of this procedure.

STAGE 3 - PANEL HEARING

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they should do so in writing to the Chair of Governors at chairman@bancrofts.org or the Clerk to the Governors at coo@bancrofts.org unless the complaint is against the Clerk, following which a complaints panel will be convened.

A complaints panel hearing (**Hearing**) is a Hearing to consider those elements of the Stage 2 response to a parent's complaint with which the parent remains dissatisfied. The complaints panel (**Complaints Panel**) is not obliged to consider any new complaints which have not been previously raised.

A complaints panel will be convened within 7 working days save for where the complaint is made during the holidays where the Hearing date will be determined by the availability of all participants, including the independent panel member.

Every effort will be made to enable the Hearing to take place within 15 working days of acknowledgement of the request.

The request for a Hearing should include:

- a copy of any relevant documents and full contact details;
- details of all the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired;
- a list of documents which the parent(s) believes to be in the School's possession and wish the Complaints Panel to consider; and
- whether the parent(s) propose to be accompanied to the Hearing.

The Chair of Governors will acknowledge the request for a Hearing in writing within 3 working days of receipt.

If assistance with the request is required, for example because of a disability, please inform the Chair of Governors or Clerk who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Complaints Panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the School (**Independent Panel Member**); he or she will also not be an employee of the School. Each of the Complaints Panel members shall be appointed by the Board of Governors. The Complaints Panel members will appoint one of themselves to be the Chair of the Panel throughout the proceedings.

The Clerk to the Governors will send written notification to each party of the date, time and place of the Hearing and particulars of the complaint at least 5 working days before the date of the Hearing.

If the Complaints 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 2 working days prior to the Hearing.

- The parent(s) 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.
- The Chair of the Panel may, at his / her discretion, adjourn the Hearing if he / she considers it appropriate to do so. This may include an adjournment for the parties to take legal advice on a specific issue arising.
- After due consideration of all facts, they consider relevant, the Complaints Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations. The Complaints Panel will issue a letter or email to the parent(s) within 7 working days of the Hearing informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Complaints Panel will be final.
- The Complaints Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations, will be sent in writing to the Head, the Head of the Prep School (in the case of a Prep School matter), and, where relevant, the person complained of. Those Governors involved in the Stage 3 Hearing will provide an oral update to the next full board meeting with an anonymised written summary of the nature of the complaint, whether it was upheld or not and any learning points for the School.
- A copy of the Complaints Panel's findings will be held at the School and made available for Inspection by the Governing Body, Head and ISI inspectors.

For compliance purposes the Stage 3 Panel Hearing should go ahead unless the parent later indicates, in writing, that he or she is now satisfied and does not wish to proceed further. A Panel Hearing should, therefore, proceed notwithstanding that a parent may decide not to attend subsequent to the Panel Hearing being convened but prior to it being held, unless the parent(s) has withdrawn their complaint in writing. If necessary, the Complaints Panel should consider the parent's complaint in absentia and issue findings on the substance of the complaint, thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion.

A written record of all complaints, whether Stage 1 or above are recorded whether they have been resolved following an informal, formal or panel hearing. This will record the action taken by the School as a result of the complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially.

In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will be kept only for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in the circumstances.

Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except in so far as is required of the School by part 7 paragraph 33 (K) of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014; where disclosure is required in the course of the School's inspection, under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Education and Skills Act or where any other legal obligation prevails.

The School makes available the number of complaints registered under Stages 2 and 3 of the Complaints Procedure during the preceding school year. This is available from the Head's EA upon request.

The records created in accordance with this Procedure may contain personal data. The School has a number of privacy notices which explain how the School will use personal data about pupils and parents. The privacy notices are published on the School's website. In addition, staff must ensure that they follow the School's data protection policies and procedures when handling personal data created in connection with this Procedure.

Notwithstanding the above, complaints will be retained for a minimum of 7 years except where the complaint is one of a safeguarding nature when records will be retained at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation if it is longer.

APPENDIX: VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS & UNREASONABLE BEHAVIOUR

The School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality of service to those who complain.

Nevertheless, once the complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented at all stages, the matter will be considered closed and complainants should not expect the School to deal with it further. Where complainants make attempts to raise or add to the same complaint after it has been considered at Stage 3, this may be regarded as vexatious and the complainants may be contacted formally by the Head and asked to desist from further correspondence on the matter in question.

Whilst acknowledging that complaints may be highly emotive for some or all of the parties, the School does not expect staff or Governors to tolerate behaviour which is abusive, offensive, overbearing or threatening. Complainants who engage with the School in this way should expect to be contacted formally by the Head and asked to desist from such behaviour.

Complainants are also reminded that contact with Governors, where relevant, should take place only through the contact details provided for the Chair of Governors on the School's website. It is unacceptable to seek to contact any Governors personally via their place of work or by any other means outside the channels set out by the School.