

Version	Date	Updated by
1.0	Sept 2023	Cate Tumman
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COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Introduction

Silver Linings School is passionately committed to providing the best teaching and pastoral care it can for its children. However, if parent/carers do have a concern or complaint, they can expect that it will be dealt with sensitively, fairly and in a timely manner as detailed below.

Definition of Complaint

“A complaint is any matter about which a parent/carer expresses dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem and seeks action by the school”

This policy applies to all parent/carers of current registered pupils. It also applies to the parent/carers of past pupils if the complaint was originally raised when the child was a registered pupil. The complaints procedure does not apply to prospective parent/carers.

The school’s aim is to resolve every concern or complaint informally, where possible. If a matter cannot be resolved informally, the matter may proceed as a formal complaint.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

If parents have a concern or complaint, this should be addressed initially to the teacher, most closely connected with the issue. It is hoped that the matter will be resolved informally at this stage. Staff may need to consult with others in order that they can resolve matters effectively and to the satisfaction of the parents. If this is the case, they will get back to the parents/carers within 5 working days.

Complaints made directly to the Head will usually be referred to the Class teacher/relevant Staff member unless the Head deems it appropriate for the matter to be dealt with by the Head personally.

If the complaint is against the Head, parents should address their complaint to the Proprietor and proceed through the three stage Complaints Procedure, as necessary.

A written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received will be kept by the school.

Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays, or where parents are not satisfied with the response to the complaint raised informally, parents may proceed with a formal complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.

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Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

If a complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents/carers may put their complaint in writing to the Head, making sure they include the term ‘Formal Complaint’ in their letter or email. The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

In most cases, the Head will either meet with or speak to the parents/carers concerned, normally within 5 working days (no longer than 10 days) of receiving the complaint or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

A senior member of staff delegated by the Head may investigate all written complaints.

Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made. The parents/carers will be informed of this decision in writing together with reasons for the decision as soon as reasonably practicable (and normally within 5, no longer than 20 working days of receipt of the written complaint).

Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept by the school. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except in so far as is required of the Regulatory Requirements of the Independent School Standards, where disclosure is required in the course of the school’s inspection, or where any other legal obligation prevails.

If the parents are not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with the formal procedure, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3, they must write to the Proprietor setting out in full the details of the complaint normally within 10 working days of receiving the Head’s decision, or immediately if the complaint is against the Head.

Parents’ letters should give full details of the complaint and enclose all relevant supporting documents. A request for a hearing will normally only be considered if parents have invoked Stage 1 and 2, however if the complaint is against the Head, parents reserve the right to invoke Stage 3 immediately.

The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least 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. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Proprietor. The Proprietor, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 10 working days of receiving the complaint or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays.

Parents may be accompanied to the hearing if they wish by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.

The Panel will review the Head’s decision. The Panel will not consider any new complaints that have not been raised as part of the initial complaint. After due consideration of all facts the Panel considers relevant, the Panel will reach a decision on the balance of probabilities as to whether or

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not the complaint is made out. If the complaint is not made out, the Panel will dismiss the complaint. If the complaint is made out, the Panel will uphold the complaint and may make recommendations. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it normally within 10 working days of the panel hearing.

If the Panel deems it necessary, the Proprietor will arrange for the complaint to be further investigated. The Proprietor will inform the parents on the day after the panel hearing and a revised response date will be set.

If for any reason the Panel is unavoidably adjourned and reconvened, the Proprietor will inform the parents that day or no later than the day after the scheduled panel hearing, giving reasons for the adjournment and a new date for the panel hearing will be set.

The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel’s findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise confirmed in writing to the parents, the Head, the Proprietor and, where relevant, the person complained of. The Panel’s decisions, findings and any recommendations will also be made available for inspection on the School premises.

In the unfortunate event that parents are not satisfied with the Panel’s decision, they will be advised that their final recourse should be with:

The Secretary of State for Education,
 Department for Education,
 Piccadilly Gate,
 Store Street,
 Manchester,
 M1 2WD

Unreasonable or vexatious complaints

Silver Linings School is committed to ensuring all complaints are dealt with fairly and impartially, providing our families with an excellent standard of care. However, we will always protect our staff from unacceptable behaviour from complainants. This might include behaviour which is threatening, abusive or offensive. Should a complainant demonstrate aggression or violence to the school, the police will be contacted immediately.

If a parent conducts themselves in an unacceptable manner which hinders our consideration of the complaint, due to frequency or nature of the complainant’s contact with the school, we will consider this ‘unreasonable’. This behaviour may include:

- Refusing to articulate their complaint, or specify the grounds of the complaint, or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, even with assistance from the school
- Refusing to cooperate with the complaints investigation process
- Refusing to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- Insisting on the complaint being dealt with in a way that does not comply with the complaints procedure
- Introducing trivial or irrelevant information not pertinent to the issue
- Asking a significant number of unimportant questions unrelated to the matter which they want responses to outside of the allotted complaint timescale, and seeks an unrealistic outcome

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- Unjustified complaints regarding staff, and asking them to be removed from contact with their child
- Altering the nature of the complaint during the process
- Repeating the same complaint despite previous investigation outcomes reflecting it was not upheld
- Refusing to accept the findings of the investigation where the process has been fully implemented
- Becoming vexatious or making excessive demands on the school via frequent communication
- Publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public platforms

The Headteacher will always discuss the issues with the complainant before considering it as 'unreasonable'. If a complaint is deemed unreasonable, a communication plan will be formulated and agreed upon, with a termly review.

Stopping responding

The School may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- They believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- They have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts the school repeatedly, and the school believes their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where the school stops responding, they will inform the individual that they intend to do so. The School will also explain that they will still consider any new complaints made.

Recording Complaints

A written record (which will be kept for at least three years) will be kept of all complaints in a Complaints File and all actions & outcomes, whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage (stage 2) or proceeded to a panel hearing (stage 3). The proprietor will review this record of formal complaints at least annually.

In addition, a separate log of all informal complaints will be kept on site. This will be reviewed periodically by the Head and SLT to identify patterns and trends.

Parents 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 25(k) of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2010 where disclosure is required in the course of the School's inspection, or where any other legal obligation prevails except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

The School will provide Ofsted, upon request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period and the action taken and conclusion reached.

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Record of Formal Complaints

Academic Year	Complaints Received	Stage	Outcome
2023/2024			
2024/2025			
2025/2026			
2026/2027			

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