



The Blue Coat School

# COMPLAINTS POLICY

This Complaints Policy was devised by the Headmaster and the Head of Pre-Prep in consultation with colleagues in the school.

Date of Next Review: Michaelmas 2021

## **COMPLAINTS POLICY**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

#### **I.1**

The Blue Coat School takes pride in the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this Policy. A complaint is defined as any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the school and in the scope of the procedures set out in this Policy. All formal complaints will be made in writing, this does not mean that the formal stage is automatically triggered whenever a concern is expressed in writing, for example, by e-mail. Complaints will usually only progress to the formal stage after first being considered at the preliminary stage as set out below. This Policy relates to complaints other than those relating to exclusions. Complaints relating to exclusions are set out in the Behaviour Management and Exclusions Policy. Parents should use the procedures as set out in this Policy for complaints and should refrain from airing any grievances or concerns on social media sites as this could be potentially damaging to the School or its pupils.

#### **I.2**

The Blue Coat School Complaints Policy applies to all children in the school including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception). The Blue Coat School Complaints Policy is available for parents on the school website and in Main Reception and the Pre-Prep Office.

#### **I.3**

All time scales referred to in this Policy should be interpreted as normal school working days. The relevant time scales and criteria for complaints in respect of the EYFS are set out in 5.1 below. Due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, time scales in this Policy may have to be adjusted as a consequence of disruption to normal school operating procedures and possible staff absences. Where time scales have to be adjusted, the complainant is kept fully informed and revised timings are agreed.

#### **I.4**

The School reviews the nature of any complaint and follows up on any wider issues identified where appropriate.

#### **I.5**

Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages as set out below, this will be regarded as a vexatious complaint and will therefore be outside the scope of this policy.

### **2. PROCEDURAL STAGE 1 – INFORMAL RESOLUTION**

#### **2.1**

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.

#### **2.2**

If parents have a complaint, they should first contact the member of staff concerned. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the member of staff cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult the Headmaster or Head of Pre-Prep.

#### **2.3**

Complaints made directly to the Headmaster or Head of Pre-Prep will usually be referred to the relevant member of staff unless the Headmaster or Head of Pre-Prep deems it appropriate for him or her to deal with the matter personally.

#### **2.4**

The member of staff dealing with the matter will make a written record of all concerns and complaints, the date on which they were received, and the outcome of the complaint. Should the matter not be resolved within 7 working days or in the event that the member of staff and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.

### **3. PROCEDURAL STAGE 2 – FORMAL RESOLUTION**

#### **3.1**

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Headmaster. The Headmaster will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

#### **3.2**

Parents may also contact the Headmaster requesting a formal meeting or raise issues through a formal letter which may require a written response from the School. Such matters will be treated as formal complaints. If a concern about more minor matters is repeated and the parent is clearly not satisfied with the School's original response, this will also be regarded as a complaint.

#### **3.3**

In most cases, the Headmaster will meet the parents concerned. This will be within 7 working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

#### **3.4**

It may be necessary for the Headmaster to carry out further investigations. The Headmaster will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. Records will include the School's response and any ensuing actions.

#### **3.5**

Once the Headmaster 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 Headmaster will also give reasons for his decision. The timescale for a response at this stage will be 28 working days.

#### **3.6**

If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

### **4. PROCEDURAL STAGE 3 – PANEL HEARING**

#### **4.1**

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to a Convenor appointed by and from the Governors (normally the Chairman) to call hearings of the Complaints Panel which will set out clear terms of reference, a clear process and the direction to reach a final decision within specified timescales. A panel hearing should take place unless the parents later indicates that they are now satisfied and do not wish to proceed further. The panel hearing should, therefore, proceed notwithstanding that the parent may subsequently decide not to attend. If necessary, the panel should consider the parent's complaint in his/her absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion. The requirement for the panel to proceed does not prevent the school from accommodating parental availability for dates or considering comments concerning panel composition.

#### **4.2**

The matter will then be transferred 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, two of whom will normally be Governors, and one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school (for example serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background or a retired member of the Police Force). Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Board of Governors. The Convenor, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable which will be within 28 working days.

#### **4.3**

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 3 working days prior to the hearing. The Panel hearing will consist of a full merits hearing of the complaint not merely a judicial review style check that process was followed.

#### **4.4**

Parents are entitled to be accompanied at the panel hearing by one other person such as a relative, teacher or friend, but this provision does not entitle parents to legal representation. Parental rights to request and attend a panel is not forfeit because they have threatened or initiated legal proceedings.

#### **4.5**

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.

#### **4.6**

Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts the Panel members consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within 7 working days of the Hearing. The Panel will write to the parents/complainant informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents, the Headmaster, the Governors and, where relevant, the person complained about. A copy of these documents will be kept at the school.

#### **4.7**

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and sensitively. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

#### **4.8**

A record of formal complaints is kept. This states whether the complaints are resolved at the formal stage or proceed to a panel hearing. A record is also kept of any actions taken by the School as a result of complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). Records are also kept of informal complaints to enable any patterns of concern to be identified and resolved.

### **5. COMPLAINTS RELATING TO THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE**

#### **5.1**

All written complaints relating to the fulfilment of the requirements of the EYFS will be investigated and complainants will be notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of the complaint having been received. The procedures set out in this Policy will be followed for all such complaints.

#### **5.2**

Parents of children in the EYFS may also make a complaint to Ofsted and/or ISI should they so wish if they believe that the requirements of the EYFS are not being met. The contact details for Ofsted and ISI are given to parents annually via the Pre-Prep Parents' Handbook. These are as follows:

Independent Schools Inspectorate, CAP House, 9 - 12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

T: 020 7600 0100

Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231 (08.00 to 18.00, Monday – Friday) or email: [enquiries:ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries:ofsted.gov.uk)

### **6. RECORDS**

#### **6.1**

A written record of all complaints made during any specified period, the action which was taken as a result of each complaint and the resolutions outcome is maintained as set out in 2.4, 3.4 and 4.8 above. All such records including correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints is confidential but will be provided to Ofsted and ISI on request. The number of complaints is available on request from the Headmaster's PA.

#### **6.2**

Complaints which do not have an implication in respect of safeguarding will be maintained for a period of seven years. Where there are safeguarding implications, the records will be kept for the term of the Independent inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation if it is longer.

### **7. POLICY MONITORING AND REVIEW**

This Policy will be reviewed every year in the autumn term. It will be presented to the Governors' Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Committee for approval. The minutes of this meeting will be presented to the Governors.