



# Barnard Castle School

ESTD 1883

## COMPLAINTS POLICY

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# Complaints Policy

## 1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 Barnard Castle School aims to provide the best possible academic, co-curricular and pastoral support and has long prided itself on the quality of the provision given to its pupils, so the School hopes that complaints will be rare. However, there are occasions where parents do have cause to complain to the School.
- 1.2 References in this policy to a 'parent' are to a biological parent or any other person with parental responsibility or care for a pupil attending the School. The procedures outlined in this policy aims to ensure that all complaints made are handled promptly, appropriately and fairly.
- 1.3 *This policy applies to parents of current pupils, and to parents of former pupils if their complaint was first raised while the pupil was registered at the School. For these purposes, a pupil is considered registered until the last day of the final term for which notice has been given, or until the last day of the Trinity Term in Year 13. Complaints submitted after this period will not be considered.*
- 1.4 We make every effort to ensure that any complaint is treated seriously and sensitively. We aim to respond courteously and efficiently and to act where appropriate to ensure that we work in partnership with parents to promote the best interests of the young people in our care. Complaints made by parents will never adversely affect the care or concern for their children.
- 1.5 Many issues that arise can often be classified as a concern and in most cases will be resolved directly with class teachers, Tutors, HSMs or in some cases members of the Senior Management Team.

## 2. Introduction

- 2.1 Barnard Castle School operates a complaints procedure to allow those who have concerns or complaints to raise them both informally and formally with those who have responsibility for the management and governance of the School.
- 2.2 Whenever a complaint is made, the interests and welfare of the pupil are our primary concern and responsibility. Barnard Castle School welcomes suggestions and comments from parents and takes seriously concerns or complaints that they may wish to raise.
- 2.3 The policy complies with ISSR Part 7 (updated August 2024) and Standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (revised September 2022). In addition, the policy includes reference to the Early Years Foundation Stage (Reception).
- 2.4 The policy is reviewed annually and its effectiveness is considered by the School's Governors.

2.5 The policy is available on the School website and by request from the School's General Office. Advice to parents of new pupils is given in the frequently asked questions in the parental handbook.

### 3. What Constitutes a Complaint?

3.1 Any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the School is a complaint. This includes where a parent tells us that we have done something wrong, failed to do something that we should have done, or where we have acted unfairly.

3.2 A complaint may be made about the School as a whole, a specific department or activity, or an individual member of staff. This list is not exhaustive.

3.3 This procedure relates to complaints made in good faith other than those relating to:

- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures
- Applications for admissions to the School.

3.4 Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The School is here for all pupils and parents can be assured that a pupil will not be penalised for a complaint that a parent raises in good faith.

### 4. Who to Contact?

4.1 If parents have an *initial* concern or complaint, they should normally contact their child's Tutor (for a student in Senior School) or Class Teacher (for a pupil in Prep School).

4.2 Where the complaint is about a pupil's Tutor or Class teacher, a parent should take their concerns directly to the Head or Prep School Head, as appropriate. Parents may also wish to follow this route where the issue is particularly serious or sensitive.

4.3 If a complaint relates to a senior member of staff, concerns should be taken directly to the Head.

4.4 Where a complaint relates to or involves the Head, parents should make their complaint to the Chair of Governors via the Clerk to the Governing Body.

### 5. The Process

5.1 The process of resolving complaints involves up to three stages:

- Stage 1: Informal Resolution
- Stage 2: Formal Resolution
- Stage 3: Panel Hearing

It is in our experience that in most cases any problems are satisfactorily dealt with at Stage 1.

## Timescales for Complaints

5.1 In all cases we shall aim to complete the process as soon as is practicable, whilst allowing sufficient time for a thorough investigation to take place. It is in the interest of everyone to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the anticipated timescales for each stage necessary are set out in this policy. Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, working days refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays.

It is recognised that timescales may need to be adjusted in the event of staff absence or other disruption and that meetings may need to take place virtually.

## Stage 1: Informal Resolution

5.2 Many concerns can be resolved quickly and informally by talking to those people within School with particular knowledge or interest in the area of concern, or with the person responsible for a pupil's welfare and to this end the class teacher/Tutor /Housemaster/Housemistress should always be the first point of contact with the aim of a timely and informal resolution. It is regarded as essential and consistent with the School's ethos to keep channels of communication open and deal with concerns as amicably and collegially as possible and at an early stage.

5.3 On receiving such complaint either in writing, by email, in person or by telephone, the Tutor or Class Teacher will make a written record of the concern that has been raised and the date and time on which they were received.

5.4 The School in all cases will investigate the concern raised fairly and appropriately with any relevant parties concerned and we hope that the matter will be resolved quickly and informally and to the parent's satisfaction

5.5 An informal written complaint will be acknowledged within 2 days and, once the staff concerned have fully investigated the matter, they will either meet with or telephone the complainant within 10 *working* days from the receipt of the complaint, in an effort to resolve the matter.

5.6 If the School and the parents fail to achieve a satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed to Stage 2: Formal Resolution.

## Stage 2: Formal Resolution

5.7 Should a complainant's concerns not have been resolved satisfactorily by the informal process, they should be addressed to the Head in writing. This should be submitted within 10 days of the conclusion of Stage 1. It should be made clear that it is a formal complaint and a **Complaints Form** (see *Appendix A*) should accompany any letter or email.

5.8 The Head will acknowledge the complaint within 2 *working* days and having investigated the matter, aim to meet with or otherwise respond to the complainant within 10 *working* days from the receipt of the complaint to explain their findings and subsequent recommendations. *The Head will write to the complainant to conclude Stage 2.*

5.9 If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3: Panel Hearing.

### Stage 3: Panel Hearing

- 5.10 A Panel Hearing cannot normally be requested unless Stage 2 of this process has been completed.
- 5.11 Should the complainant remain dissatisfied, they may write to the Clerk of Governors at the School within 7 working days of the date of the Head's response to the conclusion of Stage 2 findings. This letter should be sent or delivered to the General Office at the School and addressed to the Clerk of Governors, marked private and confidential. The Clerk of Governors will acknowledge receipt of the letter within 3 *working* days and invite the complainant to a hearing with a Complaints Panel; this will be within 15 *working* days of receipt of the complainant's letter by the Clerk of Governors and the date of the Panel Hearing will be mutually agreed.
- 5.12 The Panel will not accept any new areas of complaint which have not previously been raised in Stage 1 and Stage 2.
- 5.13 The Panel will consist of a Governor and a Senior Manager who have not been party to any of the foregoing process, **and** one other person of standing who is independent of the management and governance of the School.
- 5.14 The Panel will hear the complaint and the complainant will be given the opportunity to make appropriate representations. The complainant may be accompanied at the Panel Hearing by a friend or supporter, but legal representation is inappropriate.
- 5.15 The aim of the hearing will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve resolution and reconciliation between School and the complainant.
- 5.16 The complainant, and, where relevant, the person who has been complained about, will be informed in writing of the Panel's findings and recommendations. A copy of those findings and recommendations will also be made available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair and the Head. Notification of this decision will take place within 28 working days of having received the complaint and will be a final one from the School's point of view, concluding the School's complaints procedures.

## 5 Record of Complaints

- 6.1 Written records of informal and formal written complaints will be kept in School that proceed beyond Stage 1. These will contain all relevant correspondence, statements, findings, recommendations, noting whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing, and actions taken by the School as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld) and retained for a minimum of seven years.
- 6.2 Where the complaint relates to a safeguarding concern, records containing allegations of abuse will be preserved for the term of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and at least

until the accused has reached normal pension age or for ten years from the date of the allegation if it is longer.

## **7. Safeguarding**

7.1 In line with the safeguarding policy, should a complaint relate to a safeguarding issue, immediate contact will be made with the LADO(s) to discuss any allegation, consider the nature, content and context of the allegations and agree a course of action including any involvement of the police.

## **8. Data Protection**

8.1 Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are normally kept after the resolution of the complaint.

8.2 These will be kept confidential except for the conduct of any related litigation or when the School is required to disclose information by:

- The Secretary of State for Education under paragraph (k) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2010
- The ISI under Sections 108 and 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008
- Other legal authority.
- Any panel findings and recommendations would also be available for appropriate inspection on the School premises.

## **9. Monitoring and Evaluation**

9.1 The monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of this policy and its implementation will be carried out by the Head.

9.2 Stage 1 complaints are kept under on-going review by the Deputy Head Pastoral and Deputy Head Academic of both Schools.

9.3 The Senior Management Team (SMT) meet to review the complaints log at least once each year.

9.4 If you would like to know how many complaints were received by the School in the previous academic year, please contact the School Office.

## **10. For Complaints relating to the EYFS**

10.1 This policy also covers the Early Years Foundation Stage and records of complaints are kept for at least three years. Parents may contact OFSTED and/or the Independent Schools Inspectorate if they believe the School is not meeting the EYFS requirements. The Head will

investigate and notify the complainant of the outcome of the investigation in fulfilment of EYFS requirements, within 28 days of receipt of a complaint.

- 10.2 OFSTED can be contacted at: Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD or via their Helpline: 0300 123 4666 or website: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Schools/for-parents-andcarers/how-complain>.
- 10.3 ISI can be contacted at: Independent Schools Inspectorate, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA or by telephone: 020 7600 0100 or via their website: [www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net)
- 10.4 The record of complaints in relation to EYFS must be made available to OFSTED and ISI on request.

## Appendix A – Complaint Form



### BARNARD CASTLE SCHOOL

Please complete the form below if escalating a complaint to **Stage 2: Formal Resolution** along with your supporting letter. The Head will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken next.

<b>Your Name:</b>		<b>Pupil's Name:</b>	
<b>Relationship to the Pupil:</b>			
<b>Address:</b>			
<b>Postcode:</b>			
<b>Telephone Number:</b>		<b>Email:</b>	
<b>Please give details of your complaint:</b> <i>Please include as much information as possible about what specifically you are unhappy about and why. Where appropriate include names and dates:</i>			
<b>What action if any have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint?</b>			

**What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?**

**Are you attaching any further documentation with the Complaint Form? Please give details below:**

**Declaration:**

The information included in this complaint form is accurate to the best of my knowledge. I agree to cooperate fully with the complaints procedures and acknowledge my ongoing obligation to treat the School and its staff in a reasonable manner at all times.

**Signed:**

**Print Name:**

**Date:**

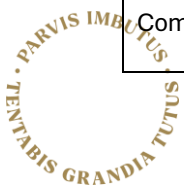
**School Use Only:**

Date Complaint Form Received:

Date Acknowledgement sent:

By Whom:

Complaint Referred to:



Date:

Complaint ID Number: