COPTHILL SCHOOL

PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH PARENTAL COMPLAINTS

At Copthill we believe in an 'Open Door' policy, and we welcome the opportunity to talk to parents at any time. We believe in solving the small problems to prevent the large ones. The staff will always do their utmost to make every child's time at Copthill happy and successful.

Staff are always accessible to and approachable by parents. Issues raised by parents are taken seriously and handled professionally and swiftly.

This policy is applicable to all parents of pupils, including those in the EYFS. It is available from the School Office on request. This is noted on the school website.

Definitions:

The Parent/s - those who have parental responsibility for the pupil. This may be a parent or legal guardian or a relative with direct responsibility for the pupil.

School – a person employed by, or under contract with Copthill School Ltd or any person acting under authorisation of the Directors of Copthill School Ltd.

Concern
A concern may be treated as ‘an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought’.

Complaint
A complaint may be generally recognised as ‘an expression or statement of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action’.

This policy makes no direct distinction between a concern or a complaint. Any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the school is a complaint, and in the scope of this procedure.

An effective complaints procedure can diffuse problems and can provide the School with helpful information. Complaints treated as constructive suggestions can be used to improve standards and may prevent cause for further complaint. Even an unjustified complaint may indicate an area which can be improved.

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Introduction

If parents have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with the following procedure. **Failure to adhere may affect any consideration for the waiving of usual terms and conditions.**

Stage 1-Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their son/daughter's form teacher or relevant member of staff (e.g. subject teacher). In many cases the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the form teacher/staff member cannot resolve the matter alone, or if approached about a matter which lies outside their remit, staff should refer it to the appropriate person or consult their Department Lead and inform the parents of this action.

Parents may wish to raise certain complaints directly with the Department Lead/Headteacher, and this should be respected. However complaints made directly to the Department Lead or Headteacher may be referred back to the relevant form teacher/subject teacher unless the Department Lead or Headteacher deems it appropriate for him/her to deal with matter personally.

The form teacher/subject teacher/Department Lead/Headteacher will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. An attempt must be made to make immediate contact to acknowledge the complaint (within **3** working days) and aiming to resolve the matter completely within **10 working days.** In the event that the staff member 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 by staff and /or the Headteacher, then the parents should put their complaint **in writing** (see Appendix 1) to the Headteacher or Principal. The Headteacher/Principal will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

In most cases the Headteacher/Principal will meet/speak to the parents concerned, normally within **5 working days** of receiving the complaint to discuss the matter. If possible a resolution will be reached at this stage. This process must be completed within **28** days from receipt of the complaint.

It may be necessary for the Headteacher/Principal to carry out further investigations. The Headteacher/Principal will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

Once the Headteacher/Principal 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 Headteacher/Principal will also give reasons for the decision.

If parents are still not satisfied with the decision they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure. There may be certain circumstances, such as complaints about the Headteacher/Principal, when the parents should write directly to the Directors. Stage 3 of this procedure will then be invoked.

Defining Stage 2 Complaints

Although 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 email. Complaints will usually only progress to the formal stage after first being considered at the preliminary stage and only then if the complainant intends to escalate a matter to the formal stage - *Commentary on the Regulatory Requirements (para 669)*

If parents seek a formal meeting with the Head, or raise issues through a formal letter, which may require a written response from the school, this would normally be regarded as a formal complaint, even if it has not been referred to as such in the letter. Also, if a concern about a more minor matter is repeated and the parent is clearly not satisfied with the School's original response, it should be regarded as a complaint - *ISI Briefing 2019*

Stage 3-Panel Hearing

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), the Principal must write to the parents within 7 working days, confirming that the matter has been referred to the Directors who will call hearings of the Complaints Panel.

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 Directors. The Chair of the Complaints Panel on behalf of the Panel will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and within 21 days. The Chair of the Complaints Panel should request that a letter be sent by the parents to the Panel, outlining the complaint and containing any further information. Copies of such letters or any related matters shall be supplied to all parties not later than 10 working days prior to the hearing.

**Complaints Panel – Minimum of three persons - composed of members of the Advisory Panel and at least one independent panel member. The Directors have contacted a small 'pool' of independent members who have agreed to act as Panel members if required.*
Independent Panel Members

The parents 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.

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

Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations which it shall complete within 5 working days of the Hearing. The Panel will write to the parents 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 in writing to the parents, the Headteacher, the Directors and, where relevant, the person complained of.

Regarding EYFS, Stages 1-3 must be completed within 28 days.

A written record is kept of all formal complaints, highlighting whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and the action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld)

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them, where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

Complaints which do not have safeguarding implications should be retained for a minimum of 7 years. Where there is a safeguarding angle: 'Records concerning allegations of abuse must 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 10 years from the date of the allegation if it is longer.'

The Directors will provide Ofsted [and ISI], on request, with a written record of all Early Years complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint.

If all actions have been taken by the School, and the Parent still feels that the resolution is unsatisfactory, then a formal complaint can also be made to one of the following organizations:

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

Telephone 020 7600 0100 or Email: concerns@isi.net

https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

EARLY YEARS ONLY
To complain about a childcare provider
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or 0300 123 4666.
suggested method is now online **https://contact.ofsted.gov.uk/online-complaints**

Reviewed by Advisory Panel / Directors – Nov 24

Formal Complaints History

2022-23 - 0 complaints reached Stage 2-Formal Resolution
2023-24 - 0 complaints reached Stage 2-Formal Resolution
2024-25 - 0 complaints reached Stage 2-Formal Resolution

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Helen Schofield (Headteacher) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Child's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the child (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Telephone number: Email address:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature: Date:
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Action taken:
Date: