

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS OF PUPILS

Introduction

Frequent, open and constructive communication with parents has always been an important hallmark of life at d'Overbroeck's, and it is fully our intention to do all we can to ensure that this continues to be the case at every level. We welcome, and indeed regularly invite, comments and suggestions from parents; and we take equally seriously any complaints or concerns that a parent may wish to raise. We treat a complaint as an expression of genuine concern or unhappiness which needs careful consideration followed by a prompt and reasoned response.

This Complaints Procedure takes into account the regulatory requirements currently in force and is underpinned by a genuine desire to maintain within the school a flexible and responsive culture that recognises the need for a fair, objective and open-minded approach to dealing with complaints and concerns.

The school is happy to make this policy available in larger print or in a more accessible format if required.

Scope

The DfE defines a complaint as any matter about which a parent of a pupil at the school is unhappy and seeks action by the school. This Complaints Procedure applies to parents of pupils currently registered at d'Overbroeck's. It does not apply to parents of prospective pupils, nor does it cover exclusions (ie, instances where a student has been asked to leave the school – these are addressed in the school's policy on Behaviour, Rules, Rewards and Sanctions). It applies to former pupils only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still registered at d'Overbroeck's.

What you should do if you have a complaint

If you have a complaint or a concern, please let us know at the earliest opportunity. This document sets out the procedure to follow if you wish to make a complaint and what you can expect from the school by way of a response.

The procedure is staged. Obviously our hope is that most issues can be resolved quickly and informally; but the policy sets out a clear procedure to follow in situations where a parent may feel that an informal resolution has not been possible.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

If there is anything, in any aspect of your son or daughter's life at d'Overbroeck's, that is troubling you, then we would urge you to let us know immediately, no matter how minor you may feel the matter to be. We will do our best to listen, to try to understand your concern, and to arrive at a resolution that meets with the satisfaction of all concerned.

It is best to start with the person most closely concerned with the issue. The following guidelines should, in most cases, help you to identify the appropriate person to contact – but if in doubt please

ask. You are welcome to contact the relevant staff members by telephone, by email, by letter or by calling in person.

- If your complaint relates to a boarding issue, then your first point of contact should be the Head of Boarding.

For any other issue, please contact:

- In Years 7-11: your son or daughter's Form Teacher
- in the Sixth Form: your son or daughter's Director of Studies
- in the International School: your son or daughter's Form Teacher

In the great majority of cases, it is likely that the appropriate member of staff will be able to address your concern effectively and straightforwardly. If they cannot resolve the matter alone, then it may be necessary for them to consult a more senior colleague.

Equally, you may yourself wish to address your concern directly to a more senior member of staff – in particular to the Head of Years 7-11, the Head of Sixth Form or the Head of the International School, either in the first place or if you feel that the person to whom you first addressed your complaint has not dealt with it to your satisfaction.

In all cases, members of staff who receive a complaint will make a written record of the issue(s) involved and of the date on which the complaint was received.

Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days in term-time (or within 15 working days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays), then you may wish to proceed with your complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.

Stage 2: Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then we would ask you to put your complaint in writing to the Principal.

Upon receipt of a written complaint, the Principal will normally contact you within 3 working days in term-time, or within 7 working days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays, to acknowledge receipt of your letter, to gather more detailed information where necessary, and to set out how she proposes to proceed – including letting you know when she expects to be able to come back to you with a response. During term-time, this will usually be within 10 working days of receipt of the written complaint. It may take a little longer if the complaint is received during school holidays.

Following this initial communication, the Principal will need to discuss the matter with the relevant colleagues and / or students, to carry out any necessary investigations and, with the help of senior colleagues, to give the matter full and detailed consideration. As part of this process, the Principal may wish to have more communication with you along the way, by telephone, email or face to face, to clarify issues or to seek more information.

Once a conclusion has been reached, the Principal will communicate the outcome to you in writing, setting out the reasons for it as well as any action taken or proposed.

The Principal will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

In the event of a formal complaint about the Principal, this should be addressed to the Chairman of the Board, c/o the COO, Nick Woods, at the school's main address: 333 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7PL. The Chairman will consider the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 3: Panel Hearing

If, following the completion of the procedures set out in Stage 2, you are still unhappy with the outcome and wish to take your complaint further, you may invoke Stage 3, which means that the matter will be referred to a Complaints Panel for consideration.

To initiate this process, you will need to contact the Chairman of the Board within 14 working days of the Principal's decision under Stage 2. Please write to the Chairman c/o the COO, Nick Woods at the school's main address: 333 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7PL.

The Chairman of the Board will acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible, usually within 3 working days during term-time (or within 7 working days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays), and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable, normally within 10 working days during term-time (or 15 working days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays).

The Panel will consist of three people not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. As stipulated by the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 the Panel members will be appointed by the school. One of the Panel members will be independent of the management and running of the school. The independent member of the Panel, who will be chosen and appointed by the school, will be someone who has held a position of responsibility and who, by dint of their professional experience, has had experience of analysing situations and evaluating complex information and putting forward balanced arguments.

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 the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matters be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars will need to be supplied to all parties not later than 4 working days prior to the hearing.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out and keep the complainant informed of the progress of the investigation.

After due consideration of all facts it considers relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within 5 working days in term-time (or within 10 working days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays) of the date 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 any recommendations will be sent in writing to the complainant(s), to the Principal and, where relevant, to the person(s) complained about. They will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Principal.

Timescales

We will do our very best to keep to the timescales set out in this Procedure. These are expressed as a number of working days, which means Monday to Friday (excluding weekends). It may take a little longer to progress issues in school holiday periods, but we will always do our best not to let a complaint linger unresolved any longer than can be helped.

We aim to deal with complaints received during school holidays as soon as reasonably practicable, and normally within the timescales set out in this policy. Where there are delays, caused for example by staff absence, parents will be informed and given an indication of the next steps and likely timescale for a response.

The aim will always be to deal with all complaints as promptly as possible; and, as a backstop deadline, a complaint received outside of term time will always be dealt with, at the latest, within the timescales set out above for term-time once term has started again.

Record keeping

Detailed written records will be made of all complaints made under Stages 2 and 3 above, including those relating to boarding. The records will indicate whether the complaint was resolved following a formal procedure or whether it proceeded to a panel hearing. They will also contain an account of the action taken by the school as a result of these complaints regardless of whether or not they were upheld.

Confidentiality

You may be assured that your complaint or concern 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 108 or 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.

It is important to stress that it is school policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children.

Child protection issues

The following members of staff have designated responsibility for issues relating to safeguarding and child protection at d'Overbroeck's:

- Jonathan Cuff – Deputy Principal (Pastoral) and the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)
- Emma-Kate Henry – Principal
- Mark Olejnik – Head of Years 7-11
- Jane Cockerill – Deputy Head of Years 7-11
- Alasdair MacPherson – Head of Sixth Form
- Kate Palmer – Head of Lower Sixth
- David Wareham – Deputy Head of the International School

Concerns over child protection issues may be communicated to any of the above members of staff who will deal with them according to the school's policy on Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children. If you felt the need to address a complaint relating to a child protection issue to someone outside the school, then you may get in touch directly with the Oxfordshire Multi-Agency

Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on 0845 050 7666, or by email: mash-childrens@oxfordshire.gcsx.gov.uk .
Out of office hours, you may contact the Emergency Duty Team on 0800 833 408.

Please note that the school's policy on Safeguarding & Promoting the Welfare of Children is posted on the website. Copies are also available on request from the Principal's PA, Mrs Tracy Roslyn (tel: 01865 688601 or email: tracy.roslyn@doverbroecks.com).

Alternative Dispute Resolution

In the event that the school is unable to resolve a complaint with you and the internal procedure has been exhausted, the school will write to you to let you know that it cannot settle the complaint but that you may, if you wish, contact the Ombudsman Service as a means of alternative dispute resolution. Use of ADR by the school and parents is voluntary. Please note that the school is under no obligation to submit to alternative dispute resolution.

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We hope this policy document will make clear that, whenever parents have a complaint or a concern, we are anxious to be told about it and to be able to work with the parents to address such concerns in the best interests of the student(s) concerned.

The number of parental complaints registered in the past academic year under the full formal procedure set out above is available from the Principal's PA, Mrs Tracy Roslyn (tel: 01865 688601 or email: tracy.roslyn@doverbroecks.com).

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Last updated: August 2018