

HBJ EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS & APPEALS POLICY

APPLIES TO:	All staff, visitors, volunteers, contractors, governors, guests, residents etc.
LAST UPDATED:	August 2024
REVISIONS: (Reviewer to enter initials and date)	PAK, CBO Feb 2025

1 PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

- 1.1 This document sets out the principles and procedures regarding complaints by external stakeholders against the school. The audience for this policy includes:
- Parents making a complaint
 - External stakeholders making a complaint
 - Staff managing external complaints

It does not relate to internal complaints between members of staff, for which a separate policy document exists.

- 1.2 It is anticipated that this policy, and then only in sections as relevant, will only be shared with stakeholders via the school website and with complainants at the point of formal proceedings. Senior leaders may wish to share the graphic in APPENDIX 2 after the first contact is made with the complainant if they feel this is necessary.

- 1.3 The complaints process is divided into three stages:

STAGE	DESCRIPTION
I. Informal / Concern	Informal raising of a concern notified orally or in writing to a senior manager.
II. Formal Complaint	A formal complaint made in writing to the Head.
III. Review	An unresolved formal complaint progressed as a last resort to the Chief Education Officer, Chief Operations Officer or Chief Financial Officer depending on the context.

- 1.4 The Headmaster/Mistress and SLT are responsible for ensuring that there is an effective means of recording concerns and complaints, tracking progress in resolving complaints and analysing trends so that they can be reflected in the risk register, School Self-Evaluation and Strategic Development Plan.
- 1.5 Complaints against the Head personally (as opposed to against school policy or procedures) are accelerated directly to Stage III. Safeguarding concerns should be notified immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (see *Safeguarding Policy*).

2 DEFINITIONS: A CONCERN OR A COMPLAINT

- 2.1 The school defines a **concern** as:
'An expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.
- 2.2 In the first instance, community members are encouraged to raise concerns with their child's class teacher/form tutor, the appropriate Phase Leader or Head of School. For other types of concern, the school receptionists are on hand to direct concerned persons to the correct member of staff. In most cases, concerns can be resolved informally, without the need to invoke formal procedures.
- 2.3 In the case of **complaints**, procedures outlined throughout this document should be followed. The school defines a complaint as:

'An expression of specific dissatisfaction about particular actions taken or a lack of action'. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint; these procedures apply to all such potential complainants.

3 STAGE I: INFORMAL CONCERNS

- 3.1 Stage I aims to resolve the complaint informally, through the appropriate senior manager(s). Examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, about a timetable clash, a billing error or some other aspect of the school's systems, equipment or operational procedures.

Procedures

- a) Where a concern (see above) has been made by a complainant and there is evidence of communication in line with paragraph 2.2 who now wishes to raise the issue with senior management, depending on severity, it should be treated as an informal complaint. In the event of a direct informal complaint, it should be addressed to the relevant senior manager and/or the relevant Head of School.
- b) The senior manager/Head of School will arrange to meet with (or, where a meeting is not immediately possible, place a telephone call to) the complainant. It is important to respond to a complaint (informal in this case) within 48 hours to acknowledge receipt of the complaint and the intention of a meeting with the complainant.
- c) In the event of a technical complaint better dealt with directly by a senior manager (i.e. a specific timetable complaint) the relevant Head of School should be informed (and may, if appropriate, also attend the meeting).
- d) If the complaint relates to the Head of School, it will be referred to the Head who will initially deal with it as an informal complaint.
- e) The senior manager(s)/Head of School will normally meet with the complainant within five working days of notification.
- f) The senior manager/Head of School will listen to and record in writing the complaint. These notes will be kept on file for at least one year. Copies of any written response to the complaint and related documentation, including copies of all communication between the senior manager/Head of School and the complainant will also be kept on file.
- g) If possible, the senior manager/Head of School will offer resolution and/or reassurance at this meeting. If further information is required, the senior manager/Head of School will investigate, reconvening with the complainant no more than five working days after the initial meeting. In most cases this second meeting should be face-to-face, though a telephone call may be appropriate for smaller issues with positive resolutions.
- h) If the complainant remains dissatisfied following this informal approach, the complaint should be forwarded to the Head (and becomes a Formal Complaint – Stage II).
- i) All informal complaints and concerns must be recorded and trends tracked by senior leaders so that strategy and mitigate against them.

4 STAGE II: FORMAL COMPLAINT

4.1 In Stage II formal written complaints are considered by the Head.

- a) Whether a complainant has previously raised the complaint with a senior manager or not, progression to Stage II requires a formal written letter of complaint, addressed to the Head.
- b) The Head's Office will acknowledge the complaint in writing as soon as possible (within 24 hours) after receiving it.
- c) The complainant then will be asked to supply as much detail regarding the complaint as possible, completing the 'Formal Complaints Form' (see APPENDIX 1), which will also accompany the acknowledgement.
- d) The complainant will be invited to meet with the Head within ten working (school) days of receipt of the written complaint. If this is not possible the school will write to explain the reason for the delay, giving a date by which the Head is available. Where appropriate, and with due regard to privacy and balance in participant numbers, the Head will invite relevant members of staff to this meeting (for example, if technical or phase-specific expertise is required).
- e) Where necessary the Head will investigate the complaint, reconvening with the complainant within ten working days of the original meeting.
- f) With the relevant details established, the Head will provide a written response to the complainant. This response, presented within 10 working days of the last meeting with the complainant, will give a full explanation of the Head's decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, this will also be indicated in the response. If not presented in person at the outset, the written response will also be accompanied by an invitation to meet the Head to discuss the response. There are some complex cases where the timeline may need to be extended. However, if this happens the complainant will be communicated with and the rationale shared.
- g) The Head will keep written/typed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation, including the formal response.
- h) If the complainant remains unsatisfied with the outcome of the Stage II investigation and the school's findings, the complaint may be progressed to Stage III – Governor Review.
- i) Informal complaints and concerns should be recorded and trends tracked by senior leaders so that strategy and mitigate against them.

When a formal complaint is raised (and possibly for later legal proceeding), the complainant has a right to request all forms of communications relevant to the complaint including but not limited to meeting minutes, email exchanges, files, records directly related to the "individual" or the individual's child, be available to the complainant. However, sensitive or confidential information about other people should not be handed over. Schools are advised to be cautious and follow communication protocol for any forms of communications with this individual and among staff for instance.

5 STAGE III: GOVERNOR REVIEW

5.1 In Stage III unresolved complaints (or complaints against the Head) are presented to a Complaints Panel, consisting of two members of the Governing Board and one panel member independent of the management of the school. None of these panel members should have been directly involved in the complaint to date. **Used as a last resort**, the purpose of this stage is to give the complaint a fair hearing in front of a panel of governors who have no prior knowledge of the details of the complaint and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice.

Procedures

- a) Unless the complaint is made against the Head personally, it will have been through Stage II and received a written response (if this isn't the case, complaints addressed directly to the Governing Body that have not been Stage 2 will be reverted to the Head). In the event of the former, or if the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of Stage 2, a written request for review, clearly stating the reasons that it is being made, should be sent to the Chair of Governors.
- b) The Chair will acknowledge receipt of the request for review within five working days. A copy of this document will be enclosed with the acknowledgement.
- c) The Chair will convene a Complaints Review Panel. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, and with at least one member of the Panel with suitable experience who is unconnected and independent of the school (for example a Head/Board member from a reputable local school). A member of the school's administrative staff will act as secretary to the panel with a full record of the process being recorded.
- d) The complainant will be asked to supply as much detail regarding the complaint as possible, including the original 'Formal Complaints Form' (see APPENDIX 1) submitted during Stage II. The Panel will also ask the School to supply all corresponding documentation, including a written report detailing procedures followed and actions taken to date.
- e) The complainant will be invited to meet with the Complaints Review Panel within fifteen working (term time) days of receipt of the written complaint. If this is not possible, due to exceptional circumstances, the school will write to explain the reason for the delay, giving a date by which the Panel is available. The parents may attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative or friend, but not a legal representative. The name and occupation of this person need to be submitted to the panel at least 5 working days before the panel hearing. In the event that a complainant arrives to the meeting with previously undisclosed participants the Complaints Review Panel reserves the right to deny those parties access to the meeting, or to adjourn the meeting.
- f) With the agreement of the Chair of the Panel, and having informed the complainant prior, the Head may invite members of staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant to attend relevant portions of the meeting.
- g) As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses previously undisclosed will be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the meeting will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to the new evidence.
- h) If necessary, the Complaints Review Panel may need to carry out further investigations prior to reaching a conclusion.
- i) In closing the meeting, the Chair will explain that the Panel will now consider its decision (or requires further information), and that written notice of the decision will be sent to the Head and the complainant within 10 working days.
- j) The Panel will then:
 - a. reach a majority decision on the complaint;
 - b. decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
 - c. recommend, where appropriate, to the governing body changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.

- k) With a final decision made, the Complaints Review Panel will provide a written response to the complainant. This response, presented within 10 working days of the last meeting with the complainant, will give a full explanation of the Panel's decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, this will also be indicated in the response.
- l) The Head will keep a copy of the final decision, all notes and correspondence on file in the school's records for a period of one year from the date of the Panel's review.

5.2 The Complaints Review Panel's decision is to be considered final and binding.

5.3 The Senior Leadership Team will lead a review of the management of the complaint in order to improve systems and processes in managing complaints and addressing the issue raised as part of school improvement procedures moving forward.

5.4 Complaints that are raised to Stage III must be reported to the next BOG meeting in the Head's Report.

6 SERIAL AND PERSISTENT COMPLAINANTS

6.1 There may be occasions when, despite all stages of the above procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors can inform them that the procedure is completed and that the matter is closed.

6.2 The complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, then the correspondence may be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the school may choose not to respond. However, the decision not to respond must be taken with due consideration of whether:

- the school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs;
- the complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any);
- they are contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time;
- the school has reason to believe the individual is contacting them with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience;
- their letters/emails/telephone calls are often, always or increasingly abusive or aggressive;
- they make insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff.

Moreover, the school will not stop responding just because an individual is difficult to deal with or asks complex questions. However, where the complainant has been through all three complaint stages the school will consider the matter to be closed.

- 6.3 A complaint may be regarded as ‘unreasonable’ when the person making the complaint:
- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
 - refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
 - refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
 - insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
 - introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
 - makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
 - changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
 - repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
 - refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school’s complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to a Complaints Review Panel, seeks an unrealistic outcome; makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
- 6.4 Before concluding that a complaint is ‘unreasonable’, the Head or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally.
- 6.5 The School does not respond to anonymous complaints.
Should a parent wish to know how many formal complaints the School receives in any one year, they should email (communications@harrowbeijing.cn) and the information will be provided.

APPENDIX 1

FORMAL COMPLAINTS FORM (optional)

I wish to make a complaint about the school; I have already discussed the matter informally but now wish to invoke the formal complaints procedure.

NAME OF COMPLAINANT			
NAME OF CHILD (if appropriate)		HOUSE/ YEAR/ CLASS	
MEMBER(S) OF STAFF PREVIOUSLY SPOKEN TO IN REGARD THE COMPLAINT		DATE OF MEETING	
CONTACT DETAILS	E-MAIL:		
	TELEPHONE:		


Please give as much detail about the complaint as possible, using additional sheets as necessary. Please include as many dates, names and specific details as possible. You may also attach to this document any further materials relating to the complaint.

SIGNED:		DATE:	

A copy of this document should be forwarded to Head's office. We suggest you keep a copy for your own reference.

APPENDIX 2: Exemplar Complaints Guidance Sheet

Before submitting a stage 1 complaint all parents are advised according to paragraph 2.2 to seek resolve of their concern by discussing the matter with the relevant class teacher or head of Department.



Something Not Quite Right?

Before you begin..

Sometimes (we hope very rarely) you might want to make a complaint. We've put this guide together to take you through the steps: Gather the information you need. it helps if you contact the right person from the outset, but of course we'll help if you're not sure. We've published a useful guide on our website that lists key contacts for different scenarios.

- 1**

Approach a member of staff and make your concerns known. Depending on the nature of your complaint, it will either be dealt with there and then, or might be taken to a more senior member of staff.

Informal Resolution
- If concerns remain

2

Formal Resolution

At this stage you need to contact the Head Master, you should do so in writing, making it clear that you are making a formal complaint.
- If concerns remain

3

If you have a complaint against the Head Master himself, or where matters remain unresolved, you should send a letter to the Chair of Governors.

Governor Review

A more detailed explanation of the process is available on request. This version will be sent to you in any case, once you enter stage two of the process.

APPENDIX 3: Exemplar Complaints Poster



It's Good to Talk!

At Harrow Beijing we want everyone to feel that their voice is heard. We understand that sometimes it's difficult to know who to speak to. This guide will help you decide who to go to.

Pastoral (well-being)

Things like...

- Friendship issues, loneliness, unhappiness, Social and emotional issues,
- Coping skills, conflict resolution, crisis intervention etc

You can talk to

Tutors or Class teachers, School Counsellors, Heads of Year, or the Director of Wellbeing



Co-curricular (LSA, Sport, Arts)

Things like...

- Sports teams
- Coaches and team selection
- Expeditions and trips
- Orchestras, bands, exhibitions etc

You can talk to

Tutors or class teachers, Sports Coaches, Activity Leaders, Directors of PE & Sport or Head of Music or the Head of Arts

Academic

Things like...

- Homework, classwork, tests.
- Extra help and support with schoolwork
- Subject choice matters
- Careers and university advice
- Pathways and teacher allocation etc.

You can talk to

Tutors or class teachers, Heads of Departments, Heads of Year or the Director of Studies



Any matters still not yet resolved

You can talk to the Communications Department or the Head Master

School-wide or operational matters

Things like...

- Policy and procedure
- Management and leadership
- Finance and facilities
- School lunch and school bus
- Lost and found
- Safety matters

You can talk to

SLT or Operation staff



You can get the contact details for any of these people easily via the school helpline: 64448900 ext. 6, or communications@harrowbeijing.cn