



## **More House School** **Procedures for addressing concerns** **and the management of complaints**

No matter is too trivial to discuss with a member of the staff; if it matters to you then it matters to us. There is no way in which the referral to the School of a concern or complaint will be detrimental to any child; the School encourages the communication of any concern or complaint. Furthermore, the School recognises the value that the communication and investigation of concerns and complaints can afford to its processes for self-evaluation and continual development.

This document explains how concerns or requests for clarification can most effectively be communicated to the School, and how you can expect the School to respond. This document also describes the procedures for the proper communication and management of complaints.

More House School acknowledges the confidentiality of all information relating to individual concerns or complaints, although such information will be made available for school inspection purposes by approved inspection bodies, and is subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts.

These procedures have been formed in accordance with the Department for Education's advisory document: Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2016; January 2016.

### **Requesting clarification of information, or communicating a concern**

You are encouraged to communicate any expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought. The School hopes that such a request or concern will be communicated at the earliest possible juncture so that the matter can be resolved swiftly and effectively for the benefit of the child(ren) and adults involved.

You are encouraged to communicate any request for information or any concern, for the attention of the pupil's form-tutor. This supports the School's approach to effective communication and makes sure that the form-tutor remains at the centre of information relevant to the pupil. Such communication should be made by electronic mail, in writing or by telephoning the School Office. The School Office staff is able to forward electronic mail or telephone messages to the pupil's form-tutor. The School Office is open from 8am until 5.30pm weekdays in term-time, and usually from 9.00am until at least 3.00pm in the school holidays. It is not open on bank-holidays. Where the pupil is a boarder, you may prefer to communicate the matter directly to the pupil's housemaster or housemistress, either in person, by telephone, in writing or by electronic mail. The housemaster or housemistress will make sure the form-tutor is kept informed. If the form-tutor is absent, the matter should be referred to the head of year.

The form-tutor, housemaster or housemistress will expect to respond to you within two working days, although before the end of the next working day following the initial contact is most usual. This response might provide the information required or an answer to the communicated concern,



or might be in the form of a holding response which provides an explanation of what action is being taken to resolve the concern; it may be appropriate for the form tutor, housemaster or housemistress to seek opinion or information from a colleague or from another source before providing a full response. It is expected that any holding response will specify a time by which additional information will be communicated.

## **Complaints Procedure**

It is expected that a majority of concerns can be managed and resolved swiftly and effectively through the process described in the above section (*Requesting clarification of information, or communicating a concern*) of this document. However, if you experience dissatisfaction about actions taken by the School, or about a lack of action, at a level that cannot be resolved in the manner described above, you are encouraged to refer the matter to the School in accordance with the School's Complaints procedure, as detailed below.

The School encourages and expects complaints to be communicated as soon as possible after an incident arises, and certainly within three months. The School will not normally conduct a formal investigation in regard to complaints made outside of this time-frame. However, the School will consider exceptions, and the School will always investigate any concern or complaint relating to the safeguarding and welfare of children, regardless of the time elapsed.

An anonymous complaint will not be investigated under this procedure, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

### **Stage 1 - Informal Resolution**

The School encourages communication of a complaint to be made in writing, either electronically or on paper, and submitted to the pupil's Head of Year, to the Head of Boarding, to one of the Deputy Heads or to the Headmaster directly. However, the School recognises that the expression of a complaint in writing might be difficult for some individuals, and will acknowledge complaints communicated verbally by telephone or in person to any of the persons named immediately above, or to a member of the staff in the School's Main Reception. You are asked to make explicit within the communication that you wish the matter to be recognised by the School as a complaint.

The School's Main Reception and Office is open from 8am until 5.30pm weekdays in term-time and usually from 9.00am until at least 3.00pm in the school holidays. It is not open on bank-holidays. The Head of Boarding may be contacted by electronic mail, or by telephone on the Boarding Mobile Telephone during residential hours. The number for this telephone is communicated to all parents of boarders.

The initial recipient of your complaint will refer the matter to the most suitable senior member of the staff, and will respond to you, acknowledging your complaint and stating which member of the staff will manage the School's response to the complaint. It is expected that this initial response will occur within twenty-four hours if during a normal school week during term-time, and certainly within two working days. A record of correspondence and actions regarding the complaint will be maintained by the School, compiled by the member of the staff managing the complaint.



The member of the staff managing the complaint will ask you what you think might resolve the issue, and they will work to achieve a satisfactory resolution. We would hope that the member of staff who deals with your complaint will be able to support you to reach an appropriate resolution. However, if they are unable to do so, either party may progress the complaint to the second stage of this Complaints Procedure. In any case, the member of staff with whom you have been dealing will have made a written record of your correspondence and have passed it to the Headmaster for his information. He may decide himself to take further action. Any written records relevant to the complaint will be placed in your son's School records.

### **Stage 2 - Formal complaint heard by the Headmaster**

If you have not been satisfied by the first stage of the School's Complaints Procedure you are encouraged to put your complaint in writing to be submitted directly to 'The Headmaster or his Deputy', and are invited to telephone the School Office, seeking to make an appointment to meet with the Headmaster. If the subject of the complaint is the Headmaster, the complaint should be addressed to the Chairman of the Board of Governors, and submitted to the School Office. Where the Chairman of the Board of Governors is the subject of the complaint, the complaint should be addressed to the Clerk of the Board of Governors, and submitted to the School Office.

Unless the Headmaster is away from the School, he will respond to you within two working days. In his absence, his deputy will respond to you. Unless the Headmaster or his deputy is able to achieve a satisfactory resolution by telephone or by electronic communication, he will invite you to come in to School in order to meet with him. It may sometimes be necessary for him to adjourn the meeting with you to seek information from other members of the staff or from other sources. He will do this as soon as possible, certainly within two working days of the adjournment, and arrange for a second meeting with you. In dealing with the complaint the Headmaster will respond to you in writing about his decision and any action taken.

Such a response will comply with the School's obligations regarding the confidentiality of some information; where the matter relates to the conduct or capability of a member of the staff, the investigation will be carried out under the School's Disciplinary or Capability procedures and the outcome must remain confidential to the School and the member of the staff concerned. Where the matter relates to the behaviour of another pupil, the details of the investigation and outcomes must remain confidential to the School and the parents of the child concerned.

Where a complaint is regarding the Headmaster and submitted to the Chairman of the Board of Governors, the Chairman will seek to respond to the complainant directly within three working days. In the event of the Chairman's absence for a prolonged period, the Vice-Chair of the Board of Governors will respond.

Where a complaint is regarding the Chairman of the Board of Governors and submitted to the Clerk to the Board of Governors, a representative of the Board of Governors will seek to respond to the complainant directly within three working days.

The School maintains a central record of all complaints registered at Stage 2 or higher.

### **Stage 3 - The Formal Hearing**



If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the second stage of the School's Complaints Procedure, there is recourse to progress the complaint to the third stage. The complainant should write to the Vice-Chair of the Board of Governors, at the school's postal address, marking the letter 'private and confidential'. The School guarantees that such a letter will be passed immediately to the Vice-Chair of the Board of Governors or, in the case of their known absence, to another member of the Board of Governors. That person will convene a panel and arrange a meeting with the complainant for the panel to hear the complaint. The date of such a meeting must be arranged with the complainant within three working days of the Vice-Chair of the Board of Governors receiving the complainant's letter. This panel will consist of three or five people and the group may choose their own chairman. The group must be independent and impartial, meaning that they have no previous involvement in the management of the complaint or initial circumstances, and no Governor may sit on the sub-committee if they have a prior involvement in the complaint or knowledge of the circumstances surrounding it. If possible, the Governors need to try to ensure there is a cross-section of categories of Governor, and that the specially convened sub-committee is sensitive to issues of race, gender and religious affiliation. There must be one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the School.

The aim of the meeting, which must be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the School and the complainant, who may bring a supporter to the meeting. It must be recognised that the complainant might not be happy with the outcome of the hearing and it may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations that will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously. The chair of this meeting should ensure that the proceedings are as informal as possible and definitely not adversarial.

As the panel may wish to seek clarification and to ask for further evidence to be supplied, it should not give a decision at the time of the meeting but should adjourn to consider its position before making any recommendations. These must be sent to all parties within five working days of the meeting or, if a different time scale is needed, it should be agreed by both parties at the meeting. The decision and recommendations of the panel will be final and binding.

In the event that the complainant is dissatisfied with the procedures carried out by the sub-committee rather than by its recommendations, then the complainant must write to the Chairman of the Board of Governors who will convene a full meeting of the Board of Governors. The decision of the Board will be final and binding.

### **Serial and persistent complainants**

In accordance with advice from the Department for Education, [Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2016](#); January 2016, the School recognises the potential detrimental impact on its time and resources caused by serial and persistent complainants.

Where all stages of the Complaints Procedure have been followed and a complainant remains dissatisfied such that they attempt to reopen the same issue, the Chairman of the Board of Governors will inform them that the procedure has been completed and the matter closed. Further communication from the complainant regarding the same issue may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the School may choose not to respond. This should not happen prior to all three



stages of the Complaints Procedure being completed. A 'serial' or 'persistent' marking will only be applied against the subject or complaint itself rather than against the individual complainant.

The decision to stop responding will be taken where:

- 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); and
- the complainant is contacting the School repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time.

Additionally, the following factors are relevant in supporting further a decision to stop responding:

- the School has reason to believe the individual is contacting the School with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience;
- the complainant's letters, electronic mailings or telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive;
- the complainant makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, members of the staff or the Board of Governors.

Ultimately, if a complainant persists to the point that the School considers it to constitute harassment, legal advice will be sought as to the next steps.

**This Complaints Procedure is reviewed annually.**