



## **Parent Grievance Procedure**

Date: September 2016

Next review date: September 2017

## Part 1: General Principles of Grievances

### Dealing with Grievances – Initial concerns

1. The School has implemented a Grievance Procedure for parents/carers. The School will endeavour to take all concerns seriously at the earliest stage so as to reduce the numbers of issues that may develop into formal complaints.
2. These key messages deal with grievances but the underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. The requirement to have a grievance procedure need not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern informally. In most cases the class teacher or the individual delivering the service in the case of extended school provision, will receive the first approach. Staff should be able to resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary.

### Dealing with Grievances – Formal procedure

3. The formal procedure will need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.
4. The School has nominated a member of staff to have responsibility for the operation and management of the school grievance procedure. She is called the 'grievance co-ordinator' and in the Ecole Internationale Franco-Anglaise, it is the Head of School.

### Framework of Principles – Aim of the Procedure

5. The School's Parents Grievance Procedure will:
  - Encourage resolution of problems by **informal** means wherever possible
  - Be easily **accessible** and **publicised**
  - Be **simple** to understand and use
  - Be **impartial**
  - Be **non-adversarial**
  - Allow **swift** handling with established **time-limits** for action and keeping people informed of the progress
  - Ensure a full and **fair** investigation by an independent person where necessary
  - Respect people's desire for **confidentiality**
  - Address all the points at issue and provide an **effective** response and **appropriate** redress, where necessary
  - Provide **information** to the School's Board of Directors so that services can be improved

### Investigating Grievances

6. The Head of School (the grievance co-ordinator), makes sure that she:
  - Establish **what** has happened so far, and **who** has been involved
  - Clarify the nature of the grievance and what remains unresolved

- Meet with the grievant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary)
- Clarify what the grievant feels would put things right
- Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- Keep notes of the interview

### **Resolving Grievances**

7. At each stage in the procedure the School will keep in mind ways in which a grievance can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the grievance is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:
  - An apology
  - An explanation
  - An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
  - An assurance that the event complained of will not recur
  - An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
  - An undertaking to review school policies in light of the grievance
8. It would be useful if the grievant were encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the School could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.
9. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

### **Vexatious Grievance**

10. The School's objectives are to limit the number of grievances that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, after all stages of the procedures having been exhausted, the grievant remains dissatisfied. If the grievant tries to reopen the same issue, the President of the Board of Directors is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

### **Time-Limits**

11. Grievances need to be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. Realistic time limits for each action within each stage have to be set and the grievant must be informed of such time limit. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the grievant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

## **Part 2: The Formal Grievance Procedure**

### **The Stages of Grievances**

12. The School Parents' Grievance Procedure has well-defined stages. A flow chart of stages can be found in Annex B. At each stage it would be helpful to clarify exactly who will be involved, what will happen and how long it will take. There may, on occasion, be the need for some flexibility for example the possibility of further meetings between the grievant and the member of staff directly involved and further investigations may be required by the Head of School after a meeting with the grievant.

13. The School has three stages as follows:

- Stage one: informal raising of a concern or difficulty notified orally or in writing to a member of staff
- Stage two: grievance heard by Head of School
- Stage three: grievance heard by the Board of Directors Grievance Appeal Panel.

The Parents Grievance Procedure can be found in Annex A.

## **Part 3 – Managing and Recording Grievances**

### **Recording Grievances**

14. The School will record the progress of the grievance and the final outcome. A grievance may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing. The EIFA Grievance Form can be found in Annex C. At the end of a meeting or telephone call, it would be helpful if the member of staff who dealt with the grievant first ensured that the grievant and the school have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls can be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

15. The Head of School (grievance co-ordinator) is responsible for the records and hold them centrally.

16. Written records will be kept of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stages or whether they proceeded to the panel hearing. Correspondence, statements and records of complaints will be kept confidential. At the end of every academic year, the School will record the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the proceeding academic year and will make this information available to parents and others.

### **Board of Directors Review**

17. The Board of Directors will monitor the level and nature of grievances and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary. The monitoring and review of grievances by the School and the Board of Directors can be a useful tool in evaluating a school's performance. Preferably, grievance information shared with the whole Board of Directors will not name individuals.

## **Publicising the Procedure**

18. A summary of the Parents Grievance Procedure will be provided to all parents through the following documents:

- The SLG, Parents intranet
- The School website

## **Annex A**

### **Grievance Procedure**

#### **Stage One: Informal discussion with a member of staff**

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.

If parents have a complaint or concern they should, in the first instance, contact their son's/daughter's teacher. In most cases, the matter will be resolved.

Teachers will keep anecdotal records of concerns and complaints on the date when they were received and reviewed. The teacher will document the outcome in a letter to the parent/carer.

Most complaints will be resolved informally and in any case within fourteen days. In the case(s) when this does not happen, parents will be advised that they may follow a formal procedure in Stage Two.

#### **Stage Two: Grievance Heard by Head of School**

It is in everyone's interest that grievances are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the grievant and the School can be crucial in determining whether the grievance will escalate. To that end, if staff are made aware of the procedure, they know what to do when they receive a complaint.

Where the first approach is made to a member of the Board of Directors, the next step of the member of the Board is to refer the grievant to the Head of School and advise them about the procedure. Members of the Board of Directors will never act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or be involved at the early stage in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the procedure.

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head of School. The Head of School will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

In most cases the Head of School will speak to the parents concerned, normally within 3 days of receiving the complaint, and will discuss the matter. If possible a resolution will be reached at this stage. The Head of School may need to carry out further investigations.

The Head of School will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. Once the Head of School 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 Head of School will also give reasons for the decision.

If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they may request a formal Grievance Appeal Panel (Stage Three).

#### **Stage Three: Grievance Heard by the Board of Directors Grievance Appeal Panel**

The grievant needs to write to the President of the Board of Directors and gives details of the grievance. The President will convene a Board of Directors Grievance Appeal Panel.

The Board's appeal hearing is the last school-based stage of the grievances process, and is not convened to merely rubber-stamp previous decisions.

Individual grievances will not be heard by the whole Board of Directors at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

The Board of Directors will nominate three members with delegated powers to hear grievances at that stage and set out its terms of reference. These can include:

- drawing up its procedure
- hearing individual appeals
- making recommendations on policy as a result of grievances

The panel may choose their own chair.

The grievant may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person of their choice.

### **The Remit of The Grievances Appeal Panel**

The panel can:

- dismiss the grievance in whole or in part
- uphold the grievance in whole or in part
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the grievance
- recommend changes to the School's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur

There are several points which any Board member sitting on a grievance panel needs to remember:

- a. It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No Board member may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the grievance or in the circumstances surrounding it. At least one member of the panel will be independent of the management and running of the School. In deciding the make-up of the panel, Board members need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of member and sensitive to the issues of race, gender, culture and religious affiliation.
- b. The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the grievance and achieve reconciliation between the School and the grievant. However, it has to be recognised that the grievant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in his/her favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the grievant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.
- c. An effective panel will acknowledge that many grievants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will ensure that the setting is informal and not adversarial.
- d. The Board members sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaints procedure.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

#### *The Role of the Clerk*

All panel hearings considering a grievance shall be clerked. The clerk (a Board member sitting on the panel) will be the contact point for the grievant and be required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing

- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing
- record the proceedings
- notify all parties of the panel's decision

#### *The Role of the President of the Board of Directors*

The Board President's role is to:

- check that the correct procedure has been followed
- if a hearing is appropriate, notify the clerk to arrange the panel

#### *The Role of the Chair of the Panel*

The chair of the panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy
- the panel is open minded and acting independently
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions
- written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it

### **Notification of the Panel's Decision**

The chair of the panel needs to ensure that the grievant is notified of the panel's decision with the panel's response within 10 working days of the hearing. A copy of the findings and recommendations of the panel will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the grievant, the proprietors, the Head of School, and, where relevant, the person complained about.

A copy will be made available for inspection on the School premises by the proprietors and the Head of School. This will clearly state whether the complaint was settled at an informal or formal stage. The letter needs to explain that there are no further rights of appeal and that the decision is final and binding.

The complaints policy provides that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to 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.

### **Checklist for a Panel Hearing**

The panel needs to take the following points into account:

- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, the grievant is invited to explain their grievance, and be followed by their witnesses.
- The Head of School may question both the grievant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Head of School is then invited to explain the School's actions and be followed by the School's witnesses.
- The grievant may question both the Head of School and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The grievant is then invited to sum up their grievance.
- The Head of School is then invited to sum up the School's actions and response to the grievance.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within 10 working days.