

Daffodil Grammar School for Girls

Complaints Policy and Procedure

1. Policy statement

Daffodil Grammar School for Girls (“the School”) is committed to working in close partnership with parents and carers and to listening to and resolving concerns **promptly, fairly and transparently**.

We recognise that:

- Parents/carers may, from time to time, wish to raise concerns or make a complaint.
- Most concerns can and should be resolved **informally** in the first instance.
- Where a formal complaint is made, it will be handled in accordance with this policy, with clear timescales and a structured process.

This policy sets out:

- How parents/carers (and, where appropriate, others) can raise concerns or complaints.
- The stages through which a complaint will be considered.
- The timescales and possible outcomes at each stage.
- How the school records and retains complaints information.

This policy meets the requirements of the **Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Part 7 (Complaints)**.

Note: Matters involving **child protection/safeguarding** will be dealt with under the **Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy** and may be referred to external agencies immediately where appropriate.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Complaints raised by **parents or carers of registered pupils** at the school.
- Complaints raised by **former parents or carers** provided the complaint relates to matters that occurred while the pupil was still registered at the school and is raised within a reasonable timeframe.

This policy does **not** cover:

- Admissions decisions (which may be subject to separate procedures).
- Exclusions decisions (managed under the Behaviour Policy and any exclusion process).
- Allegations of abuse or serious safeguarding concerns (see Safeguarding Policy).
- Staff grievances or disciplinary matters (covered by staff HR procedures).
- Services provided by other organisations using the school premises.

Where a concern or complaint falls outside the scope of this policy, the school will explain which procedure applies.

3. Guiding principles

Our complaints procedure is based on the following principles:

- **Transparency** – the process, roles and timescales are clear.
 - **Fairness and impartiality** – complaints are considered objectively and without bias.
 - **Confidentiality** – information is shared only with those who need to know, in line with data protection requirements.
 - **Timeliness** – complaints are addressed within reasonable and specified timescales.
 - **Respect and courtesy** – all parties are treated with dignity, and communication remains calm and respectful.
 - **Right to representation** – at the panel hearing stage, parents may be accompanied by a friend or relative.
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4. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy:

- A **concern** is an expression of worry or doubt, or a request for information, that can often be resolved informally.
- A **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, that requires a formal response from the school.

The school encourages parents to raise **concerns early** to prevent escalation.

5. Stages of the complaints procedure

There are **three main stages**:

- **Stage 1 – Informal resolution**
- **Stage 2 – Formal written complaint** (considered by the Headteacher or nominee)
- **Stage 3 – Panel hearing** (complaints panel including at least one independent member)

Parents are expected to follow these stages in order. However, for serious matters the school may, at its discretion, move directly to **Stage 2 or Stage 3**, or treat the issue as a **safeguarding matter**.

6. Stage 1 – Informal resolution

6.1 Raising a concern

In the first instance, most concerns should be raised with the person most directly involved, for example:

- The **class/subject teacher**
- The **Form Tutor** or **Head of Year**
- The **Head of Department**

Parents can raise concerns:

- In person (by prior arrangement).
- By telephone.
- By email or in writing.

6.2 Timescale

- We aim to acknowledge and, where possible, address informal concerns **within 5 school days**.
- Some issues may require more time; if so, the parent will be informed of the likely timescale.

6.3 Outcomes

Possible outcomes of Stage 1 might include:

- An explanation, clarification or additional information.
- An apology where appropriate.
- An agreed action plan or adjustment.
- A meeting between relevant parties to resolve misunderstandings.

If the concern is not resolved to the parent's satisfaction, or if the matter is more serious, the parent may proceed to **Stage 2 – Formal complaint**.

7. Stage 2 – Formal written complaint

If a parent wishes to make a **formal complaint**, they should put their complaint in writing to the **Headteacher**.

7.1 How to submit a formal complaint

The written complaint should:

- Be addressed to the **Headteacher** (or, if the complaint is about the Headteacher, to the **Proprietor/Chair** – see 7.4).
- Clearly state:
 - The nature of the complaint.
 - Relevant facts, dates and any previous informal steps taken.
 - The outcome sought by the parent.

The school may provide a **complaints form** to assist parents, but will also accept a clearly written letter or email.

7.2 Acknowledgement and investigation

- The Headteacher (or nominee) will acknowledge the complaint **in writing within 5 school days** of receipt.
- The Headteacher (or nominee) will conduct a **thorough investigation**, which may include:
 - Reviewing relevant documents and records.
 - Speaking with the complainant.
 - Speaking with staff, pupils or others involved (with appropriate consent and safeguarding consideration).

7.3 Outcome and response

- The Headteacher (or nominee) will aim to provide a **written response within 15 school days** of acknowledging the complaint.
- If more time is needed (e.g. due to the complexity of the complaint), the Headteacher will write to the parent explaining the reason for the delay and giving a revised timescale.
- The written response will include:
 - A summary of the complaint and investigation.
 - The decision and reasons.
 - Any actions the school will take to resolve or address the complaint.
 - Information about the parent's right to proceed to **Stage 3** if they remain dissatisfied.

7.4 Complaints about the Headteacher

If the formal complaint concerns the **Headteacher**, the complaint should be addressed to the **Proprietor/Chair of Governors**. The Chair (or their nominee) will:

- Acknowledge the complaint within **5 school days**.
- Investigate the complaint.
- Aim to respond in writing within **15 school days**, following the same principles as in 7.3.

If the parent remains dissatisfied, they may proceed to **Stage 3 – Panel hearing**.

8. Stage 3 – Panel hearing

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response at Stage 2, they may request that the complaint be considered by a **Complaints Panel**.

8.1 Requesting a panel hearing

- The request must be made **in writing** to the **Proprietor/Chair** within **5 school days** of the Stage 2 response.
- The letter should:
 - State the grounds of appeal.
 - Indicate any relevant documents the complainant wishes the panel to consider.

8.2 Composition of the panel

The Complaints Panel will:

- Consist of **at least three people** who were **not directly involved** in the matters detailed in the complaint.
- Include **at least one member independent of the management and running of the school** (for example, an independent educational professional or community representative with appropriate knowledge and experience).

The panel will appoint a **Chair** from among its members.

8.3 Timescale

- The school will arrange for the panel hearing to take place **within 20 school days** of receiving the request, where reasonably practicable.
- The complainant will be given **written notice of the date, time and venue** of the hearing, normally at least **5 school days** in advance.

8.4 Rights of the parent

At the panel hearing, the complainant:

- Is entitled to **attend the hearing** and be accompanied by a **friend or relative**.
- May submit further written evidence in advance of the hearing.
- Will have the opportunity to explain their complaint and the outcome they seek.

Legal representation is not normally expected; if either party wishes to be legally represented, this must be discussed with the school in advance.

8.5 Conduct of the panel hearing

The panel will conduct the hearing in a manner that is:

- **Respectful, fair and non-adversarial.**
- Structured to allow all parties to be heard, including:
 - The complainant.
 - The Headteacher (and/or other appropriate school representative).
 - Any witnesses (as deemed appropriate by the panel).

The panel may:

- Review all relevant documentation.
- Ask questions of all parties to clarify facts and issues.
- Retire to **consider its findings and recommendations** in private.

8.6 Panel decision and outcome

Following the hearing, the panel will:

- Make **findings and recommendations.**
- Decide whether to:
 - Uphold the complaint in whole or in part; or
 - Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part; and
 - Identify any actions to be taken by the school and/or the complainant.

The panel will produce a **written report** which will include:

- The findings and recommendations.
- A clear statement as to whether the complaint is upheld (in whole or part) or not.

The panel will ensure that:

- A copy of the findings and recommendations is provided to:

- The complainant.
- The Headteacher.
- The Proprietor/Chair.
- (Where relevant) any person who was the subject of the complaint.
- The report is provided **within 10 school days** of the hearing, where reasonably practicable.

The **panel's decision is final** as far as the school's complaints procedure is concerned.

9. Recording and confidentiality

9.1 Record-keeping (as required by the Independent School Standards)

The school will keep a **written record** of:

- All complaints handled at **Stage 2 (formal) and Stage 3 (panel)**, including:
 - Whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage (Stage 2) or proceeded to a panel hearing (Stage 3).
 - The outcome of the complaint.
- Any action taken by the school as a result of those complaints, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld.

Records will be:

- Retained securely for a **minimum of 3 years** from the date of resolution (or longer where necessary, in line with data retention and safeguarding requirements).
- Made available to the **Secretary of State for Education and/or a body conducting an inspection** (e.g. Ofsted) on request.

9.2 Confidentiality

- Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be treated as **confidential**, except where disclosure is required:
 - By law.
 - For the school to carry out a thorough investigation.
 - For inspection by the Secretary of State or an inspectorate.
- **Any 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 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.**

10. Complaints that raise safeguarding concerns

If, at any stage, a complaint raises a **safeguarding or child protection** concern, this will be dealt with under the school's **Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy** and procedures.

In such cases:

- The complaints process may be **suspended** while safeguarding investigations take place.
- The complainant will be informed that the matter is being treated as a safeguarding issue, though details may be limited for confidentiality and legal reasons.

11. Vexatious and unreasonable complaints

The school is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially. However, **vexatious or unreasonably persistent complaints** may place a strain on time and resources and may be considered unreasonable where, for example:

- The complaint is **frivolous or malicious**.
- Repeated complaints are made on the same issue where the school's procedures have been exhausted.
- The complainant behaves in an **abusive, threatening or harassing** manner towards staff or other stakeholders.

In such cases, the school may:

- Set out **clear boundaries** for communication (e.g. only in writing, only to one named contact).
- Decide not to respond to further correspondence on the same issue, except to confirm that the procedure has been exhausted.
- In extreme cases, seek advice from legal or other professional advisers.

This will not prevent the school from considering any **new** complaint that involves new evidence or issues.

12. Availability of this policy

This Complaints Policy:

- Is available to parents of pupils and prospective pupils:
 - On the **school website**, and/or
 - In the **school office** on request.
- Is available for inspection on the school premises during working hours.

Information on the **number of formal complaints** registered during the preceding school year will be provided to parents upon request (in anonymised summary form).

13. Monitoring, evaluation and review

The Headteacher will:

- Maintain an overview of complaints, their nature and outcomes.
- Report **anonymised complaints data** to the Proprietor/Governing Body, including:
 - Number and type of complaints.
 - Outcomes and actions taken.
 - Any recurring themes or lessons learned.

The school will use this information to:

- Identify areas for **improvement**.
- Inform staff training and school development planning.

This policy will be:

- **Reviewed annually** by the Headteacher and Proprietor/Governing Body.
- Updated sooner if required by changes in legislation, DfE guidance or the Independent School Standards, or by learning from practice.