

FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Summerhill School aims to respond to complaints in the most direct manner possible. Given the informal nature of the school and the good relations that the school has with parents we anticipate that most parents will be able to resolve problems by talking directly with houseparents, teachers and Zoë and/or William and/or Henry. This procedure outlines the stages and timescale that a complaint might take if it were to become more serious.

Stage 1

- All complaints should be referred to Zoë and William and Henry.
- If an informal complaint is not resolved within 14 days, then the Formal Complaints Procedure should be followed.

Stage 2

- Any official complaint that is referred directly to Zoë and/or William and/or Henry will be recorded in the Complaints File in the office.
- A written statement of the full nature of the complaint will be necessary in order for it to be recorded in the Complaints File.
- The Complaints Procedure is designed to help resolve specific issues of concern: generalised grievances will have to be broken down into individual complaints in order to be recorded.
- The Complaints File will record the date of the complaint, the nature of the complaint, if it relates to boarding and will indicate the action to be taken as a result of the complaint, whether it is upheld or not. The school will record in the complaints file if the complaint is resolved as this stage or if it proceeds to a panel hearing.
- Action to resolve complaints will invariably involve an interview with Zoë and/or William to investigate the nature of the complaint.
- Complaints will be investigated as soon as reasonably possible, but in any event an interview with Zoë and/or William and/or Henry will be offered within three days.
- The aim is to resolve the Formal Complaint within 21 days of it being logged. If a formal complaint is not resolved within 21 days, then a complaints hearing will be held within 10 days.

Stage 3

- If the school needs to set up a hearing we will invite an Independent Panel of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters in the complaint. One of these people will be independent of the running and management of the school. We have a list of people we might invite who are familiar with the school and its ethos and who are prepared to act in this capacity.
- You can also bring an independent party to this panel hearing, or to any interview during the complaints procedure. Records of these meetings will be available to all those in attendance. However, 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.
- The findings of the independent panel will be kept in the Complaints file in the office and copies will be given to the complainant and to the person complained about, if applicable.
- Independent parties will not be permitted general access to the school and particularly not to children's living areas.
- Minutes will be taken of interviews and recorded in the Complaints File. Both parties will have the opportunity to comment upon the minutes.
- If the complaining party wishes to have a confidential, unrecorded interview with Zoë, William or Henry, this will be considered to be outside the remit of the formal complaints procedure, which is open and accessible to inspection.
- It may be necessary to gather evidence to investigate the relevance of a complaint. If this is the case, the school will act quickly and fairly to gather the relevant information and will always attempt to cause the minimum disruption to the happiness and well-being of the children at the school.
- If there is an irreparable breakdown in communication such that the complaining party does not feel able to resolve the complaint using the Complaints Procedure, it may be superseded by the legal process.
- The decision of the panel at stage 3 is final.
- At any point in the process, the complainant may contact ISI (Tel: 0207 6000100). Minutes and records will be made freely available.

Document history

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