



Complaints Policy

Governors' Committee Responsible	TAS Board of Governors
Status	Statutory
Review Cycle	Annual
Version	v1.2 – Hareen Wasantha (19/02/2020) v1.1 – Hareen Wasantha (28/05/2018) v1.0 – Adam Corres (25/03/2018)
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Next review	18/02/2021

References used in this document: -

- Chair of the Board of Governors: Mrs. Margaret Evans
- Director: Mr. Hareen Wasantha
- Principal: Miss. Ilge Alpay

1. Introduction

Tennis Avenue School encourages suggestions and comments from parents and takes concerns and complaints seriously. Any observations are always welcome, legitimate complaints represent opportunities to improve the quality of service Tennis Avenue School provides and the school understands that the process of learning works in both directions.

The Director and Principal are committed to providing the best educational and developmental experience they can for all students attending the school. They recognise the value to all concerned of dealing fairly, speedily and effectively with any concern or complaint against school processes, staff decisions and any actions or omissions that a student or parent or other aggrieved person may have.

The school informs parents annually of the number of complaints made in the previous academic year, including how many were upheld, alongside a “You said / We did” improvement report which dismisses any fear of blame culture and instead celebrates a healthy climate of intelligent reinvention and renewal.

2. Principles

The School's guidelines for handling concerns or complaints are that it should:

- seize the opportunity for constructive change and improvement.
- assure the quality of processes by re-designing them to prevent the issue re-occurring; or otherwise to minimise the possibility if removal of the issue is not practically achievable.
- encourage resolution of problems by informal means and cooperation, wherever possible.
- be an easy to find, easily understood and accessible process for anyone submitting an issue.
- be impartial, objective and un-confrontational process for all concerned.
- allow swift handling with time-limits set for action, otherwise prompting automatic escalation.
- keep interested parties informed of progress.
- ensure a full and fair investigation, when that becomes necessary.
- respect people's desire for confidentiality and our legal responsibilities of data protection.
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response, usually either improvement or redress.
- provide information to the school's senior leadership team so that services can be demonstrably improved.

Complainants will be treated seriously and courteously and given the time they require to be heard. It is important to Tennis Avenue School that the whole school has confidence in these procedures and there are no doubts about impartiality.

Complainants will be advised at an early stage of:

- the scope of the investigation, if appropriate, for pursuing their concern or complaint.
- the stages of the procedure for dealing with it.
- subject to the conclusions of the investigation, a preliminary indication of the possible outcomes.

Concerns and complaints will be dealt with as quickly and effectively as possible, adhering to the time limits laid down for response at each stage of the procedures. If time limits are not met, this will precipitate an escalation.

3. Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is a formal, considered and explained expression of dissatisfaction by a person or persons with a legitimate interest in the school. It may refer to any aspect of school life, for example teaching methods, pastoral care, safety measures, staff and student behaviour or not receiving communications.

There is a second category that will be considered under this process: where an interested person, who may choose to identify themselves or to remain anonymous, writes to identify a concern they have or an aspect with potential for improvement. Whether a message of this kind includes a recommendation for change or whether it simply identifies a weakness and leaves the School to investigate the options or areas for investment, the Director welcomes all such insight. As communications of this kind are not complaints but are considered and worked on in a similar way, their progress will also be tracked by the system and will be reported in the annual “You said / We did” report.

4. Initial Complaint (Stage One)

4.1 Informal resolution

Informal resolution of a concern is when the situation giving rise to the concern is corrected on the spot by the child’s teacher. Although this is described as informal, the teacher will make a written record of the concern and actions taken to resolve it. If that issue is not resolved after discussion with the complainant, the teacher will have a duty to enter it into the official complaints procedure. *[For example, if a functional objection has been raised that stationery is kept out of reach and the form teacher decides that in future it will be stored on a lower shelf, the approach and subsequent change will be recorded but it will not trigger a formal complaints process record against the School].*

4.2 Complaints made against staff

If the concern is about the child’s teacher or another member of staff, then the parents may wish to contact the Principal or Director without first approaching the staff member against whom they have the issue. The complainant has the right to present their concern in the presence of two independent members of staff, i.e. unconnected with the issue, if that helps to allay fears of personal interest or un-objective favouritism. This meeting can be held with or without the individual being complained about being present. A formal record of this meeting will be made and signed by the complainant and an un-involved representative of the school before being entered into the formal complaints process and tracked through to resolution. No complaint against staff will be disregarded or mislaid.

4.3 Complaints made against the Principal and/or the Director

Tennis Avenue School’s Safeguarding Policy insists that everyone, including those at the highest levels of authority, are accountable and not exempt from due process. If the concern is about the Principal, it should be addressed to the Director of Tennis Avenue School and the Chair of the Board of Governors (contact information available upon request to the School office); If the concern is about the Director, it should be addressed to the Principal of Tennis Avenue School and the Chair of the Board of Governors. Parents can rest assured that the formal complaints procedure will be followed and that the fact of the complaint’s registration and outcome will be included in the annual reporting to parents of complaints made against

the School. Persons occupying higher levels of authority will not be able to direct or otherwise influence the process or resolution of complaints in which they are the subject. The collective ruling of the Board of Governors will represent the final position of the School.

4.4 When early resolution has not happened

Should the outcome not be resolved to the parents' satisfaction within 5 working days of the start of the informal process, parents will be asked if they wish to proceed with a formal complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

5. Formal Resolution of Complaint (Stage Two)

If it has not been possible to achieve an informal resolution of the concern that is acceptable to the complainant, the complainant will be given a copy of this Complaints Procedure and encouraged to make a formal submission in writing to the Principal. The complaint should include full details of the issue, including names and dates where appropriate, together with the complainant's demands or recommendations for redress, action, training, investment or any other changes and improvements to address the concern with appropriate finality.

5.1 The investigation process begins

Principal will investigate any formal, written complaints and notify the complainants of the outcome within 28 days of them being lodged. If there is any delay, such as for a school holiday period, the Principal will advise you accordingly. If the Principal is absent, this task will transfer to the Director or their nominated staff representative.

The responsible investigator will speak to all those involved in the cause of the complaint in order to establish the facts. Initially, those involved will be interviewed separately. If there are discrepancies in the evidence given, a decision may be taken to gather several people together in order to investigate more efficiently.

Although the grounds for the complaint may be known from the original formal letter, the investigator may offer the complainant an interview, at which the circumstances may be cross-checked co-operatively, for better understanding by all. It may be necessary to investigate further following the interview, if additional lines of enquiry have arisen. The investigator will keep written records of all meetings and interviews and will enter subsequent details and progress about the complaint into the Complaints Incident Log Book.

5.2 The investigation process reports

The Principal will inform the complainant in writing of the conclusions of the investigation, the ruling or outcome they have arrived at, the actions which the School proposes to take to redress/prevent/improve and by when those changes will be implemented. The complainant will have a two week period in which to respond to indicate if the resolution has satisfied their concerns or if they wish to take their concern further.

The Principal will record in the Complaints Incident Log Book if the issue has been resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant and the School at this stage, or after a fortnight if no response has been received.

5.3 In the event of continuing lack of resolution

Although this should typically resolve the complaint, the option is available for the complainant to meet with the Director, discuss the case and try to agree a way forward.

If this offer is declined or if the meeting is held but the issue has not been satisfactorily resolved in the view of the complainant, the case will be escalated to Stage Three of the process, which represents the last opportunity to resolve the concern without resorting to the legal system.

6. Escalation of Complaint (Stage Three)

6.1 Directions

If the complainant is not satisfied by the outcome of the previous stage, a letter should be sent to the Chair of the Board of Governors setting out the grounds for the complaint in writing, enclosing copies of correspondence so far and explaining why progress has not been acceptable.

6.2 Composition and imposition of decisions

In such circumstances, the Board of Governors will be convened in a panel of a minimum of three people to be quorate, which may include an independently invited Principal or Director of another school, who will be a full voting member. The Panel will call for the investigator's complete report (not summary) from the Principal and, if necessary, obtain further particulars about the matter. The Panel will examine the complaint fully before responding. The complainant will be invited, with a relative or advisor, to a meeting that should normally take place within 10 working days of the complaint passing into Stage Three. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. The Principal may be invited to attend the meeting in order to clarify the facts about the previous investigation, but will not be a member of the decision-making panel.

After due consideration of all the relevant facts, the Panel will reach a decision and make recommendations that shall be completed within 10 working days of the hearing. The Panel will write to the complainant, the Principal and (if relevant) the person who is the subject of the complaint informing them of its decisions and the reasons for them.

The Board of Governors' collective majority decision will be the final position of the School on the matter and, as an independent control body, they may equally well issue their ruling against the School. The School is obliged to implement the Board's decisions.

6.3 Protests of withholding and withdrawal

It is very important that parents do not withhold school fees pending the result of a dispute or because a ruling has gone against their claim, as this could result in a legal recovery process. Having signed a contract agreeing to pay education and coaching fees, it is a commonly understood obligation that advanced notice must be given of removing a child and that parents or guardians will still be liable for those fees during the contract period if a child has discontinued their education mid-term.

7. Further Stages

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with a decision made by the Panel they will be able to pursue their complaint with the Department for Education and/or the Independent Schools Inspectorate.

The address of the Department for Education is: Mowden Hall, Staindrop Road, Darlington, DL3 9BG.

The address for the Independent Schools Inspectorate is: CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA, telephone 020 7600 0100.

The address for Ofsted for any Early Years concerns is: Ofsted, National Business Unit, Royal Exchange Buildings, St. Ann's Square, Manchester M2 7LA, telephone 08456 404040.

8. Record Keeping

The panel will ensure that written records of all complaints made at this stage are kept in the Complaints Incident Log Book for at least three years, whether they are resolved following a formal procedure or proceed to a panel hearing. Action taken by the school as a result of the complaint will be recorded and kept regardless of whether it has been upheld.

Tennis Avenue School issues an annual report of how many complaints have been made against the School and whether or not they were upheld. Additionally, the School issues a "You said / We did" report, which includes improvements implemented as a result of both complaints and responsible concerns.

The Panel's findings and recommendations will be available for inspection on the school premises during regular opening hours. Specific 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.

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9. Notes

9.1 Compliance

This policy takes into account of the Department for Education's *Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2016* and the obligations and duties in relation to Section 29 of the Education Act 2002.

9.2 Quality assurance and revision

This complaints policy will be evaluated regularly and updated as part of the School's annual feedback and policy improvement cycle.