

JAMES ALLEN'S GIRLS' SCHOOL

(DFE NUMBER 210/6002)

WHOLE SCHOOL POLICY FOR DEALING WITH PARENTAL COMPLAINTS

Aims of the Whole School Complaints Policy

- James Allen's Girls' School (JAGS) (including James Allen's Junior School) aims to be a listening and responsive school. We encourage pupils, parents and staff to inform us of their concerns while they are still minor ones which can more easily be resolved. It is hoped that most concerns and complaints will be resolved quickly and informally.
- This policy is applicable to EYFS, Junior School and Senior School.
- In the following sections, the term 'Head' relates to either the Head of the Junior School or the Head of JAGS.

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

- At JAGS, parents who have any concerns or complaints about their daughters' experience should normally contact the Head of Section in the first instance, either by email, letter or by telephone. Heads of Section will always liaise closely with the Head when dealing with parental concerns and complaints. At the Junior School, parents who have any concerns or complaints should normally contact the teacher concerned (if it is an academic matter) or the Class Teacher (if it is a pastoral matter) in the first instance, either by email, letter or by telephone or in person. Staff will always liaise closely with the Head of the Junior School or Head of the Pre-Prep when dealing with parental concerns and complaints. We will endeavour to acknowledge such emails, letters or telephone calls within two working days of their receipt and to inform parents of how we intend to investigate the matter.
- A written record will be kept of all concerns and complaint, the date on which they were received and the details of any subsequent investigation.
- In the event of a failure to reach a satisfactory resolution, or where the matter has not been resolved within 10 working days, parents will be advised to pursue their complaint in accordance with the Stage 2 procedure set out below.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- Parents whose complaint has not been resolved by the Stage 1 process should put their complaint formally in writing to the Head (Headmistress@jags.org.uk) and mark it as a formal complaint. The Head will aim to acknowledge the complaint within two working days.
- The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head will meet with the parents concerned to discuss the complaint within ten working days of receiving it, unless, despite the best efforts of all involved, circumstances dictate that the meeting be delayed beyond this timescale.
- The Head (or her delegated representative) will then carry out any necessary further investigations.
- Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be maintained and the School will record whether the complaint was then resolved at this stage or proceeded to Panel Hearing.
- Once the Head 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, within 10 working days of the meeting with parents. The Head will also give reasons for the decision.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they may proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the Convenor, the *Clerk to the Governors*, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel (jason.peck@jags.org.uk).
- Parents wishing to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution at Stage 2) should make this request within 10 working days of the outcome of the Stage 2 complaint.
- The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom is independent of the management and running of the School. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chair of Governors. The Convenor, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 20 working term time days unless, despite the best efforts of all involved, circumstances such as holidays or existing commitments of the Panel dictate that the meeting be delayed beyond this timescale. If the Stage 3 complaint is received in a period leading into or during the school holidays, the Complaints Panel may be convened at the start of the following term.
- If, after confirming the date and time of the Complaints Panel hearing, the parent is unable to attend the hearing, an alternative date may be sought. If a suitable new date cannot be found,

the Chair of the Complaints Panel may decide to convene the panel and review the complaint in the absence of the parent.

- If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than 5 working days prior to the hearing.
- The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not be permitted.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.
- Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within 10 working days of the hearing.
- The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head, the Chair of Governors and, where relevant, the person about whom the complaint was made.
- Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except in so far as is required of the School by Part 7, Paragraph 33, of The Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2014; where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection; or where the Secretary of State or body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

Further Notes

- **Availability of Policy:** This policy is made available on the school website to all parents, staff and pupils, and on request.
- **Scope of Policy:** This policy is written with reference to parents of current registered pupils (i.e. those pupils on the current school roll), and parents of past pupils if the formal complaint (i.e. those which reach Stage 2) was initially raised when the pupil was still registered. The policy does not include parents of prospective parents (i.e. those who have yet to join the school.)
- **Timescale of Complaints:** Complaints must be raised within three months (in the absence of mitigating reasons) of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. Complaints made outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

- Complaints made outside of term time will be considered to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.
- Where this policy refers to working days, it should be noted that this refers to working days within the school's term times, as defined by the term dates on the school's website.
- **Withdrawal of a Complaint:** If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint the Head will ask them to confirm this in writing.
- **Anonymous Complaints:** The School will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Head or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the anonymous complaint warrants an investigation. Where a complaint relates to a whistleblowing matter, it will be investigated in line with the Whistleblowing Policy.

Records of Complaints:

- For formal complaints (i.e. those that reach Stage 2), the School will record whether the complaint was resolved at Formal Resolution or proceeded to Panel Hearing, and the action taken by the school as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).
- Records of all formal complaints (i.e. those which reach Stage 2) will be kept confidentially in a separate file for a minimum of seven years. Separate rules for the retention of complaints are in place if the complaint contains an issue regarding to safeguarding.
- Any findings and recommendations following a formal complaint will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Chair of Governors and the Head.
- The number of formal complaints logged in the last academic year is recorded on the school website under 'Policies' and is also available to parents on request from the school.
- **Vexatious Complaints:** Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages this can be regarded as vexatious and outside the scope of this policy.

EYFS Complaints:

- The school must investigate written complaints relating to its fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements and will notify complainants of the outcome on the investigations within 28 days of receiving the complaint.
- In accordance with the Early Years Foundation Stage regulations, the School will provide Ofsted (and ISI), on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint, regardless of whether they are upheld.

External Contact

- Parents may contact Ofsted and/or ISI should they wish to. The relevant contact details are:
- Independent Schools Inspectorate - CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA Telephone 020 7600 0100 _or email concerns@isi.net
- Ofsted – 26-32 Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD Telephone 0300 123 4666 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk