



Academy *for*
Collaborative
Education *of* Brussels
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL



Cambridge Assessment
International Education

Cambridge International School

ACE of BRUSSELS

COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

RATIONALE

ACE of BRUSSELS values feedback from all who give it whether it is complimentary or in the form of a complaint. The school constantly reviews the systems and teaching and, if such feedback is given, then the school will acknowledge it and learn from it.

AIM

The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint by a parent/carer is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice, it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote parents' and students' confidence in the school's ability to safeguard and promote welfare. The school will try to resolve every concern or complaint in a positive way with the aim of resolving the issue in a transparent manner.

ACE of BRUSSELS expects that most concerns can be resolved informally and guarantees to treat seriously and confidentially all concerns whether raised informally or formally.

ACE of BRUSSELS values feedback from our parents. We store all "thank you" letters to remind us of the work we have done and the school's commitment to high standards of service.

Where appropriate a letter is sent to the originator of the compliment thanking them for giving the compliment and the sender of the compliment is asked if their letter might be displayed publicly either in hard copy or on the school website.

PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING OF CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

This policy applies to all concerns and complaints other than child protection issues and exclusions where separate procedures apply.

This policy complies with GDPR and Cambridge International guidelines.

TIMESCALES

We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage of the Complaints procedure are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. For the purposes of this policy, a "working day" is defined as a weekday during term time, when the school is open. The definition of "working day" excludes weekends, school holidays and Bank Holidays. Should a complaint be submitted during a school holiday then it will be dealt with immediately on the return to school according to the "working day" schedule.

STATEMENT

We need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. We recognise that a difficulty that is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment which could be damaging to relationships and also to our school culture. We intend that parents and students should never feel or be made to feel that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a student or his/her opportunities at the school. The policy, however, distinguishes between a concern or difficulty which can be resolved informally and a formal complaint which will require further investigation.

INTRODUCTION

1. ACE of BRUSSELS undertakes to provide a friendly and safe environment in which pupils will be helped to achieve their potential, both academically and socially.
2. We believe that a close partnership between the school, parents and pupils is essential to ensure pupil progress and well-being. In support of this, we develop close links with our parents and are constantly looking for ways to improve communication.
3. Through our programme of meetings between parents and teachers, as well as through informal contact, we provide opportunities for parents to raise matters of concern related to both the curriculum or more general issues. We try our best to ensure that parents know we have an “open door” policy and that any constructive points for improvement are welcome.
4. Class teachers are usually available to see parents before school begins and at the end of the day. If it is necessary to make an appointment, this can be done through the office.
5. The Head of either the Junior School, Senior School or Inclusion is the next person to see if the class teacher cannot deal with a concern or problem. They all make themselves available without appointments. If it is necessary to make an appointment then this can be done through the office. The Head of Schools is also available via email which can be obtained from the office.
6. The school is obliged to have procedures in place in case there are concerns or complaints by parents and members of the public. The following policy sets out the procedure that the school follows in such cases.
7. If a Director or Governor is approached by parents regarding a complaint they will take steps to steer them in the direction of the School staff rather than becoming involved in the direct discussions.

POLICY

1. This policy statement sets out the school’s approach to dealing with parental concerns and complaints.
2. We value good home/school relations and will, therefore, do everything we can to establish and maintain them. This includes seeking to resolve any concerns or complaints promptly, to the satisfaction of all concerned.
3. We welcome feedback on what parents feel we do well, or not so well, as a school. We will carefully consider all feedback, whether positive or negative, and will review our policies and practices accordingly.
4. We will treat all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously and will advise parents and others of the school’s procedures for dealing with their concerns. In return, we expect parents and other complainants to behave respectfully towards all members of the school community.
In particular, any disagreement with the school should not be expressed inappropriately or in front of pupils.

5. All school staff and members of the governing body will receive a copy of this policy statement and will be familiar with the school's procedures for dealing with parental concerns and complaints, to which they will have access as required. The policy is available on the school website and the parent portal with granted permissions.
6. The school's procedures will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.
7. Staff, directors and governors will receive training in handling parental concerns and complaints as appropriate. This may be on an individual basis, or as a group activity for all staff, or for specific groups such as the administrative staff or members of the governing body.
8. Whilst we will seek to resolve concerns and complaints to the satisfaction of all parties, it may not be possible to achieve this in every case. We will, therefore, use our option to close a complaint before all the stages of the school's procedures have been exhausted, if this appears to be appropriate.

SCHOOL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The majority of concerns from parents, carers and others are handled under the following general procedures.

The procedure is divided into two stages, each being recorded within the school:

1. **The Informal Stage** aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school.
2. **Formal Stage** is the point at which both verbalised as well as written complaints are documented and considered by the Head of Schools or the designated director or governor, who has special responsibility for dealing with complaints.

Each of these stages operates as follows:

Informal Stage - your initial contact with the school.

1. Many concerns will be dealt with informally when they are made known to the school. The first point of contact should be the class teacher. After that, it may be appropriate to discuss the concern with the Head of the Junior School, Senior School or Inclusion.
2. Once the concern is made known to the school, the person making the concern will be contacted by phone or email as soon as possible.
3. Any actions or monitoring of the situation that have been agreed will be communicated clearly, recorded in school and confirmation in writing will be sent to the person raising the concern.
4. If necessary appropriate people will be contacted who may be able to assist with the concern.
5. The person raising the concern will be updated on the progress of enquiries within 10 working days. Once a response to the concern is given there will be the opportunity to ask for the matter to be considered further.
6. If the person raising the concern is still dissatisfied following this informal approach, the concern will become a formal complaint and will be dealt with at the Formal Stage.

Formal Stage - formal consideration of the complaint.

This stage in the school procedures deals with written complaints as well as strong verbal complaints which will necessarily be dealt with formally throughout the written complaints process. It applies when the informal stage has been exhausted e.g. when the concern raised has been discussed with the Head of Schools but a satisfactory resolution is not achieved, as outlined above.

1. Normally, a written complaint should be addressed to the Head of Schools. If, however, the complaint concerns the Head of Schools personally then it should be sent to the school and marked "For the attention of the Board of Directors". The complaint will then be managed by the Chair of the Board of Directors.
2. Acknowledgement of the receipt of the complaint will be issued as soon as possible. This will be within three working days.
3. A copy of the procedures will be included with the acknowledgement.
4. Normally, a response will be issued within 15 school days but, if this is not possible, a written explanation will be issued giving the reasons for the delay accompanied by an estimate of the provision of a full response.
5. As part of the process of considering the complaint the person raising the complaint may be invited to a meeting to discuss the issue and fill in any required details. The person raising the complaint is at liberty to be accompanied.
6. The Head of Schools or a Director is also at liberty to be accompanied by a suitable person.
7. Following the meeting the Head of Schools or investigating officer will, where necessary, talk to witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil then the pupil concerned may be interviewed along with, where appropriate, others present at the time of the incident.
8. Pupils will normally be interviewed with a parent or guardian present unless this would delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint, or where a pupil has specifically said that he or she would prefer the parent or guardian not be involved. In such circumstances we will ensure that another member of staff, with whom the pupil is comfortable, is present.
9. If the complaint is against a member of staff it will be dealt with under the school's internal confidential procedures, as required by law.
10. The Head of Schools or the directors will keep written, signed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations and other related documentation.
11. Once all the relevant facts have been discovered, a written response will be sent to the person who has raised the complaint. This will give an explanation of the Head of Schools or Directors decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed then proposals will also be communicated. The person who raised the complaint may be invited to a meeting to discuss the outcome as part of the commitment of the school to building and maintaining good relations.

12. The person investigating the complaint may decide that enough has been done to resolve the complaint in which case the school may use its discretion to close the complaint at this point.

Closure of complaints

1. Very occasionally the school will feel that it needs, regrettably, to close a complaint where the person who has raised the complaint still feels dissatisfied.
2. The school, where appropriate, will do all possible to help to resolve a complaint against the school but sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes. Sometimes it is simply a case of "agreeing to disagree".
3. If a complainant persists in making representations to the school, to the Head of Schools, directors or anyone else then this can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from the school's responsibility to look after the interests of all the children in its care.
4. For this reason the school is entitled to close correspondence (including personal approaches, letters, emails and telephone calls) on a complaint where the school feels that it has taken all reasonable action to resolve the complaint and that the complaint has exhausted the official process. The Directors will support this decision especially where the complainant's action is causing distress to staff and/or pupils.

Unacceptable behaviour

Complaints are only escalated to the governing body as a last resort. They also have a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of pupils, parents and staff.

The governing body is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and to providing a high quality service to those who make them. As part of this service it would not normally limit the contact complainants have. However, the governing body does not expect the school's staff to tolerate behaviour by complainants which is unacceptable, for example, abusive, offensive or threatening behaviour, and it will take action to protect staff and pupils from this behaviour. This applies to unacceptable behaviour on any part of the school premises, including the gardens and the road outside of the school.

If the principal considers that a complainant's behaviour is unacceptable then the complainant will be told why their behaviour is deemed to be unreasonable and will be asked to change it. If the unacceptable behaviour continues then the principal will take action to restrict the complainant's contact with school.

Unacceptable actions and behaviours

These are some of the actions and behaviours of unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants with schools often find problematic.

- Foul and abusive language towards staff, other parents and children
- Behaviour that staff consider to be harassing and intimidating, including in person, over the telephone, by email or any other type of communication.
- Undermining school policies by actively encouraging pupils to ignore staff requests
- Making unnecessarily excessive demands on the time and resources of staff by, for example, excessive telephoning or sending emails to numerous staff, writing lengthy, complex letters every few days and expecting immediate responses

- Combinations of all of these

The decision to restrict access to our school will be taken by the Head of Schools.

Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. The options most likely to be considered are:

- Requesting contact in a particular form (for example, emails only)
- Requiring contact to take place with a named member of staff
- Restricting telephone calls to specified days and times and/or
- Asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their conduct

In all cases the school will write to tell the complainant why the school believes his or her behaviour is unacceptable, what action is being taken and the duration of that action.

Where a complainant continues to behave in a way which is unacceptable the school may decide to terminate contact with that person and discontinue any investigation into the complaint. However, the governing body will seek to limit any detriment to any pupils who attend the school, as far as is reasonable, within these circumstances e.g. access to parents' evenings, newsletters and other correspondence.

Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of the school staff or pupils the school will consider other options, e.g. reporting the matter to the police or taking legal action. In such cases the school may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

Unreasonably persistent complainants

The governing body recognises that it is the last resort for complainants. It is also accountable for the proper use of school money and must ensure that this is spent wisely and achieves value for money and the wider public.

The governing body is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and to providing a high quality service to those who make them. As part of its service the school does not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school.

However, there may be a small number of complainants who, because of their frequent contact with the school, hinder consideration of their or other people's complaints. Such complainants are referred to as 'unreasonably persistent complainants' and, exceptionally, the Head of Schools will take action to limit their contact with school.

Actions and behaviours of unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants

These are some of the actions and behaviours of unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants which schools often find problematic. It is by no means an exhaustive list and factors may vary, but these are examples that may come to the attention of the school:

- Refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint, despite offers of assistance with this from the school staff
- Refusing to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint be resolved
- Refusing to accept that issues are not within the remit of a complaints procedure despite having been provided with information about the procedure's scope

- Insisting on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Making what appear to be groundless complaints about the staff dealing with the complaints and seeking to have them replaced
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds and/or denying statements he or she made at an earlier stage
- Introducing new information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on or raising large numbers of detailed questions which are particularly time consuming and costly to respond to and insisting they are all fully answered
- Electronically recording meetings and conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of the other persons involved
- Adopting an unfocused approach: pursuing a complaint or complaints with the school and at the same time, with an independent authority
- Making unnecessarily excessive demands on the time and resources of staff whilst a complaint is being looked into, for example, excessive telephoning or sending emails to numerous school staff, writing lengthy, complex letters every few days and expecting immediate responses
- Submitting repeat complaints after the complaints process has been completed, essentially about the same issue, with additions/variations which the complainant insists make these 'new' complaints which should be put through the full complaints procedure
- Combinations of all these

The decision to restrict access to the school will be taken by the Head of Schools and will normally follow a prior warning to the complainant. Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. The options that are most likely to be considered are:

- Requesting contact in a particular form (for example, emails only)
- Requiring contact to take place with a named member of staff
- Restricting telephone calls to specified days and times and/or
- Asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their future contacts with the school

In all cases where the school decides to treat someone as an unreasonably persistent complainant the school will tell the complainant why it is believed that his or her behaviour falls into this category, what action is being taken and the duration of this action. The school will also tell the complainant how they can challenge the decision if they disagree with it. If the school decides to carry on treating someone as an unreasonably persistent complainant and is still investigating a complaint 6 months later the school will carry out a review and decide to terminate contact with that complainant but, unless there is fresh evidence which affects the school's decision on the complaint then it will simply acknowledge it or place it on the file with no acknowledgement.

New complaints from people who have come under the unreasonably persistent complainants policy will be treated on their merits.

Monitoring and review

1. The directors monitor the complaints procedure in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. The Head of Schools logs all complaints received by the school and records how they are resolved. An overview is presented to Directors for discussion as part of the regular directors' meeting.
2. Directors take into account any local or national decisions that affect the complaints process and make any modifications necessary to this policy. This policy is made available to parents so that they can be properly informed about the complaints process.

3. All complaint records, including compliments, formal complaint files, and any pupil interview notes, are retained inline with GDPR and the ACE of BRUSSELS Data Protection, Privacy and Retention Policy. This can be found on the ACE of BRUSSELS website and on the parent portal.
4. This policy will be reviewed annually.

This policy is available on the school website www.aceofbrussels.com, on the parent portal and can be downloaded and made available as a hard copy upon request.

This is a whole school policy which also applies to the Early Years Foundation Stage.

This policy was submitted to the directors for approval.