



Complaints procedures – guidance note

Introduction

MIST expects all its schools to ensure the highest possible standards of teaching and pastoral care. Notwithstanding such aspirations, however, concerns and complaints from parents, pupils, staff and others will arise from time to time and MIST expects its schools to manage such concerns and complaints in a courteous, timely and sensitive fashion. How schools do so will be for their own governors and management to determine but what follows is a general guide that may be used as a framework for local arrangements. Parents can request the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year. Schools include a report on the Complaints in any one year in their Annual School Report to MIST.

STAGE 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a concern or complaint, they should normally contact their son/daughter's Head of Year/House. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Head of Year/House cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult the Head.
- Complaints made directly to the Head will usually be referred to the relevant Head of Year/House unless the Head deems it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
- The Head of Year/House will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within usually 5 days or in the event that the Head of Year/House and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.

STAGE 2 – Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head. The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head (or a senior Deputy Head) will meet/speak to the parents concerned, normally within 5 days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Head (or a senior Deputy Head) to carry out further investigations.
- The Head will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- 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. The Head will also give reasons for his decision.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

STAGE 3 – Panel (Appeal) Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the Chair of the Appeals Committee, who has been appointed by the Governors to arrange all hearings of the School's Appeals Panel.
- The matter will then be referred to the Appeals 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 shall be independent of the management and running of the school. The Panel will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 21 days.
- 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 usually 5 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 normally be appropriate.
- 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 the facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within usually 5 days of the Hearing. The Panel's findings and recommendations will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. The panel's findings and recommendations will then be made available for inspection on the school premises by the governors and the Head.

Parents must be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. A written record will be kept on file of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing.

Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except in so far as is required of the school by the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2008 (or as amended) where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

Complaints made directly to MIST

Except in exceptional circumstances all parental (and other) complaints will be dealt with by the school following procedures outlined above. The decision of the school's appeals panel will be final.

Exceptional circumstances may include, but are not limited to:

1. A complainant can show that a MIST school has not followed agreed and reasonable procedures; or
2. Where it has been agreed between the school and the complainant that mediation from MIST could be helpful in resolving the complaint; or
3. Where an unresolved complaint is expected to lead to a legal claim against the School and/or MIST.

In the first instance, parents (or others) who consider they have reason to take their complaint directly to MIST should do so by contacting the General Secretary of MIST. MIST will usually not be involved until a school's complaint procedure has been exhausted.

Complaints made directly to the Church

The Methodist Conference has delegated responsibility for the oversight of its schools to the Methodist Independent Schools Trust (MIST). Thus, any person making a complaint about the schools or the Trust must be referred by the Church to MIST. Any letter of complaint with any accompanying documentation must be forwarded to the General Secretary of MIST, or if the complaint is about the General Secretary, to the Chair of MIST. The General Secretary and/or the Chair of MIST will put in place appropriate procedures to investigate the complaint and to respond to it. The outcome of the process will be reported to the Trustees and to the Secretary of Conference.

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