

## **GEORGE HERIOT'S SCHOOL**

### **POLICY FOR THE HANDLING OF FORMAL COMPLAINTS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

George Heriot's School places great emphasis on the value of partnership between home and School. This is reflected in the Aims of the School, which include the aims that:

- our pupils will feel safe, secure, valued and happy
- our parents/guardians will be partners with the School in promoting their children's learning
- our parents/guardians will feel that they are valued members of the Heriot's community, whose comments and concerns are listened to and expeditiously handled

At all stages in their association with the School parents/guardians and pupils are provided with guidance on what to do if they have concerns. The School encourages openness in its relationships with parents/guardians and pupils, and in the great majority of cases matters of concern are most effectively and expeditiously dealt with by contact in the first instance with the member of staff most directly involved in the issue (e.g. Class Teacher, Guidance Teacher, subject teacher). If the complainant remains dissatisfied, the complaint should be referred to an appropriate manager (e.g. Head of Department, Depute, Head of School); senior staff will recognise when issues need to be referred to the Principal, who has overall responsibility for most complaints.

This policy sets out the procedure that will be followed if a parent/guardian or a pupil acting in their own capacity wishes to complain to the Principal or Governors, where, either, they remain dissatisfied after pursuing all other appropriate avenues or address their concern, or they consider that their concern is sufficiently serious to warrant a direct approach to the Principal or Governors.

A copy of this policy will be published on the School website and is available on request. It will automatically be sent to those parents who expressly make a formal complaint either to the Principal or to the Governors.

Every effort will be made to ensure that all complaints are treated in a professional and sensitive manner. Complaints will be dealt with on a confidential basis, with the proviso that in certain circumstances it may be necessary to make third parties outside the School aware of the complaint (this would happen where, for example, a child's safety was at risk or it became necessary to refer matters to the Police).

#### **PROCEDURE**

1. If, having exhausted all other avenues to address their concern, a parent/guardian or pupil remains dissatisfied, or if they consider that their concern is sufficiently serious to warrant a formal complaint at the most senior level, they should put their complaint in writing to the Principal. The response to any such contact is to include the parent being provided with a reminder of the School's Parental Complaints Policy within five working days. The Principal will investigate the matter by whatever means he/she considers appropriate and will respond to the complainant as quickly as possible.
2. The Governors would not expect to deal with a complaint which had not previously been referred to the Principal. If such a case occurred, the Chairman would take steps to inform the complainant that the complaint had been passed to the Principal for initial action.

3. In the case of a complaint which the Principal had investigated and responded on but the complainant continued to feel dissatisfied, they should refer their complaint to the Chairman of Governors. They should explain, in writing, within five working days, their view of the situation and the reasons for their dissatisfaction. This procedure also applies if a parent/guardian or pupil has a complaint against the Principal individually.
4. On receipt of a written complaint, the Chairman or, on his/her behalf, the Bursar, should acknowledge receipt within five working days.
5. Other than in exceptional circumstances, the Chairman should pass copies of the complaint to the Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors (this sub-committee consists of two Governors nominated annually at the January meeting of Governors to investigate such matters). In the absence of one or both Governors, the Chairman should nominate replacements. At each meeting one member of the sub-committee should act as Chairman.
6. The Governors' Complaints Sub-Committee should agree how the case is to be handled. The process would normally involve consulting with the complainant(s), the Principal and relevant members of staff. The sub-committee will ask a member of the Trust Office to be present at these meetings to take a written record.
7. All cases will be conducted as quickly as possible. Bearing in mind the possible need to consult several parties, it should be understood that a period of time may elapse between notification of a complaint and the final determination but the matter will be resolved as speedily as possible.
8. Having considered the evidence and reached a conclusion, the sub-committee will submit their decision in writing to the Chairman of Governors. Unless there were exceptional circumstances, the Chairman would be expected to endorse the Committee's decision.
9. The Chairman will convey the outcome of the process immediately to the complainant and to the Principal, and will report on the case at the next meeting of the Board of Governors.
10. If agreement is not reached and if a complaint cannot be resolved at this stage, the parents may choose to seek legal advice, or advice from an appropriate external body such as the Registrar of Independent Schools in the Scottish Executive, or the Care Inspectorate.