



## **Complaints Procedure**

### **Introduction**

Barnard Castle School operates a complaints' procedure to allow those who have concerns or complaints to raise them both informally and formally with those who have responsibility for the Management and Governance of the School.

The policy (as with all School policies) is available on request to parents of pupils and prospective pupils' parents and pupils. It can be obtained from either the School's General Office or the Headmaster's Secretary, or the Clerk to the Board of Governors. Parents of current pupils and pupils are informed of this annually in the Headmaster's end-of-term Letter to Parents, written in July. In addition, the statement is made both in the introductory letter to prospective parents and in 'A Handbook for New Pupils and Their Parents'.

The Headmaster will make available to interested parties, on request, the number of complaints received under the formal complaints' procedure in the previous academic year.

The policy is reviewed annually and its effectiveness is considered by the School's Governors at their summer term Meeting in June.

The policy complies with Standard 5 of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. In addition, the policy includes the Early Years Foundation Stage (Pre-Prep). Records of complaints are kept for at least 3 years. Dissatisfaction with any EYFS complaint outcome should be made to Ofsted. Details of this address are given at the end of this document.

Whenever a complaint is made, it is the interests and welfare of the pupil which are our primary concern and responsibility.

Written records of informal and formal written complaints will be kept in School; these will contain all relevant correspondence, statements, findings, recommendations and actions. Although these will be confidential, they will be available to the Secretary of State and school inspectors inspecting under section 162A of the Education Act 2002. The School recognises the requirement to notify complainants of the outcome of a formal investigation within 28 days of having received the complaint.

### **The procedure for dealing with complaints from Parents and Staff**

Barnard Castle School welcomes suggestions and comments from parents, and takes seriously concerns or complaints they may wish to raise. We aim to respond courteously and efficiently and to take action where appropriate to ensure that we work in partnership with parents to promote the best interests of the young people in our care. Barnard Castle School will also act upon any

complaint received from School employees or engaged volunteers, and follow the complaints' procedure as detailed in this document.

Most concerns and complaints are relatively minor and short-lived although they will appear important at the time. Most problems can be sorted out quite quickly by talking to those people within Barnard Castle School with particular knowledge or interest in the area of concern, or with the person responsible for a pupil's welfare.

To raise a concern or make a complaint, you can talk directly to a member of staff, or write or telephone. It will usually be best to start with the person most closely concerned with the issue - for House matters with the Housemaster or Housemistress, for example. They will usually be best placed to sort things out quickly with the minimum of fuss. You may wish to raise the matter with the Deputy Head (Mr Oliver Marlow), the Senior Mistress (Mrs Bernadette Ellison), or the Director of Studies (Revd Stephen Ridley). This can be in person, over the 'phone or in writing.

Your concerns will be treated in as confidential a manner as possible, but anonymous complaints may not be pursued. We hope it goes without saying that complaints made by parents will not rebound adversely on their children.

We trust having gone through the above channels you will be satisfied with the outcome, or at least that your concerns have been fully and fairly considered. Should you consider your concerns or complaint have not been resolved satisfactorily in an informal way, or you consider the complaint to be too serious to be dealt with informally, you will be asked to put the details relating to the complaint which you wish to make on paper.

In the unlikely event of this failing to resolve the situation, you should contact the Headmaster (or Deputy Head in his absence) formally; he will acknowledge receipt of the formal complaint within three working days of its receipt, and will investigate the complaint on your behalf. This will be done without fuss and with the minimum of embarrassment to you. The Headmaster (or Deputy Head) will then let you know his findings and what subsequent action he has taken. This will either be in writing or at a meeting with you and will be within six working days of receipt of the complaint wherever practically possible.

Should you subsequently decide your written complaint has not been dealt with fully, you are advised to write to the Chairman of Governors detailing your complaint and explaining why you are unhappy with the outcome to date. Your letter should be sent or delivered to the General Office of the School and addressed to the Chairman of Governors, marked private and confidential. He will acknowledge receipt of the letter, meet with the Headmaster and any others directly involved in the complaint, and respond in writing within seven working days of his receipt of the letter.

Should you consider the matter remains unresolved, the Chairman of Governors may invite you to a meeting with him and/or will refer the matter to a Complaint Appeal Panel; this would be within fourteen working days of you responding to his letter and the date of the Panel will be mutually agreed.

The Panel would be made up of two Governors who have not been party to any of the foregoing process, and one independent person of standing who is independent of the management and governance of the School. The Panel will hear the Appeal; you would be given the opportunity to make appropriate representations. You would be entitled to be accompanied at the Panel Hearing. The complainant, the Governors, Headmaster and, where relevant, the person who had been complained about, would be informed in writing of the Panel's decision with any findings and recommendations. Their decision would be a final one from the School's point of view.

Should you remain dissatisfied you could contact the Ofsted General Helpline, the National Business Unit, Manchester (Tel: 08456 404045).

### **The procedure for dealing with complaints from Pupils**

The School recognises the need for pupils to have an avenue whereby they can express problems and possible grievances. Whenever a problem or complaint is raised, it is the interests and welfare of the pupil which are our primary concern and responsibility.

All pupils are provided with a leaflet outlining what they should do and whom they should contact if they have a problem or if there is something or somebody either inside or outside the School making them unhappy.

All members of staff have a duty to listen if approached by a pupil and to follow up complaints until they are satisfactorily resolved.

Most complaints which occur may be relatively minor and short-lived, but they will appear important at the time. Members of staff need to distinguish complaints being made about the quality of service from those which involve child abuse matters.

In the case of suspicion or evidence that child abuse has occurred, members of staff should refer directly to the Child Protection Policy.

In the case of complaints being made about the quality of service, the matter can usually be resolved by taking them up with the appropriate member of staff, e.g. a complaint over food would be referred to the Catering Manager, or a complaint over defective furniture would be referred to the Maintenance Department. Most complaints will be of an informal nature and can be satisfactorily resolved within the normal pastoral structure of the School, usually via Tutors and Housemasters or Housemistresses, or else via the Chaplain, Matron or School Sisters. Complaints about bullying may also be resolved through these channels - see the Counter Bullying Policy document.

If this fails and a pupil wishes to make a formal complaint, he or she has the right to do so on a Complaint Form obtainable from the General Office. The complaint will be registered and investigated within 48 hours by the Headmaster or Deputy Head, who will keep the pupil informed of the outcome of the investigation and of any subsequent action.

If the pupil is still unhappy about the outcome and doesn't feel able to enlist the help of parents, he or she may contact the School's Independent Listener, Mrs Margaret Forsyth, who is not involved in the running of the School or Dr Welch (phone 690707). Childline (0800 1111), Durham Social Services Department (08458 505010 or 690999) or Ofsted (08456 404045), or any other outside agencies could also be contacted.

All pupils receive a small leaflet titled, "***I have a problem***", the text of which runs as follows:

*"We can all have worries, problems and difficulties from time to time, which may be major or minor. If you feel you need some help to sort things out, there are a number of people to whom you might turn.*

*Most young people would talk first to their parents or another relative, but sometimes this is not possible.*

*If you have a medical problem, it would be sensible to make an appointment to go and see your doctor. For boarders, the Sisters, Matron and the School Doctor are also there to help you. Mrs Forsyth (School Independent Listener) and Mrs Eldridge (School Counsellor) are also available.*

*At school, your tutor will always be ready to listen and to discuss things with you. Alternatively, you may feel you would rather talk to your Housemaster or Housemistress. The Chaplain, the Deputy Head and the Headmaster and their spouses are also available to see you on any occasion if you feel it is appropriate.*

*It is important to remember that you may choose the people with whom you would like to speak, and that you are welcome to approach any member of staff with whom you feel comfortable. You do not have to tell anyone else what you are doing.*

*There is also a complaint procedure which you can follow by completing a form which is obtainable from the General Office. Details are publicised on the general notice boards.*

*If you have tried one of these approaches and are not happy that the problem has been dealt with satisfactorily, or if you feel the need to talk to someone who is not involved in the running of the school, you may contact Dr Welsh, the School Doctor, by phoning 690707. Alternatively you may choose to get in touch with Childline (tel: 0800 1111), the Durham Social Services Department (tel: 08458 505010 or 690999), or Ofsted (08456 404045), or in writing to Ofsted, Royal Exchange Buildings, St Ann's Square, Manchester, M2 7LA.*

*Some problems are best dealt with by individual contact with one person, but others may need to be tackled by several people. In any event, the important thing is to ensure that your problem is dealt with and that you are satisfied with the action that has been taken.*

*We are here to help you if you need us. So if you have a problem which is making you unhappy come and talk."*

D H Ewart  
Headmaster

**Policy reviewed and amended:      June 2009**  
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