

CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY 2025 – 2026

THIS POLICY INCLUDES EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

Policy Author:	Head – Chris Murray
Date reviewed by author:	August 2025
Next review date:	August 2026

Governor sign – off		
Governor: Adrian Cutler	Date:	

This policy includes Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

1. Introduction

At Pennthorpe we take pride in the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided for our pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with the following procedure.

As a matter of daily routine, the School receives numerous contacts from parents of current pupils. Some of these may raise concerns that are resolved simply by providing information or through the arrangement of an informal meeting. The procedure is likely to be concluded at this stage if the concern has been explained satisfactorily, or a shared understanding has been reached on the issue being raised. Where a matter is more serious, or an informal approach has failed to resolve the issue, it may then be raised, in writing, as a complaint. Under normal circumstances the school will not investigate anonymous complaints.

This policy applies to parents of current pupils and does not apply to parents of prospective pupils. This policy is available to parents of currently registered pupils. It is also available to parents of former pupils where the complaint was initially raised by them when the pupil was still registered. It does not extend to complaints about exclusions. Pupils are removed from the school's admissions register, five working days from their last day of attendance.

Child Protection: Concerns regarding Child Protection are outside the scope of this procedure. If you have a concern regarding Child Protection, please contact the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead, Victoria Daley directly by telephoning the School Office.

Appeals against Exclusion: These are heard under a different procedure, details of which are available from the Head's PA.

Copies of this policy are made available to current parents through the school's website or on request from the School Office.

2. Aims

A complaint is any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action whether this be a real or perceived problem. It may be made about:

- The school as a whole
- A department
- A specific member of staff
- We recognise that it is right for a parent to make a complaint if they believe the school has:
 - Done something wrong
 - Failed to do something it should have done
 - Acted unreasonably or unfairly

The aim of this policy is to ensure all complaints are managed:

- Seriously
- Sympathetically
- Efficiently
- At the appropriate level
- As swiftly as possible
- With no adverse effect on their children.
- Confidentially
- Positively and without resentment

3. Stage 1: Informal

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. Often there is a misunderstanding which can be easily resolved.

The person best placed to deal with any concern or complaint will usually be the Form Tutor, Subject Teacher or Class Teacher; however, parents may wish to contact the relevant Head of the relevant subject department. If parents are unsure who to contact, please contact the School Office. Complaints related to finance and fees, should be referred to the Bursar – bursar@pennthorpe.com

We aim to acknowledge receipt of a complaint or concern received by telephone, email or letter within three working days during term time and as soon as practicable during the school holidays and no later than three working days following the beginning of term.

If necessary, the staff member may consult with other staff within the school in order to investigate the concern.

Complaints made directly to a member of the Senior Management Team will often be referred, in the first instance, to the member of staff deemed most relevant to investigate the concern unless the member of the Senior Management Team concerned deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.

All concerns and complaints will be ideally resolved within 10 working days of them being raised, except where they are raised during the school holidays, in which case they will be resolved within 10 working days of the start of the new school term. If the matter is not resolved, or if a parent has a serious complaint which is felt cannot be dealt with by the Form Tutor, Class Teacher or Subject Teacher, then the parent should proceed to Stage 2 of this procedure.

4. Stage 2: Formal

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis at Stage 1 above, and the complaint has first been considered at the informal stage, then the parents should make a formal complaint in writing to the Head. The Head will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 3 working days, or if the complaint is during the school holidays, the Head will acknowledge receipt of the complaint as soon as practicably possible and certainly within 3 working days of the new school term.

The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. In most cases, either the Head, will meet or speak with the parents concerned, normally within 5 working days of receiving the complaint (during term time), to discuss the matter and if the complaint cannot be resolved at this stage, to detail the next steps. If an investigation is needed, the Head may delegate responsibility for undertaking investigation of the complaint to one of the Senior Management team as appropriate. The Head (or one of the Senior Management Team) may ask to meet with the parents for a discussions of the problem. The designated investigator will then conduct a full investigation of the complaint and may interview members of staff or pupils involved. A written record will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

Following the investigation, the Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. Parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head may also ask to meet with parents to explain the decision. It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible; the school's target is to give a decision within 28 working days of the complaint being made if the complaint is lodged during term time and as soon as practicable during the holiday periods and certainly no later than 28 working days from the start of term.

If the complaint is about an action of the Head, the complaint can be referred to the Chair of Governors, stating clearly that a complaint is being made. The Chair can be contacted via the Clerk to the Governors at bursar@pennthorpe.com

5. Stage 3: Panel Hearing

If the matter is still not resolved, parents may wish to proceed to Stage 3, and ask for the complaint to be referred to a Complaints Panel. The appeal must be made in writing, stating that a request for a Panel Hearing is being made. The appeal must be lodged within 10 working days of the Head's decision at Stage 2. If the request for a panel hearing is made without the matter having previously been investigated under Stage 2 of this procedure, the Chair will refer the matter for investigation at Stage 2.

The appeal should be addressed to the Chair of Governors and sent to the Clerk to the Governors at bursar@pennthorpe.com The request for an appeal will be acknowledged within 5 working days of the Chair receiving it.

The appeal must include a list of the complaint(s) made against the school and what is believed not to have been resolved satisfactorily by the Stage 2 procedure, along with the remedies sought in respect of each. Parents should also state whether they wish to attend the hearing, or whether the panel may deal with the matter based only on written submissions.

The Chair will convene a panel consisting of three individuals, two governors and an independent member, who shall not have been directly involved previously in the matters detailed in the complaint and shall be independent of the management and running of the School.

The Chair will inform the Head that an appeal has been lodged. The Clerk to the Governors will serve as the secretary to the Panel and will gather all relevant paperwork and make the arrangements for the appeal hearing. The secretary's role at the hearing will be limited to advice on the procedure. The panel will convene as soon as possible, normally within 28 working days of the receipt of the appeal. If despite the best efforts of the panel, a hearing cannot be arranged within this time period, the panel secretary will write to the parents before the expiry of the 28-day period setting out the likely timeframe of the hearing.

The parents should supply copies of their previous written complaint and any other documentation they may wish to rely on for the secretary to circulate, not more than 7 days after the date of the notification of the hearing. Documentation must be relevant to those matters set out in the complaint. The panel may refuse to consider matters of which written notice has not been given. The panel reserves the right to separate the complaint into its constituent parts and delegate the consideration of each part to one or more members of the panel.

If parents have requested to attend the hearing, they will be invited to attend and speak to the panel; parents may be accompanied by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. The Head will also usually attend the hearing, and may bring a colleague (for example, the senior leader who investigated the matter under Stage 2). Details of anyone accompanying either party should be provided in advance to the panel secretary. If the parents decide not to attend the hearing, the panel will still hear the appeal.

The parents will be supplied with copies of any statements and supporting background documentation provided by the school to the panel, not less than 7 working days before the hearing.

If the panel deems it necessary, it may require further particulars of the complaint or any related matter, in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than 3 working days prior to the Hearing.

Conduct of the hearing shall be at the panel's discretion which will be exercised in the interests of a fair, effective and appropriately rapid resolution of the complaint. The Chair of the panel, or the secretary to the panel, will normally write to the parent, prior to the hearing, having considered the nature of the

complaint and the documentary material to state how the hearing will be conducted. Should parents have any questions concerning the panel's procedure, they can be addressed at this point.

After due consideration of all relevant facts, the panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it will complete within 10 working days of the hearing. The decision of the Panel will be final and binding on all parties. The findings will be sent in writing or email to the parents, head, the Chair of Governors and where relevant, the person complained about. The letter will state any reasons for the decisions reached and recommendations (if any) made by the panel.

The Panel's findings and if appropriate, any recommendations, will be held confidentially and made available for inspection by the Head, Governors and ISI Inspectorate.

6. Arrangements for record keeping:

Written records will be kept of all complaints, informal or formal, including whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or at a hearing and any action taken by the school as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld) for at least three years. The written record of all complaints is reviewed regularly by the Head or a senior member of staff. Complaints are resolved either to the complainant's satisfaction, or with an otherwise appropriate outcome which balances the rights and duties of pupils.

Such records will be kept for one year after the pupils leaves the school.

7. Persistent correspondence:

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 by the school, as vexatious and outside the scope of this policy.

8. Early years foundation stage:

Additional requirements apply for EYFS settings beyond those which apply to the main school. Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements must be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days. The record of complaints must be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.

If a parent wishes to make a complaint directly to Ofsted this may be done by emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or calling 0300 123 4666.

9. Confidentiality

The correspondence, statements and records of complaints are to be kept confidential except in so far as where a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act, or the Secretary of State, requests access to the records or other documents involved in the complaint.

The School may be required to declare the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the previous year to parents of pupils or prospective pupils and on request to the Chief Inspector,

the Secretary of State or a body approved under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act. The number of formal complaints made in the previous year is available on request from the Head's PA.

Ofsted and/or ISI will, on request, be provided with a written record of all complaints made during a specific period and the action taken as a result of each complaint.

Parents may wish to raise their complaint with ISI (Independent Schools Inspectorate) at CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA or by telephone: 020 7600 0100 or via their website: www.isi.net/contact

10. Number of Level 3 complaints

In the academic year 2024 – 2025:

- there was one stage 2 complaint.
- there were 0 stage 3 complaints.

11. Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

Pennthorpe is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartial, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behavior and will take action to protect staff from that behavior, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Definitions of serial or unreasonable complaints

Pennthorpe defines unreasonable behavior as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as if the complainant:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process;
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure;
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice;
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on;
- Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);

- Refuses to accept the findings of an investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedures have been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department of Education;
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;
- Uses threats to intimidate;
- Uses abusive, offensive, discriminatory language or violence;
- Knowingly provides falsified information;
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Response to serial or unreasonable complaints:

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Wherever possible, the Head or Chair of Governors, will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behavior continues, the Head will write to the complainant explaining that their behavior is unreasonable and ask them to change it. Where the complaint is about the Head, the Chair of Governors will write to the complainant explaining that their behavior is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Pennthorpe causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

Response to unacceptable conduct by the complainant

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the Pennthorpe school campus and virtual environment.

The complainant's contractual obligations:

In the case of continued serial and/or unreasonable complaints, the school may refer to the contractual Terms and Conditions which all parents are required to sign on acceptance of a place for the child.

The Terms and Conditions, state as follows:

"We require your co-operation. In order to fulfil our obligations under this contract and to maintain a constructive and good faith relationship with you, we, the Head and School staff need your cooperation, including in particular by you fulfilling your own obligations under this contract.

Examples of the co-operation and assistance we require. You must co-operate with the School and School staff in good faith, including by:

- maintaining a constructive relationship with School staff (including where the School is exercising its rights and performing its obligations under this contract);
- providing cooperation and assistance to the School so that your child can participate and benefit from the School's provision of education (including where the School may wish/need to provide such education remotely); and

The school may consider that the above aspects of the accepted Terms and Conditions have been breached by the complainant and may move to further discussions with the complainant about a future at Pennthorpe. This may result in a mutual termination of the contract under agreed terms or the school may seek to exclude the pupil(s) due to breach of contractual Terms and Conditions.