Complaints Policy

Please note:

Where ACS International Schools is operating outside of the United Kingdom the UK regulatory framework will provide the foundation for best practice as far as this policy is concerned. All ACS schools will operate in compliance with the relevant legislation of the country in which they are operating.

ACS International Schools is committed to protecting individual's personal data, and aims to remain at all times fully compliant with data protection laws and guidance from the relevant regulators. ACS further commits to ensuring that the planning and writing of all policies and procedures that involve the handling of personal data are guided by the principle of privacy by design, and that individuals' rights to have their data safeguarded are a paramount consideration in ACS' pursuit of all its operational and strategic practices.

ACS is committed to inclusion across race, gender, faith, identity and abilities. We believe that diversity helps us to fulfil our purpose, realise our vision and exemplify our values.

Document Status & RACI

Document Name:	Complaints Policy and Procedure
Document Status:	Active
Responsible:	Compliance, Accreditation and Policies Officer
Accountable:	Chair of Board of Trustees
Consulted:	ACS Leadership Team, Education Sub-Committee of the Board
Informed:	Heads of School Committee

Change Control

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Changes from the last edition of this policy are marked by a vertical black line in the left-hand margin against the paragraph where the change has been made.

1 Introduction

1.1 ACS International Schools (henceforward referred to as ACS in this policy) recognises the importance of regular interaction between school personnel and various stakeholders in the community, and especially the importance of interactions between faculty members and parents that support student learning and development. ACS is committed to meeting the needs of all students, parents, and other community members as appropriate. However, we recognise that there may be occasions where complaints arise, and the intention of this policy is to provide a clear and transparent explanation of the process that will enable complaints to be dealt with promptly, fairly and proportionately.

1.2 This policy has been developed in accordance with the requirements specified in the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Part 7. This policy is primarily intended to guide parents and other ACS community members acting in a parental capacity. Separate arrangements govern complaints by staff and are outlined in the staff handbook. In addition, this policy is not intended to guide staff grievances related to their employment at ACS. The processes associated with such grievances are outlined in the separate Grievance Procedure published on the ACS PowerSchool Learning Policy page. For the purposes of this policy, a complaint is any matter about which a parent or other ACS community member is unhappy and seeks action by the school.

1.3 ACS will treat complaints in accordance with the three-stage procedure outlined in this document. ACS will maintain a written record of all Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints. Records of Stage 1 complaints will be held at the divisional or departmental office associated with the complaint. Records of Stage 2 complaints will be held at the Head of School's office. Records of complaints that reach the panel stage (Stage 3) will be held securely at a remote location with copies being held at the Head of School's office. The records will include the actions taken by the school as a result of the complaint, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld.

1.4 ACS will keep records of complaints in order to monitor any patterns of concern. Retention of records will follow the guidance of the regulatory authority and will comply with the relevant data protection legislation.

1.5 For the purpose 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 and national holidays. For the avoidance of doubt, term dates are published on the school's intranet, and information about term dates is made available to parents and students periodically. Timescales for dealing with complaints may need to be extended. Where this is the case, the parents will be advised of the extension which is necessary and any reason(s) for this.

1.6 All complaints will be considered in an open and fair way. At all times ACS will respect the rights and feelings of those involved and deal with complaints seriously and confidentially. There may be occasions when the person dealing with a complaint will need to consider whether anyone else within the school needs to know about the complaint or whether the consent of another individual is required so as to address it appropriately. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008

requests access to them.

1.7 All school staff will be made aware of the complaints procedures and will be expected to familiarise themselves with the school's process of dealing with complaints to ensure they can be of the most assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

1.8 This policy explains that process, and the steps it outlines should be referred to and followed by all complainants should an issue arise that causes them concern. This policy is made available on the ACS website and on the PowerSchool Learning policy page, and will be provided in hard copy form upon request.

1.9 For the purpose of this policy, where the term "parent" is used it will refer to anyone who has legal custody over a student enrolled at ACS.

1.10 Some types of complaint may raise issues that have to be dealt with in another way (other than under this policy), in which case ACS will explain to the complainant why this is so and will inform them what steps will be taken.

1.11 Complaints that are made anonymously will be handled at the discretion of ACS and may be considered using other procedures, depending on the nature of the complaint. For example, anonymous complaints relating to (or appearing to relate to) a child protection matter or alleged criminal activity may be referred to the relevant authorities as appropriate.

2 Informal Resolution (Stage 1)

2.1 ACS hopes and expects that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally and usually within five working days. If parents have a complaint they should, in the first instance, contact their son's/daughter's teacher. In most cases, the matter will be resolved at this point. If the teacher/parent cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to contact the Divisional Principal.

2.2 If the complainant is not a parent, he or she should address the complaint to the member of the leadership team most directly associated with the complaint.

2.3 A complaint made directly to the Divisional Principal will normally be referred to the relevant teacher unless the Divisional Principal deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.

2.4 The Divisional Principal/Teacher dealing with the complaint will document the outcome in a letter or e-mail to the parent.

2.5 Most complaints will be resolved informally. In the case(s) when this does not happen, complainants will be advised that they may follow a formal procedure. ACS will provide for a written record to be kept of all complaints that are made in accordance with this Policy.

3 Formal Resolution (Stage 2)

3.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, the complainants should put their complaint in writing to the Head of School. The Head of School will decide, after

considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. If the complaint is about the Head of School, the complainants should raise their concern with the Chief Executive.

3.2 In the event that the informal resolution of a complaint is not moving to conclusion, the Head of School may determine that the formal stage should be used to seek a resolution. In this case, the Head of School will speak to the complainants and advise that this stage is now to be used to resolve the complaint.

3.3 In most cases the Head of School will speak to the complainants concerned, normally within three working days of receiving the complaint, and will discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

3.4 The Head of School may need to carry out further investigations.

3.5 The Head of School will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

3.6 Once the Head of School is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and complainants will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head of School will also give reasons for the decision.

3.7 The investigation and feedback will, as far as is practicable, be provided within 10 working days after the first meeting between the Head of School and the complainant.

3.8 If the complainant(s) is/are still not satisfied with the decision, they may request a formal Panel Hearing (Stage 3), stating clearly the reason for their appeal.

4 Panel Hearing (Stage 3)

4.1 If complainants seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they will be referred to the Chief Executive or a designee who has been appointed by the Board to call hearings of the Complaints Panel.

4.2 The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three persons: a Board member, the Chief Executive or designee, and another person independent of the management and running of the school. Members of the Panel will not have been directly involved in either the complaint or in previous investigations. The Panel members will be appointed by the Chief Executive and will meet normally within ten working days of receiving the request to review the outcome of Stage 2.

4.3 The purpose of the Panel will be to confirm whether the original complaint was handled appropriately and reached a reasonable conclusion. To that end, the Panel will review the Stage 2 decision, including evidence presented in the complaint and any Stage 2 investigation. Complainants may not present additional complaints or introduce new matters for the Panel to consider in Stage 3.

4.4 If possible, the Panel will resolve the complaint immediately, without the need for further investigation. Where a further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.

4.5 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 two working days prior to the hearing.

4.6 Complainants will be entitled to be accompanied to the Panel hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend (not legal counsel). Complainants must notify the school of the identity of their proposed companion at least two working days prior to the hearing.

4.7 After due consideration of all the facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations which it shall complete normally within five working days of the hearing. The Panel will write to the complainant informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final.

4.8 The Panel's findings and any recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head of School, the Chairman, Chief Executive and where relevant, the person(s) about whom the complaint was made.

5 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

5.1 In accordance with the Independent Schools Inspectorate Commentary on the Regulation Requirements (September 2021) sections 3.75-3.76, ACS makes additional provision for complaints that refer to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), that corresponds to the grade levels up to and including Pre-kindergarten in the Early Years division of the school.

5.2 ACS will investigate written complaints about the fulfilment of EYFS requirements and notify complainants of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of having received the complaint.

5.3 ACS will provide the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) with a written record of all complaints about the fulfilment of EYFS requirements.

5.4 ACS will notify parents of students in the EYFS setting about an inspection once notification about the inspection is received. Copies of the final inspection report will be provided to parents of students who regularly attend classes in the EYFS setting.

6 External Agencies

6.1 Parents and other community members are informed that they may also contact Ofsted and/or the ISI in order to discuss their complaint. The contact details for these two bodies are as follows:

Independent Schools Inspectorate
CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA
Telephone 020 7600 0100, Fax 020 7776 8849

Ofsted ask complaints to be registered through their contact form on their website. This can be found at http://live.ofsted.gov.uk/onlinecomplaints/

Alternatively, Ofsted can be contacted by e-mail at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Ofsted also maintains a telephone helpline at 0845 601 4771.

6.2 ACS is registered as a charity. In addition to the above inspection bodies, therefore, parents and other community members may contact the Charity Commission to discuss their complaint. ACS is registered charity number 1179820.

The Charity Commission may be contacted at 0300 066 9197, or via the contact form available from the Charity Commission website at https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission

7 Monitoring and Review of Complaints Procedures and Retention of Complaints Records

7.1 ACS will monitor the number and type of complaints received under this procedure and the operation of the procedure in resolving those complaints.

7.2 ACS will review this procedure on an annual basis to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice, and we will make any necessary changes.

7.3 In line with DfE guidance, ACS will retain records of complaints for a minimum of seven years (a period informed by the six-year inspection cycle in the UK and allowing a period for unforeseen circumstances).

Complaints that involve some safeguarding matters will be retained for substantially longer periods. Under guidance published by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in October 2022, where an organisation has identified that it holds records that are known to relate to allegations or cases of child sexual abuse, that material should be retained for 75 years.[1]

8 Persistent and/or Vexatious Correspondence

8.1 Where repeated attempts are made by a parent or other complainant to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this can be regarded as vexatious and outside the scope of this policy.

9 Associated policies

9.1 This policy is one of a number of ACS policies addressing statutory responsibilities. The attention of parents and other community members is drawn to other policies that may be found on the ACS website. These include:

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*This reflects the requirement under the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015, regulation 36 to retain records relating to looked after children and care homes until the individual's 75th birthday.

Admissions and Continuing Enrolment policy
Anti-Slavery and Human Trafficking policy
Behaviour policy
Safeguarding and Child Protection policy
Child-on-Child Abuse Prevention and Response policy

10 Number of Complaints Received and Dealt with at Stage 2 or Above in the 12 months to July 1st 2024:

	ACS Cobham	ACS Egham	ACS Hillingdon
Formal Resolution (Stage 2)	2	6	0
Panel Hearing (Stage 3)	0	1	1