

THE  
**BRITISH**  
**SCHOOL**  
 OF AMSTERDAM

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# Complaints Policy for Parents

Policy Title		<b>Complaints Policy for Parents</b>									
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### 1. Aims

The British School of Amsterdam is committed to providing the best educational experiences possible for pupils and encourages friendly relations and mutual respect throughout the School community. Such an atmosphere is a positive example for the School's pupils and a necessary foundation for their successful development.

From time to time problems do arise and our aim is to swiftly resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible, so that good relations may resume without delay. However, if that does not prove possible, the formal procedures below will be followed.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

The BSA will ensure that parents wishing to raise concerns know how to do so. To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals. A spirit of reasonableness and common sense is expected on all sides.

### 2. Legislation and guidance

As an accredited British School Overseas, this document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the [Standards for British Schools Overseas](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.

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In case of discrepancies local law or regulations will take precedence.

## 3. Definitions and scope

### 3.1 Definitions

The UK Department for Education guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”, and can be shared with any member of staff via a range of methods
- A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction, about actions taken or a lack of action”, and can only be made to the Principal or Bursar using the [Parent Complaint Form](#) (see 5.1 below for more information)

### 3.2 Dealing with concerns

The school will take appropriate action to address any concerns, which may include providing reassurances, offering support, or making changes to policies and procedures. If the concern relates to safeguarding or child protection, The BSA will follow its safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures. If a concern cannot be resolved informally, the person raising it may escalate it to a formal complaint.

### 3.3 Formal investigations and/or legal action

It is important to note that certain complaints may have more serious consequences, such as the need for a formal investigation or legal action, including the involvement of the police or other respective government bodies. In such cases, the school will follow its legal obligations and procedures to address the complaint appropriately.

### 3.4 Scope

The BSA intends to resolve parent complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their complaints formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

## 4. Dealing with complaints

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened and what were the circumstances
- Who was involved
- What the parent feels would put things right

### 4.1 Time scales

A parent must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant explain the delay

## 5. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the Principal, Bursar or Supervisory Board)

### 5.1 Stage 1: informal

The BSA will take informal complaints seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The parent should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the Principal or Bursar, either in person or by completing the [Parent Complaint Form](#), found on Firefly. If the parent is unsure how to contact the school, they should contact the school reception for guidance [Tel: 020 679 7840].

The BSA will acknowledge informal complaints within 2 school days, and investigate and provide a response within 5 school days.

In all cases, there will be a written record of the complaint, including the date received and the action taken, where appropriate. If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint (Stage 2).

### 5.2 Stage 2: formal

The formal stage involves the parent putting the complaint to the Principal or Bursar:

- In a letter or email ([principal@britams.nl](mailto:principal@britams.nl) or [bursar@britams.nl](mailto:bursar@britams.nl))
- Over the phone
- In person

The parent should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The parent should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If parents need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school reception [Tel: 020 679 7840].

The Principal or Bursar will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 2 school days.

The Principal (or other person appointed by the Principal for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. In most cases, the Principal (or other person investigating) will meet or speak to the parent to discuss the matter and, if possible, reach a resolution at this stage.

The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the parent within 10 school days. In all cases, there will be a written record of the complaint, including the date received and the action taken, where appropriate.

If the parent is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the PA to the Management Board in writing within 20 school days.

### 5.3 Stage 3: review panel

#### Convening the panel

Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal, stage.

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the Chair of the Supervisory Board and must consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school. The panel cannot be made up solely of Supervisory Board members, as they are not independent of the management and running of the school.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 8).

The parent must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The PA to the Management Board will aim to find a date within 20 school days of the request, where possible.

If the parent rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting.

### **At the meeting**

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a parent's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The parent must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish. Legal representation is not usually appropriate and representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

The panel, the parent and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the parent and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the parent and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the Chair of the Supervisory Board and Principal.

### **The outcome**

The committee can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld, the committee will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the BSA's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 school days.

## **6. Complaints against the Principal or Bursar**

### **6.1 Stage 1: informal**

Complaints made against the Principal or Bursar should be directed to the Chair of the Supervisory Board in the first instance. Contact details for the Chair of the Supervisory Board can be found by contacting the school reception [Tel: 020 679 7840].

If the complaint is about the Principal or the Bursar, a suitably skilled and impartial Supervisory Board member will carry out the steps at stage 1 (set out in section 6 above).

In all cases, there will be a written record of the complaint, including the date received and the action taken, where appropriate. If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint (Stage 2).

## 6.2 Stage 2: formal

If the complaint is raised to Stage 2 an independent investigator will carry out the steps in stage 2 (set out in section 5 above). They will be appointed by the Supervisory Board, and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation.

## 7. Persistent complaints

### 7.1 Unreasonably persistent complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure, beyond all reason
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to cooperate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the timeframes it sets out
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value

#### Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address a parent's complaint, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place. We may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

#### Stopping responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their complaint
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

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 our school site.

## 7.2 Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete

If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

## 7.3 Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

## 8. Record keeping

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a subject access request under the terms of GDPR, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law.

## 9. Learning lessons

The Supervisory Board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Management Board, where appropriate, and respect confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

## 10. Monitoring arrangements

The Chair of the Supervisory Board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The Chair of the Supervisory Board will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 9.

The complaints records are logged and managed by PA to the Management Board.

This policy will be reviewed by the Principal, Bursar and Supervisory Board at least once every 3 years.

At each review, the policy will be approved by the Supervisory Board.