HOLMEWOOD HOUSE SCHOOL

'Kindness, aspiration & self-belief'

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE
(for parents)

Policy Holder	The Bursar
Date Approved	September 2026
Governor Approval	Full Board
Date for next review	September 2027

INTRODUCTION

Holmewood House has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided for its pupils and welcomes feedback, suggestions and comments from parents. The School takes seriously concerns or complaints which parents may wish to raise.

A 'concern' may be treated as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

A complaint may be generally recognised as 'an expression or statement of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

It's in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to follow formal procedures. Schools should take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

However, there will be occasions when complainants want to raise their concerns formally. In those cases, our three stage complaints procedure should be followed.

The aim of this procedure is to achieve a fair, effective and timely resolution of parental concerns about the education and/or welfare of individual children in the care of the School. This Complaints Procedure is available to parents of current pupils and of prospective pupils via our website and it is also obtainable from the School Office on request. The Procedures apply to all pupils including children in the EYFS. There is an additional Complaints Procedure for Boarders.

The expression "parent" is used for all those having parental responsibility for a child.

Although this Procedure is made available to parents of prospective pupils, it is not available for use by them; it may only be used by parents of current pupils. Complaints by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure only if the complaint was initially raised in writing when the pupil to which the complaint relates was still registered as a pupil at the School.

Every reasonable complaint shall receive fair and proper consideration and a timely response. A complaint can be considered as an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. Any parental complaint about the school, about an individual member of staff, any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the school is within the scope of this procedure. Complaints about any matter of School policy or administration affecting their children must be made in accordance with the following procedure except where the complaint relates to an exclusion which will be dealt with under the School's Exclusion Procedures, see Behaviour and Sanctions Policy.

Holmewood House School will make available, on request, to the Secretary of State, Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE) or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), details of this Complaints Procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

The School is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you raise in good faith.

THE THREE-STAGE PROCEDURE

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most queries and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.

- If parents have a complaint regarding a day-to-day issue, they should normally contact their child's form tutor. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straight away by this means to the parent's satisfaction. If the form tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult the appropriate head of department or the Assistant Head, Pastoral and Wellbeing as appropriate.
- For a more serious subject-related, curriculum or general academic concern, the Head of Department or Head of Year should be contacted in the first instance. If the matter cannot be resolved, it may be necessary for them to consult the Deputy Head.
- Concerns relating to child protection allegations must be referred directly to the Head and will be dealt with in accordance with the School Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.
- For all other matters, including those relating to clubs, holiday courses, swim school and the playscheme, please contact: queries@holmewoodhouse.co.uk and your concern will be forwarded to the relevant member of staff.
- If the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors whose contact details are available from the school website or School Office on request.
- Complaints made directly to the Assistant Head, Pre-Prep or the Deputy Head will usually be referred to the relevant member of staff for a written response unless the line manager concerned deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally. In this event the line manager will attempt to resolve the matter in five working days or as soon as is practicable.
- The relevant member of staff will make a written record of all complaints and concerns, and the date on which they were received. Should a matter not be resolved within five working days of the initial complaint being made, or in the event that the relevant teacher and the parents fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure. This should be done within 10 working days of the school's response to Stage 1.

- We will do all we can to ensure that we respond to serious concerns and complaints in a professional manner, ensuring that during any process all of the parties concerned – be they parents, pupils, activity attendees, those letting school facilities or school staff – remain fully supported and communicated with openly and in a timely manner.

Stage 2 - Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint, **in writing to the Head**, via admin@holmewoodhouse.co.uk who will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- Depending on the individual nature of the complaint, the Head will appoint an appropriate member of the SLT to investigate the matter. In most cases, the member of the SLT in charge of the investigation will meet with or speak to the parents concerned, within two working days of receiving the written complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the SLT member to carry out further investigations. These will be completed within eight working days or as soon as is practicable. The SLT member will determine who should carry out any investigation and this may be someone external to the School.
- If further time is needed to gather information pertaining to the investigation, the parent will be informed in writing.
- Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the designated member of the SLT is satisfied, so far as is practicable, that all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The SLT member will give reasons for their decision. In most cases, the decision will be provided the parents, along with the reasoning behind it, within 15 working days of the written complaint being received.
- If the complaint is against the Head, the complaint should be made to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors will nominate someone to determine the complaint. The Stage 2 process described above will then be followed as if the references to the designated SLT member is to the individual nominated by the Chair of Governors to determine the complaint against the Head.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they may take the opportunity to proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3 - Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they should do so in writing to the clerk to the Panel via compliance@holmewoodhouse.co.uk within five working days of receiving the decision at Stage 2, setting out their grounds of appeal. Any supporting evidence which the parents wish to rely on should also be provided with their grounds of appeal.
- To the extent the parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated due to extenuating circumstances which have impeded the parents from taking action, the parents should request an **extension in writing**. Such a request should be made to the clerk to the Panel in advance of the original deadline, setting out the further time period requested and the reason for this. This will be considered.
- In the event the parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated (including to the extent applicable any extensions if agreed) the School reserves the right to conclude the complaint process and not progress the matter to Stage 3.
- The clerk to the Panel, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel, will then refer the appeal to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the School. The clerk to the Panel/Chair of Governors

will appoint one Panel member to act as Chair of the Panel OR The Complaints Panel will appoint one of the Panel members to act as the Chair of the Panel. The convenor, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint within five working days and schedule a hearing to take place within twenty working days after acknowledgement of the parents' letter to invoke Stage 3.

- 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 or further investigation be carried out. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than five working days prior to the hearing.
- The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. The Stage 2 decision-taker shall also be entitled to be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not be appropriate and the companion should not be from the legal profession. The Panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend.
- The remit of the Panel shall be at the discretion of the Chair of Governors and the manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.
- After due consideration of the merits of the complaint and all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and decide whether to:

    - dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part;
    - uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and
    - make recommendations.

- The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, within five working days of the hearing (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following the hearing).
- The decision of the Panel will be final. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents, and, where relevant, the person complained about as well as the Chair of Governors and the Stage 2 decision-taker.
- A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair of Governors and the Head.

TIMEFRAME FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

- All complaints will be handled seriously, sensitively, and within clear and reasonable timescales.
- It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the School's target is to complete Stages 1 and 2 of the procedure within twenty working days. Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further thirty working days.
- Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, working days refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time as published on its website, excluding Bank Holidays and half term. This means that during School holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although the School will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay.
- It may take longer to resolve a complaint where statutory agencies are involved (for example, the Local Authority or the Police), during periods of significant disruption to School life, or as a consequence of unavoidable staff absence. The timeframes set out in this Procedure may therefore change depending on the circumstances of an individual case. Any deviation will, however, be on an exceptional basis, and the School will take all reasonable steps to limit any such delay, and parents will be advised should timeframe revisions be necessary.
- The School expects parents to engage in the process in a reasonable, constructive and responsive manner to help ensure matters can be dealt with in a timely way and in line with the targets set out in this Procedure.

- A Complaints timeline can be found in this document for further detail and clarification.

PERSISTENT CORRESPONDENCE

- The Procedure should be used as a mechanism for resolving issues in good faith and in a courteous manner. It should not be used in an abusive or threatening manner or in a way that is vexatious.
- Once a complaint is made by a parent and whilst it is being dealt with under the complaint's procedure, we request the parent refrains from repeated correspondence or contact with staff members that may be considered vexatious.
- Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this will be regarded by the School as vexatious and outside the scope of this procedure.

RECORDING COMPLAINTS AND USE OF PERSONAL DATA

- Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where a request for access is made under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 or where the School is required to share information relating to a child protection concern, complaint to in order to comply with its legal or regulatory obligations.
- Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all complaints, whether they are resolved at Stage 1 (informal stage), the formal stage (Stage 2) or proceed to a Panel hearing (Stage 3) and any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld).
- The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice which can be found on the School's website. When dealing with complaints the School (including any Panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

    - Date when the issue was raised
    - Name of parent
    - Name of pupil
    - Description of the issue
    - Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
    - Witness statements (if appropriate)
    - Name and contact details of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
    - Third party and internal reports
    - Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
    - Notes/minutes of the hearing, and
    - The Panel's written decision

- This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the School's Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy, but potentially including, for instance, information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy
- The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Notice, Data Protection Policy and Retention of Records Policy. All records relating to complaints shall be treated as confidential. In addition to where requested by the Secretary of State or an inspector (see above), there may be other circumstances where disclosure of the substance of a complaint or particular confidential records relating to it is

required, for example, where there is a legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligation (eg, in response to a subject access request) which prevails over the requirement to maintain the records as confidential.

PARENTS OF EYFS PUPILS

- Parents of EYFS pupils should follow the three stages of this Complaints Procedure. If parents remain dissatisfied and their complaint is about the School's fulfilment of the EYFS requirements, then parents may take their complaint to the ISI or Ofsted.
- Parents will be notified by ISI or Ofsted of the outcome of the investigation into their complaint within 28 days of the complaint being received.
- Holmewood House School will provide ISI/Ofsted, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaints will be kept in accordance with its Privacy Notice and Retention of Records Policy.

Ofsted can be contacted at:
Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD
Telephone: 0300 123 1231 or by email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

ISI can be contacted at:
ISI, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA
Telephone: 020 7600 0100 or by email: info@isi.net

REGISTER OF FORMAL COMPLAINTS

The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (2025/6), In accordance with paragraph 32(1) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 is available upon request from the school.

OVERVIEW OF COMPLAINTS TIMELINE

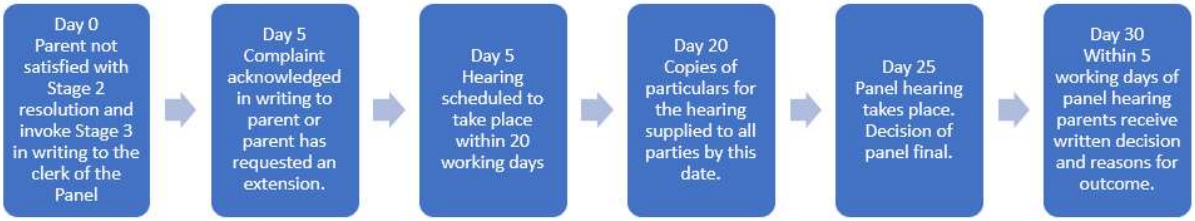
Stage 1 Informal Resolution	**Action**	**Timescale**
To the form teacher/tutor	Resolved 'straight away' to the parent's satisfaction	Response to emails from parents – 2 working days for initial response Further follow up asap / with relevant information
To HOD and or Deputy	Dealt with in conjunction with form teacher / tutor	Resolved within 5 working days after the initial day or as soon as is practicable
Complaint against the Head	Must be made **in writing** directly to the COG therefore follow Stage 2 process	
		Total days for stage 1 = 5
Stage 2 – Formal resolution	**Action**	**Timescale**
Written complaint made to the Head no later than 10 days after the school has responded to Stage 1	Speak to the parents Resolution agreed. Written response confirming resolution.	Initial response written 2 working days within the date of the initial written complaint.
	If further investigation required	Investigations completed 8 working days or sooner

	Decision made and parents informed in writing giving reasons.	15 working days from receipt of complaint in writing
		Total days for stages 1&2 = 5+ (10) + 15 = up to 30 days
Stage 3 – Panel Hearing	**Action**	**Timescale**
Parent not satisfied with stage 2 resolution	Parent writes to clerk to the Panel	Within 5 working days of receiving stage 2 decision
Parent unable to provide written complaint to clerk of panel within 5 days	Parent requests an extension to the clerk to the panel in writing	Must be received within working 5 days of receiving stage 2 decision
Parent not able to provide complaint within time frame	School reserves the right to conclude the complaint process	
Panel to take place:	Convener on behalf of the panel will acknowledge the complaint	Within 5 working days of parents receiving stage 2 decision letter
Hearing	Hearing scheduled	Hearing completed within 20 working days after acknowledgement
Information to all parties	Copies of particulars supplied to all	Parties 5 working days prior to hearing
Parents informed	Panel writes to parents informing their decision and giving reasons	Within 5 working days of the hearing taking place Additional time may be required if further investigations are needed following the hearing
		Total days for Stage 3= 5 + 20 + 5 = 30

Timeline for complaint at Stage 2 total number of working days = 15



Timeline for complaint at Stage 3 total number of working days = 5 + 20 + 5 =30



DATA PROTECTION COMPLAINTS

There are specific procedures that are followed with regards to Data Protection complaints.

This section outlines how individuals can raise concerns about how the school handles their personal data (or that of others they represent). It ensures compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018, and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025.

This applies to complaints from any data subject whose personal data we process, including:

- Pupils / students (considering their age and competence)
- Parents / carers
- Staff
- Governors / trustees
- Other third parties

Data protection complaints include (but are not limited to):

- Inaccurate, incomplete, or outdated personal data
- Unlawful or unfair processing / sharing of data
- Delays or issues with Subject Access Requests (SARs) or other data subject rights
- Data breaches or unauthorised disclosures
- Concerns about retention, security, or transparency
- Issues with automated decision-making or profiling

This part of the Complaints policy is separate from the school's general complaints procedure. General complaints with a data protection element will have the data protection aspects handled under this section (with the broader issues addressed via the normal process where appropriate).

How to Make a Complaint

You can complain:

- By email: complaince@holmewoodhouse.co.uk
- By post: School address
- In person or by phone

For any data protection complaint, please provide the following information:

- Your full name and contact details
- Relationship to the data subject (if not yourself)
- Description of the complaint and relevant dates
- Any supporting evidence
- Desired outcome Complaints on behalf of others require proof of authority (e.g., signed consent, power of attorney).

For parents complaining about a child's data, we consider the child's competence and any safeguarding issues.

Identity Verification and Authority

We may request proof of identity (e.g., passport, driving licence) or authority before investigating, to protect personal data. We will do this promptly and only where necessary.

Acknowledgement and Response Times

We will acknowledge receipt within 30 calendar days (starting the day after receipt). We will investigate and provide a substantive response without undue delay. We will keep you updated on progress. During school holidays or staff absences, we maintain arrangements to handle complaints.

Investigation Process

The DPO or designated Data Protection Lead will oversee the investigation. Relevant staff will be consulted where necessary. We will act fairly, objectively, and in line with data protection principles. Where appropriate, we will take remedial actions such as correcting data or improving processes. You will receive a written outcome explaining our findings and any next steps.

Escalation

If you are unhappy with our response (or we fail to respond appropriately), you have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office: https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/ ICO address: Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.

Record Keeping

We will maintain a secure log of complaints, including details, outcomes, and actions. Records will be kept in line with our retention schedule and the accountability principle of UK GDPR. Access is restricted.

Training and Awareness

All relevant staff are trained to recognise and appropriately route data protection complaints. This policy is publicised via our website, privacy notices, and on request.

FORMER PUPILS

This Complaints process does not cover complaints from parents of pupils who have left voluntarily or as a result of being excluded.

Complaints by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil to which the complaint relates was still registered as a pupil at the School.

The only exception to this is if the complaint is a review of a decision taken by the Head to exclude or require the removal of a pupil under clause 7 of the School's Terms and Conditions in which case such a review must be requested by no later than five working days from the date of the decision to exclude or require the removal of a pupil.

Any complaint about a decision taken by the Head to exclude or require the removal of the pupil under clause 7 of the School's Terms and Conditions will be governed by this Stage 3 of the School's Complaints Procedure. There may be circumstances in which the School consider it necessary and appropriate to deviate from the Stage 3 procedure in the context of appeals for exclusion and required removal, and the School will inform the parents of this. In such circumstances, the Panel may only uphold the complaint and ask the Stage 2 decision-taker to reconsider their decision if they consider, having regard to the process followed by the Head, that the Head's decision to exclude / require the removal of the pupil was not a reasonable decision for the Head to have taken.

Schools reserve the right not to progress the complaint to Stage 3 in circumstances where the parents fail to provide the details of their appeal within the specified time period (which may include an agreed extension where there have been extenuating circumstances, for example).