



## **British International School and Montessori Education**

### **Complaints Policy and Procedure**

<b>Approved by:</b>	The Governing Board	<b>Date:</b> 30/06/2020
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## **Introduction and scope**

The British International School and Montessori Education is committed to working in positive partnership with its parents, learners and staff and to working in an open and accountable way that builds the trust and respect of all our stakeholders.

A school is a busy place where there are many interactions between learners, parents, guardians, and staff as part of the everyday life of the school and from time to time something may go wrong, or you may think we can do something better. Usually concerns that are raised can be resolved very quickly but where an individual may feel that an issue has not been dealt with appropriately, this procedure provides a clear and transparent process for a complaint to be investigated and responded to.

## **The difference between a concern and a complaint**

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

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

## **Our aim**

One of the ways in which we can continue to improve our service is by listening and responding to the views of our parents, learners, staff and other stakeholders, and in particular, by responding positively to complaints, and by putting mistakes right.

## **Therefore, we aim to ensure that:**

- making a complaint is as easy as possible
- we treat a complaint as a clear expression of dissatisfaction with our service which calls for an immediate response
- we deal with it promptly, politely and, when appropriate, confidentially
- we respond in the right way - for example, with an explanation, or an apology where we have got things wrong, or information on any action taken etc
- we learn from complaints, use them to improve our service, and review annually our complaints policy and procedures.

We recognise that, many concerns will be raised informally, and dealt with quickly. Our aims are to:

- resolve informal concerns quickly
- keep matters low-key
- enable mediation between the complainant and the individual to whom the complaint has been referred

An informal approach is appropriate when it can be achieved. But if concerns or complaints cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally, then the formal complaints procedure should be followed.

### **The school's responsibility is to:**

- acknowledge the formal complaint in writing
- respond within a stated period of time
- deal reasonably and sensitively with the complaint
- take action where appropriate.

### **A complainant's responsibility is to:**

- bring their complaint, in writing, to the school's attention normally within 1 week of the issue arising
- raise concerns promptly and directly with a senior member of staff in the school
- explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date
- allow the school a reasonable time to deal with the matter
- recognize that some circumstances may be beyond the school's control.

### **Responsibility for Action**

**Confidentiality:** Apart from exceptional circumstances, every attempt will be made to ensure that both the complainant and the school maintain confidentiality. However, the circumstances, giving rise to the complaint may be such that it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality (each complaint must be judged on its own merit). Should this be the case, the situation will be explained to the complainant.

**Monitoring and Reporting:** The school Advisory Board will receive annually an itemized report of complaints made and their resolution. This policy will be reviewed by the Advisory Board annually and assess its implementation and effectiveness. The policy will also be promoted and implemented throughout the school.

**Withdrawal of a Complaint:** If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, he or she would be asked to do so in writing.

## **FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

### **Stage 1**

In the first instance, if the issue remains unresolved informally, a letter should be written to the Principal, in order to provide an opportunity to correct matters. It is important that the complainant writes down the complaint details, the resulting consequences stated, and the remedy that is sought. All complaints should be sent to the Principal in writing through the administration office, or in person using the complaint's form (unless the complaint is about the head). The Principal will record the date the complaint was received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing electronically (email) or by hard copy within 3 working days. A response and explanation will be available within 7 working days. Within this response, the Principal will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Principal can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

During the investigation, the Principal (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish to.
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Principal will provide a formal written response within 20 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the Principal is unable to meet this deadline, he/she will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date. The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The Principal will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

## **Stage 2**

If the initial response to the complaint is not satisfactory, the next step is to write to the Chairperson of the Advisory Board and ask for the complaint and the response to be reviewed. Acknowledgement by the Chairperson of your request can be expected within 3 working days of receipt and a response within 7 working days.

The school's aim is to resolve all matters as quickly as possible. However, inevitably some issues will be more complex and therefore may require longer to be fully investigated. Consequently, timescales given for handling and responding to complaints will reflect this. If a matter requires more detailed investigation, an interim response will be given describing what is being done to deal with the matter, and when a full reply can be expected and from whom.

Upon receipt of a formal complaint, the Advisory Board will conduct an investigation and determine the best course of action. This may involve referring your complaint back to the Principal and the SLTs to resolve with a recommended course of action.

Should the Advisory Board fail to achieve an acceptable outcome, the matter will then be referred to a Complaints Panel for consideration.

## **Stage 3**

A Complaints Panel will be appointed by the Advisory Board, on a case-by-case basis or as the Chairperson considers appropriate. The panel will comprise of up to three independent persons unrelated to the board or leadership of the school but may be drawn from the Parents Teachers Association.

Members of the Complaints Panel may not have been involved in dealing with your complaint at an earlier stage. If it deems it necessary, the Panel may require further particulars of the complaint or any related matter to be supplied in advance of a hearing. A hearing will be arranged as soon as practicable and normally within fifteen working days of the convening of the Panel. Parents may be accompanied to a hearing of the Panel by one other person. It would normally be inappropriate for this person to be acting in a professional capacity.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the complaint immediately 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 all the relevant facts the Panel will reach a decision and make recommendations within fifteen working days of the conclusion of the hearing.

The Panel will write to the complainant informing them of its decisions and the reasons for them. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations by the Complaints Panel will be final. All correspondence, statements and records throughout all stages of the complaints procedure will be kept confidential except where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection, or where any other legal obligation prevails. Records of complaints are kept for three years.

### **Next Steps**

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education after they have completed Stage 3.

*Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.*

### **Managing serial and unreasonable complaints**

BIS is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, 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 behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

BIS defines unreasonable behaviour 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 outcome sought by raising the complaint,

despite offers of assistance

- refuses to co-operate with the complaint's investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaint's 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 the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Ministry of Basic and Secondary 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 or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school if it 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.

Whenever possible, the Principal or chairperson of the Advisory board will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Principal will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact BIS 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.

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 School.

### **Training**

Staff will receive up to date and relevant training on complaints procedures and changes in policy where necessary training is required.

### **Anonymity**

Anonymous complaints may not be pursued.

### **Information Requests**

The complaints procedure is for genuine complaints or concerns and should not be used simply to obtain information from the School.

## **Appendix 1-Complaint Form**

## Appendix 1 – Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Principal/ Clerk to the Advisory Board via the Administration Office who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

<b>Pupil's name (if relevant):</b>
<b>Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):</b>
<b>Address:</b>
<b>Telephone number:</b>
<b>Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.</b>
<b>What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?</b>
<b>Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.</b>
<b>Signature:</b>
<b>Date:</b>



<b>Official use only</b>
<b>Date acknowledgement sent:</b>
<b>By who:</b>
<b>Complaint referred to:</b>
<b>Date:</b>