

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS

The commitment to diversity, equality, and inclusivity is at the heart of our values at Austin Friars. Equality means creating an environment where pupils have the chance to achieve their full potential, free from barriers, prejudice, and discrimination. Inclusion is about recognising that each pupil is unique and that their needs can be met in different ways. Diversity means recognising, respecting, and celebrating the added value that differences bring. Our unwavering dedication to our school values – Truth, Love and Unity - is how we fulfil our mission at Austin Friars. It is through our commitment to diversity, equality, and inclusivity that our pupils are empowered to be authentic and succeed.

Austin Friars is an equal opportunities employer and is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

This Policy is the responsibility of the Headmaster (in conjunction with the Chair of Trustees) and will be reviewed biennially.

Introduction

Austin Friars prides itself on the high quality of its educational provision for its pupils and the pastoral care it provides. Such provision is based upon a strong and supportive relationships between staff and pupils, as well as between staff and parents, carers and guardians (hereafter referred to as 'parents'). The expectations of the School are articulated in the School-Parent Relationship Policy which is available on the website and should be read in conjunction with this policy. This policy covers EYFS, Junior School and the Senior School.

Concerns and Complaints definition

The following guidelines are intended to assist parents who have a complaint about any aspect of the provision for their children at the School. 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 may be made about the School as a whole, a specific department or an individual member of staff.

A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly and this procedure covers any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School. It can be very difficult to pursue anonymous complaints but all parents can be assured that all concerns will be treated seriously and confidentially. It is the School's policy that complaints made by parents do not rebound adversely on their children.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- Parents should refer a concern, in the first instance, to the person most closely concerned with the issue (e.g. Junior School class teacher; Senior School teacher; Head of School, games complaints to the Director of Sport; music complaints with the Director of Music, or to a member of the Senior Management Team, **other than the Headmaster**).
- In many circumstances, the person contacted will need to discuss the matter with a colleague or colleagues and consider it carefully before responding. This will normally be done within five working days during term-time and as soon as is reasonably practicable in holiday periods.

- Minor complaints may be dealt with through meeting with the member of staff or by telephone.
- If a parent makes a written complaint, they are entitled to a written response. This will normally be done within five working days during term-time and as soon as is reasonably practicable in holiday periods. The School will process a complaint raised by a parent of a child who is no longer on the School Roll provided the complaint is raised, in writing, within 6 weeks, (i.e. one half-term), of the child being removed from the Roll.
- If staff are asked for an appointment with a parent to deal with a complaint, they will endeavour to arrange the appointment promptly and at a mutually convenient time. Parents who seek an appointment with any member of staff should contact the School Office.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- If the complaint is more serious, or if the parent does not feel that a less serious complaint has been handled satisfactorily, they should raise the matter with the Headmaster. The Headmaster is always willing to meet parents by appointment to deal with complaints.
- In this case it is preferable that the parent writes to the Headmaster outlining the nature of the complaint. In most cases, the Headmaster will arrange to meet the parent concerned, normally within five term-time working days, to discuss the matter.
- Depending on the nature of the complaint the Headmaster may nominate a member of the senior management team to investigate on their behalf.
- Occasionally it may be appropriate for the Headmaster to appoint an external investigator, in such cases it may be necessary to extend the timescales of the complaint and parents will be informed in writing in such cases.
- Once the Headmaster is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, that all the relevant facts have been established, he will decide, and the parent will be informed of this decision in writing. This decision will normally be given to the parents within fifteen term-time working days of the meeting having taken place.
- The Headmaster will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

Stage 3 – Appeal to a Panel of Trustees

- If a parent is not happy with the handling of a stage 2 complaint, or if the complaint concerns the Headmaster, the parent is entitled to complain to a Trustees' panel that will make findings and provide recommendations.
- Parents must address a complaint in writing to the Chair of Trustees at the School. **This should give the reasons for, and grounds on which, the appeal is being made** and should be received by the School within five term-time working days of completion of a Stage 2 formal resolution (or within 20 term-time working days of the event which provoked the complaint if it concerns the Headmaster and Stage 2 does therefore not occur). The Chair of Trustees or their nominee is responsible for appointing a Panel consisting of at least three people, two of whom will normally be Trustees, together with one person who is independent of the management and day-to-day running of the School. None of the Panel members will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. The Chair of Trustees will normally aim to convene a Panel meeting within 20 term time school days after receipt of a written complaint.
- The School will process a complaint raised by a parent of a child who is no longer on the School Roll provided the complaint is raised, in writing, within 6 weeks, (i.e. one half-term), of the child being removed from the Roll.

The Appeal Panel

Parents, or staff will be invited by the Chair of the Panel (or their nominee) to attend a panel hearing at a given date, time and location. Such hearings may be conducted in person or virtually using an appropriate application. The parent(s) may be accompanied by a relative, friend or adviser but legal

representation would not normally be appropriate. The Chair of Trustees will aim to convene a Panel meeting within 20 term time school days after receipt of a written complaint.

Conduct of the Appeal Panel

Prior to the appeal Panel members and the appellant will receive the following paperwork:

1. When appropriate, a chronology of events and explanatory notes prepared by the School which explains the background and reasons behind any decisions made.
2. A copy of the letter from the parents stating the grounds on which the appeal is being made.
3. A copy of the School’s current Complaints Procedure for Parents and along with any other relevant policies.

In addition, the pupil’s personal file may be made available to the Panel for the hearing.

The hearing will be conducted by meeting with all interested parties but this may be done on an individual basis depending on the nature of the complaint.

A contemporaneous copy of the hearing will be kept and minutes produced but no electronic recording will normally be appropriate.

The Panel must satisfy itself that the Headmaster’s decision at stage 2 was reasonable, proportionate and in line with school policies.

The committee can:

1. Uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
2. Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part;

The Panel’s decision will be based on the balance of probabilities.

If the complaint is upheld the committee will:

1. Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
2. Where appropriate, recommend changes to the School’s systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Panel’s decision will be final. A copy of the panel’s decision, the reasons behind it and any recommendations they may have made will be sent in writing to the parent, the Headmaster, the Chair of Trustees and, where relevant, the person complained about normally within ten term time working days. A copy of the findings and recommendations will be ‘available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the headteacher’.

- The School should make parents aware of the existence of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Guide (July 2015)
- This Complaints Policy also applies to EYFS. Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 working days. The register of complaints will be available to both OFSTED and ISI on request.

<p>Independent Schools Inspectorate CAP House</p>	<p>Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street</p>	<p>Competition and Marketing Authority (CMA) (CoDP registered)</p>
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Records and Confidentiality

A central register of parental complaints, made in writing under the formal part of this procedure, is held on school premises through the intranet and available for inspection. The register includes details as to whether the complaints were resolved following formal procedure or were proceeded to a Trustee panel hearing. The register also includes details pertaining to the action taken by the School as a result of the complaints regardless of whether they were upheld or not. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential which is limited to Head, Head of Junior School, Deputy Head Pastoral, Deputy Head Academic, Bursar and Chair of Trustees except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year was 0.

Headmaster
 January 2026

Current version reviewed and endorsed by Full Trustees Meeting on: 5th January 2026