

HAMILTON COLLEGE COMPLAINTS POLICY AND RESOLUTION PROCEDURES

1. Introduction

The school sees it as important to respond positively and openly to expressions of concern or dissatisfaction from parents or pupils. Any issue from staff which cannot be resolved by discussion and negotiation may be taken through existing channels, such as the Line Manager, the Staff Council or the grievance procedure, as per staff employment contracts and the staff handbook. The points below relate to approaches from people **other than** staff of the College.

2. Aim of the Complaints Policy

This policy aims to reassure anyone making a complaint that his/her concern will be taken seriously, investigated and acted on appropriately with due feedback given on the outcome. Procedures associated with the policy are likely to cover a wide range of issues, and this brief policy statement is followed by guidance on procedures.

3. What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction. This may result, for example, if an individual feels that the school has:

- done something wrong
- failed to do something it should have
- acted unfairly
- been impolite
- not given due consideration to a matter

A complaint may focus on the school as a whole, on a department, on an issue, or on a member of staff. Not every concern raised will be a complaint, particularly if it is dealt with seriously and sensitively at an early stage, then, it is likely to have a satisfactory outcome. After due investigation, a complaint may be found to be justified (in which case the school would offer an apology and appropriate action would be taken), or it may be found to be unjustified (in which case the position would be explained courteously to the complainant). If no action were possible after the situation has been thoroughly investigated, again the position would be explained. In certain circumstances, it may be appropriate for the complainant to be asked to clarify their concern in writing.

4. Sources of Complaint

Schools may receive complaints from parents (or guardians), pupils, or members of the public. Parents will often raise issues on behalf of their child and may speak or write to the class/form teacher, or contact a member of the SLT. Pupils in both Junior and Senior Schools may approach their teacher, guidance teacher or in the case of aftercare, the aftercare manager. The School Councils in both Junior and Senior Schools provide a useful forum for discussion. Occasionally, the school receives a complaint from a member of the public. Anonymous complaints will be noted, but are obviously difficult to respond to. If the complainant identifies him/herself, the complaint can be dealt with more directly.

Complainants should note that any abuse of staff will not be tolerated.

5. Initial Contact

Most often a member of the office staff will be the first person to receive the complaint. This first point of contact is crucial in resolving the complaint appropriately. In the first instance the complainant should feel confident that they are being taken seriously and that the complaint will be investigated.

The person at this first point of contact should take a note of the complaint on the appropriate complaints form, taking contact details and reassuring the complainant that his/her concern/complaint will be passed on to the appropriate person.

6. Resolving a Complaint

Any concern or complaint will be:

- recorded
- taken seriously, and information given about how it will be handled
- received in an open and positive manner
- acknowledged as soon as possible, certainly within 48 hours even if the resolution may take longer
- dealt with in a confidential manner with information restricted to those directly involved
- followed up by action that is fair and appropriate.

A complaint may be resolved by explaining to the complainant another of the school's existing policies, such as bullying or child protection.

Complaints should be referred to the appropriate level so that there is a clear progression in the event of dissatisfaction at the original handling of the complaint. If the original concern/complaint is handled appropriately at the first level then often it will be quickly and easily resolved and there will be no need for further investigation.

In Junior School the order should be:

- Class teacher/Aftercare manager
- Head of Department/Deputy Head of Junior School
- Vice Principal Junior School
- Principal
- Governors

In Senior School the order should be:

- Class teacher
- Head of Department/Pupil Support
- Vice Principal (depending on nature of the complaint, either by stage of pupil, or by link department)
- Principal
- Governors

7. Unresolved Complaints

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the response from the person handling the complaint, this situation should be referred to the appropriate more senior member of staff (see section 6 above). Complainants themselves may take the initiative in referring upwards.

8. Appeals

Complainants may decide to take further a complaint which they feel has not been resolved to their satisfaction. If so, they would refer to the Principal. In certain circumstances, they may decide to complain to the Chairman of the Board, whose contact address is c/o the school.

9. Dissemination

This policy will be made available to staff on Moodle and to parents and other interested parties, on the school web site.

Appendix 1

1. Introducing and Reviewing the policy

This policy has been the subject of consultation with teaching and support staff, and duly amended in the light of that. After a suitable period, it will be reviewed and amended as necessary in the light of experience.

SLT will monitor the complaints log drawing the attention of the Principal to any trends or patterns which may become apparent. HMIE may also request information about the frequency of complaints at the school's next inspection.

2. Staff Development

The SCIS Guidelines for Complaints Procedures (2003 edition) contain useful background information. The booklet is relatively short and quick to read. It is available in the library. In-service training for all staff will continue, including the office staff, who are most likely to be the first point of contact for the person making the complaint.

3. Monitoring

Irrespective of the source, the complaint should be logged. A central log is held by the Principal's PA, and information is communicated by the person dealing with the complaint. While there may be notes or correspondence relating to any individual complaint, only brief details should be given in the central log. These should indicate the date, the complainant, the nature of the complaint, the means of resolving the complaint, and the time (in days) taken to respond. It should also be made clear where the relevant papers are filed, should there be a need for follow-up in future.

Principal

Reviewed May 2009