WHOLE SCHOOL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

1. Introduction

1.1 New Hall School prides itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its students. Therefore, if parents/guardians have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School with care and in accordance with this procedure.

1.2 This procedure is made available to all parents/guardians of current students on the School's website *http://www.newhallschool.co.uk/Policies* and in the School office during the School day. Parents are made aware of this procedure in the *Early Years Information Booklet, Preparatory Divisions Information Booklet, Girls' & Boys' Divisions Handbook* and the *Sixth Form Student Information Booklet*. New Hall School will ensure that parents of students and of prospective students who request it, are made aware that this document is published or available and of the form in which it is published or available.

In accordance with paragraph 32(1)(b) of Schedule 1 to the *Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014*, New Hall School will make available to parents/guardians of students and of prospective students and provide, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate, details of the Complaints Procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding School year.

1.3 The School has a separate procedure for complaints by boarding students, which is made available on its website.

1.4 The dates of terms are published on the School's website.

2. Eligibility

2.1 The Whole School Complaints Procedure applies to parents/guardians of current students. Therefore, the process does not apply to complaints from parents/guardians of prospective students or students who have left (except in cases where the complaints process was initiated when the student was being educated at the School).

2.2 This procedure does not cover complaints from parents of students who have left the School as a result of being excluded (except in cases where the complaints process was started when the student was still being educated at the School or in exceptional circumstances the School agrees that such a procedure may be used). If a student has left the School, the parents must keep to the timescales set out in this procedure, which includes a maximum of 10 working days between outcomes of a Stage being notified and a request to move to the next Stage.

3. What constitutes a complaint?

3.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. A complaint is usually made in writing. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a current parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School is within the scope of this procedure. 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.

3.2 Parents/guardians can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The School is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you or your child raises in good faith.

4. Confidentiality and record keeping in relation to complaints

4.1 A written record will be kept of all formal complaints, and of whether they were resolved at Stage 2 or proceeded to a Complaints Panel Hearing, including the action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether it is upheld) and whether the complaint relates to the School's boarding provision.

4.2 Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except in so far as is required of the School by the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the *Education and Skills Act 2008*, or where disclosure is required as a result of any other legal obligation to which the School is subject.

5. Stage 1 – Initial complaints/concerns raised, whether made by the complainant verbally (informally) or in writing

5.1 It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved in a timely manner and effectively. Complaints should be raised in a timely way (as soon as possible in relation to the incident and normally within three months). Historic complaints, other than safeguarding issues, are unlikely to be investigated if the issues relate to a period of more than six months previously.

5.2 If parents/guardians have a complaint, they should normally contact their child's Form Tutor/Class Teacher, Head of Department/Subject Leader, or Head of Boarding, making it clear that they wish to make a complaint. The most appropriate person to lead the review of the complaint should be identified by the School, as well as whether an Investigating Officer is required (who should be a different person and not have any conflict of interest with the matter under investigation). If the complaint is of a more serious nature (e.g. regarding the professionalism of staff, significant injury of a child), the Head of Division would then take the lead role in the process to resolve the complaint. The lead reviewer should write to the parent, via email, to acknowledge the date that the complaint has been received. They should summarise their understanding of the complaint/concern, to ensure that this is clear to both parties. They should explain that they are leading the review, state whether the matter requires investigation and, if so, who will be doing this, and give a timescale for the response.

5.3 The complaint lead should complete the sections of the Stage 1 log (overseen by the Senior Administrator to the Vice Principals).

5.4 Complaints made directly to the Principal will usually be referred to the relevant member of staff unless, either the Principal deems it appropriate for her to deal with the matter personally in the first instance, or the parents/guardians have specifically requested review by the Principal and there is good reason for agreeing to this at the first stage.

5.5 If a complaint is made in term time, the member of staff dealing with the complaint will contact the parents/guardians, **in writing**, to acknowledge its receipt within five working days of receiving the complaint. In the case of staff unavailability (e.g. due to a School

trip), it is recommended that the Senior Administrator to the Vice Principals is copied in on any email or is separately notified of the matter.

5.6 Within 10 working days of the acknowledgement of the complaint, the member of staff dealing with the matter will investigate the complaint and **write** to the parents/guardians with the outcome. If it also helpful to have a conversation with the parents/guardians to resolve the matter (before or after issuing the written outcome), this can be done in addition to the written outcome.

5.7 If the feedback has been verbal, the formal **written conclusion** to the investigation is to be communicated within seven working days of any meeting/telephone discussion.

5.8 The member of staff dealing with the complaint will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within the timescale notified to parents, or in the event that the parents are not satisfied with the outcome at this stage, they may choose to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure. Any request to proceed to Stage 2 must be made within 10 working days of receiving the outcome of Stage 1, in order that closure may be brought to any outstanding matter within a reasonable timeframe. (In exceptional circumstances, e.g. serious illness, the School has discretion to consider a request to proceed to Stage 2 that exceeds this timeframe). The request should set out the details of the complaint, and why the Stage 1 outcome is not accepted, which the Principal is asked to consider. The outcome sought should also be stated.

5.9 If, however, the complaint is against the Principal, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors.

6. Stage 2 - Complaints/concerns not resolved at Stage 1

6.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis then the parents/guardians should state their complaint formally to the Principal. Where possible, it is expected that the complaint will be set out in writing.

6.2 The Principal will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

6.3 The Stage 2 complaint will be acknowledged in writing within five working days of receipt, although the timescale may be extended if the complaint is received during a School holiday.

6.4 In term time, in most cases, the Principal will meet or speak to the parents, within seven working days of acknowledging the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. Once the Principal is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents/guardians will be informed of this decision in writing. The Principal will also give reasons for her/his decision.

6.5 It may be necessary for the Principal to carry out further investigations. In this case, the Principal will nominate an Investigating Officer (IO), who will be a member of the Senior Leadership and School Management Team (SLMT) not previously involved at Stage 1.

6.6 The IO will investigate the complaint within 15 working days of the acknowledgement of the complaint in term time (n.b. this may be longer in the School holidays); the follow up

meeting with parents/guardians will also take place within this timescale. The parents/guardians will be invited for a meeting with the Principal and the IO.

6.7 Following the Stage 2 meeting, the Principal will make a decision regarding the outcome and any actions to be taken, to be confirmed in writing to the parents/guardians within seven working days in term time (as well as to the person whom the complaint is about, if applicable).

6.8 The Principal will inform the Chair of Governors of the nature of the formal complaint and the outcome of Stage 2. The details of the complaint will not be shared with the whole governing body, except in very general terms, in case a Complaints Panel needs to be organised.

6.9 Parents of students in the EYFS setting will be notified of the outcome of their complaint within 28 days of the complaint being received.

6.10 The Principal will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

6.11 If the complaint is against the Principal, the Chair of Governors will call for a full report from the Principal and for all the relevant documents. The Chair of Governors may also call for a briefing from members of staff, and will in most cases, speak to, or meet with the parents/guardians to discuss the matter further. Once the Chair of Governors is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents/guardians will be informed of the decision in writing within seven working days. The Chair of Governors will give reasons for her/his decision.

6.12 If parents/guardians are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

7. Stage 3 - Panel Hearing

7.1 If parents/guardians seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), this request should be made in writing where possible, addressed to the Chair of Governors. Such a request will usually only be considered after the procedures at Stages 1 and 2 have been completed. Any request to proceed to Stage 3 must be made within 10 working days of receiving the outcome of Stage 2, in order that closure may be brought to any outstanding matter within a reasonable timeframe. The request should set out the details of the complaint, together with the outcome sought, which the Panel is asked to consider. The request should set out the details of the complaint, which the Panel is asked to consider. The specific wording of the complaint may be different from that raised at Stage 2, but the substance of the complaint should remain the same. Parents/guardians may introduce new information at this Stage, but it must be relevant to the original complaint.

7.2 The request for a panel hearing should include:

- a copy of all relevant documents and full contact details;
- details of all the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired;
- a list of the documents which the parents/guardians believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Complaints Panel to see;
- whether they propose to be accompanied to the hearing and by whom and
- if assistance with the request is required, for example because of a disability.

7.3 The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. The Chair of Governors will not be a member of the Complaints Panel and at least one panel member will be independent of the management and running of the School. The Clerk to the Governors, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place; in term time this will take place within 20 working days.

7.4 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. Copies of such particulars, together with any documents the parents/guardians have requested the Panel to see, shall be supplied to all parties not later than 10 working days prior to the hearing.

7.5 Both parents/guardians may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish, for support. This may be a relative or friend, who must be independent of the complaint. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.

7.6 If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents'/guardians' complaint without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.

7.7 After due consideration of all facts that they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings and may make recommendations.

7.8 The Chair of the Panel will write to the parents/guardians informing them of the Panel's decision and the reasons for it, within 10 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/guardians, and, where relevant, the person complained about as well as the Chair of Governors and the Principal. 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 Principal.

7.9 The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the School's Complaints Procedure.

8. Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

8.1 All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. They will be acknowledged within five working days, if received during term time, and as soon as practicable during School holiday periods.

8.2 It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the School's target is to complete Stage 2 of the procedure within 22 working days from the written acknowledgement. Stage 3, the Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further 25 working days. In exceptional circumstances, where a complaint is particularly complex, or key witnesses are unavailable, it may be necessary to allow some additional time for the investigation. Where this is necessary, the revised timescale will be discussed and agreed with parents/guardians in advance and confirmed in writing.

8.3 For the purposes of this procedure, 'working days' refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday). Timescales may be longer for complaints made during the School holidays. Parents should note that the School closes during the Christmas, Easter and summer breaks, so it may not be possible to investigate and process complaints during these times. If the parent wishes to have acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint, they should contact

Reception, who will endeavour to respond. The dates of terms are published on the School's website.

In summary:

Stage 1	Written acknowledgement of complaint within **five working days**
	Investigation and communication of Stage 1 outcome (meeting/telephone/letter/ email, as appropriate) within **10 working days** of the acknowledgement
	*If the feedback has been verbal, the formal written conclusion to the investigation is to be communicated within **seven working days** of any meeting/telephone discussion.*
Stage 2	Written acknowledgement of complaint sent within **five working days.**
	The Principal will meet or speak to the parents/guardians, within **seven working days** of acknowledging the complaint. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
	If further investigations are needed, an Investigating Officer (IO) will be nominated. The IO will investigate the complaint within **15 working days** of acknowledging the complaint in term time; the follow up meeting with parents/guardians will also take place within this timescale.
	Following the Stage 2 meeting, a decision regarding the outcome and any actions to be taken. This will be confirmed in writing to the parents/guardians within **seven working days** of the Stage 2 meeting in term time.
Stage 3	Written acknowledgement of complaint sent by the Clerk to Governors within **five working days;** a Stage 3 Complaints Panel hearing will be scheduled to take place **within 20 working days from the acknowledgement (this may be longer in School holidays)**
	The documents for the hearing will be supplied to all parties **not later than 10 working days** prior to the hearing.
	The Chair of the Panel will write to the parents/guardians informing them of the Panel's decision and the reasons for it, **within 10 working days of the hearing.**

9. Recording Complaints

9.1 Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all Stage 2 complaints, whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or proceed to a panel hearing and any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld). At the School's discretion, additional records may be kept which may contain the following information:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Names of parents/guardians
- Name of student
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name of member/s of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of telephone conversations)

All records will be kept in accordance with the School's *Data & Records Retention Policy.*

9.2 The number of formal complaints in the preceding School year received by the School is available on request from the Executive Assistant.

9.3 Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

9.4 New Hall School will provide ISI/Ofsted, on request, with a written record of all formal 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 for at least three years.

10. Complaints to Ofsted or the Independent Schools Inspectorate

10.1 Although the School is inspected by ISI, an independent organisation which reports to the Government on schools, parents of children in the Early Years Setting have the right to contact Ofsted if they have a complaint that has not concluded to their satisfaction through the School's procedure.

10.2 Such parents can report their concerns to Ofsted on 0300 123 4666 or by email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

10.3 All other parents have the right to contact the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) if they have a complaint that has not concluded to their satisfaction through the Whole School Complaints Procedure. ISI can be contacted at concerns@isi.net, on 020 7600 0100 or at the following address:
Independent Schools Inspectorate
CAP House
9 - 12 Long Lane
London
EC1A 9HA
ISI may also be contacted on 020 7600 0100 or by email: concerns@isi.net

10.4 It is expected that complaints made under this Policy will go through the School's Complaints Procedure before Ofsted or ISI is contacted.