DANES HILL SCHOOL

Complaints Procedure Policy

This policy applies to the Prep School and Pre-Prep School, including the EYFS

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1. Statement of Intent

1.1 Danes Hill School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care it provides. Where parents have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated with care and in accordance with this policy. The school aims to resolve all complaints at the earliest possible stage and, where possible, informally.

1.2 This Complaints Procedure is published on the school's website and is available from the school Office during the school day. On request, the school will tell parents of pupils where and in what form this procedure is published, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

1.3 In accordance with paragraph 32 of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the school will make available on request to the Department for Education (DfE), the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and Ofsted details of this procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

1.4 This policy sets out a clear, impartial and fair process which respects the confidentiality and rights of complainants and of those complained about.

1.5 A complaint may be resolved or withdrawn at any stage.

2. Legal Framework and Other Policies

2.1 This policy has due regard to the relevant legislation and guidance, including:

- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Schedule 1, Part 6 (paragraph 32) and Part 7 (paragraph 33)
- Education and Skills Act 2008
- Education Act 2002
- Equality Act 2010
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018 (as amended by the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025)
- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework 2026
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026
- Information sharing to safeguard children and young people (DfE statutory guidance, updated September 2026)
- Independent School Standards Guidance 2026
- ISI Inspection Framework and Handbook.

2.2 This policy operates alongside the school's:

- Admissions Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Behaviour and Rewards Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Overarching Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notice
- Information and Records Retention Policy

- Staff Code of Conduct
- Parent Terms and Conditions

3. Definitions and Scope

3.1 A "complaint" is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken by the school or a lack of action.

3.2 Every concern or complaint will be taken seriously, whether raised formally or informally. Unreasonable and vexatious complaints are addressed in Section 11.

3.3 A "duplicate complaint" is a complaint identical to one already dealt with, received from the original complainant's spouse, partner or child. It will not be investigated again, and the person making it will be told that the complaint has already been dealt with and of the outcome, where appropriate.

3.4 "School days" means weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays and school holidays. "Working days" means Monday to Friday, excluding bank holidays, and includes school holidays. Unless stated otherwise, all timescales in this policy are in school days.

3.5 This procedure applies to complaints from parents of pupils currently at the school. It also applies to complaints from parents of pupils who have left where the complaint was made while the pupil was still a pupil at the school.

3.6 This procedure does not apply to:

- prospective pupils, including decisions not to offer a place (see the Admissions Policy);
- safeguarding concerns or allegations of harm against a member of staff, supply staff, volunteer or contractor. These are dealt with under the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Part 4 of Keeping Children Safe in Education, which may involve referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). If a safeguarding issue arises during a complaint, the complaint may be paused while the safeguarding process takes place;
- staff grievances and disciplinary matters (see the relevant staff policies);
- complaints about how the school uses or handles personal data. These are dealt with under the Overarching Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notice. Under the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025, from 19th June 2026 the school must acknowledge a data protection complaint within 30 days, investigate it without undue delay, keep the complainant informed and tell them the outcome [confirm that the Data Protection Policy sets out this process];
- whistleblowing by staff (see the Whistleblowing Policy).

3.7 Where a complaint relates to one of these matters and also raises separate issues about the school's actions, those separate issues will be considered under this procedure.

4. Overview of the Procedure

4.1 The procedure has three stages:

Stage	What happens	Who deals with it	Target timescale
Stage 1 – Informal	Concern raised in person, by phone or by email	Form Teacher or subject lead, then Head of Year, Section Head or Deputy Head	Acknowledged within 2 school days; resolved within 10 school days
Stage 2 – Formal	Complaint put in writing	The Head (or the Chair of Governors, see Section 6)	Meeting and investigation within 20 school days; written decision within a further 7 school days
Stage 3 – Panel hearing	Written request for a hearing	Complaints Panel of three, one independent	Request within 15 school days of the Stage 2 decision; hearing within 20 school days; written decision within 7 school days

EYFS complaints have an overriding 28-day limit (Section 5).

4.2 Most concerns are resolved quickly and informally, and parents are encouraged to raise matters early.

4.3 The school will make reasonable adjustments to help any complainant use this procedure, including those with a disability or additional needs. For example, it can accept a complaint made verbally and record it in writing, provide documents in an alternative format, or adjust meeting arrangements. Parents should contact the School Office to request an adjustment.

4.4 Timescales may be longer during school holidays, periods of significant disruption, or unavoidable staff absence. Such extensions will be exceptional during term time. If a timescale needs to be extended, the school will write to the parents with the reason and a revised date. The school asks parents to engage with the process reasonably and promptly so that complaints can be resolved within the target timescales.

5. Complaints Relating to the EYFS

5.1 Parents of EYFS pupils may use all three stages of this procedure.

5.2 The School will investigate any written complaint relating to its fulfilment of the EYFS requirements and will notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 calendar days of receiving the complaint. This

28 day limit applies whichever stage the complaint is at, and it overrides the other timescales in this policy, including during school holidays.

5.3 Parents may complain directly to Ofsted or ISI at any time, without first using this procedure, if they believe the school is not meeting the EYFS requirements. Contact details are in Section 13.

5.4 In all matters, the welfare and best interests of the child remain central to the handling of any complaint

5.5 The School will keep a written record of all complaints relating to the EYFS, the action taken as a result, and the outcome. It will provide Ofsted and ISI, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period and the action taken in each case. Records are kept in line with the School's Privacy Notice and Information and Records Retention Policy.

6. Complaints about the Head or Governors

6.1 A complaint about the Head should be put in writing to the Chair of Governors, via the Clerk to the Governors (clerk@daneshillschool.co.uk). The Chair of Governors, or another governor they nominate who has had no involvement in the matter, will deal with it under Stage 2 in place of the Head. The Stage 2 timescales still apply.

6.2 A complaint about the Chair of Governors should be sent to the Clerk to the Governors, who will pass it to the Vice-Chair [confirm role] to deal with under Stage 2.

6.3 A complaint about any other individual governor should be sent to the Chair of Governors via the Clerk.

6.4 A complaint about the Governing Body as a whole should be sent to the Clerk to the Governors. The Clerk will arrange for it to be considered by a person or persons independent of the Governing Body and of the management and running of the school [confirm arrangement].

6.5 In every case, if the complaint is not resolved at Stage 2, the parents may request a Stage 3 Panel hearing. No person who dealt with the complaint at Stage 2, or who is the subject of the complaint, may sit on the Panel.

7. Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

7.1 Parents should first raise any concern with their child's Form Teacher or the subject lead concerned, in person, by email or by telephone.

7.2 If the Form Teacher cannot resolve the matter, they will refer it to the Head of Year, who will try to resolve it with the parents. The Head of Year may seek support from the Section Head or the relevant Deputy Head.

7.3 Where a concern relates to behaviour which, under the Behaviour Policy, warrants it, it may be taken straight to the Section Head or the Deputy Head Pastoral.

7.4 Parents who have exhausted these routes may also raise the matter informally with the Head at Stage 1 and are encouraged to do so before making a formal complaint.

7.5 The School will aim to acknowledge the concern within 2 school days and tell parents how it will be investigated.

7.6 The School will aim to reach an agreed resolution within 10 school days, unless circumstances require an extension (see paragraph 4.4).

7.7 The member of staff dealing with the concern will keep a written record of it, the date it was received, the steps taken and the outcome.

7.8 Once the concern has been dealt with, the school will write to the parents by letter or email confirming how the issue has been handled and the outcome.

7.9 If the concern is not resolved to the parents' satisfaction, they will be told how to make a formal complaint at Stage 2.

8. Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

8.1 A complaint becomes a formal Stage 2 complaint when the parents put it in writing to the Head (or, for complaints about the Head or governors, as set out in Section 6). This applies even if the Head was involved informally at Stage 1. A minor concern that is repeated, where the parents are clearly not satisfied with the school's response, should also be raised as a formal complaint.

8.2 The written complaint should set out what the complaint is about, the steps already taken to resolve it, and the outcome the parents are seeking.

8.3 The Head will acknowledge the complaint within 5 school days and will usually meet the parents to discuss it. Parents are not normally accompanied or represented at this meeting, although a reasonable adjustment will be considered under paragraph 4.3.

8.4 The Head may carry out or appoint a senior member of staff to carry out further investigation. The Head decides how any investigation is conducted.

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

8.6 The Head will aim to complete the investigation within 20 school days of receiving the complaint. Once the relevant facts have been established as far as practicable, the Head will make a decision and inform the parents in writing, with reasons, within a further 7 school days.

8.7 The decision letter will explain how to request a Stage 3 Panel hearing if the parents remain dissatisfied, and the deadline for doing so.

9. Stage 3 – Complaints Panel Hearing

Requesting a hearing

9.1 Parents who remain dissatisfied after Stage 2 may request a Panel hearing. They should write to the Chair of Governors via the Clerk to the Governors (clerk@daneshillschool.co.uk) within 15 school days of receiving the Stage 2 decision, setting out the grounds of the complaint and the outcome sought, with any supporting evidence.

9.2 The Clerk may extend this deadline where there is good reason, such as illness or other exceptional circumstances. A late request received without good reason may be declined, and the parents will be told in writing why.

The Panel

9.3 The Panel will consist of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one member will be independent of the management and running of the school. The Chair of Governors will appoint the Panel and one member to act as Panel Chair. Where the Chair of Governors has been involved in the complaint, the Clerk will arrange for another governor with no involvement to do so.

9.4 The Panel will consider the complaint afresh based on the evidence. It will also consider whether the Stage 2 decision was reasonable. The Panel decides how the hearing is conducted, in line with this policy.

Arrangements

9.5 The Clerk will acknowledge the request within 5 school days and will arrange a hearing within 20 school days of receiving it.

9.6 The Panel may ask for further details of the complaint or any related matter, or for further investigation, before the hearing. All documents the Panel will consider will be sent to all parties at least 5 school days before the hearing.

9.7 The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied by one other person, such as a relative, teacher or friend. The Head may also be accompanied by one other person. The hearing is not a legal proceeding, so legal representation is not appropriate, and companions should not act as legal representatives. The names of companions should be given to the Clerk at least 5 school days before the hearing. The Panel will decide whether witnesses should attend.

9.8 The School will make reasonable arrangements to allow the parents to attend. If the parents choose not to attend, the hearing will still take place, and the Panel will consider the complaint on the written evidence.

9.9 If the parents cannot attend the proposed date, they should tell the Clerk in writing within 5 school days of receiving the invitation, suggesting alternative dates. Cancellations with less than 48 hours' notice will be accepted only in exceptional circumstances, at the Panel's discretion. If a second date cannot be kept, a third date will be offered. The hearing will go ahead on that date whether or not the parents attend.

9.10 A note-taker will attend. The notes will not be verbatim but will accurately reflect the discussion and will be shared with attendees as soon as practicable. Any comments on the notes will be considered by the Panel Chair and attached to the notes.

Findings and recommendations

9.11 Having considered the complaint and all relevant facts, the Panel will make findings and may:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- make recommendations.

9.12 The Panel will write to the parents with its findings, any recommendations, and the reasons for its decision within 7 school days of the hearing. If further investigation is needed after the hearing, the Panel will tell the parents and give a revised date.

9.13 A copy of the findings and recommendations will be sent, by email or otherwise, to the parents and, where relevant, to the person complained about. A copy will also be sent to the Chair of Governors and the Head.

9.14 A copy of the findings and recommendations will be kept available for inspection on the School premises by the proprietor (the Governing Body) and the Head.

9.15 The Panel's decision is final and concludes the school's complaints procedure.

Exclusions and required removal

9.16 A request to review a decision by the Head to exclude a pupil or require their removal under the Behaviour Policy will be heard under this Stage 3. Given the urgency of such cases, the school may shorten the timescales in this section and will tell the parents in writing if it does. The requirements for Panel composition, attendance and accompaniment, and written findings in paragraphs 9.3 to 9.14 will always apply.

10. Closure of Complaints and Further Escalation

10.1 Occasionally the School will close a complaint while the complainant remains dissatisfied. It is not always possible to meet all a complainant's wishes, and there may need to be an agreement to disagree.

10.2 Once a complaint has completed this procedure, the school may decline further correspondence with it, including calls, letters, emails and personal approaches. It will do so only when it has taken all reasonable steps to resolve the complaint. The school will tell the complainant in writing that the matter is closed.

10.3 The Department for Education (DfE) regulates independent schools. It cannot investigate or overturn the outcome of individual complaints about independent schools. Parents may contact the DfE if they believe the school has not met the Independent School Standards, including the standard on handling complaints. The DfE may ask the inspectorate to take the matter into account at the school's next inspection, or act on serious failings. Parents can contact the DfE using the online school complaints form on GOV.UK.

10.4 Parents may also tell ISI about concerns that the school is not meeting the regulatory standards. For EYFS matters, parents may also contact Ofsted (see Section 5). ISI does not adjudicate on individual complaints, but may take concerns into account in its regulatory work. Contact details are in Section 13.

11. Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints and Serial or Persistent Complainants

11.1 The School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and will not normally limit a complainant's contact with the school. However, staff are not expected to tolerate behaviour that

is abusive, offensive or threatening, or that breaches the Parent Terms and Conditions, and the School will act to protect them.

11.2 Serial or unreasonable complainants are those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contact with the school, hinder the consideration of their own or other people's complaints.

11.3 A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable where the complainant, for example:

- refuses to articulate the complaint, its grounds or the outcome sought, despite offers of help;
- refuses to co-operate with the investigation while still wanting the complaint resolved;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are outside the scope of this procedure;
- insists on the complaint being handled in ways incompatible with this procedure, the Behaviour Policy or good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information and expects it to be addressed, or raises large numbers of detailed questions and insists on full, immediate answers;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff dealing with the matter and seeks their replacement;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint after it has been addressed;
- refuses to accept the outcome after this procedure has been fully and properly completed;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on staff time through frequent, lengthy or complicated contact while the complaint is being dealt with.

11.4 A complaint may be considered vexatious where it is made, in any form:

- maliciously or aggressively;
- using threats, intimidation or violence;
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- knowing it to be false, or using falsified information;
- by publishing unacceptable information, including on social media or in the press, to cause distress or disruption;
- excessively and persistently, with the aim of harassment.

11.5 Before treating a complaint as unreasonable or vexatious, the Head or Chair of Governors will, where possible, discuss the concerns with the complainant informally. The school will take into account any disability or additional needs that may affect the complainant's behaviour.

11.6 If the behaviour continues, the Head will write to the complainant explaining how it breaches the Parent Terms and Conditions and asking them to change it. Where contact causes significant disruption, the school may set out a communication plan limiting the method and frequency of contact. Any plan will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

11.7 Treating a complainant's behaviour as unreasonable does not prevent a genuinely new complaint from being considered under this procedure.

11.8 Any serious incident of aggression or violence will be recorded in writing immediately and reported to the police. This may lead to the individual being banned from the school site in line with the Parent Terms and Conditions.

12. Records, Confidentiality and Personal Data

Records

12.1 The School keeps a written record of all complaints made under the formal procedure (Stage 2), whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or proceed to a Panel hearing. The record includes any action taken by the school as a result, whether or not the complaint was upheld. The school also keeps records of Stage 1 concerns (paragraph 7.7) and of all EYFS complaints (paragraph 5.4).

12.2 Records of formal complaints are kept for 7 years. Where a complaint involves an allegation against a member of staff that raises safeguarding concerns, records are kept until the person's normal pension age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation, whichever is longer, in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education and the Information and Records Retention Policy.

Confidentiality

12.3 It will normally be in the interests of any child involved that the fact of a complaint, its subject matter and its outcome are kept confidential. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where access is requested by the Secretary of State for Education or by a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The EYFS complaints record will be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.

12.4 Disclosure may also be required where there is a legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligation, for example a referral to a statutory agency or a response to a subject access request. From 30th September 2026, the Information Sharing Duty (section 16LA of the Children Act 2004) also requires the school to share information relevant to safeguarding or promoting a child's welfare with other agencies where it may help them carry out their safeguarding functions; this applies to information arising from a complaint.

Personal data

12.5 The School, including any Panel member, processes personal data in line with its Privacy Notice (available on the website) and its Overarching Data Protection Policy. Information processed may include:

- the date the issue was raised;
- the names of the parent and pupil;
- a description of the issue;
- records of any investigation and witness statements;
- the names and contact details of staff handling the issue at each stage;
- copies of all correspondence, including emails and notes of phone calls;
- notes of any hearing and the Panel's written decision.

12.6 This may include special category of personal data, such as information about physical or mental health, where the nature of the complaint requires it.

13. Regulator Contact Details

13.1 Regulator contact details

Regulator	Telephone	Email	By post
Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI)	020 7600 0100	concerns@isi.net	CAP House, 9–12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA
Ofsted (EYFS complaints)	0300 123 4666	enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk	Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD
Department for Education	Online school complaints form on GOV.UK	https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe	Ministerial and Public Communication Division Department for Education Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD