



8c. Concerns & Complaints Policy

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Procedures for Dealing with Complaints

The British International School of Tunis (BIST) undertakes to provide a friendly and safe environment in which pupils will be supported in achieving their potential, both academically and socially. We recognise, however, that sometimes parents, carers and members of the public may wish to make a complaint or raise concerns they have with the school. This policy provides guidance about how to deal with any concerns.

Introduction

The majority of issues raised by parents, the community or pupils, are concerns rather than complaints. We are committed to taking concerns seriously, at the earliest stage. This enables us to reflect on the quality of our service to the wider school community and reduces the need to implement formal procedures. However, depending on the nature of the complaint, we may wish or need to follow the school's formal complaints procedure. For the school to be able to investigate a complaint, it needs to be made within one year of the incident occurring. If a complaint is older than a year it will not be investigated.

The prime aim of BIST's approach is to resolve the complaint as fairly and speedily as possible. Formal complaints will be dealt with in a sensitive, impartial and confidential manner. Malicious complaints may incur appropriate action by the school. Any complaints concerning the conduct of school staff will be handled in accordance with the school's internal disciplinary procedures such an investigation will remain confidential.

The following details outline the stages that can be used to resolve complaints.

Stage One - Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most concerns/complaints can be resolved quickly and informally.

Please note that it is the School that deals with Stage One concerns/complaints and no other body linked to the school such as the Governing Board or Proprietor (Britus Education).

Initial concerns and complaints should be raised through the pupil's class/form teacher. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straight away by this means and to the parents' satisfaction. If the class/form teacher is unable to resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult the Executive Principal, depending on the year group of the child. It is important for parents / carers to recognise that the school is a busy organisation and that whilst we will do our best, it may not be possible to offer an appointment immediately.

The class/form teacher should record any concerns and complaints that are raised and the date upon which they were received and ensure that a copy is placed on iSAMs. Should the matter not be resolved within 5 working days, parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage Two of the complaints procedure.

Stage Two - Formal Resolution

If the concern/complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then parents should **put this formally in writing or via email (labelled as *Concern or Complaint*)** to the Executive Principal. She will decide, after careful consideration, the appropriate course of action to take. This must be recorded in the 'Parent Concerns meetings' folder on iSAMs.

In most cases, the Executive Principal will write to, call or arrange to meet with the parents concerned within **3 school term time working days or 5 holiday days**. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. The complaint will be treated in a confidential manner, knowledge of it being confined to the Executive Principal and those directly involved. Depending upon the nature of the complaint, we cannot rule out entirely the requirement to make third parties outside the school aware of the complaint and, possibly, of the identities of those involved. Parents will be kept fully informed in these circumstances.

Following a meeting or telephone conversation, it may be necessary for the Executive Principal to conduct further investigations.

The Executive Principal will keep written records of all meetings, interviews and telephone conversations and will retain all communications (letters, notes, emails) relating to the complaint on iSAMs.

Once the Executive Principal is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents informed of this decision in writing. The Executive Principal will give reasons for his/her decision no longer than 7 school working days (during term time) or 10 holiday days after the first meeting unless there are further investigations which could delay this time frame and in which case the parents will be informed.

If parents remain dissatisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage Three of the complaints procedure.

School Holidays

Complaints may take longer as access to the member of staff may not be possible. Parents will be informed of this, when the first complaint or concern is made. The process will resume as soon as the member of staff involved is available. Where possible we will endeavour to keep to the timeframes mentioned above.

Stage Three - Panel Hearing

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response of the Executive Principal or the complaint is about the Executive Principal, a written complaint should be made to the Board of Governors, this will be sent to the Head of HR, who will inform the Board.

The matter will be referred to the Board of Governors for consideration. The Board will acknowledge the complaint and will schedule a meeting to take place as soon as practicable, normally within **10 working days**.

For all appeals relating to permanent exclusions, the appeal will immediately be raised to Stage 3 of this policy. See Behaviour Policy for more details on the circumstances leading to a permanent exclusion.

Convening the Panel

The Stage 3 review panel consists of two members of the Board of Governors and an appropriate member of staff, who don't have direct knowledge of the complaint. These individuals will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see below.) They will select a panel chair from among themselves.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. We aim to find a date within 10 school days of the request, where possible.

If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, we will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the meeting.

At the meeting

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied by a suitable companion if they wish. We don't encourage either party to bring legal representation, but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported, this will be communicated to all involved.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representatives have completed presenting their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

If the Chair of the Complaints Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the meeting. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than **3 working days prior to the meeting**. The parents may be accompanied to the meeting by one other person. This may be a relative, friend or teacher.

If possible, the Complaints Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately and without the need for further investigation.

Where further investigation proves necessary, the Complaints Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all the facts that are considered relevant, a decision will be made and the findings and recommendations will be complete within **10 working days of the meeting**. The Chair of the Complaints Panel will write to the parents informing them of the findings and recommendations and the reasons for it (the decision will be final).

The Chair's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Executive Principal, and where relevant, the person(s) complained of.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated with absolute confidentiality. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except insofar as it is required of the school by where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection; or where any other local legal requirements permit access.

A copy of the findings and recommendations will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Executive Principal.

A written record is kept of all formal complaints that are made and whether they were resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to the Chair and the subsequent action taken by the school as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld.)

NOTE

Allegations of abuse against a member of the school staff must be reported to the Executive Principal immediately. Allegations of abuse against the Executive Principal must be reported to the Governing Board immediately. See Safeguarding Policy for more details. The Governing Board will arrange for the matter to be investigated. In cases where the matter concerns the conduct of a member of the Board the member will be informed of the complaint.

Review

The Board will review this policy at least every two years and assess its implementation and effectiveness. The policy will be promoted and implemented throughout the school.

Record Keeping

- All complaints will be responded to in writing.
- At Stage 1 – even though this is an informal stage, the complainant will receive a reply in writing and a copy should be retained for reference.
- At Stages 2 and 3 – there should be clear communication in writing throughout the handling of the complaint. A copy of all written communication should be retained for reference.
- All records will be held on iSAMs with access limited to appropriate staff.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is vital. All conversations and correspondence will be treated with discretion. Complainants have the right to know what use will be made of personal information and, accordingly, personal information will only be shared between staff on a 'need to know' basis.

Data Protection

All information will be stored and disseminated in line with the Data Protection Policy. See Data Protection Policy.