



BRITANNICA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, SHANGHAI

## Concerns and Complaints Policy

August 2021

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 At Britannica we understand that feedback from our parents and pupils is an essential part of improving our organisation – from the education we deliver to the way we communicate with you, and right through to our organisational strategy. We want to encourage parents and pupils to give us feedback, even when the feedback might be something you are not happy about as we can only resolve issues or concerns if we know about them.
- 1.2 Britannica aims to ensure that any concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently, quickly and at the appropriate level and resolved as soon as possible. We will try to resolve every concern or complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, we will review our systems and procedures in light of the circumstances of the complaint.
- 1.3 We recognise that a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment and so we need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. Parents and pupils should never feel that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or his / her opportunities at this school. This policy distinguishes between a concern or difficulty which can be resolved informally and a formal complaint which will require investigation.
- 1.4 Parent(s) / You: Includes a current parent or legal guardian.
- 1.5 Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. When we refer to working days, we mean Monday to Friday, when the School is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website.
- 1.6 This policy relates specifically to parents of pupils attending Britannica International School, Shanghai.

#### 2.1 The School's complaints procedure has three stages:

2.2 **Stage 1** – Informal Concern: informal raising of a concern or difficulty with a member of staff orally or in writing

- the student or parent raises the concern with the Subject Teacher, Class Teacher or Form Tutor.

This is almost always the best and quickest way of resolving issues;

- the parent and Teacher agree an appointment for as soon as possible, to discuss the concern in an appropriate and informed manner and without being interrupted.

It is important to recognise that schools are busy organisations and that the Teachers' first commitment must be delivering their lessons to their students, so it may not be possible for a Teacher to see a parent immediately.

The purpose of this meeting will be to establish the nature of the concern and to seek or plan a realistic resolution to the problem;

- should the concern be an issue which is not appropriate for anyone other than the Principal to deal with, the Teacher will refer the parent directly to the Principal;

the Teacher will make a brief written record of the concern raised and any actions agreed on a Complaint Record form (**Appendix 2**).

**2.3 Stage 2 – Formal Complaint:** a formal complaint in writing to the Head of Phase- further details of how to make a formal complaint and the relevant procedures are set out below.

If the concern is beyond the Teacher to resolve or the parent is dissatisfied with the outcome of the discussions with the Teacher, s/he should arrange an appointment with the Head of Section.

- the purpose of this meeting will be to establish the nature of the ongoing concern, what has been discussed with the Teacher so far and any actions arising from the initial meeting(s).

The Head of Phasemay need to investigate what has happened since the initial meeting before s/he can assess how the concern might be resolved. In this case, it will be agreed how and within what timescale s/he will contact the parent to let him/her know the outcome of enquiries and the actions taken or planned;

- should the concern be an issue which is not appropriate for anyone other than the Principal to deal with, the Head of Phasewill refer the parent directly to the Principal;
- the Head of Phasewill make a brief written record of the concern discussed and what has been agreed;
- the Head of Phasewill obtain the initial Complaint Record form from the Teacher and complete the further sections from these notes OR will complete a Complaint Record form from his/her notes if the parent had gone to him/her directly;
- the Head of Phasewill e-mail the parent, summarising the concern, what has been agreed, and when to anticipate a response;
- the Head of Phasewill investigate the complaint and either resolve the complaint or set in motion the steps the reach resolution. This may involve consultation with other staff (such as the Teacher, the Principal and/or the Legal Representative) and the parent;

- the Head of Phase will notify the parent, by e-mail or in person (or by telephone only if no other means is possible), of the outcome and resolution of the concern, within the deadline communicated previously.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they were resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access is requested and is required in the course of a school's inspection or under other legal authority.

In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will be kept only for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in the circumstances.

### **Further action**

It is hoped that most problems will be resolved through the informal process. If not, or if it is not appropriate for anyone other than the Principal to deal with a particular concern, the matter will be referred to the Principal and resolved through the formal process.

### **3. Formal Procedures**

If a concern has not been resolved through the informal process – either the concern has been beyond the Teacher and Head of Phase to resolve or the parent is dissatisfied with the outcome and explanation from the Head of Phase – then formal procedures must be followed.

Raising a concern to the formal level is a serious step. In consideration of future home-school relationships, everyone involved will need to work together to find a resolution to the issue and negotiate an agreement as to how this can best be achieved.

#### **3.1 Stage 3: Principal**

##### **3.1.1 Initiating formal procedures**

To start formal procedures, the parent should put their concerns in writing to the Principal. This may be as a letter, delivered to the school and clearly marked '*For the attention of the Principal*', or as an e-mail to [topfarrell@educator.orbital.education](mailto:topfarrell@educator.orbital.education). The letter should set out clearly:

- the concern which has previously been discussed;
- why the parent considers that the issue is still unresolved;
- an indication of what outcome the parent is seeking or expecting.

##### **3.1.2 Investigation**

The Principal should immediately acknowledge receipt of the complaint but, before responding to it, must ensure that s/he understands the circumstances surrounding the matter. To do this, s/he will:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved (including obtaining the initial Parental Complaint record form from the Head of Section);
- clarify the nature of the complaint;
- identify what remains unresolved.<sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>

If the complaint involves criticism of a staff member, no action will be taken until a written statement has been obtained from him/her.

In addition to written evidence, the Principal will convene a meeting with the member of staff and the parent who has raised the complaint, in order to clarify outstanding points. This may include calling witnesses. The Principal will convene a similar meeting with staff members involved in the complaint. It may be helpful, with the agreement of all parties, for the Principal to call a joint meeting, with all parties being given the opportunity to present their case, call witnesses and ask questions.

At the above meeting(s), the Principal may also request the presence of the Head of Phase and/or the school's Legal Representative.

In these meetings, the Principal will:

- probe to elucidate further information about the concern, actions taken and actions proposed.<sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>
- clarify what the various parties would consider as appropriate to resolve the situation.<sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>
- explore potential resolutions;
- maintain an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- not express any judgements unless agreed by all parties together;
- make detailed written notes of each meeting.

### **3.1.3 Decision-making**

After meeting with all parties, the Principal will

- from his/her notes, add further comments to the original Complaint Record form OR (if the parent had raised the concern to him/her directly) will complete a Complaint Record form;
- consider the evidence and desired outcomes;
- consider the various means by which the concern could be resolved

and formulate a final solution to the concern or complaint.

### **3.1.4 Feedback**

The Principal will inform all parties of the decided outcome in writing within three working days. S/he may also convene a final meeting to go through the decision and, if required, advise on the right of Appeal.

The Principal will acknowledge if the complaint is valid in whole or in part, or if the complaint has not been substantiated and is therefore considered to be unfounded. S/he may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation;<sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
- an apology;<sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better [NOTE: this is not an admission of negligence];<sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur (with an explanation of any steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again);
- an undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint.

## **4 Anonymous Complaints**

4.1 In so far as we are able, we will manage anonymous complaints as we do any other complaint. If you are considering submitting an anonymous complaint you should be aware that there may be instances where our ability to investigate a complaint thoroughly could be hindered by a lack of information – including our ability to speak to you directly about your concerns. We will always investigate the complaint as far as we are able on the information given, however we will only feedback on the outcome of any investigation to a known parent of a pupil at the school. All investigations will be reported internally to the Regional Head of School for full oversight.

## **5 Expectations of Parents and the School**

5.1 Parents/carers/members of the public who raise either informal concerns or formal complaints with the school can expect the school to:

- a) Ensure that the Complaints policy and this policy are available
- b) Respond within a reasonable time;
- c) Be available for consultation within reasonable time limits bearing in mind the needs of the pupils within the school and the nature of the complaint;
- d) Respond with courtesy and respect;

e) Attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the school's complaints policy, other policies and practice

5.2 The school can expect parents who wish to raise concerns with the school to:

a) Treat all school staff with courtesy and respect;

b) Respect the needs and well-being of pupils and staff in the school;

c) Avoid any use, or threatened use, of violence to people or property;

d) Avoid any aggression, verbal abuse or other intimidating behaviour;

e) Ensure that written communications state the facts surrounding the concern without using threatening or unpleasant language.

f) Recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond; g) Recognise that resolving a specific problem can sometimes take some time.

## **6. Orbital Education**

Whilst Orbital Education is required to ensure that the school has a robust procedure for dealing with parental concerns and complaints in place, they are not the forum for parents to approach to raise or resolve concerns: these must be raised with the school. <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

Orbital Education will only become directly involved if they are requested to consider an Appeal from the parent or a staff member.

## **7. Specific concerns**

### **7.1 Concerns about, or allegations of, abuse**

Allegations of abuse against a member of Britannica staff must be reported to the Designated Senior Lead and the Principal immediately. Allegations of abuse against the Principal must be reported to the Designated Senior Lead and the Regional Head of Schools.

Full details about how allegations of abuse will be managed are laid out in the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and in the Staff Behaviour & Code of Conduct Policy, which can be found on the school's website.

### **7.2 Concerns or complaints about the Principal**

Should a parent have a complaint about the Principal, it should be addressed in writing directly to Orbital Education in the form of an e-mail to the school's designated RHoS (Regional Head of Schools) at [michael@orbital.education](mailto:michael@orbital.education), who will follow the informal procedure and, if necessary, the formal procedure.

NOTE: If a parent is unhappy with the decision the Principal has made about a complaint or that the complaint has not been resolved, this should not become a complaint about the Principal but should be dealt with through the Appeal process (see **Section 8**, below).

### **8. Right of Appeal**

If a parent or member of staff is unsatisfied with the outcome of the formal Complaints procedure, s/he has the right of appeal to Orbital Education.

Appeals must be submitted in writing to Orbital Education in the form of an e-mail to the designated RHoS at [michael@orbital.education](mailto:michael@orbital.education) within three working days of the initial decision, and will be considered jointly by at least three members of the Orbital management team.

Orbital Education will either uphold the resolution as it stands or instruct the Principal to revise the outcome. In the case of revising the outcome, Orbital Education will work with the Principal to formulate a new outcome.

The decision of Orbital Education is final and will be communicated to the parent or staff member who raised the complaint, to the Principal and, if relevant, to any staff member against whom the initial complaint was made, in writing within five working days.

All concerns should be successfully resolved by following through the various stages of the Complaints procedure. However, there may be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedure, including an Appeal, having been followed, the parent remains dissatisfied.

Unless there is significant new information, if the parent tries to reopen the same issue, the Principal and Orbital Education will jointly write to inform the parent that all stages of the procedure have been exhausted and the matter is considered to be closed.

### **9 Persistent Complainants**

9.1 For the purpose of this policy, a persistent complainant is a parent who complains about issues, either formally or informally, or frequently raises issues they consider to be within the remit of the school, and whose behaviour is unreasonable. Such behaviour may be characterised by:

- a) Actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
- b) Prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail or telephone contact about a concern or complaint;
- c) Uses Freedom of Information requests excessively and unreasonably
- d) An insistence upon pursuing unsubstantial complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes;
- e) An insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- f) An insistence on only dealing with the Principal on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the school to deal with such matters;

g) An insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but cannot be changed, for example, if the desired outcome is beyond the remit of the school because it is unlawful.

9.2 For the purpose of this policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions as in (a) to (g) above in such a way that they:

- a) Appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff and/or
- b) Cause on-going distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or
- c) Have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community and/or
- d) Are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health.

9.3 The School's Actions in cases of persistent or vexatious complaints or harassment:

9.3.1 In the first instance the school will communicate either in writing or verbally (confirmed with a letter) to inform the complainant that his / her behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable / unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this policy.

9.3.2 If the behaviour is not modified the school will take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:

- a) Inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this section of the policy;
- b) Inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties;
- c) Inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the school should be by letter only;
- d) In the case of physical, or verbal aggression or other forms of intimidating behaviour, take appropriate advice and consider warning the complainant about being banned from the school site; or proceed straight to a temporary ban;
- e) Consider taking advice from the HR / Legal Services about putting in place a specific procedure for dealing with complaints from the complainant, i.e. the complainant will not be able to deal directly with the Principal but only with a third person, to be identified by the Regional Head of Schools, who will

investigate, determine whether or not the concern / complaint is reasonable or vexatious and then advise the Principal accordingly.

9.3.3 In the event of extreme situations or events, the school may take the decision to move implementing one of the above steps immediately. In this situation the complainant will be informed in writing.

9.3.4 The Principal and SLT will keep the Regional Head of School informed at all times.

### **Contacting the Board**

Mr. M W Clack, Regional Head of Schools / Board member

Email: michael@orbital.education

c/o Ms.Catherine Huang(HR Manager) Britannica International School of Shanghai

**Address:** 1988 Gubei Lu Near Wuzhong Lu, Shanghai

**Phone:** +021 6402 7889

**Email:** [chuang@support.orbital.education](mailto:chuang@support.orbital.education)

**APPENDIX 1: Concerns and Complaints Process Flowchart**

<b>Informal Procedures</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Student/parent raises the concern with the Class Teacher</b>	⇒	<b>Teacher and parent agree actions to be taken</b>	⇒	<b>Class Teacher fills out the Complaint Record form</b>
	⇓	<b>If concern is beyond Teacher to resolve</b> OR <b>If the Parent is dissatisfied with the outcome</b>				⇓
	<b>2</b>	<b>Student/parent raises the concern with the Head of Section</b>	⇒	<b>Head of Phase and parent agree actions to be taken</b>	⇒	<b>Head of Phase adds to the Complaint Record form</b> OR <b>Head of Phase fills out the Complaint Record form</b>
			<b>OR</b>			
			⇒	<b>Head of Phase e-mails parent, indicating when to expect a response</b>  <b>Head of Phase investigates concern and any actions already taken</b>  <b>Head of Phase notifies parent of outcome and actions</b>	⇒	<b>Head of Phase adds to the Complaint Record form</b>
⇓	⇓	<b>If concern is beyond Head of Phase to resolve</b> OR <b>If the Parent is dissatisfied with the outcome</b>				⇓

<b>Formal Procedures</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Parent puts concern in writing to Principal</b>	⇒	<b>Principal e-mails parent, indicating when to expect a response</b>  <b>Principal investigates concern and any actions already taken</b>  <b>This will, if required, include meetings with the parties involved</b>  <b>Principal notifies all parties of outcome and actions</b>	⇒	<b>Principal adds to the Complaint Record form</b>
⇐	↓	<b>If the Parent or staff member is dissatisfied with the outcome</b>				↓
<b>Appeal</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Parent or staff member submits Appeal by e-mail to Orbital</b>	⇒	<b>Orbital investigates concern, actions taken and decision</b>  <b>This will include discussion with the Principal</b>  <b>Orbital notifies all parties of outcome: either upholding the Principal's decision or giving a new outcome.</b>		<b>This decision is Final</b>

## APPENDIX 2: Complaint Record Form

- *This form must be completed by any member of staff receiving a complaint,*
- *For Informal complaints, this should be sent to the Head of Section.*
- *For formal complaints, this should be sent to or completed by the Principal.*

Name of complainant:	Date complaint made:
Name of student: Relationship to student:	Class:
Nature of complaint: (summary)	
Informal procedures followed prior to starting formal procedures:	
Evidence supplied:	

Outcome and explanation:  (summary, as copy of notification to parents/staff member(s) should be attached)	
Decision made by:	Date:

Date appeal submitted:	Date of appeal panel:	Appeal panel members:
Outcome of Appeal and explanation:  (summary, as copy of notification to parents/staff member(s) should be attached)		

Complaints can be raised to any member of staff

Key Contacts:

Principal

[Principal@britannicashanghai.com](mailto:Principal@britannicashanghai.com)

Vice Principal and Head of Primary

[Katherine.Mustoe@britannicashanghai.com](mailto:Katherine.Mustoe@britannicashanghai.com)

Head of EYFS

[msmyth@educator.orbital.education](mailto:msmyth@educator.orbital.education)

Head of Secondary

[aobrien@educator.orbital.education](mailto:aobrien@educator.orbital.education)

Regional Head of School

[michael@orbital.education](mailto:michael@orbital.education)

**PREPARED/UPDATED BY:** Paul Farrell \_\_\_\_\_ 22 / 08 / 2021

**APPROVED BY:** Principal – P. Farrell 23 / 08 / 2021

Reviewed by Michael W Clack, Regional Head of Schools 24/ 08 / 2021

This Policy is to be reviewed **annually** and updated as and when changes occur.