

**The Mill Hill School Foundation**

**Walker House, Millers Close, The Ridgeway, Mill Hill,  
London NW7 1AQ**

**Mill Hill School**

**Belmont, Mill Hill Preparatory School**

**Grimsdell, Mill Hill Pre-Preparatory School**

## **Policy on the handling of concerns and complaints received from Parents and Pupils aged over 16 years**

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**Independent Co-educational Day School for Pupils aged 3 to 18  
years and Boarding School for Pupils aged 13 to 18 years**

**Effective May 2011**

## **The Mill Hill School Foundation**

### **Policy on the handling of concerns and complaints received from Parents and Pupils aged over 16 years**

#### **Definitions:**

- “School” : School will mean Mill Hill School, Belmont Mill Hill Preparatory School and Grimsdell Mill Hill Pre-preparatory School.
- “Head” : a. at Mill Hill School will mean the Headmaster of Mill Hill School.  
b. at Belmont Mill Hill Preparatory School will mean the Head of Belmont Mill Hill Preparatory School.  
c. at Grimsdell Mill Hill Pre-Preparatory School will mean the Head of Grimsdell Mill Hill Pre-Preparatory School.
- “Parent/You (Your)” : includes current or prospective parent or legal guardian or education guardian or a pupil aged 16+ at the School and may at the School’s discretion include a parent whose child has recently left the School.
- “Concern” : is a query or anxiety or dissatisfaction with an aspect of the School or its processes and procedures which is raised or otherwise brought to the attention of the School and which is resolved informally either orally or in writing.
- “Complaint” : is a concern that is not resolved informally but is made formally in writing and considered under the formal procedure as described in this policy or is raised directly to a member of the Senior Management Team, or to a Housemaster or Housemistress, or to a Head of Department and which requires investigation, or other significant input, by a member of the Senior Management Team. A record will be made of such formal complaints.

#### **Introduction**

1. **Circulation:** This policy is addressed to current or prospective parent/s or legal guardian/s or education guardian/s or a pupil aged 16+ at the School, and may at the School’s discretion include a parent/s whose child has recently left the School. The policy is available, upon request to the School Office, to the parents and prospective parents, pupils and staff at the School
2. **Policy Status:** The policy has been approved by the Head, the Bursar and the Court of Governors of the Mill Hill School Foundation. It provides guidelines for handling concerns and complaints. It takes account of Regulation 7 of the *Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003*. The procedures set out below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and circumstances of each case. Certain of the procedures can be carried out only during term time.
3. **Application:** Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue (see The Mill Hill School Foundation Policy to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children who are pupils at the School) or if the Head expels or asks a pupil to leave and the parents seek a Governors’ Review of that decision (see Paragraph 29 below).
4. **Four Stages:** This policy describes a four stage procedure:-
  - Stage 1** informal resolution of a concern or difficulty notified orally or in writing to a member of staff
  - Stage 2** a formal complaint in writing to the Head

**Stage 3** a renewed complaint in writing to the Chairman of the Court of Governors

**Stage 4** a reference to the Complaints Panel

A concern about the safety of your child should be notified immediately to the person you believe is best placed to take urgent action and should be confirmed in writing to the Head.

### Policy aim and statement

5. **Aim:** The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice, it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote parents' and pupils' confidence in the School's ability to safeguard and promote welfare. The School 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, reviewing systems and procedures in light of the circumstances.
6. **Policy statement:** The School need to know **as soon as possible** if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. The School recognise that a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, which would be damaging to relationships and also to the School culture. Parents and pupils should never feel – or be made to feel – that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or his/her opportunities at the School. The policy however distinguishes between a **concern or difficulty** which can be resolved informally and a **formal complaint** which will require investigation.

### Management of complaints

7. **Designated Person:** The Head has appointed a senior member of his/her staff, normally a Deputy Head ("Designated Person") to be responsible for investigating and resolving complaints. If the Designated Person is unavailable or is the subject of the complaint, his/her duties will be carried out by the Head or another senior member of staff designated by the Head. The main responsibilities of the Designated Person are to :-
  - 7.1 be the first point of contact while the matter remains unresolved and to keep records
  - 7.2 co-ordinate the complaints procedures in the School
  - 7.3 maintain an on-going training programme for all employees in relation to complaints
  - 7.4 monitor the keeping, confidentiality and storage of records in relation to complaints
  - 7.5 report regularly to the Head with respect to complaints
  - 7.6 to act as the Duty Officer at all times when the School is open with authority to take decisions relating to most matters of pastoral care and discipline. The Duty Officer can be contacted by telephone and e-mail, details of which are provided in the School Calendar.
8. **Complaint Form:** Every complaint notified to a member of staff will be noted, together with the action taken, on a standard form known as the Complaint Form. A sample of the form is attached to this policy.

### Stage 1 – concerns and difficulties

9. **Concerns:** The School expect that most concerns, where parent or pupil seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other action can be taken, can be resolved informally. Examples might include a dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, or about allocation of privileges or responsibilities, or about a timetable clash or some other aspect of the School's systems or equipment, or a billing error.
10. **Notification:** Please raise the concern initially as follows :-
  - 10.1 **Education issues** – if the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs at Grimsdell Mill Hill Pre-preparatory School or Belmont Mill Hill Preparatory School please speak or write to the Form Teacher, and at Mill Hill School please speak or write to the Housemaster/Housemistress or Designated Person as appropriate
  - 10.2 **Pastoral Care** – for concerns relating to matters outside the classroom or in the House at Grimsdell Mill Hill Pre-preparatory School please speak or write to the Form Teacher, at

- 10.3 Belmont Mill Hill Preparatory School please speak or write to the Head of Upper School or Head of Lower School as appropriate and at Mill Hill School please speak or write to the Housemaster/Housemistress or Designated Person as appropriate
- Disciplinary matters** – for a problem over any disciplinary action taken or sanction imposed at Grimsdell please speak or write to the Deputy Head, at Belmont Mill Hill Preparatory School please speak or write to the Head of Upper School or Head of Lower School as appropriate, and at Mill Hill School please speak or write to the Housemaster/Housemistress or Designated Person as appropriate.

11. **Acknowledgement:** The School will acknowledge a written notification by telephone, fax, e-mail or letter within five (5) working days of receipt within term time and as soon as practicable in the holidays. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing but a Complaint Form will be completed and a copy sent to the Designated Person.

### Stage 2 – formal complaint

12. **Notification:** An unresolved concern under Stage 1, or a complaint which needs investigation, or a dissatisfaction with some aspect of the School's policies, procedures, management or administration should be set out in writing with full details and sent with all relevant documents and your full contact details in an envelope addressed to the **Head** or to the **Designated Person**. Your complaint will be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within five (5) working days during term time, indicating the action that is being taken. A Complaints Form will be completed and sent to the Designated Person.
13. **Investigation:** The Designated Person or another senior member of staff designated by the Head will act as '**investigator**'. The investigator may request additional information from you and will probably wish to speak to you personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. The outcome of the investigation will be reported to the Head and you will then be notified in writing of his or her decision and the reasons for it. The investigation and notification of the decision will be made within 28 working days of the date of receiving the written complaint. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to your complaint.

### Stage 3 – reference to the Chairman of the Court of Governors

14. **Notification:** If you are dissatisfied with the Head's decision under Stage 2, your complaint may be renewed in writing to the Chairman of the Court of Governors. Your letter to the Chairman of the Court of Governors should be addressed to the Clerk to the Court of Governors, Walker House, Millers Close, The Ridgeway, Mill Hill, London NW7 1AQ and should give full details of your complaint and enclose all relevant documents and your full contact details. Your letter will normally be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within seven (7) working days during term time, indicating the action that is being taken
15. **Action by the Chairman of the Court of Governors:** The Chairman of the Court of Governors will arrange for your complaint to be investigated following procedures equivalent to those described in Stage 2 Investigation above and may involve one/more governors as '**investigator**'. When the Chairman of the Court of Governors is satisfied that he/she has established all the material facts and relevant policies, so far as is practicable, he will notify you in writing of his decision and the reasons for it. The investigation and notification of the decision will be made within 3 calendar months of the date the Clerk to the Court of Governors received the written complaint.

### Stage 4 – reference to the Complaints Panel

16. **Composition:** The School has constituted a Complaints Panel ("Panel") comprising members of the Court of Governors and members who are independent of the governance, management and running of the School. The Panel will consist normally of three individuals (and never fewer than three) who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint. One member of the Panel shall be an **independent member**.

17. **Notification:** To request a hearing before the Panel please write to the Clerk of the Court of Governors (“Clerk”) within seven (7) working days of the decision complained of. Your request will only be considered if you have completed the procedures at Stages 1 to 3. Please ensure that a copy of all relevant documents and your full contact details accompany your letter to the Clerk. Please state in your letter the outcome you that you desire and all the grounds of your complaint. Please also send the Clerk a list of documents which you believe to be in the School’s possession and wish the Panel to see. The Clerk will acknowledge your request in writing within seven (7) working days.
18. **Convening the Panel:** The Clerk will convene the Panel within 3 calendar months of the date the Clerk to the Court of Governors received the written request for a hearing but the Panel will not normally sit during half terms or School holidays. You may ask the Clerk to tell you who has been appointed to sit on the Panel. If you have a genuine reason for objecting to one or more members of the Panel then all reasonable efforts will be made to find alternative members; otherwise, by agreement, the Panel may be reduced to two or one in number.
19. **Notice of Hearing:** Within 3 calendar months of the date the Clerk to the Court of Governors received the written request for a hearing, the Clerk will send you written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing together with brief details of the Panel members who will hear it.
20. **Attendance:** You will be asked to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, teacher or friend. It is not necessary for that person to be legally qualified but if you do wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, acting in their professional capacity, please notify the School at least seven days before the hearing. Your child aged 13+ may attend part or all of the hearing at the discretion of the Chairman of the Panel. Copies of additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk at least **three clear days** prior to the hearing.
21. **Chairman of the Panel (“Chairman”):** The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Panel (chosen by themselves) and will be conducted in an informal manner.
22. **Hearing:** All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Chairman may direct that the hearing is tape recorded to assist accurate recollection for purposes of the decision. The Panel will be under no obligation to retain tapes thereafter. The Clerk will be asked to take a handwritten minute of the proceedings in any event.
23. **Evidence:** The Chairman will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.
24. **Conduct:** All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chairman. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his/her comment will be minuted.
25. **Adjournment:** The Chairman may at his/her discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue.
26. **Decision:** After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel shall reach a Decision unless there is an agreed position. The Panel’s findings and any recommendations may be notified orally at the hearing or subsequently and shall be confirmed in writing (by electronic mail or otherwise) to you, the Chairman of the Court of Governors, the Head and, where relevant, to the person complained about, within seven working days. Reasons for the Decision will be given. The Decision and any recommendations will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chairman of the Governors and the Head. No further appeal is available after the decision has been made by the Panel.

27. **Private Proceeding:** A hearing before the Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.
28. **Confidentiality:** Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except to the extent required by Regulation 6(2)(j) of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003, or where disclosure is required in the course of a School's inspection or under other legal authority.
29. **Record Keeping:** It is the responsibility of the Designated Person to ensure that a written record of all formal complaints is kept, including details of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage (Stage 2) or proceed to a panel hearing. A formal complaint is a written complaint as defined on page 1 of this Policy. The record of complaints shall be kept for a minimum of three years. The written record of complaints will be reviewed by the Head, or, at the Head's request, by the Deputy Head of the School.
30. **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS):** At Grimsdell, the Mill Hill Pre-Preparatory School, where there is provision for the EYFS, the following additional provisions apply to this policy:
- The School will retain a written record of complaints for at least three years, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint.
31. **Boarding pupils**

As there are boarding pupils at Mill Hill School, the requirements under Standard 5 of the National Minimum Boarding Standards apply to this policy when applied to Mill Hill School. In accordance with this Standard, the School will ensure that:

- The complaints procedure is available not only to parents but also to all staff and boarders;
  - Boarders and their parents are informed by the School how they can contact Ofsted regarding any complaint concerning boarding welfare. Details on how boarders and their parents may contact Ofsted are to be found in section 32 of this policy (below)
  - A written record is kept of serious complaints and their outcomes for regular review by the Deputy Head (Pastoral) on behalf of the Headmaster, with whom the outcomes of each regular review will be discussed.
  - Complaints are resolved either to the complainant's satisfaction, or with an otherwise appropriate outcome which balances the rights and duties of pupils;
  - Pupils are not penalised for making a complaint in good faith.
32. **Complaints to Ofsted and the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI):** Parents of children in the EYFS, parents of boarders and boarding pupils are entitled to make a complaint directly to Ofsted and/or to the Independent Schools' Inspectorate (ISI):
- The number for the Ofsted helpline is 08456 404040, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk). Ofsted have produced a leaflet that gives information about how to raise concerns about schools; how to raise concerns with Ofsted; what Ofsted can and will do when they receive complaints; and Ofsted's enforcement and other powers. The leaflet, 'Concerns and complaints about childminders and childcare providers' can be found at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance/Browse-all-by/Other/General/Factsheet-childcare-Concerns-and-complaints-about-childminders-and-childcare-providers>.
  - Parents can contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) regarding any complaints concerning the welfare of a pupil. The LADO telephone contact is 0208 349 4489.
  - Parents can also raise concerns related to the quality of education or the welfare health or safety of pupils, by writing to ISI directly to: Durell Barnes, Head of Communications, Independent Schools Inspectorate, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA, or email [durell.barnes@isi.net](mailto:durell.barnes@isi.net). Concerns will be recorded and may be copied to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). However, ISI will not investigate disputes about fees or specific complaints about pupils no longer at the school.

33. **Expulsion:** A pupil may be formally expelled from the School if it is proved on the balance of probabilities that the Pupil has committed a very grave breach of school discipline or a serious criminal offence. Expulsion is reserved for the most serious breaches. In the event of expulsion or of the Pupil's removal being required, the Head will advise the parents of this procedure under which a written application for a Governors' Review by the Complaints Panel ("Panel") of that decision may be made as described in paragraph 16 above. The written request to the Clerk to the Court must be made within seven (7) working days of the decision being notified to the Parents. Please ensure that a copy of all relevant documents and your full contact details accompany your letter to the Clerk. Please state in your letter the outcome that you desire and all the grounds of your complaint. Please also send the Clerk a list of documents which you believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to see. The Clerk will acknowledge your request in writing within seven (7) working days. The Hearing will be convened and conducted in accordance with Paragraphs 18 to 28 inclusive above.

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**By resolution of the Pastoral Committee on behalf of the Court of Governors**

# The Mill Hill School Foundation

## Mill Hill School

### Complaints Report Form

**This form is to be completed by any member of staff who receives a complaint from a Parent or from a Pupil over the age of 16yrs. It should be passed to the Designated Person (Deputy Head Pastoral)**

**Definition of a complaint that must be logged on this form:**

- a) A complaint that has been raised under the School's formal complaints procedures or
- b) A complaint that is raised directly to a member of the Senior Management Team, or to a Housemaster or Housemistress, or to a Head of department and which requires investigation, or other significant input, by a member of the Senior Management Team

**1. What is the nature of the complaint?** (Please tick)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staff Conduct:                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Pastoral Care: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching Standards :           | <input type="checkbox"/> Time Tabling:  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Condition of Premises:         |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Matters of Regime and Routine: |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please give details):   |   |

**2. Please give details of the complaint:**

Date/s of Incident:

Time/s:

**3. Please give the names of any witnesses to the incident/s:**

**4. Action Taken:**

**Name:**

**Date:**

**Signed:**

**5. FOR OFFICE USE ONLY:**

**Is this deemed to be a complaint according to the definition used by the School?**

YES/NO (please circle)

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