



# BRITISH SCHOOL OF TIRANA

## Complaints Policy

2024-202



# Complaints Policy

**It is the responsibility of all employees and volunteers at British School of Tirana to familiarise themselves with the contents of all BST policies and any amendments hereafter.**

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## Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Time limit for making complaints	3
3. Vexatious and repeated complaints	4
4. Anonymous complaints	4
5. Investigating complaints	5
6. Resolving complaints	5
7. Complaints about the School Director/s	5
8. Complaints about the Chair of the Board	6
9. Complaints about other Board members	6
10. Complaints about Administrators	6
11. INFORMAL STAGE	6
Stage 1: Concerns or complaints to members of the school	6
12. FORMAL STAGES	
Stage 2: Complaints to the Director	6
Stage 3: Complaints to the Chair of Board	7
Stage 4: Complaints to the Board of Administration	8
13. COMPLAINTS PANEL HEARING	9
Stage 5: Complaint heard before a complaint panel	9
14. Reporting to the Board	11
15. Confidentiality & record keeping	11
16. Publication	11
ANNEX A: Complaint Form	10
ANNEX B: Guidance on interviewing pupils	15

## Introduction

Every school values its relationship with parents, carers and the local community. The British School of Tirana (BST) staff is happy to receive suggestions and comments on what goes on within the school, and this can help to identify areas of success and where improvements can be made.

Individuals will, however, also want to raise concerns and it is important that anyone who does so is treated fairly and their concern is taken seriously. It is in everybody's interests that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Every effort should be made to resolve the matter informally. Many enquiries and concerns can be dealt with by members of staff or the Director of school promptly and amicably without needing to be dealt with on a formal basis.

The Complaints Policy can be used by anyone outside of BST, e.g., a parent complaining about lack of homework.

A person wanting to raise a concern or a complaint (referred to as "the complainant") should follow the procedure outlined in this Complaints Policy. The procedure provides a five-stage process to ensure that all complaints are dealt with consistently and fairly. It is clearly stated at each stage, who is responsible for dealing with the complaint and the timescales which will apply. The aim is to try and resolve matters fairly and promptly to the satisfaction of both parties. The procedure must be followed, but common sense and proactive dialogue should be used to try and resolve the matter.

The Proprietor of the BST and the Board of Directors of BST have overall responsibility for the management and running of the school. The Director/s of school (Primary and Secondary) have been authorised by the Board of Administrators of BST to be responsible for the day-to-day management and running of the school.

The standard of proof to be applied by a person investigating a complaint is the civil standard, namely "on a balance of probabilities" (or more likely than not). **The criminal standard of "beyond reasonable doubt" does not apply to any stage of the procedure outlined in this complaints policy.**

### 1. Time limit for making complaints

It is often difficult or impossible to properly investigate complaints that involve events that happened more than a year ago. For this reason, BST will not normally consider a complaint raised more than a year after the incident the complaint relates to. The school will, however, consider a late complaint if it can be demonstrated that:

- There is a genuine reason for the complaint not being made within one year;
- There is sufficient access to information or the individuals involved to enable a proper investigation;
- There is a real benefit to the complainant in proceeding.

When the BST decides that a late complaint will not be investigated, the BST will write to the complainant to inform them of the decision. If the complainant is unhappy with the decision, they may write to the Chair of the Board of Directors to ask for the decision to be reviewed. The Chair of the Board of Directors will be provided with the letter of complaint, the letter rejecting the complaint and any other related documentation and will review the decision made.

The Chair of the Board of Directors will write to the complainant notifying them of the outcome of the review **within 10 normal school days of receiving the letter seeking the review.** If the Chair of the Board of Directors quashes the decision, the school will investigate the complaint under the relevant stage of the procedure in this Complaints Policy. If the Chair of the Board of Directors upholds the decision, the complainant may refer their complaint to the address stated towards the end of this Complaints Policy.

### 2. Vexatious and repeated complaints

There may be occasions when, despite exhausting the procedure in this complaints policy, the complainant persists in making the same complaint to the school. There may also be occasions when a complainant makes unreasonable persistent complaints or unreasonable complaints about matters that do not affect them. In

addition, there may be occasions when a complaint is made about a matter which is clearly so trivial that it would be a waste of the school's resources to deal with it under the formal stage of the procedure.

Where BST decides that a complaint is vexatious and/or repeated and will not be investigated, **the school will write to the complainant to inform them of the decision.** If the complainant is unhappy with the decision, they may write to the Chair of the Board of Directors to ask for the decision to be reviewed. The Chair of the Board of Directors will be provided with the letter of complaint, the letter rejecting the complaint and any other related documentation, and will review the decision made.

The Chair of the Board of Directors will write to the complainant notifying them of the outcome of the review. If the Chair of the Board of Directors quashes the decision, the school will investigate the complaint under the relevant stage of the procedure in this complaints policy. If the Chair of the Board of Directors upholds the decision, the complainant may refer their complaint to the address stated towards the end of this complaints policy.

### 3. Anonymous complaints

When the person making a complaint cannot be identified, the complaint will not be investigated under the procedure in this complaints policy. The complaint will be referred to the Director/s of school who will decide what, if any, action to take.

### 4. Investigating complaints

The person conducting an investigation into a complaint should;

- **Read this complaints policy** to familiarise themselves with the procedure for investigating complaints;
- **Identify the time limits** that apply to the stage of the complaint they are dealing with and ensure that they comply with them;
- Establish **what** the complainant says happened;
- Establish **who** was involved in the events that led to the complaint;
- Establish the exact **nature of the complaint**;
- Establish what the **complainant feels** would put things right;
- **Interview** those involved in the matter, including those complained about
- Ensure that students are accompanied by the school psychologist (and/or a parent, if appropriate) when they are interviewed and the guidance in Annex B is followed on interviewing students;
- **Keep a written record** of any interview and ask the interviewee (and the person accompanying them, if applicable) to sign and date it;
- **Decide** what facts have been established, **on a balance of probabilities**, and make a written record;
- **Decide whether the complaint is rejected, partially upheld or wholly upheld**, and make a **written record**, including reasons;
- **Decide what actions**, if any, should be taken to resolve the complaint or prevent a recurrence of the events that led to the complaint;
- Above all, **keep an open mind** throughout the investigation, keeping in mind that the complainant may be right and BST colleagues may be wrong.

### 5. Resolving complaints

At each stage of the procedure in this Complaints Policy, ways in which a complaint can be resolved should be kept under consideration, and **it would be useful if complainants were encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem.** This will support the identification of areas of agreement between the parties. It is equally important to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred, as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

It is unlikely that all complaints will be upheld. Some complaints may only be partially upheld, while other complaints may be wholly upheld.

Where a complaint is partially or wholly upheld, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following;

- An apology;
- An explanation;
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;

- An assurance that the event complained of will not recur, with an explanation of the steps that have been taken to prevent a recurrence;
- An undertaking to ask the school or Board, as appropriate, to review BST policies or procedures in light of the complaint.

None of the above will be regarded as an admission of negligence or an acceptance of liability by or on behalf of BST.

## 6. Complaints about the Head of school/ Directors / Managers

If your complaint is about a member of the Senior Leadership Team, Head of school and/or the Director / Manager, you should write to the Proprietor at BST, who will investigate the complaint under Stage 2 of the procedure in this Complaints Policy. If you are unhappy with the Proprietor's decision under Stage 2, you should write to the Chair of the Board of Directors of BST seeking a review under Stage 4 of this procedure, and Stage 3 will not apply.

## 7. Complaints about the Chair of the Board of Directors

If your complaint is about the Chair of the Board, you should write to the Proprietors at BST, who will investigate the complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure. Complaints about other Board members

If your complaint is about a Board member other than the Chair of the Board, your complaint will follow the formal procedure from Stage 2 in the usual way, and you should write to the Chair of the Board in the first instance.

## 8. Complaints about the Proprietor

If your complaint is about the Proprietor you should write to the Chair of the Board of Directors who will investigate under Stage 4.

## INFORMAL STAGE

### Stage 1: Concerns or complaints to members of staff of the British School of Tirana

Where possible, BST will try to deal with the concern or complaint as near to its source as possible. This means that the complainant should raise the concern or complaint with the most relevant person, likely to be the **class teacher/subject teacher or form teacher**. If the complaint or the matter is not resolved then it should be raised with the **Director of School**, depending on the nature of the complaint. The complainant can raise the concern or complaint in person, on the telephone or in writing. BST will investigate the concern or complaint and reach a decision. Concerns or complaints dealt with informally under Stage 1 will not normally be formally acknowledged unless they were submitted in writing, in which case they **will be acknowledged within 3 normal school days**.

The investigation will be completed and the complainant will be informed of the decision in person, over the telephone or in writing, as appropriate, normally **within 10 normal school days**. In exceptional circumstances, it may take longer to deal with the concern or complaint. If this is the case, the complainant will be informed, usually by telephone or, if appropriate, in writing, within 10 normal school days, and will be told the date by which the decision will be notified.

Complaints raised over the telephone will be recorded in writing.

## FORMAL STAGES

### Stage 2: Complaints to the Director/s of School/s

If the complainant is unhappy with the way the complaint was dealt with at Stage 1, the complainant should write to the Director of School at the school and explain the nature of the complaint. The **complainant's letter will be acknowledged within 3 normal school days** from the date that it was received.

The Director of School will investigate the complaint, which may involve speaking to members of staff and students, as appropriate. Students will usually be accompanied by the school psychologist for support when they are spoken to and the guidance in Annex B will be followed on interviewing students. The Director of School will keep a written record of all meetings with members of staff and students.

During the course of the investigation, the complainant may be invited to attend for a meeting if the Director of School thinks that this is necessary to obtain further information. If the complainant is invited to a meeting, the complainant may bring a friend or relative with them for moral support. The friend or relative will not be invited to give their view of the complaint, unless the Director of School feels that there are exceptional reasons for doing so.

The Director of School will write to the complainant to inform them of the outcome of the investigation. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the **letter will be sent within 12 normal school days** of the date that the letter of complaint was received. Sometimes it may not be possible to comply with this time limit, in which case the Director of School will write to the complainant within this time limit informing you them it has not been possible to comply, and notifying them of the date when they will receive a letter confirming the outcome of the investigation.

In some cases, the Director of School may feel that it is appropriate to delegate the investigation of the complaint to another member of the Senior Leadership Team. Complaints at this stage will be recorded in the **complaints log** by Director of School

### **Stage 3: Complaints to the Proprietor**

If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of their complaint at Stage 2, the complainant should write to the Proprietor at BST to ask for the decision made at Stage 2 to be reviewed. The **complainant's letter will be acknowledged within 3 normal school days** of the date that it was received.

The Proprietor will be provided with the original letter of complaint, all records made by the Head of School during Stage 2, the letter sent to the complainant by the Director(s) of school confirming the outcome, and the complainant's letter seeking a review under Stage 3.

If necessary, and usually only in exceptional circumstances, the Proprietor will carry out further investigations to ensure that all aspects of the complaint have been thoroughly investigated. This may involve speaking to the complainant (over the telephone or in person) as well as to members of staff or students. Students will usually be accompanied by school psychologist for support if they are spoken to and the guidance in Annex B will be followed on interviewing students. The Proprietor will keep a written record of all conversations with the complainant, members of staff and students.

The Proprietor will consider the original complaint, and will also consider how the complaint was dealt with under Stages 1 and 2.

The Proprietor will write to the complainant to **confirm the outcome of the review within 15 normal school days** of the date that the letter seeking a review under Stage 3 was received. Sometimes it may not be possible to comply with this time limit, in which case the Proprietor will write to the complainant within this time limit informing them why it has not been possible to comply, and notifying them of the date when they will receive a letter confirming the outcome of the review.

In exceptional circumstances, the Proprietor may feel that it is appropriate to delegate the review of the complaint to another local member of the Board who is not a member of staff. If this is the case, the complainant will be notified when the letter to the Proprietor is acknowledged. In such cases, the Proprietor will continue to monitor the progress of the review of the complaint and it will be the Proprietor who will write to the complainant confirming the outcome of the review.



## Stage 4: Complaints to the Chair of the Board

If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the review of their complaint at Stage 3, the complainant should write to BST marking their letter “For the personal attention of the Chair of the Board” to ask for the decision made at Stage 3 to be reviewed. **The letter will be normally be acknowledged within 5 normal school days** of the date that it was received, however as the Chair of the Board is not regularly in attendance at the school, it may sometimes take a day or two longer for the request to be acknowledged

The Chair of the Board will be provided with the original letter of complaint, all records made by the Director of School during Stage 2, the letter sent to the complainant by the Director of school confirming the outcome, all records made by the Chair of the Board during Stage 3, the letter sent to the complainant by the Proprietor confirming the outcome, and the letter seeking a review under Stage 4.

If necessary, and only in exceptional circumstances, the Chair of the Board will carry out further investigations to ensure that all aspects of the complaint have been thoroughly investigated. This may involve speaking to the complainant (over the telephone or in person) as well as to members of staff or students and the guidance in Annex B will be followed on interviewing students. Students will usually be accompanied by school psychologist for support if they are spoken to. The Chair of the Board will keep a written record of all conversations with the complainant, members of staff and students.

The Chair of the Board will consider the original complaint, and will also consider how the complaint was dealt with under Stages 1, 2 and 3.

The Chair of the Board will write to the complainant to confirm the **outcome of the review within 20 normal school days** of the date that the letter seeking a review under Stage 4 was received.

Sometimes it may not be possible to comply with this time limit, in which case the Chair of the Board will write to the complainant within this time limit informing them why it has not been possible to comply, and notifying them of the date when you will receive a letter confirming the outcome of the review.

The Chair of the Board may feel that it is appropriate to delegate the review of the complaint to another Director of the Board who is not a member of staff. If this is the case, the complainant will be notified when the letter to the chief executive officer is acknowledged. In such cases, it will be the Director who reviewed the complaint under Stage 4 who will write to you confirming the outcome of the review, rather than the Chair of the Board.

## COMPLAINT PANEL HEARING

### Stage 5: Complaint heard before a complaint panel

If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the review of the complaint at Stage 4, the complainant should write to the clerk to the Board at BST at [secretary@britishschooloftirana.al](mailto:secretary@britishschooloftirana.al) asking for the complaint to be considered at a complaint panel hearing. The complainant’s letter will be **acknowledged within 3 normal school days** of the date that it was received.

The clerk to the Board will liaise with the Board in arranging for a complaint panel to be appointed. The complaint panel will consist of three persons, none of whom will have been involved in the subject matter or circumstances surrounding the original complaint, or have been involved in dealing with the complaint under the previous stages, or have any detailed knowledge of the complaint. One of the complaint panel members will be independent of the management and running of the school (i.e., they will not be a member of staff or Board member of BST).

The Chair of the Board will decide who is the most appropriate person to represent BST at the complaint panel hearing. This will be Chair of the Board, the Proprietor, another Board member or the Director of school. If the complainant has complained about the way in which the complaint was dealt with in the previous stages (rather than simply disagreeing with the decision reached), then that person will not be BST’s representative, and is likely to be a witness for the school in any event as outlined below. For the avoidance of doubt, BST’s

representative will not be a member of the complaint panel.

The clerk to the Board will liaise with the complainant, the members of the complaint panel, and the BST's representative to convene a complaint panel meeting on a date and at a time which is convenient to all parties, and in any event is **within 20 normal school days** of the date that your letter requesting a complaint panel hearing was received. The clerk will confirm the date and time of the complaint panel meeting in writing to the complainant and all other parties, once it has been agreed.

Members of staff or Board members involved in the subject matter or circumstances surrounding the complaint will attend the complaint panel hearing as witnesses for the school, unless their statements are unchallenged and their attendance is not required.

Persons dealing with the complaint in the earlier stages may be required to attend the complaint panel hearing as witnesses for the school, if appropriate. If the complainant has complained about the way in which the complaint has been dealt with in the previous stages (rather than simply disagreeing with the decision reached), then it will be appropriate for the person who dealt with that stage to attend the complaint panel hearing as a witness for the school.

The complainant is entitled to attend the complaint panel hearing to make representations to the complaint panel. The complainant is entitled to be accompanied by a friend or relative, who will attend for moral support only and will play no part in the hearing unless it appears to the complaint panel that it would be helpful to allow them to do so. **Complaint panel hearings are not legal proceedings, and it is therefore not appropriate for the complainant or the school to be legally represented at the hearing.**

The complainant may bring witnesses with them to the complaint panel hearing, who will remain outside of the room at all times except when they are giving their statement to the complaint panel. If the complainant does wish to bring witnesses with them, the complainant should ask the witnesses to write down their statements and send these to the clerk to arrive no later than 2 normal school days prior to the complaint panel hearing. Only witnesses whose statements are deemed relevant to the complaint will be heard by the complaint panel, at their discretion.

The complainant will be provided with a copy of all documentation relating to the complaint, including the records made during investigation and the reviews of the complaint under Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 at least 2 normal school days prior to the complaint panel hearing. Each member of the complaint panel and the school's representative will also be provided with this documentation.

There will be a clerk at the complaint panel hearing, who will usually be the clerk to the Board. The clerk to the complaint panel will keep an accurate record of the proceedings.

At the complaint panel hearing;

- The complainant will be invited to give details of the complaint;
- The complainant will be asked questions by the BST's representative, if any;
- The complainant will be asked questions by the complaint panel, if any;
- The complainant's witness will be invited into the room to give a statement;
- The complainant's witness will be asked questions by the BST's representative, if any;
- The complainant's witness will be asked questions by the complaint panel, if any;
- The complainant's witness will be asked to leave the room;
- If the complainant has any other relevant witnesses, they will be invited to give a statement in the same way as outlined above;
- The BST's representative will respond to the complaint, outline the way in which the complaint has been dealt with under the previous stages, and confirm the BST's stance;
- The complainant may ask questions of the BST's representative, if any;
- The complaint panel may ask questions of the BST's representative, if any;
- The BST's witness will be invited into the room to give a statement;
- The complainant may ask questions of the BST's witness, if any;
- The complaint panel may ask questions of the BST's witness, if any;
- The BST's witness will be asked to leave the room;
- If the BST has any other relevant witnesses, they will be invited to give a statement in the same way as



outlined above;

- The complainant will be invited to summarise the complaint;
- The BST's representative will be invited to summarise the BST's position;
- The complainant and the Proprietor or representative will be asked to leave to enable the complaint panel to retire to consider their decision.

The complaint panel will, in private, consider all of the documentation provided and everything that they have heard, and make:

**Findings of fact.** The complaint panel will decide which facts are true and which are not, on a balance of probabilities (i.e., more likely than not). The complaint panel will disregard facts that they deem to be irrelevant to the complaint. The complaint panel will make a written record of their findings of fact, with reasons.

**Recommendations,** if any. The complaint panel will consider if they have any recommendations to make. These may include suggesting changes to school or Board procedures, providing the complainant with a written apology or explanation, or taking further formal action. The complaint panel may not have any recommendations to make. In any event, the complaint panel will make a written record of their recommendations, or record that they had none to make.

The clerk to the Board will write to the complainant, BST's representative and any person complained about within **10 normal school days** of the complaint panel hearing with notification of the complaint panel's findings of fact and recommendations.

The clerk to the Board will ensure that a record of the complaint panel's findings of fact and recommendations is made available for inspection on the school's premises by the Head of school and the Board of Directors.

## **REFERRALS TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION OFFICE**

If the complainant feels that BST's Complaints Policy does not comply with the regulations, or if the complainant believes that BST has not followed the procedure contained within its complaints policy, the complainant can refer the complaint to the local government officials at the following address:

Tirana Department of Education

The complainant should be aware that the TDEF will not investigate the complaint itself, unless it is clear that the decision made by the complaint panel was manifestly unreasonable. The TDEF may review a copy of BST's Complaints Policy to ensure that it complies with the regulations, and will review the procedure followed by BST in dealing with the complaint to ensure that it complied with its published procedure.

## **REPORTING**

The BST will complete the form found in Annex A in relation to all formal concerns and complaints raised, whether they are dealt with informally under Stage 1, or are sufficiently serious to be dealt with immediately as formal complaints under Stage 2, and in relation to anonymous, late and vexatious/repeated complaints. The form will be retained by BST.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY & RECORD KEEPING**

The BST will keep a record of all concerns and complaints, whether they were dealt with formally or informally. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential by BST, except where the Albanian government request them officially.

## **PUBLICATION**

This complaints policy will be reviewed biannually by the Board, and will be published on the BST's website, as well as being made available to parents upon request.

# ANNEX A:

British School of Tirana

## COMPLAINT FORM

The person who experienced the problem should normally fill in this form. If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone else, please fill in Section B also. Please note that before taking forward the complaint we will need to be satisfied that you have the authority to act on behalf of the person concerned. If you are a pupil the school will help you complete, will explain it to you and will give you a copy of it when it is completed.

### A. Your details

Surname /Name(s):

.....

Title: Mr / Mrs / Ms / Other:

.....

Address and Postcode:

.....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Contact number:

.....  
.....

Email Address:

.....  
.....

How would you prefer us to contact you?

.....

### B. If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone else, what are their details?

Their name in full:

.....  
.....

Address and Postcode:

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.....  
.....  
.....

What is your relationship to them? .....

Why are you making a complaint on their behalf? .....

*continued...*

# COMPLAINT FORM

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## C. About your complaint

What do you think the school did wrong or did not do?

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Describe how you have been affected:

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When did you first become aware of the problem?

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If it is more than three months since you first became aware of the problem, please give the reason why you have not complained before:

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## COMPLAINT FORM

What do you think should be done to put matters right?

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Have you already put your complaint to a member of staff? If so, please give brief details about how and when you did so:

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Signature of complainant: ..... Date:  
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Signature if you are making a complaint on behalf of someone else

Signature: ..... Date:  
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## **ANNEX B:**

### **Guidance on interviewing pupils**

There will be times when an investigating officer considers it appropriate to interview students. The following procedures should be followed:

1. Parents should be contacted to ask permission to interview their children. Parents should be encouraged to attend.
2. Parents and pupils should be clear the process is confidential.
3. Parents and pupils should sign the written statement as a true record and any initial hand written statements.
4. Pupils should not be invited to disciplinary hearings other than in very exceptional circumstances.
5. Pupils should not be interviewed together.
6. To avoid collusion pupils should not sit with other pupils involved in the investigation.
7. Parents and their son/daughter should be seated separately from other parents and pupils involved in the investigation.
8. Pupils and parents should be escorted at all times by an employee of British School of Tirana.
9. School psychologist is always present when a student is interviewed



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