

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Introduction

The Gower School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the school with care and in accordance with this Complaints Procedure. In accordance with paragraph 32(1) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014, The Gower School will make available, on request, to parents, Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE) or ISI, details of this Complaints Procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year can be found at the end of this procedure.

Although this Procedure is made available to parents of prospective pupils, it is not available for use by them; it may only be used by parents of current pupils. Complaints by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil to which the complaint relates was still registered as a pupil at The Gower School.

For the purposes of this procedure, a 'parent' shall include anyone holding the parental responsibility of a child at the school.

Timescales for each complaint are set out in the different stages below. 'Working days' refers to Monday-Friday during term time when the school is open as usual. Any complaints made outside of term time will be resolved as soon as is practicable due to unavailability of relevant staff, but the complaint will be notified of any extensions to the timescale at the time the complaint is acknowledged.

This policy has been approved by the Proprietor and is available to parents on the website or on request from the School Office. It can be made available in large print or another more accessible format if required. If assistance is needed with making a complaint, for example because of a disability, a parent should contact the Head of Operations who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Emma Gowers'.

Miss Emma Gowers
Principal and Proprietor

Date reviewed: July 2025

Date of next review: July 2026

What Constitutes a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about The Gower School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by The Gower School is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that The Gower School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them. There may also be other circumstances in which The Gower School is required to share information relating to a concern or a complaint in order to comply with its legal or regulatory obligations.

The Gower School is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you or your child raises in good faith.

The Three-Stage Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

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

- If parents have a complaint, they should contact their child's teacher. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult with a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).
- Complaints made directly to a member of staff other than the child's teacher will usually be referred back to the child's teacher unless a member of SLT or the Principal deems it appropriate for them to deal with the matter personally.
- Teachers will make a written record of all complaints and concerns, the date on which they were received and any action taken by the school as a result. These records are monitored by the Principal.
- A complaint which has not been resolved by informal means to the parents' satisfaction within 10 working days should be notified to the school in writing as a formal complaint which will be dealt with in accordance with Stage 2 below.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Principal, stating that they wish to invoke the formal complaints procedure.

- The Principal will acknowledge in writing receipt of the complaint within five working days. In most cases, the Principal/Head of Nursery/Head of Operations/Deputy Head of School will meet or speak to the parents concerned to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Principal or a senior member of staff to carry out further investigations and to request further information from any party. Where this investigation is delegated, the investigator will prepare a report on the investigation which will be considered by the Principal before reaching a final decision.
- Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept.
- Once the Principal is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing within 15 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. The Principal will give reasons for the decision reached. Where appropriate, the Principal will include details of the action the school will take to resolve the complaint.
- Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay, the parents will be notified of this and informed of the new timescales as soon as possible.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

Alternative procedure for handling complaints about the Principal

- Should a parent have a complaint about the Principal, they should direct the Stage 2 complaint to a member of the SLT (Rebecca Falloon, Joey Haigh, Jacqui Chittoi, Tajana Baldwin) to decide whether it is within their remit to resolve or whether it should go to a Stage 3 Independent Panel Hearing as a more appropriate route for resolution.

Stage 3 – Independent Panel Hearing

- An Independent Panel Hearing is a review of decisions taken by the Principal. If the parents are not satisfied with the Principal's response to their formal complaint, they should request a hearing before the Complaints Panel.
- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they must write to the Principal requesting a hearing before the Complaints Panel. It is expected that the complaint will progress in a timely manner and parents should make the request within 10 working days of the decision complained about. The Panel will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint, but will hold a full-merits hearing of the complaint, not merely a check that the correct process was followed.
- Parents must state in their letter the outcome desired and all the grounds of the complaint. They should also send a list of all the documents that they believe to be in the school's possession that they consider relevant in the matter and that they wish the Panel to see.

- Once requested, an Independent Panel Hearing will take place unless the parents later indicate that they are now satisfied and do not wish to proceed further. The Independent Panel Hearing will, therefore, proceed notwithstanding that the parents may subsequently decide not to attend. If necessary, the Panel will consider the parents' complaint in their absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion. The requirement for the Independent Panel Hearing to proceed will not prevent the school from accommodating parental availability or considering comments concerning the panel's composition.
- The Principal will acknowledge the request within five working days of receiving it and schedule a hearing before the Panel to take place as soon as practicable and within 20 working days thereafter.
- The Panel will be appointed by the Principal and will consist of at least three persons who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint and at least one member who is independent of the governance, management and running of The Gower School. The role of the Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:
 - o the documents provided by both parties; and
 - o any representations made by the parents and the Principal
 and to reach a decision on the balance of probabilities as to whether each complaint is upheld in whole or in part. It is not within the powers of the Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, students or parents.
- The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Panel (chosen by themselves) and will be conducted in an informal manner.
- If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied to all parties not later than five working days prior to the hearing. The Panel Chair will circulate a copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the Panel to all parties at least three working days prior to the hearing.
- The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative or friend. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and so legal representation is not normally appropriate. If the parents do wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, the school must be notified of this at least seven working days before the hearing and they should note that the Panel will wish to speak to them directly and this person will not be permitted to act as an advocate or to address the hearing unless invited to do so by the Panel Chair.
- All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they so wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Panel Chair may direct that the hearing is recorded to assist accurate recollection for the purposes of the decision. The Panel will be under no obligation to retain recordings thereafter. A handwritten minute of the hearing will be taken in any event.
- The Panel Chair will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that the parties have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. 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.
- All those attending the hearing will be expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Panel Chair. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way in which the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his/her comments will be minuted.
- If further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. When the Panel Chair considers that all issues have been sufficiently discussed, he/she will conclude the hearing.
- After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations shall be confirmed in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about within seven working days 4 of the hearing. The decisions, findings and any recommendations will also be made available for inspection on the school premises by the Principal.
- The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the school's complaints procedure.

Child Protection

For any complaint that involves a potential child protection issue, this must be reported immediately to the Principal (See our Safeguarding Policy for details of the procedure).

Persistent correspondence

The school will do its best to be helpful to parents who wish to raise a complaint. However, there may be occasions when, despite all three stages of the complaints procedure having been followed, a parent remains dissatisfied. If a parent attempts to re-open the same issue, the school will inform them that the procedure has been completed and that

the matter is now closed. If the parent contacts the school again about the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial and/or vexatious' and the school may choose not to respond. The application of a 'serial and/or vexatious' designation for a complaint will be against the subject of the complaint itself rather than the complainant themselves.

Record keeping

A written record will be kept by the Principal of all formal complaints, including any action(s) taken by the school as a result of the complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld) and of whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or progressed to a panel hearing. The school's written record of complaints also identifies those complaints specifically relating to its boarding provision, even if it is later withdrawn. At the school's discretion additional records may be kept. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except as required by the school by paragraph 33 (k) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014; namely, where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them, or where any other legal obligations prevail. Records of individual complaints will be retained for at least seven years unless they relate to allegations of abuse in which case they will be preserved for the term of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation if this is longer.

Complaints about the fulfilment of EYFS requirements

Additional regulatory requirements apply to written complaints regarding the fulfilment of EYFS requirements. Specifically, the complainant will be notified of the outcome of any investigation by the school into their complaint within 28 days. The school's record of complaints will be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request. In the event of dissatisfaction with the above actions, the complainant may refer the matter to the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) or to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The contact details for these organisations are as follows:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
www.ofsted.gov.uk
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
0300 123 1231

Independent Schools Inspectorate
CAP House
9-12 Long Lane
London
EC1A 9HA
www.isi.net
concerns@isi.net
0207 600 100

The Gower School will provide ISI/Ofsted, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaints will be kept in accordance with its Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy

Monitoring and review of complaints policy and procedures

The Proprietor will monitor the number and type of complaints received and the operation of the procedures set out in this policy. She will also review the policy at least annually to ensure it meets statutory requirements and continues to reflect best practice.

During the 2024/25 academic year, the school received two formal complaints, neither of which went to a panel hearing.