



# The Meadows Montessori School

## Complaints Policy and Procedure

### **Applies to:**

The whole school including Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), out of school care, the after-school clubs and all other activities provided by the school, inclusive of those outside of the normal school hours.

All staff (teaching and support staff), any pupils, the Proprietor and volunteers working in the school.

### **Availability**

This policy is made available to parents, staff, and pupils by request from the Head of School or school office.

### **Monitoring and Review**

This policy will be subject to continuous monitoring, refinement, and audit by the Head of School.

The Proprietor (who is also the Head of School) undertakes an annual review of this policy and of the efficiency with which the related duties have been discharged, by no later than one year from the date shown below, or earlier if changes in legislation, regulatory requirements or best practice guidelines so require.

Approved Date – February 2024	Sam Sims
Review Date – February 2025	Head of School

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## Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair, and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed. The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

## Legislation and Guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations, and refers to good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE).

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

## Definitions

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A **concern** is defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought"
- A **complaint** is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action"

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## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **The Complainant**

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not publish details about the complaint on any form of social media

### **The Investigator**

An individual will be appointed to investigate the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the Head of School or Head Teachers, which includes the facts and potential solutions

### **The Complaints Co-ordinator**

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- The Head of School
- The Head Teachers
- Any other staff member providing administrative support

The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the Head of School, the headteacher.
- Be aware of issues relating to:
  - Sharing third-party information
  - Additional support needed by complainants; for example, interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- Keep records

### **Principles for investigation**

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

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## **Timescales**

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

## **Complaints about our fulfilment of Early Years Requirements**

We will investigate all written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the school is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by:

- Calling 0300 123 4666
- Emailing [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)
- Using the online contact form available at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>

## **Stages of Complaint - Not complaints against the Head of School**

### **Stage 1: Informal**

The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Head of School, either in person or by letter, telephone, or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school office.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 5 school days and investigate and provide a response within 7 school days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the Head of School or member of SLT.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

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## **Stage 2: Formal**

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint to the Head of School and/or the subject of the complaint:

- In a letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on their behalf

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office.

The Head of School will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

The Head of School (or other person appointed by the Head of School for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 7 school days.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the school within 5 school days.

## **Stage 3: Review Panel**

### **Convening the Panel**

Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal stage.

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the Head of School and must consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school. The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress. The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the panel will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties. Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting.

### **At the Meeting**

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

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

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish. We do not encourage either party to bring legal representation but will consider it on a case-by-case basis.

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For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union if they have one. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

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

The panel, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave, and evidence will then be considered.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the Head of School.

### **The Outcome**

The committee can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld, the committee will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 school days.

### **Complaints against the Head of School**

Complaints made against the Head of School should be directed to Deborah Broadway (Advisory Board member) who has been appointed to deal with complaints against the Head of School at The Meadows Montessori School.

Deborah can be contacted confidentially via email [deborah@themeadowsmontessori.com](mailto:deborah@themeadowsmontessori.com).

A suitably skilled and impartial person will be asked to then follow the complaints procedure as above.

### **Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure**

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure and the complaint is regarding the school not meeting standards set by the DfE in any of the following areas, the complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE:

- Education
- Pupil welfare, health, and safety
- School premises
- Staff suitability
- Making information available to parents
- The spiritual, moral, social, or cultural development of pupils

The DfE will consider reports of a major failure to meet the standards. Where appropriate, it can arrange an emergency inspection from ISI (Independent Schools Inspectorate) to look at pupil welfare, health, and safety, and make sure that the school deals with serious failings.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

[www.gov.uk/complain-about-school](http://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school)

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## **Complaints to ISI**

In addition to the Complaints Procedure detailed above, parents may also make a complaint to ISI, should they wish to.

The contact details are:  
Independent Schools Inspectorate  
CAP House  
9-12 Long Lane  
London  
EC1A 9HA.

Email: [concerns@isi.net](mailto:concerns@isi.net) Tel: 020 7600 0100 Web: [www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net)

## **Duplicate Complaints**

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we had not previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

## **Complaint Campaigns**

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

## **Record Keeping and Confidentiality**

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and stored securely and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or through a subject access request under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

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Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the Head of School, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

### **Learning Lessons**

The Head of School will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Senior Leadership Team, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

### **Child Protection**

For any complaint that involves a potential Child Protection issue, this must be reported immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) (See our Child Protection Policy for details of the procedure).

DSL based at Primary School	Faye Metcalfe	<a href="mailto:faye@themeadowsmontessori.com">faye@themeadowsmontessori.com</a>
Deputy DSL based at Primary School	Kristie Manser	<a href="mailto:kristie@themeadowsmontessori.com">kristie@themeadowsmontessori.com</a>
DSL based at High School	Matt Sims	<a href="mailto:matt@themeadowsmontessori.com">matt@themeadowsmontessori.com</a>
Deputy DSL based at High School	David Green	<a href="mailto:david@themeadowsmontessori.com">david@themeadowsmontessori.com</a>

### **Complaints from External Bodies**

Complaints from the public about the behaviour of a group of pupils will be dealt with on a general basis, with reminders to all about the school's expectations.

### **Policy for Dealing with Complaints from Staff**

The Meadows Montessori School aims to be a listening and responsive school. We encourage staff to inform us of their concerns while they are still minor ones, which can more easily be resolved. It is hoped that most concerns and complaints, will be resolved quickly and informally.

- All staff who have any complaint or cause for concern should speak to their Lead Teacher in the first instance. If this is not appropriate, they should bring the matter to the attention of one of the Senior Leadership Team.
- A written record will be kept of all significant concerns and major complaints, the date on which they were received and the details of the subsequent investigation.
- All complaints will be investigated within fourteen days and a formal letter will always be written as 'closure,' indicating how the issue has been dealt with and what the outcome is.
- When a member of staff is dissatisfied with the outcome and has discussed this with the Head of School, the matter should be referred to.

### **Number of Complaints Received**

School Year 2019 – 2020	2
School Year 2020 – 2021	1
School Year 2021 – 2022	0
School Year 2022 – 2023	0
School Year 2023 – 2024	0 (Up to January 2024)

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