Date: Sep 2026
Next review due: Sep 2027
Responsibility: SMT (Principal)

DAME ALLAN'S SCHOOLS

COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

Dame Allan's Schools (hereafter the Schools) have long prided themselves on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to their pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the Schools with care and in accordance with this Policy.

A copy of this policy can be found on the Schools' website and hard copies may be provided on request from the school office at the Junior and Senior Schools' sites. In accordance with paragraph 32(1) of Schedule 1 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulation 2014, the Schools will also make this policy (including the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year) available, upon request, to Ofsted, the Department for Education and the Independent Schools Inspectorate.

Although this policy 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. The policy applies to parents of former pupils only where the original complaint was raised whilst the pupil was still registered at the Schools. Where the complaint is related to a pupil's exclusion from the Schools, a separate procedure is set out in the Whole School Behaviour Policy.

The Schools wish to ensure that:

- Parents wishing to make a complaint know how to do so.
- Complaints are responded to within a reasonable time (as set out below) and in a courteous and efficient way.
- Parents realise that the Schools listen and take complaints seriously.
- Action is taken where appropriate.

"Parent(s)" means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for a current pupil about whom the complaint relates.

What constitutes a complaint?

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

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The Schools are here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you raise in good faith.

The Schools have a three-stage complaints procedure as follows:

2. STAGE 1 – INFORMAL RESOLUTION

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

If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their son/daughter's form teacher or tutor. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the form/class teacher or tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult a Head of Department, a pastoral manager or a member of the Schools' management team, including the Principal or Head of Junior School, as appropriate.

Complaints made directly to a pastoral manager or senior member of staff including the Principal or Head of Junior School will usually be referred to the relevant form teacher or tutor unless the pastoral manager or senior member of staff deems it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.

Concerns dealt with in this informal manner are not regarded as formal complaints However, the form teacher or tutor will retain written records of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received.

Should the matter not be resolved within five working days or in the event that the form teacher or tutor (or pastoral manager where applicable) and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure. Parents may also proceed to this stage directly if they deem the complaint sufficiently serious or if the complaint concerns safeguarding issues.

If the complaint is against the Principal, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors, whose contact details are available from the School office upon request.

3. 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 or Head of Junior School, as appropriate. In addition, if parents have raised

a concern about a more minor matter, which is subsequently repeated, and the parents are not satisfied with the Schools' original response, they should put their complaint in writing to the Principal or Head of Junior School, as appropriate. A template complaint form is included at the end of this policy and an electronic version can be obtained from the Bursar's office in order to submit your complaint.

Any written complaints escalated beyond Stage 1 may be referred to the Principal or Head of Junior School for consideration at Stage 2, regardless of the person to whom it has been addressed, and parents will be informed of any such referral.

All such complaints will be recorded as formal complaints in the Complaints Register. The Principal or Head of Junior School will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. In some cases the Principal or Head of Junior School may seek to speak to or meet parents in order to clarify or discuss the complaint; if possible a resolution may be reached at this point.

Once the Principal or Head of Junior School 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 fifteen working days of receipt of the complaint. The Principal or Head of Junior School will also give reasons for the decision. The Principal or Head of Junior School will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

If the complaint is against the Principal, the complaint should be made to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors or their nominee will call for a full report from the Principal and for all the relevant documents. He/she will also call for a briefing from members of staff and will, in most cases, speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the Chair of Governors or their nominee is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing, giving reasons for his/her decision.

If parents are not satisfied with this decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

4. STAGE 3 – PANEL HEARING

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they should do so in writing to the Clerk to the Governors within fifteen working days of receiving the decision at Stage 2, setting out their grounds of appeal. The Clerk to the Governors has been given the responsibility by the governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel. Any supporting evidence which the parents wish to rely on should also be provided with their grounds of appeal.

The Clerk to the Governors will then refer the appeal to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the Schools. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the governors. The Clerk to the Governors, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and within fifteen working days of receipt of the complaint.

If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than five working days prior to the hearing.

The parents will be invited to attend the panel and may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person, if they wish. This may be a relative or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. The panel will meet notwithstanding that the parents may, subsequent to expressing dissatisfaction with the outcome of stage 2, decide not to attend the meeting. Under these circumstances, the panel will reach its decisions and make recommendations in the absence of the parents. The panel hearing will only be cancelled should the parents indicate that they are satisfied with the outcome of stage 2 of the process.

The manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.

After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and accordingly decide whether to:

- dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and
- make recommendations.

The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, within five working days of the hearing (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following a hearing). The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing or email to the parents, the Principal, the governors and, where relevant, the person complained about. The decision of the Panel will be final. A copy of the Panel's findings will be available for inspection on the Schools' premises by the Chair of Governors and Principal.

Parents can be assured that all complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. A written record is kept of all formal complaints including those which proceed to a Panel hearing.

This policy applies to parents of all children within the Dame Allan's Foundation, though separate arrangements for those pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage follow below.

<u>Timeframe for dealing with complaints</u>

All complaints will be handled in a serious and sensitive way and within clear and reasonable timescales.

It is within everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the Schools' target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 15 working days. Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further 15 working days.

Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, **working days** refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays. This means that, during School holidays, it may take longer to resolve a complaint, although the Schools will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay. It may also take longer to resolve a complaint during periods of significant disruption to School life (for example, during the Covid-19 pandemic) or as a consequence of unavoidable staff absence. However, deviation from the normal timescale for resolving a complaint during term time will only be permitted on an exceptional basis, and the Schools will take all reasonable steps to limit any such delay.

Persistent correspondence

If a parent makes repeated attempts to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this may be regarded as vexatious and outside the scope of this policy.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The school recognises the increased use of AI and the benefits this can bring but strongly encourages parents to communicate concerns in their own words wherever possible. The school's experience is that issues are more likely to be resolved quickly and amicably through genuine person to person communication. AI-generated complaints are often excessively long and they can, in some cases, introduce an unnecessarily adversarial or legalistic approach which does not reflect the reality of normal school practice and the value of good parent-teacher relationships. Direct communication without AI intervention may enable concerns to be addressed more effectively, preserve positive relationships and avoid unnecessary escalation.

5. EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

If a complaint is made by a parent to the member of the Early Years Department, this is recorded and put in the child's file by the members of staff and reported to the Head of Early Years who will investigate the complaint and deal with it appropriately as set out at Stage 1 above.

Where a written complaint relates to the School's fulfilment of the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), the School will investigate the complaint and notify the complainant of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of receiving the complaint, in accordance with the EYFS Statutory Framework.

All conversations are recorded and filed in the Early Years complaints file which will be stored confidentially as outlined above. The record of complaints must be made available to Ofsted and ISI upon request.

Information about the complaint is also passed to the Head of Junior School and the Deputy Head of the Junior School, if appropriate. Should the matter not be resolved within ten working days or in the event that the Head of Early Years and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure as detailed above and may, if appropriate, also proceed to Stage 3.

If parents are still dissatisfied after following the Schools' complaints procedure, as described above, then they may contact the Schools' inspecting bodies with regard to their complaint. These are:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate,
Store Street,
Manchester
M1 2WD
Tel: 0300 123 1231
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
Website: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

Independent Schools Inspectorate
Ground Floor,
CAP House,
9-12 Long Lane,
London
ECIA 9HA
Tel: 020 7600 0100
Email: concerns@isi.net
Website: https://www.isi.net/

6. RECORDS OF COMPLAINTS AND USE OF PERSONAL DATA

Following resolution of a complaint, the Schools will keep a written record of all complaints, whether they are resolved at stage 1, 2 or 3 and any action taken by the Schools as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld).

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them. They will be retained securely in the Principal's office, for the periods specified in the Schools' Retention of Records Policy.

The security of personal data is of utmost importance to the Schools. For details of how they handle personal data, please see the Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notices, which are available on the Schools' website. Normally the Schools will process a range of information, when dealing with a complaint, which is likely to include the following:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of pupil
- Description of the issue
- Records of the investigation (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name and contact details of member(s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of telephone conversations
- Notes and minutes of a Stage 3 hearing
- The Panel's written decision

- Action(s) taken by the Schools as a result of the complaint.

This may include “special category personal data” (as further detailed in the Schools’ Privacy Notices and Data Protection Policy, but potentially including, for example, information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the Schools’ Privacy Notices and Data Protection Policy.

For the academic year 2025-26, the school received three stage 2 complaints and two stage 3 complaints.

Dame Allan's Schools

Complaint Form

Please read the School's Complaints Policy before completing this form. It provides information on when and how this form should be completed.

To be completed by those with parental responsibility for a current pupil and returned via email to the Principal via rv.baxter@dameallans.co.uk

Head of Junior School via junioroffice@dameallans.co.uk as appropriate.

If the complaint is against the Principal then this form should be sent to the Chair of Governors via the Clerk to the Governors at va.mcdonald@dameallans.co.uk.

PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS

Your name(s)	
Name of pupil(s), year(s) and your relationship to them	
Contact address	
Contact telephone day	
Contact telephone mobile	
Contact email address	
Details of the complaint Please provide details of the nature of your complaint. If you have more than one ground of complaint we suggest numbering them so that each is considered in turn. If you require more space you may wish to attach an additional page setting out your complaint.	
Action taken to date (including staff member(s) who has/have dealt with it so far) and solutions offered	

The reason(s) that this was not a satisfactory resolution for you
What action(s) would you like to be taken to resolve your complaint?
Signature(s): **Date:**
School use
Stage in the complaints procedure (circle as appropriate): 1 2 3
Date acknowledgement sent:
By whom:
Complaint referred to:
Action taken:
Date: