



**GEMS**

مدرسة جيمس وينشستر

Winchester School

ABU DHABI

## Complaints and Feedback Policy

| UPDATED BY       | LAST PUBLISH DATE | MONITORING CYCLE |
|------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Michelle Hayfron | September 2025    | September 2026   |

## 1. Rationale

At GEMS Winchester School - Abu Dhabi (WSA), feedback and complaints are viewed as opportunities to strengthen partnership with families, improve the quality of education and care, and ensure that every child is supported to flourish. The school takes seriously its accountability to students, parents, guardians and all stakeholders. We listen respectfully, respond professionally and work collaboratively to resolve concerns as early as possible.

A student's education is enhanced when home and school work in partnership. Most worries or concerns can be managed without formal procedures when the concern is taken seriously and addressed promptly by the member of staff closest to the matter. Formal procedures are used when informal attempts have not resolved the issue, when the complainant remains dissatisfied, or when the nature of the complaint requires formal investigation.

This policy is aligned with the GEMS Core Values of Care, Excellence, One Team and Always Learning and with WSA's Investing in YOU values of Unity, Transformation, Envisioning and Communication.

## 2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear, fair and accessible process for giving feedback, raising concerns and making complaints. It aims to:

- encourage open, respectful and timely communication between the school and its stakeholders;
- ensure concerns are directed to the appropriate person and resolved as close to the point of origin as possible;
- provide a transparent route for escalation when a concern is not resolved;
- ensure complaints are investigated impartially, confidentially and within clear timescales;
- support compliance with GEMS and ADEK expectations for complaint handling and record keeping;
- use feedback and complaints to inform school improvement, staff development and stakeholder satisfaction.

## 3. Scope

This policy applies to complaints and feedback from parents, guardians, students, staff, visitors, external providers and other stakeholders about matters connected with WSA, including teaching and learning, student wellbeing and behaviour, inclusion and support, school communication, facilities, operations and external services.

This policy does not replace specialist procedures that may apply to safeguarding and child protection, health and safety, student behaviour, inclusion, admissions, fees, staff grievances or employment matters. Where a concern falls under a more specific policy or legal/regulatory process, the school will explain this and refer the matter appropriately. Safeguarding, health and safety and student wellbeing concerns will always be prioritised.

## 4. Definitions

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Feedback</b>         | A compliment, suggestion or comment about the school's work or services. Feedback may not require a formal investigation, but it may still lead to action or improvement.                            |
| <b>Concern</b>          | An issue or worry that can usually be resolved informally and promptly by the relevant staff member or team.                                                                                         |
| <b>Complaint</b>        | An expression of dissatisfaction about the school, its staff, services, actions or lack of action, whether made informally or formally.                                                              |
| <b>Formal complaint</b> | A complaint made in writing, or recorded in writing with school support, that requires formal investigation or escalation because informal resolution has not been successful or is not appropriate. |
| <b>Working day</b>      | A school working day, excluding weekends, public holidays and school holidays unless an urgent safeguarding, health and safety or regulatory matter requires immediate action.                       |

## 5. Values in action

The way the school handles feedback and complaints is as important as the outcome. Staff will demonstrate the school values in the following ways:

| Commitment                   | Linked values                   | What this looks like in practice                                                                                 |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Listen and care</b>       | Care; Communication             | We listen actively, acknowledge feelings and ensure stakeholders feel heard, respected and cared for.            |
| <b>Be fair and inclusive</b> | Unity; One Team                 | We treat everyone with dignity, avoid blame, make reasonable adjustments and protect students from disadvantage. |
| <b>Aim for high quality</b>  | Excellence; Envisioning         | We use clear processes, evidence-informed decisions and timely written outcomes.                                 |
| <b>Learn and improve</b>     | Always Learning; Transformation | We identify patterns, address root causes, review actions and use feedback to improve the school experience.     |

## 6. Guiding principles

- **Student-centred:** The welfare, safety, dignity and learning of students are at the centre of all decisions.
- **Accessible:** Stakeholders may raise concerns in person, by telephone or in writing. Assistance will be provided where a complainant needs help to put a complaint in writing or requires language or accessibility support.
- **Prompt and transparent:** The school will acknowledge written complaints within 24 hours of receipt and will give clear information about who is handling the matter and the expected timeline.
- **Fair and impartial:** Complaints will be considered objectively. Relevant parties will have the opportunity to share information before conclusions are reached.
- **Confidential:** Information will be shared only with those who need it in order to investigate, resolve, record or monitor the complaint.

- **No disadvantage:** No student or stakeholder will be treated less favourably because a concern or complaint has been raised in good faith.
- **Resolution-focused:** The school will seek practical, proportionate outcomes that restore confidence and improve future practice.
- **Respectful conduct:** All parties are expected to communicate respectfully. Abusive, threatening, discriminatory or unreasonable conduct will not be accepted.

## 7. Roles and responsibilities

|                                             |                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| All staff                                   | Listen respectfully, try to resolve concerns early, record significant concerns and actions, maintain confidentiality and escalate appropriately.                         |
| Class teachers, tutors and subject teachers | Act as the first point of contact for most learning, progress, pastoral and day-to-day matters; involve Heads of Year, Heads of Department or senior leaders when needed. |
| Parent Relations Executive (PRE)            | Support families to access the correct route, receive and direct feedback, monitor service-related concerns and help ensure communication remains clear.                  |
| Senior leaders and operational leaders      | Investigate escalated complaints within their areas, communicate outcomes, implement actions and identify improvement themes.                                             |
| Principal/CEO                               | Ensure the policy is implemented; chair or delegate the School Complaints Committee; oversee record keeping, monitoring and final school-level responses.                 |
| Compliance Coordinator or delegated officer | Support complaint tracking, records, committee administration and compliance with school, GEMS and ADEK requirements.                                                     |

## 8. Feedback procedure

The school welcomes feedback because it helps us recognise strengths and identify improvements. Feedback may be shared through:

- email, telephone or verbal conversation with the Parent Relations Executive;
- email, telephone or verbal conversation with the relevant class teacher, tutor, Head of Year, Head of Department or operational lead;
- the generic school email address or feedback route published on the school website;
- parent meetings, surveys, parent partnership opportunities and school events.

Feedback requiring action will be passed to the relevant member of staff or leader. Compliments may be shared with staff and used to celebrate values-led practice. If feedback raises a concern that requires investigation or if the stakeholder remains dissatisfied, the complaints procedure below should be followed.

## 9. Complaint procedure

### 9.1 Informal resolution

Most concerns should first be raised with the member of staff closest to the issue. This may be the class teacher, form tutor, subject teacher, Head of Year, Head of Department, Parent Relations Executive or service lead. The staff member will listen, clarify the concern, agree next steps and involve the appropriate leader where needed.

Informal concerns should be addressed as promptly as possible. The school aims to provide a response or update within 5 working days. If further time is needed, the complainant will be informed of the reason and the expected next update.

### 9.2 Making a formal complaint

A formal complaint should normally be made in writing to the relevant leader, the Parent Relations Executive or the Principal/CEO. Where a complainant is unable to submit a written complaint, the school will support them by recording the complaint and agreeing the written record with them.

A formal complaint should include, where relevant:

- the name and contact details of the complainant;
- the student's name and year group, if the matter relates to a student;
- a clear summary of the concern, including dates, locations and people involved;
- steps already taken to resolve the matter;
- relevant evidence or documents;
- the outcome or remedy being sought.

Written complaints will be acknowledged within 24 hours of receipt. The acknowledgement will identify the person leading the response or explain when that information will be confirmed. Formal complaints will normally receive a written response within 10 working days. Where a matter is complex and requires more time, the lead investigator will inform the complainant in writing, explain the reason for the extension and provide a realistic revised timeline.

### 9.3 Possible outcomes

Following an investigation, a complaint may be substantiated, partially upheld, unfounded, or inconclusive where there is insufficient evidence. Possible outcomes may include an explanation, apology, corrective action, changes to practice, staff guidance or training, improved communication, service improvement, or no further action where the complaint is not upheld. In some cases, the full details of the outcome may not be shared with the complainant due to confidentiality or the sensitivity of the matter.

## 10. Escalation pathways by complaint type

The school will direct complaints to the most appropriate person. The pathway below is a guide; the Principal/CEO may adjust the pathway where the matter is urgent, sensitive, complex, involves safeguarding, or requires independence.

| Complaint type                                                           | Stage 1                                                                                                                     | Stage 2                                                                                           | Final school review                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Learning, teaching, progress, behaviour, wellbeing, inclusion or support | Class teacher, form tutor or subject teacher. Head of Year or Head of Department copied where appropriate.                  | Head of Year, Head of Department, Head of Inclusion, Pastoral Lead or Head of School as relevant. | Vice Principal, Principal/CEO and/or School Complaints Committee.                                                                           |
| Operations, facilities, administration or external services              | Parent Relations Executive or relevant service lead.                                                                        | Manager of School Operations or relevant operational manager.                                     | Principal/CEO and/or School Complaints Committee.                                                                                           |
| Complaint about a staff member                                           | Vice Principal or delegated senior leader/line manager. Safeguarding allegations go immediately to safeguarding procedures. | Principal/CEO or delegated senior leader if not already involved.                                 | Principal/CEO and/or School Complaints Committee, subject to confidentiality and HR processes.                                              |
| Complaint about a member of the Senior Leadership Team                   | Principal/CEO.                                                                                                              | Principal/CEO may involve GEMS Education Department or governance representative as appropriate.  | GEMS Education Department/GEMS Corporate Office where the matter cannot be resolved at school level.                                        |
| Complaint about the Principal/CEO                                        | GEMS Education Department/GEMS Corporate Office or Governing Board representative.                                          | The Principal/CEO will not chair or sit on the committee for a complaint about the Principal/CEO. | GEMS Education Department/GEMS Corporate Office; external escalation to ADEK may follow if the school process has not resolved the concern. |

## 11. School Complaints Committee

Where a formal complaint remains unresolved, or where the nature of the complaint requires formal review, it will be referred to the School Complaints Committee. The Principal/CEO will normally chair the committee and may delegate this responsibility where appropriate. If the complaint is about the Principal/CEO, the Principal/CEO will be excluded and replaced by a Governing Board member or delegated GEMS representative.

The committee will normally include appropriate members based on the complaint, such as a senior leader, relevant academic or operational leader, safeguarding/inclusion lead where relevant, an impartial senior staff member or governance representative, and a minute-taker. The committee will:

- review the written complaint, previous actions and relevant records;
- gather information from relevant staff and stakeholders;
- meet with the complainant where this will support a fair review;
- consider whether the complaint was handled in line with policy and values;
- agree findings, outcomes and any corrective or improvement actions;
- provide a written response normally within 10 working days of committee referral.

The committee's response is the final school-level response unless the Principal/CEO or GEMS Education Department determines that further internal review is required.

## 12. Safeguarding, health and safety and urgent concerns

Any complaint that suggests a child may be at risk of harm, that a staff allegation may have occurred, or that there is a serious health and safety risk will be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, Principal/CEO or relevant

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senior leader and managed under the appropriate safeguarding, child protection, staff conduct, health and safety or incident reporting procedures.

This complaints procedure must never delay protective action or statutory/regulatory reporting. Information will be shared with appropriate authorities where required. The school will keep the complainant informed as far as is appropriate, while respecting confidentiality and the rights of all parties involved.

### 13. Confidentiality, fairness and respectful conduct

The school will handle complaints confidentially and share information only on a need-to-know basis. Records will be stored securely. It may not be possible to share all details of an investigation, particularly where the complaint involves another student, a staff member, safeguarding matters or confidential employment information.

All parties are expected to communicate calmly and respectfully, in line with the values of Care, Unity and Communication. The school may set reasonable communication boundaries where behaviour becomes abusive, discriminatory, threatening, persistently unreasonable or disruptive. This may include appointing a single point of contact, agreeing communication timescales, or declining to respond to repeated issues where no new evidence is provided. The school will always consider new safeguarding, health and safety or serious compliance concerns.

Anonymous complaints will be considered by the Principal/CEO or delegated senior leader. The ability to investigate may be limited, but anonymous complaints involving safeguarding, health and safety, discrimination, serious misconduct or compliance concerns will be reviewed and escalated as appropriate.

### 14. Recording, monitoring and learning

The school will keep a central complaint record, overseen by the Principal/CEO or delegated Compliance Coordinator. Records should include:

- date received and acknowledgement date;
- complainant details and complaint category;
- staff member or leader responsible for the response;
- summary of the issue, meetings, evidence and actions taken;
- outcome and date of response;
- whether timelines were met and, if not, why;
- improvement actions, follow-up checks and any policy or practice learning.

The Senior Leadership Team will review complaint themes termly to identify patterns, prevent recurrence and inform school improvement. Where appropriate, themes and actions will be shared with GEMS Corporate Office, the Governing Board and ADEK. The school will use feedback and complaints as evidence of Always Learning and Transformation.



## 16. Evaluation and review

Each member of the Senior Leadership Team is responsible for reviewing unresolved or escalated complaints relating to their area and identifying whether the process was effective, fair, timely and values-led. Recommendations for improvement will be reported to the Principal/CEO.

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if required by changes to GEMS guidance, ADEK requirements, school structure, stakeholder feedback or lessons learned from complaint monitoring.

## Appendix 1: Complaint handling quick reference

| Step                                  | Action                                                                            | Target / record                                                         |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Feedback or concern</b>         | Listen, clarify and direct to the appropriate person.                             | Record if action is needed.                                             |
| <b>2. Informal resolution</b>         | Relevant staff member seeks to resolve, involving line manager where needed.      | Aim to update/respond within 5 working days.                            |
| <b>3. Formal complaint</b>            | Complaint received in writing or recorded with support.                           | Acknowledge written complaint within 24 hours.                          |
| <b>4. Investigation</b>               | Lead investigator gathers evidence, meets relevant people and considers outcomes. | Written response normally within 10 working days; explain extensions.   |
| <b>5. School Complaints Committee</b> | Committee reviews unresolved, sensitive or escalated complaints.                  | Written committee response normally within 10 working days of referral. |

## Appendix 2: Complaint record checklist

The following checklist should be used to support consistent complaint records:

- Complainant name and contact details
- Student name and year group, where relevant
- Date received and date acknowledged
- Complaint category and stage
- Summary of concern and desired outcome
- Relevant documents or evidence
- Lead investigator and staff involved
- Meetings, calls and written correspondence
- Outcome and actions agreed
- Follow-up date and evidence of completion
- Learning points linked to school improvement and values