

Ying Wa Girls' School

Guidelines for Handling School Complaints

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(IMC approved)

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Foreword

Since founded in 1900, Ying Wa Girls' School has contributed to the nurturing of generations of able and responsible citizens for our society through the provision of whole-person education with a Christian character for students of diverse backgrounds.

The School encourages students to engage in diversified programmes and activities to cultivate self-confidence, positive outlook on life and a cultured mind, aspiring for the holistic development of one's morality, physical body, mental intelligence and spirituality. Upholding the school motto of "*Time is precious, treasure every minute*" and "*To serve and not to be served*", we inspire students to contribute to society for the education they received.

The School seeks continuous improvement in our administration and operation, and places high value on stakeholders' enquiries and contribution of ideas and suggestions. We encourage parents, students and staff to express their views and sentiments to the School through different channels, such as the Parent-Teacher Association, Student Association, Staff Club and Alumnae Association. We believe communication is conducive to fostering mutual trust and avoiding misunderstanding.

In face of complaints, the School adopts a proactive and positive attitude, striving to listen patiently to and understand the complainant's views and criticisms, and to provide prompt responses within an appropriate time frame. The School addresses complaints with an open mind, and seeks to solicit and accommodate diverging opinions in reviewing existing policies, mechanisms and measures to identify areas of improvement. With reference to the *Guidelines for Handling School Complaints* issued by the Education Bureau and the interests of our stakeholders, we have reviewed our existing policies and measures in this regard and put in place a mechanism and sets of procedures for handling complaints. The results are detailed in this document.

Chapter I Scope of Application

1.1 The guidelines are applicable to the handling of complaints about the daily operation and internal affairs of the School lodged by parents, students or members of the public through various means, including post, fax, email, phone or in person.

Daily operation and internal affairs of the School	
Domain	Examples
(i) Management and organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School accounts • Other charges • School policies • Standards of contractors' services • Service contracts • School environment and hygiene
(ii) Learning and teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-based curriculum • Subject selection and class allocation • Homework • Student assessment • Staff performance
(iii) School ethos & Student support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School ethos • Home-school cooperation • Student support • Arrangements for Extra-curricular activities
(iv) Student performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students' overall performance • Student discipline

1.2 The guidelines are not applicable to the handling of the following types of complaints:

Domain	Examples
(i) Complaints to be handled directly by the Education Bureau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education policies (e.g. class structure and class size) • Alleged contravention of the Education Ordinance (e.g. corporal punishment and unregistered teachers) or of the Codes of Aid (e.g. exorbitant charges and expulsion of students) • Services directly provided by the EDB (e.g. school place allocation and services provided by the Regional Education Offices)
(ii) Complaints to which the guidelines are not applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints related to ongoing legal proceedings • Complaints under the jurisdiction of other organisations/government departments • Complaints governed by other ordinances or statutory regulations (e.g. complaints against corruption, fraud or theft) • Complaints lodged by school staff
(iii) Complaints that the School need not handle in general	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anonymous complaints • Complaints not lodged by the person concerned • Complaints involving incidents that happened more than one year • Complaints with insufficient information

Chapter II Guiding Principles for Handling Complaints

2.1 In handling complaints lodged by parents, students or members of the public, the School will refer to the following principles:

Principles	Explanations
Handling by the appropriate parties	2.2 A complaint should be handled directly by the organisation which is responsible for making the policies, providing the relevant services or managing the persons/matters being complained. In this way, it can better understand and effectively address the concerns of the complainant. Accordingly, the School will handle complaints relating to its daily operation and internal affairs, and the EDB will handle those complaints concerning the Education Ordinance, education policies and their services.
Timely and efficient handling	2.3 The School will handle and respond to all verbal or written inquiries, opinions or complaints as soon as possible. Upon receipt of an inquiry/ complaint, the frontline staff will either directly handle it or immediately refer it to the designated officer/task force for action. If the responsible staff cannot resolve the problem, they will seek help from their seniors. 2.4 If an incident is referred or reported to the School by the media, the School's Crisis Management Team will take appropriate actions.
Clear and transparent mechanism	2.5 The School will prepare for stakeholders guidelines on the relevant policies, procedures and responsible staff for handling complaints. Parents and staff will be made fully aware of the details of the procedures through different channels, e.g. school website, circulars to parents and staff meetings. 2.6 To facilitate smooth implementation of the mechanism, the School will ensure that all staff responsible for handling inquiries and complaints understand and comply with the relevant policies and guidelines. 2.7 The Schools will regularly review its complaint handling policies and guidelines, and revise the handling procedures whenever necessary.
Fairness and impartiality	2.8 The School will approach complaints positively, and treat the complainants and respondents of the complaints fairly. Under normal circumstances, the School will meet with both the complainants and the the respondents, and allow the latter a fair chance of defence. The School will also inform these two parties involved of the investigation result. 2.9 Before an investigation begins or where appropriate, the designated staff and related individuals should declare interests. 2.10 To avoid conflict of interest, any staff member who is the respondent of the complaint should not engage in handling the case, supervising the investigation, or signing and issuing letters to the complainant. 2.11 The School will see to it that the rights of the complainants or other persons involved in the complaint are being protected and that their future communication and contact with the School would not be affected.
Confidentiality	2.12 All contents and information of the complaints will be kept strictly confidential and restricted to internal reference or reference by the relevant persons only. 2.13 The School will observe the regulations and recommendations set out in the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance in collecting personal data required for handling a complaint and upon request by the parties involved for the disclosure of data/records/investigation result in respect of the complaint. This includes clear specification of the purpose and the form of collection of personal data, and that the data will only be used for handling the complaint or the appeal.

Chapter III Procedures for Handling Complaints

Interpretation of “Complaint”

- 3.1 To avoid complication in the handling procedures, all staff should exercise caution when distinguishing between a concern and a complaint. A concern is an inquiry or opinion raised to the School by a party with concerns over the interests of oneself, his/her child or the School, in the hope of changes or improvement in the current situation. Meanwhile, a complaint is disappointment, dissatisfaction or indignation expressed by a complainant, who may request the School to rectify a mistake, discipline a suspected offender or seek solutions to the issues related to the complaint. Persons-in-charge should avoid confusion between the two so as to determine the appropriate handling procedures.
- 3.2 Under normal circumstances, the persons-in-charge may handle concerns, views or informal complaints by following the informal complaint handling procedures so as to provide relevant parties with immediate or prompt assistance or a solution to the issues.
- 3.3 In general, an inquiry or an informal complaint that has been answered or resolved instantly need not be documented in formal writing. Where necessary, the staff concerned may however record the key points.

Procedures for Handling Complaints

3.4 Flowchart of School Complaint Handling Procedures

Stage		Procedures	Time limit*
1. Informal Procedures		1.1 Handle inquiries, views or informal complaints	Within 15 working days
2. Formal complaints	2.1 Investigation Stage	2.11 Complainant lodges a formal complaint	Acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 5 working days after receiving the complaint (See Appendices 2 & 3 for sample acknowledgement letters)
		2.12 Appoint appropriate staff to conduct formal investigation and reply to the complainant	Investigation to be completed within 2 months after receiving the complaint (See Appendix 1 for sample complaint record)
		2.13 Complainant accepts the investigation result	Close case
	2.2 Appeal Stage	2.21 Complainant puts forward reasons or new evidence for an appeal	Complainant may lodge an appeal in writing within 14 days from the date of the School's reply.
		2.22 Appoint appropriate staff to conduct investigation and reply to the complainant	Investigation to be completed within 2 months after receiving the appeal
		2.23 Complainant accepts the investigation result	Close case
3. Review Stage		3.1 Complainant or relevant organisation (including the School and the EDB) provides substantial grounds or new evidence to request a review	Application for a review should be made to the EDB in writing within 14 days from the date of the School's reply.
		3.2 The EDB's "Review Board on School Complaints" conducts a review. (see Chapter V of the "Guidelines for Handling School Complaints" http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/sch-admin/admin/pilot-scheme/index.html)	

* Time limit may be adjusted according to the complexity of each case

Resolving conflict through mediation

3.5 When handling complaints, the School may, having regard to the nature of individual cases, consider whether it is appropriate to adopt different means to resolve conflicts promptly. This includes seeking mediation service from a mediator, or inviting independent persons/professionals to provide impartial views to assist the persons concerned (including the complainants and the persons/organisations being complained against).

Responding to complaints/appeals

3.6 If the complaint or appeal is in written form, the School should respond with a written reply. If the complaint is made verbally, the responsible staff may decide whether to respond orally or in writing. If the case is referred by the EDB/other organisation(s), a copy of the written reply should be forwarded to them for reference.

3.7 Generally speaking, the time limit for replying to a complaint/appeal should start from the date on which it is received or when the complainant agrees to let the School have access to his/her personal data. If the information submitted is incomplete, the time limit should start from the date on which the School receives from the complainant the necessary information.

Complaint/Appeal records

3.8 The School will keep clear record of cases handled by the formal complaint investigation procedures. (See Appendix 1 for sample complaint record)

Chapter IV Arrangements for Handling Complaints

Designated staff

4.1 The School may, having regard to the nature of the complaint, its scope and the persons involved, designate a staff member to handle the complaint:

4.11 Staff members who are responsible for the appeal stage should be different from those responsible for the investigation stage. If this is not practicable, the School may make other arrangements, such as appointing staff from another department, to ensure fairness.

4.12 Where necessary, the School may set up a task force to handle special cases. Depending on the situation, the task force may include members of the IMC.

4.13 The appointed staff should be proactive in communicating with the inquirers/complainants and prompt in providing responses as well as the information they need. The School will also ensure that the designated staff have proper authorisation and clearly understand their roles and responsibilities.

4.2 Deployment of staff for handling complaints at difference stages:

Parties involved	Investigation Stage	Appeal Stage
Staff	Panel/Committee Heads or other relevant staff*	SMT
Panel/Committee Heads	SMT	Supervisor
Vice Principal	Principal	Supervisor
Principal	Supervisor	IMC Appeal Task Force
Supervisor or IMC	IMC Investigation Task Force	IMC Appeal Task Force

* The SMT will decide on the staff responsible for the investigation according to the nature of the case.

Follow-up and evaluation

4.3 The School will conduct a comprehensive review on the strategies, process and steps taken to handle complaints in order to benefit from past experience, improve the way of handling, and avoid similar incidents from recurring.

4.4 The School will regularly review its complaint handling policies and report to the IMC, and, if necessary, suggest improvement measures to enhance the School-based complaint handling mechanism and procedures.

Support and training

4.5 The School will provide appropriate support and training to assist staff to effectively handle inquiries/complaints. This includes arranging experience sharing sessions for staff to enhance their capability in handling complaints and resolving conflicts, and encouraging staff to attend relevant training programmes organised by the EDB.

Chapter V Handling of Unreasonable Behaviour

5.1 In case of complainants' unreasonable behaviour which may have adverse impact on the School (e.g. draining a considerable amount of the School's human resources, interrupting its operations or services, or threatening the safety of staff and other stakeholders), the School may adopt the following policies and measures to handle this kind of unreasonable behaviour to ensure that its operation would not be affected.

Unreasonable Behavior	Policies and Measures
<p>5.2 Unreasonable attitude or behaviour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts of violence or intimidation • Making complaints with abusive language or in an insulting and discriminatory tone • Providing false data or deliberately concealing facts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The officer handling the complaint should convey clearly to the complainant that any unreasonable attitude or behavior is unacceptable, and demand that he/she stop acting in such a way. • If the complainant refuses to comply after the warning, the officer may terminate the meeting or conversation with the complainant. • The School will remind staff responsible for handling complaints to stay alert and take suitable action to protect their own safety. • If the complainant's behaviour poses an immediate threat to the staff's personal safety or damages their personal interests, the staff may make decision, depending on the situation, on whether to terminate the interview or dialogue with the complainant and ask the complainant to leave. • The School may report to the police or take legal actions, if necessary.
<p>5.3 Unreasonable demands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requesting a huge amount of information or demanding special treatment • Making telephone calls incessantly to ask for a dialogue or an interview, or to command a certain staff member to reply • Commanding a certain staff member to meet at a specific time and place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The School may consider putting restrictions on the complainant's contacts with the School, including specifying the time, frequency, date, duration and modes of communication. • The School will notify the complainant in writing of the arrangements and handling procedures.

<p>5.4 Unreasonable persistent complaints</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insisting on rejecting the explanations and findings of the School, and/or requiring the School to discipline certain person(s), even after appropriate investigation procedures have been taken • Repeatedly making the same complaints or presenting similar justifications as before without providing any new evidence in respect of the same case • In respect of the same case, persistently bringing in new allegations or new complaint targets, while failing to present concrete evidence • Interpreting things in an unreasonable or irrational manner, or wrangling over trivial details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The School may decide whether to restrict or stop contacts with the complainant, and cease handling the case altogether. • To avoid any unrealistic expectations on the part of the complainant, the School will communicate to the complainant in a firm manner that a final decision has been made regarding the case and that the decision is irreversible. • The School will send a “Reply Letter” to the complainant (see Appendix 4 for a sample), reiterating that the School will neither respond to nor contact the complainant again on the same complaint.
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