

## Handling of Concerns and Complaints Received from Parents

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## **Definitions**

### **School**

School will mean one of Mill Hill School, Belmont Mill Hill Preparatory School, Grimsdell Mill Hill Pre-Preparatory School, Mill Hill International, Cobham Hall, Keble Prep School of Lyonsdown School, being the Mill Hill School Foundation School attended by the relevant pupil.

### **Head**

- at Mill Hill School will mean the Head of Mill Hill School
- at Belmont Mill Hill Preparatory School will mean the Head of Belmont Mill Hill Preparatory School
- at Grimsdell Mill Hill Pre-Preparatory School will mean the Head of Grimsdell Mill Hill Pre- Preparatory School
- at Mill Hill International will mean the Head of Mill Hill International
- at Cobham Hall will mean the Head of Cobham Hall
- at Keble Prep School will mean the Head of Keble Prep School
- at Lyonsdown School will mean the Head of Lyonsdown School

### **Executives**

- The seven Headteachers
- The Chief Executive Officer
- The Director of Finance and Resources
- The Director of Operations

### **Parent/s**

Includes current parent or legal guardian or education guardian of the pupil at the School about whom the complaint relates and may at the School's discretion include a parent whose child has recently left the School but only if the complaint was initially raised whilst the said pupil was still registered as a pupil at the School, unless in exceptional circumstances.

### **Concern**

Is a query or anxiety or dissatisfaction with an aspect of the School or its processes and procedures which is raised or otherwise brought to the attention of the School by phone, email or verbally in person and which is resolved informally either orally or in writing. This is considered an informal complaint.

### **Independent Member**

Is someone who is not involved in the running, management or governance of the Foundation.

### **Formal Complaint**

Is a concern that is not resolved informally but is made formally in writing and considered under the formal procedure as described in this policy or is raised directly to a member of the Senior Management/Leadership Team, or to a Housemaster or Housemistress, or to a Head of Department and which requires investigation, or other significant input, by a member of the Senior Management Team. A record will be made of such formal complaints.

### **Working Days**

Monday to Friday when the School is open during Term time excluding Bank Holidays. The dates of Terms are published on the School's website,

## **Handling of Concerns and Complaints Received from Parents (Including EYFS)**

### **1 Introduction**

#### **1.1 Circulation**

This policy is addressed to current parent/s or legal guardian/s or education guardian/s of pupils at the School, and may at the School's discretion include parents whose child has recently left the School but only if the complaint was initially raised whilst the said pupil was still registered as a pupil at the School. The policy is published on the Mill Hill School Foundation website and is available, upon request to the School Office, to the parents, pupils and staff at the School.

#### **1.2 Policy Status**

The policy has been approved by the Executives and the Court of Governors of the Mill Hill School Foundation. It provides guidelines for handling concerns and complaints. It takes account of The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 as amended by the Independent Education Provisions in England (Inspection Fees) and Independent School Standards (Amendments) 2018 and has regard to Standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (2015); ISI Handbook for the Inspection of Schools – Commentary on the Regulatory Requirements, September 2018 and the Early Years Foundation Stage: Statutory Framework, March 2017. The procedures set out below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and circumstances of each case. Certain of the procedures can be carried out only during term time.

#### **1.3 Application**

This policy applies to all concerns and complaints raised with the School. Additional procedures may also apply with regard to a concern or complaint, for example in the event of a child protection issue (see The Mill Hill School Foundation Policy to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children who are pupils at the Foundation).

#### **1.4 Three Stages: This policy describes a three stage procedure**

- Stage 1 Informal resolution of a concern or difficulty notified orally or in writing to a member of staff
- Stage 2 A formal complaint in writing to the Head of the School to which the complaint relates
- Stage 3 A referral to the Complaints Panel

**A concern about the safety of a child should be notified immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead of the child's school and should be confirmed in writing to the Head of the relevant School.** Please refer to the Policy to Promote and Safeguard the Welfare of Children who are pupils at the Foundation, which can be found on the Foundation's website, for more information.

#### **1.5 Policy Aim and Statement**

- **Aim:** The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically,

efficiently, at the appropriate level and resolved as soon as possible. The policy is designed to promote consistency in the handling of complaints and, where appropriate, to allow recommendations to be made in the light of them

- **Policy statement:** The School wishes to know **as soon as possible** if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. The School recognises that a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, which would be damaging to relationships and also to the School culture. Parents should never feel or be made to feel – that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or his/her opportunities at the School. The policy however distinguishes between a **concern or difficulty** which can be resolved informally at Stage 1 and a **formal complaint** at Stage 2 which will usually require investigation prior to determination

## 1.6 Management of Complaints

Appointed Person: The Head will appoint a senior member of staff, normally a Deputy Head (“Appointed Person”) to be responsible for investigating a complaint. The Appointed Person will be in a more senior position in the School than the member of staff previously involved in the complaint. The Appointed Person will be the first point of contact while the matter remains unresolved and will keep records.

The Appointed Person will be responsible for:

- coordinating the complaints procedures in the School
- ensuring that all teaching, support and medical staff are made aware of the procedures for reporting concern or complaint
- recording complaints and ensuring the records are kept confidential
- reporting regularly to the Head with respect to complaints

The Appointed Person can be contacted by telephone and e-mail, details of which are provided in the School Calendar or on the School website.

## 1.7 Complaint Form

Every formal complaint notified to a member of staff will be noted, together with the action taken, on a standard form known as the Complaint Form and passed to the Appointed Person and will form part of the School’s Complaints log. A sample of the form is attached to this policy in Appendix A.

## 2 Stages of Concern or Complaint

### 2.1 Stage 1 – Concerns and Difficulties

- **Concerns:** The School expects that most concerns, where a parent seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken, can be resolved informally.
- **Notification:** Parents are expected to raise the concern initially as follows:
  - **Education Issues:** If the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs at Grimsdell Mill Hill Pre-Preparatory School or Belmont Mill Hill Preparatory School parents should speak or write to the Form Teacher, and at The Mount Mill Hill International and Mill Hill School parents should speak or write to the Housemaster/Housemistress or Appointed Person as appropriate.

**Pastoral Care:** For concerns relating to matters outside the classroom or in the House at Grimsdell Mill Hill Preparatory School parents should speak or write to the Form Teacher, at Belmont Mill Hill Preparatory School parents should speak or write to the Head of Upper School or Head of Lower School as appropriate and at Mill Hill International and Mill Hill School parents should speak or write to the Housemaster/Housemistress or Appointed Person as appropriate.

- **Disciplinary Matters:** For a problem over any disciplinary action taken or sanction imposed at Grimsdell parents should speak or write to the Deputy Head, at Belmont Mill Hill Preparatory School parents should speak or write to the Head of Year or Head of Lower School as appropriate, and at Mill Hill International and Mill Hill School parents should speak or write to the Housemaster/Housemistress or Appointed Person as appropriate.
- **Acknowledgement:** The School will acknowledge a notification by telephone, e-mail or letter within three (3) working days of receipt within term time and if the notification is received during a school holiday then as soon as practicable, and no later than within three (3) working days of the start of the following term. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing but a Complaint Form will be completed and a copy sent to the Appointed Person.
- **Informal Resolution:** A concern or difficulty should be resolved within seven (7) working days of the date of receiving the expression of concern or difficulty in term time or as soon as practicable if the informal complaint is either received during or immediately before a school holiday.

### 3 Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

- 3.1 **Notification:** If a parent remains dissatisfied after the completion of Stage 1, or if a complaint needs formal investigation, or if there is dissatisfaction with some aspect of the School's policies, procedures, management or administration, this should be set out in writing with full details and sent with all relevant documents and the parents' full contact details in an envelope or by email with scanned documents addressed to the Head of the School to which the complaint relates. Such a complaint will be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within five (5) working days during term time, indicating the action that is being taken. If the notification is received during a school holiday then it will be acknowledged as soon as practicable and no later than within five (5) working days of the start of the following term. A Complaints Form will be completed by the Head and sent to the Appointed Person.
- 3.2 **Investigation:** If the complaint requires investigation, the Appointed Person or another senior member of staff designated by the Head will act as 'investigator'. The investigator may request additional information from the parents and will probably wish to speak to them personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. The outcome of the investigation will be reported to the Head and the parents will then be notified in writing of the Head's decision and the reasons for it. The investigation and notification of the decision will be made within twenty-eight (28) working days of the date of receiving the written complaint in term time or as soon as practicable if the written complaint is either received during or immediately before a school holiday. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. Without prejudice to their rights under Stage 3 of the policy, parents have the option to meet with the CEO to discuss the outcome of their complaint.

- 3.3** If the complaint is against an Executive 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 Executive and for all the relevant documents. The Chair of Governors or their nominee may 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. The Chair of Governors may appoint an external consultant to assist in the investigation. 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. The Chair of Governors or their nominee will give reasons for their decision.

#### **4 Stage 3 – Reference to the Complaints Panel**

- 4.1 Notification:** If parents are dissatisfied with the Head’s decision under Stage 2 they may request a hearing before a Complaints Panel. If parents wish to bring a complaint of a decision at Stage 2 to the Complaints Panel they should write to or email the Clerk of the Court of Governors (“Clerk”) within seven (7) working days of notification of the decision at Stage 2. This request will only be considered if the parents have completed the procedures at Stages 1 and 2. A copy of all relevant documents and the parents’ full contact details must accompany the letter or email to the Clerk. Parents must state in their letter or email the outcome that they desire and all the grounds of their complaint. Parents must also state a list of documents which they believe to be in the School’s possession and wish the Panel to see. The Clerk will acknowledge the request in writing within seven (7) working days.
- 4.2 Composition:** The Complaints Panel (“Panel”) will comprise members of the Court of Governors and members who are independent of the governance, management and running of the School. The CEO of the Foundation and/or the relevant Head of School will not be part of the Panel. The Panel will consist of a minimum of three (3) individuals who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. One member of the Panel shall be an independent member. The Panel may appoint an external consultant to carry out any necessary further investigation of the complaint on their behalf.
- 4.3 Convening the Panel:** The Clerk will convene the Panel within twenty-eight (28) working days of receipt of the written request for a hearing not including School half terms or holidays when the Panel will not normally sit. Should the period of twenty-eight (28) working days stated above include a School half term or holiday there may be a delay to the convening of the Panel which will then be convened as soon as practicable. If the parents cannot attend the date offered by the panel for the hearing all reasonable efforts will be made to find an alternative date within the 28 days.
- 4.4 Notice of Hearing:** Within fifteen (15) working days of the date the Clerk to the Court of Governors received the written request for a hearing, the Clerk will send the parents written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing together with the names of the Panel members who will hear it. The hearing can take place in person or virtually.
- 4.5 Attendance:** The parents will be asked to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, or friend to provide support. Legal representation will not be permitted. Pupils are not permitted to attend the hearing, unless deemed appropriate by the Chair of the Panel on a case by case basis. Copies of additional documents that the parents wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk at least three (3) clear working days prior to the hearing.
- 4.6 Chair of the Panel (“Chair”):** The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Panel (chosen by themselves) and will be conducted in an informal manner.

- 4.7 Hearing:** All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Clerk will take minutes of the proceedings. The Chair may direct that the hearing is audio recorded to assist accurate recollection for purposes of the decision and for accuracy of the minutes. The audio recording will only be shared with panel members, if necessary, and will be deleted after 30 days of the hearing.
- 4.8 Evidence:** The Chair will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity of asking questions relevant to the complaint and making comments in an appropriate manner. If the Chair believes that the questions are not relevant to the complaint, he/she has the right to withdraw the question. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and 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. If the parents or school wish for oral evidence to be heard, they shall inform the Clerk within seven (7) working days of the panel hearing to request the Panel's permission, giving the details of the witness/es. The panel will notify the parents within five (5) working days of the hearing as to whether oral evidence will be heard from the witness/es. If the panel agrees to hear oral evidence from witness/es, the witness/es will be called into the relevant part of the meeting to give evidence and will not usually be permitted to listen to the full proceedings.
- 4.9 Conduct:** All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. If adjourned, the panel can continue the hearing without the complainant to reach its decision.
- 4.10 Adjournment:** The Chair may at his/her discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue.
- 4.11 Decision:** After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel shall reach a decision based on the balance of probabilities as to whether the complaint is upheld or not. The Panel's findings and any recommendations shall subsequently be confirmed in writing to the parents, the Chair of the Court of Governors, the Head and, where relevant, to the person complained about, within seven working days. Reasons for the Decision will be given. A copy of the minutes will be shared with the parents, the Chair of the Court of Governors and the Head. The Decision and any recommendations will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Court of Governors and the Head.

**No further appeal is available after the decision has been made by the Panel**

- 4.12 Private Proceeding:** A hearing before the Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.
- 5 Confidentiality:** 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 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.
- 6 Record Keeping:** It is the responsibility of the Heads to ensure that a written record of all formal complaints is kept, including details of whether they are resolved following a formal procedure or proceed to a panel hearing and the action taken by the School as a result of these complaints, regardless of whether they are upheld. A formal complaint is a written complaint as defined on page 3 of this Policy. The record of complaints shall be kept for a period of 25 years from the pupil's date of birth or indefinitely if the matter relates to a safeguarding concern. The written record of complaints will be reviewed by the Head, or, at the Head's request, by the Deputy Head of the School.

## **7 Use of Personal Data**

The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice which can be found on the Foundation website. When dealing with complaints the School (including any panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, 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 all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes of the hearing
- The Panel's written decision

This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the Foundation's Privacy Notice, but potentially including sensitive data such as information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint.

The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Notice and Retention of Records policy but in most cases for a period of period of 25 years from the pupil's date of birth or indefinitely if the matter relates to a safeguarding concern.

## **8 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS):** At Grimsdell and Lyonsdown Schools where there is provision for the EYFS, the following additional provisions apply to this policy:

- The School will retain a written record of all complaints for period of 25 years from the pupil's date of birth or indefinitely if the matter relates to a safeguarding concern and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint.
- Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements must be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days. The record of complaints must be available to Ofsted and ISI on request.

## **9 Boarding Pupils**

As there are boarding pupils at Mill Hill School, Mill Hill International and Cobham Hall, the requirements under Standard 14 of the National Minimum Boarding Standards (2022) apply to this policy when applied to Mill Hill School, Mill Hill International and Cobham Hall. In accordance with this Standard a concern or complaint by parents of boarding pupils will be dealt with in accordance with this Policy.

## **10 Complaints to Ofsted and the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI)**

Parents of children in the EYFS are entitled to make a complaint about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements at Grimsdell and Lyonsdown directly to Ofsted and/or to the Independent Schools' Inspectorate (ISI):

- The number for the Ofsted helpline is 0300 1234 234 or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk). Ofsted have produced a leaflet that gives information about how to raise concerns about schools; how to raise

concerns with Ofsted; what Ofsted can and will do when they receive complaints; and Ofsted's enforcement and other powers

- The leaflet, 'Concerns and complaints about childminders and childcare providers' can be found at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance/Browse-all-by/Other/General/Factsheet-childcare-Concerns-and-complaints-about-childminders-and-childcare-providers>
- Parents can also raise concerns related to the quality of education or the welfare health or safety of pupils, by writing to ISI directly to: The Independent Schools Inspectorate, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA at email [concerns@isi.net](mailto:concerns@isi.net). Their phone number is 0207 600 0100. Concerns will be recorded and may be copied to the Department for Education (DfE). However, ISI will not investigate disputes about fees or specific complaints about pupils no longer at the School

## **11 Expulsion**

A pupil may be formally expelled from the School if it is proved on the balance of probabilities that the Pupil has committed a very grave breach of school discipline or a serious criminal offence. Expulsion is reserved for the most serious breaches. In the event of expulsion or of the Pupil's removal being required, the Head will advise the parents of the procedure for a Governors' Review of that decision and which is set out in the Mill Hill School Foundation Expulsion, Removal and Review Policy. A formal complaint regarding the decision to expel or require a Pupil to be removed from the School will be conducted in accordance with Paragraphs 10 to 13 inclusive above.

## **12 Number of Complaints in a School Year**

The number of complaints in the previous school year may be obtained by contacting the Head's PA or the school office.

## **13 Flowchart**

A flowchart summarizing the process for raising concerns or complaints is attached in Appendix B.

## **14 Review**

This Policy shall be reviewed every three years

Last review December 2020

This interim review May 2022

Next review December 2023

By resolution of the Nomination and Governance Committee of the Court of Governors.

# APPENDIX A

## Complaints Report Form

School:	
This form is to be completed by any member of staff who receives a formal complaint from a Parent. It should be passed to the Appointed Person at the School. Definition of a formal complaint that must be logged on this form:  a) A formal complaint that has been raised under the Foundation's formal complaints procedures or b) A complaint that is raised directly to a member of the Senior Management Team, or to a Housemaster or Housemistress, or to a Head of Department and which requires formal investigation, or other significant input, by a member of the Senior Management Team	
What is the nature of the complaint? (Please tick)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff Conduct <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching Standards <input type="checkbox"/> Condition of Premises <input type="checkbox"/> Matters of Regime and Routine <input type="checkbox"/> Pastoral Care <input type="checkbox"/> Time Tabling <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please give details)	
Please give details of the complaint:	
Date/s of Incident:	Time/s:
Please give the names of any witnesses to the incident/s:	
Action Taken:	
Name:  Signed:	Date:
FOR OFFICE USE ONLY: Is this deemed to be a complaint according to the definition used by the School?	YES / NO (please circle)

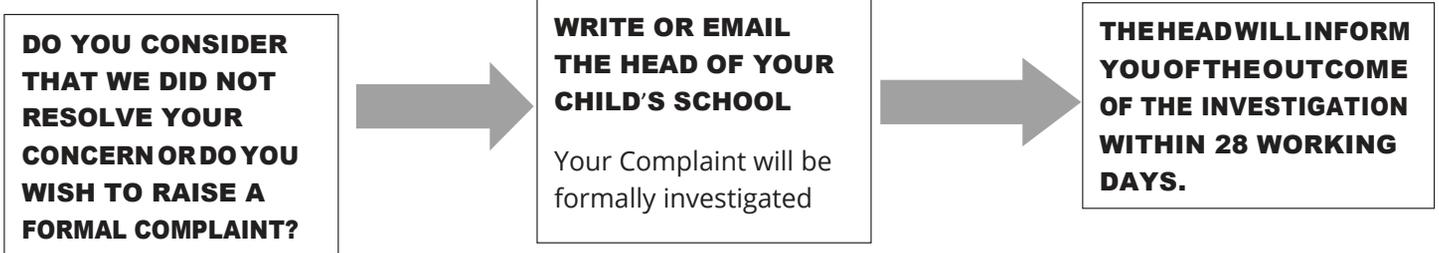
# APPENDIX B

## Flowchart for How to Raise a Concern or Complain

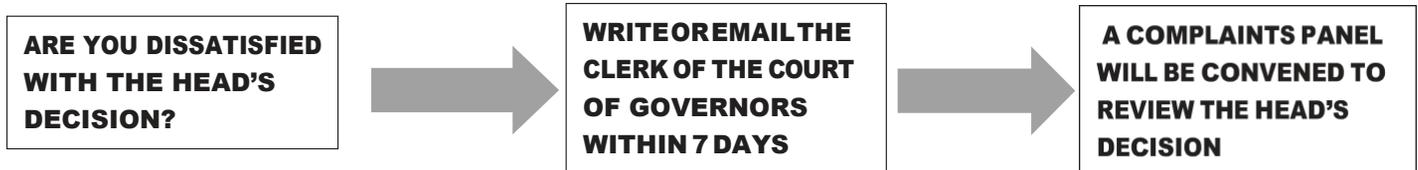
### STAGE 1



### STAGE 2



### STAGE 3



**DO YOU HAVE A COMPLAINT ABOUT THE HEAD OF YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL?**  
WRITE OR EMAIL THE CHAIR OF GOVERNORS

## APPENDIX C

### Template Procedure at the Stage 3 Panel Hearing

The Chair of the Appeal Panel may conduct the Hearing in the following manner. The Panel Hearing will be audio recorded for accuracy of the minutes. The attendees may take notes during the Hearing.

- 1) The Chair welcomes all, introduces the parties and sets out agenda for the hearing.
- 2) The Chair will invite the parents to summarise the complaint;
  - Panel members will be invited to ask the parents questions through the Chair
  - The School representatives will be invited to ask the parents questions through the Chair
  - If prior consent from the Chair has been given for witnesses to attend the meeting, Panel members can call on the external witnesses into the meeting to ask questions, if necessary
- 3) The School representatives will be invited to respond to the complaint:
  - Panel members will be invited to ask questions of the School representatives through the Chair
  - The parents will be invited to ask questions of the School representatives through the Chair
  - If prior consent from the Chair has been given for witnesses to attend the meeting, Panel members can call on the external witnesses into the meeting to ask questions, if necessary
- 4) The Panel will consider whether further investigation is required and whether adjournment is necessary for this to take place;
  - If no adjournment is required, the Chair will invite the School representatives to sum up their position
  - The Chair will then invite the parents to sum up their position
- 5) The Chair will then outline next steps.
- 6) The Hearing is then formally closed.
- 7) The Panel will then retire to consider their decision in private to make findings about the complaint on the balance of probabilities and make any recommendations.
- 8) The minutes of the Hearing, together with the Panel's findings and any recommendations will be provided in writing to the parents within seven working days of the Hearing.

***The decision of the Panel is final. There will be no further opportunity within the School for consideration of the complaint. The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the School's complaints procedure;***

- The School will ensure that the Panel decision is recorded appropriately and that any recommendations made in the course of a complaint are properly considered and actioned as appropriate
- The Panel's findings and any recommendations will be kept confidential but may be required to be disclosed to the Department for Education or to an authorised inspector
- The Panel's findings and any recommendations will be available for inspection on the School premises by the Head and the Court of Governors