

H-FARM International School Venice

Complaints Policy and Procedure

For Parents and Guardians

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Status	Final

Formal complaints: office.ve@h-farmschool.com

Subject line: Formal Complaint

1. Purpose

H-FARM International School Venice is committed to handling concerns and complaints fairly, promptly, transparently and constructively. The purpose of this policy is to provide parents and legal guardians with a clear route for raising concerns about the School's operations, policies, decisions, communication or practice.

The School will seek to resolve concerns as early as possible, while ensuring that serious, sensitive or complex matters receive the investigation and procedural care they require. Decisions under this policy will take into account the best interests of students, the dignity and rights of all parties, confidentiality, procedural fairness and the School's duty to operate safely and professionally.

Students may also raise concerns directly, or with the support of a parent, guardian or trusted adult. Where an alternative student, safeguarding or pastoral route is more appropriate, the School will help the student to access it.

2. Scope: what this policy covers

This policy may be used for concerns or complaints relating to:

- academic provision, learning, feedback, assessment communication or classroom practice, where the matter is not governed by a separate IB or examination process;
- pastoral care, student wellbeing, behaviour management or communication, where safeguarding procedures are not triggered;
- boarding provision, residential routines, supervision, communication or student experience;
- school communication with parents, guardians or students;
- school operations, facilities, transport, timetabling, invoicing or administrative services, unless a separate contractual route applies;
- the implementation of school policies or procedures.

3. What this policy does not cover

Some matters must be managed through separate safeguarding, statutory, contractual, employment, data-protection, IB or regulatory procedures. This policy does not cover:

- safeguarding or child protection concerns, low-level concerns, allegations against adults, child-on-child abuse, disclosures, suspected abuse, neglect, exploitation or significant risk to a student;
- admissions criteria, admissions decisions or enrolment decisions;
- staff grievances, employment disputes, disciplinary matters or other matters governed by HR procedures;
- whistleblowing disclosures;
- student suspension, exclusion or disciplinary decisions where a separate behaviour, exclusion or appeal procedure applies;
- final IB results, enquiries upon results, appeals or other matters governed directly by current International Baccalaureate procedures;
- data-protection rights, access requests or complaints that must be handled through the School's data-protection procedure;
- legal claims, contractual disputes, debt-recovery matters or disputes concerning third-party services where a separate legal or contractual process applies.

If a concern includes a safeguarding or child protection element, that element must be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or the appropriate safeguarding route. The complaints procedure will never delay immediate protective action, statutory reporting or the preservation of evidence. The School

will not use this policy to investigate suspected abuse, harm or safeguarding allegations where safeguarding procedures or legal obligations apply.

4. Definitions

A concern is an issue, question or expression of unease that the complainant wishes the School to address informally.

A complaint is a formal expression of dissatisfaction about an aspect of the School's operation, policy, decision, communication or practice, for which the complainant seeks a response, remedy or review.

A concern becomes a formal complaint when informal resolution has not been successful, when the matter is too serious for informal handling, or when the complainant expressly asks for the formal procedure to be used.

5. Principles and expectations

- Concerns and complaints should be raised promptly, respectfully and with enough detail to allow the matter to be understood and investigated.
- The School will listen carefully, establish relevant facts and respond proportionately.
- Every reasonable effort should be made to resolve concerns informally before moving to a formal stage, unless the seriousness of the matter requires formal handling from the outset.
- No complainant should face discrimination, retaliation or adverse treatment because they have raised a concern in good faith.
- All parties are expected to communicate with courtesy. Firm disagreement is possible without personal attack, intimidation or public escalation.
- Confidentiality will be respected. Information will be shared only with those who have a legitimate professional need to know, subject to safeguarding, legal, regulatory and data-protection obligations.
- Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated under this procedure, except where the School judges that the content raises a safeguarding, health and safety, legal or serious operational concern requiring action.
- The School will declare and manage any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest.
- The School will make reasonable adjustments to support accessibility and, where practicable, communication needs arising from the international and multilingual nature of the community.
- Complaints will be considered in the context of the School's policies, professional standards and duty of care.

6. Contact points

For concerns, please refer to the following contact points.

Nature of concern	Usual first contact	Escalation if unresolved or serious
Learning, homework, feedback or classroom routines	Subject teacher, mentor or homeroom teacher	Head of Programme; Head of School where appropriate
Pastoral, behaviour, wellbeing or student relationships	Mentor, homeroom teacher, subject teacher or relevant pastoral leader	Head of Programme; safeguarding route where required
Boarding routines, residential life or boarding communication	Boarding Parent, Head of House or relevant boarding staff member	Head of Boarding; Head of School; safeguarding route where required
Administrative, transport, timetable, invoicing or facilities matters	Student Office or relevant operational department	Relevant operational leader; Head of School where appropriate

Nature of concern	Usual first contact	Escalation if unresolved or serious
IB programme, assessment or academic-policy matter	Relevant teacher or IB Coordinator	Head of Programme and Head of School
Concern about a Head of Programme or Head of Boarding	Head of School	Director General where appropriate
Complaint about the Head of School	Director General	Appropriate group or governance route only where applicable

7. Complaints procedure

Stage 1: informal resolution

1. The concern should normally be raised with the member of staff or leader closest to the matter, using the usual School communication channel.
2. The member of staff or leader will listen, gather the information necessary to understand the concern and seek a practical, proportionate resolution.
3. Where the concern cannot be resolved at that level, or where it is more serious, it may be escalated to the relevant Head of Programme, Head of Boarding, operational leader or Head of School.
4. If the concern involves a Head of Programme or the Head of Boarding, the Head of School will normally address it directly.
5. The School will keep a proportionate record of significant concerns, the response provided and any action agreed.
6. If the concern remains unresolved, the complainant may proceed to Stage 2.

Stage 2: formal complaint to the Head of School

7. A formal complaint must be submitted in writing to the Head of School through the School Office at office.ve@h-farmschool.com, using the subject line "Formal Complaint" (see Appendix A: Formal Complaint Form).
8. The complaint should include the complainant's name and contact details; the student's name and year group where relevant; the nature of the complaint; relevant dates and people involved; steps already taken; supporting evidence; and the outcome sought.
9. The Head of School, or a delegated senior leader with appropriate independence and expertise, will acknowledge the complaint within 2 school days.
10. The School will conduct an investigation proportionate to the matter. This may include reviewing records, policies, correspondence or other evidence; speaking with relevant staff or students; and meeting the complainant where clarification would assist.
11. The complainant may be accompanied at a formal meeting by one support person. The School should be informed in advance of the person's identity and role. Legal representation will not normally be necessary or appropriate, unless agreed because of the exceptional nature of the matter.
12. The Head of School, or delegated senior leader, will normally provide a written response within 10 school days after acknowledgement. The response will summarise the issue, the process followed, the findings where appropriate, the decision and any action the School intends to take.
13. Where a complaint concerns the conduct of an employee, the School may be unable to disclose confidential employment or disciplinary information. It will nevertheless confirm that the concern has been considered and that appropriate action has been taken where required.
14. Where the complaint is about the Head of School, Stage 2 will be handled by the Director General or an appropriate delegated reviewer.

Stage 3: final local review by the Director General

15. If the complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 2, they may request a final local review by the H-FARM Director General.
16. The request must normally be made in writing within 5 school days of the Stage 2 response and should explain why the complainant believes that the Stage 2 process or outcome was insufficient.
17. The Director General, or a suitable delegated reviewer where necessary to preserve independence, will acknowledge the request and review the complaint, the process followed, the evidence considered and the Stage 2 response.
18. The reviewer may decide the matter on the documents, request further information, meet the complainant, speak with relevant staff or require limited further enquiries.
19. The review is not ordinarily a complete reinvestigation. Its purpose is to determine whether the complaint was handled fairly, whether relevant evidence and policy were considered, and whether the outcome was reasonable and proportionate.
20. The reviewer may uphold the complaint, uphold it in part, decline to uphold it, require further action or direct that part of the matter be reconsidered.
21. A written final local decision will normally be issued within 10 school days after acknowledgement. The Director General's decision is the final local decision under this policy.

8. Timelines

The timelines below are expressed in school days. A school day is a day on which the School is open to students. Timelines may pause during school closure periods unless the matter involves safeguarding, health and safety, statutory reporting or another urgent obligation.

Stage	School response
Stage 1: informal resolution	The School will seek to resolve the matter as soon as reasonably possible and normally within 10 school days. Written concerns will normally be acknowledged within 2 school days.
Stage 2: formal complaint	The Head of School, or an appropriately delegated senior leader, will acknowledge receipt within 2 school days and normally provide a written response within 10 school days after acknowledgement.
Stage 3: final local review	A review request must normally be submitted within 5 school days of the Stage 2 response. The Director General, or an appropriate delegated reviewer, will normally provide the final local decision within 10 school days after acknowledging the request.
Extensions	Complex cases may require more time, particularly where multiple witnesses, boarding records, external advice, IB rules, safeguarding interfaces, legal matters or data-protection considerations are involved. Any extension will be communicated in writing, with reasons and a revised timeframe.

9. Exceptional group or Nord Anglia oversight

A routine Nord Anglia panel hearing is not part of this standard parent-facing procedure. However, where a complainant reasonably believes that an unresolved matter concerns a systemic or structural policy breach, governance matter or group-level issue, and all appropriate local routes have been exhausted, the matter may be referred through the appropriate H-FARM, group or regional oversight route. This is an exceptional safeguard, not an additional ordinary stage of appeal.

A complaint concerning the Director General should be directed to the appropriate corporate or regional governance route. The School Office will provide the relevant contact details.

10. Boarding-related complaints

Boarding is part of the School's educational and pastoral life and is covered by this policy where the matter does not fall under safeguarding, child protection, health and safety, medical, disciplinary or contractual procedures.

- Routine boarding concerns should normally be raised with the Boarding Parent, House Parent or relevant boarding staff member.
- If unresolved, the matter should be escalated to the Head of Boarding.
- Concerns involving student safety, room entry, privacy, supervision, medication, visitors, exeats, one-to-one interactions, child-on-child concerns or adult conduct must be handled through the appropriate safeguarding, boarding or medical procedure.
- Where a boarding complaint also has academic, pastoral or programme implications, the Head of Boarding and relevant Head of Programme will coordinate the response so that the student's experience is considered as a whole.
- Formal boarding complaints may be escalated to the Head of School under Stage 2.
- Complaint records will identify boarding-related matters and any action taken by the School.

11. Complaints related to IB programme decisions

As an IB World School, H-FARM International School Venice provides internal routes for concerns about decisions taken by the School in implementing IB programmes, while respecting the official procedures and authority of the International Baccalaureate.

- Concerns about IB teaching, assessment communication, coursework submission, internal deadlines, academic integrity, access arrangements, predicted grades or programme policy should normally be raised first with the relevant teacher, IB Coordinator or Head of Programme.
- The relevant IB Coordinator will oversee, or contribute to, the investigation of complaints specifically related to IB programme implementation, assessment administration, coursework processes or internal programme decisions.
- Complaints about the School's adherence to IB-related policies will be handled through this procedure unless a specific IB process applies.
- Requests concerning final IB results, enquiries upon results, appeals or complaints about services provided by the International Baccalaureate must follow current IB procedures and timelines. The School will advise students and parents on the appropriate route and will act as intermediary where required by IB rules.
- Where an IB matter also raises safeguarding, data-protection, academic-integrity, maladministration or legal concerns, the relevant specialist procedure will take precedence.

12. Conflict of interest and impartiality

The School will take reasonable steps to ensure that complaints are considered impartially. Any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest must be declared and managed.

- A member of staff should not ordinarily be the sole investigator or decision-maker for a formal complaint about their own conduct or decision.
- Where a complaint concerns a leader who would ordinarily handle that stage, the matter will be referred to the next appropriate senior leader.
- Where independence cannot be preserved locally, the School may appoint another senior leader or appropriate reviewer.

- The existence of a personal relationship, previous disagreement or leadership responsibility does not automatically create a conflict of interest; however, any reasonable concern about impartiality will be considered carefully.

13. Records and documentation

The Head of School's office will maintain a Complaints Register. Records will be factual, dated, accurate, proportionate and stored securely in accordance with School policy and applicable data-protection requirements.

- The register will record whether the matter was resolved informally, proceeded to a formal complaint or reached final local review.
- Formal complaint records will normally include the complaint, key evidence considered, notes of meetings where relevant, written responses, actions agreed and closure status.
- Records will be retained securely for 7 years, unless a longer period is required because of safeguarding, legal, insurance, employment, regulatory, IB or governance considerations.
- Access will be restricted to those with a legitimate professional need to know.
- Complaint records may be reviewed periodically to identify patterns, training needs, policy issues, operational improvements or recurring communication difficulties.

14. Persistent, repeated or unreasonable correspondence

The School will not regard a complaint as unreasonable merely because it is difficult, persistent, uncomfortable or critical. Legitimate challenge is part of institutional accountability.

Once the complaints procedure has been completed, the School may decline to continue repeated correspondence on the same matter where no new evidence or materially new issue is being raised. The School may also take proportionate steps where communication becomes abusive, threatening, personally targeted, excessively repetitive or so demanding that it materially impedes the School's work.

Any such step will be explained in writing and may include:

- confirming that the matter is closed under this policy;
- appointing a single point of contact;
- limiting the frequency or method of further correspondence;
- declining to respond to communications that repeat matters already fully addressed.

These arrangements will not prevent a complainant from raising a genuinely new concern, presenting material new evidence or reporting a safeguarding, health and safety or legal matter.

15. Confidentiality and data protection

Concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and with appropriate confidentiality. Information will be shared only with those who need it in order to investigate, respond, safeguard, support or lawfully manage the matter.

The School will be mindful of the dignity and privacy of students, parents and staff. Confidentiality cannot be absolute where safeguarding, legal, regulatory, insurance, employment or data-protection obligations require information to be shared.

Complainants should also respect the confidentiality of the process and avoid circulating allegations, personal data or investigation material beyond those who need to support them.

16. Outcomes and school improvement

A complaint may result in one or more of the following outcomes:

- an explanation or clarification;
- an apology where appropriate;
- correction of an error;
- a change to an individual decision, where the School has authority to make that change;
- additional support, communication or follow-up;
- review of a policy, system, practice or staff training need;
- no further action, where the complaint is not upheld.

Where a complaint reveals a wider lesson, the School will consider how that learning should inform practice. The purpose is not merely to close correspondence, but to strengthen trust, consistency and the quality of the educational experience.

17. Review and related policies

This policy will be reviewed annually, normally by the end of August, by the Head of School and the School Leadership Team, with input where appropriate from the Director General, IB Coordinators, Safeguarding, Boarding, HR, Data Protection and representatives of the parent and student community.

This policy should be read alongside the following, as applicable:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy;
- Staff Code of Conduct;
- Student Behaviour, Discipline, Suspension and Exclusion procedures;
- Whistleblowing procedure;
- Data Protection and Privacy policies;
- Boarding policies and procedures;
- IB assessment, academic integrity, access and inclusion, and programme procedures;
- Admissions and contractual terms.

18. Contact details

Purpose	Contact
General concerns and formal complaints	School Office: office.ve@h-farmschool.com
Head of School	emiliano.corri@h-farmschool.com
Director General	antonello.barbaro@h-farmschool.com
Safeguarding concerns	See the School's safeguarding policy.

Appendix A: Formal Complaint Form

This form may be copied into an email or completed as a separate document. It is intended to help the School understand and investigate the matter clearly.

Field	Information to provide
Name of complainant	
Relationship to student or School	
Student name and year group, if relevant	
Preferred contact details	
Date of submission	
Nature of complaint	What happened? Include relevant dates, places, people and context.
Steps already taken	Who has already been contacted? What response has been received?
Evidence or documents	List or attach relevant emails, records, screenshots, meeting notes or other material.
Outcome sought	What would you regard as a fair or useful resolution?
Safeguarding or urgent risk	State whether there is any immediate concern about student safety, wellbeing, abuse, neglect, harm or adult conduct.

Appendix B: Summary of the Procedure

Step	Route	Typical timeline
1	Raise the concern with the relevant teacher, mentor, boarding staff member, office or leader.	As soon as possible; normally resolved within 10 school days.
2	If unresolved or serious, submit a formal written complaint to the Head of School through office.ve@h-farmschool.com	Acknowledged within 2 school days; written response normally within 10 school days after acknowledgement.
3	If still dissatisfied, request final local review by the Director General.	Request within 5 school days of the Stage 2 response; final decision normally within 10 school days after acknowledgement.
Exceptional	An unresolved systemic or structural policy breach may be referred through the appropriate group or regional oversight route after local routes have been exhausted.	Exceptional only; this is not an ordinary fourth stage.

H-FARM International School Venice

Via Adriano Olivetti 1, 31056 Roncade (TV), Italy

+39 0422 789611 | info.ve@h-is.com