Maria International School of Bucharest

Resilience Respect Compassion Integrity Responsibility

Complaints and Concerns Policy

Our Mission

We provide a learning experience and environment at Maria International that fosters creativity and excellence. Whilst providing supportive, stimulating and relevant lessons and resources within the context of the British style international curriculum.

Our school will be a caring place where adults and children are valued equally. Our aim is to create an environment where children and the whole school community will be inspired to be resilient, respectful, compassionate and act with integrity.

Our children will learn to respect themselves and others in an atmosphere of high expectations where they are nurtured and dare to make mistakes

We will strive to create opportunities for students to have a well-rounded school and learning experience, where they can develop critical thinking skills and work in collaboration with others.

Our Values

Resilience - We will handle adversity and problems with a mentality that enables us to keep going and do better.

Respect - We treat others with dignity, empathy and equality through our words and actions.

Compassion - We are kind, caring and will help everyone to be the best they can be.

Integrity - We are open, honest and act with good morals and ethics in all situations.

Responsibility - We ensure our own work, learning and duties are completed in a timely manner and to a high standard

Rationale

All staff at Maria International are committed to providing the best possible learning experience for every student enrolled at Maria International. We aim for all of the students and staff at Maria International to be healthy, happy and safe during their time at Maria International. To achieve this, we understand and recognise the importance of positive home-school partnerships, where relationships between parents/guardians, Maria International and its wider school community can work cooperatively to ensure the health, safety and happiness of all at Maria International, especially students in their academic development and whole learning experience.

However, there are occasions where students, parents/guardians or staff have complaints or concerns, and it's Maria International's aim to resolve these quickly, fairly and effectively as possible.

This policy should be used in conjunction with, and reference to:

- Maria International Terms & Conditions
- Maria International Student Handbook
- Maria International Staff Handbook, Staff Behaviour and Code of Conduct
- Other relevant Romanian legislation regarding Data Protection, Health and Safety at work

Aims

At Maria International, we believe that:

- Parent's/Guardian's have the right to address and seek resolution of any concerns relating to their child's education and learning experience
- Any complaints and concerns should be addressed quickly and fairly
- Any complaints and concerns should be addressed through a transparent and clearly structured process
- Any complaints and concerns will be treated sensitively, respectfully and fairly
- Any complaints and concerns will be kept private and not discussed outside of the relevant parties

This complaints and concerns policy lays out the guidelines for addressing complaints and concerns as well as the quick resolution of complaints and concerns. It is Maria International's aim that any complaints and concerns are dealt with, with minimal disruption to the daily operations and running of the school and also minimal disruption to Maria International students' education. This complaints and concerns policy, therefore, puts forth the following:

- The expectations and responsibilities of all those involved in the complaints & concerns procedure
- The formal and informal procedures to be followed
- The procedures to be followed for appealing decisions made in the resolution of complaints and concerns

Roles and Expectations

Maria International School

Maria International as a school will:

- Make any and all information regarding the complaints and concerns policy (and any other related policies) and procedures are available
- Communicate with Parent's/Guardian's regularly with any relevant updates and news
- Provide clear information regarding:
    - How and when concerns can and should be raised with Maria International
    - How these concerns will be addressed through the Complaints & Concerns policy and procedures
    - How the procedures and processes are integral within the framework of the Maria International Terms & Conditions

Maria International Staff

Maria International staff who have any complaints or concerns should take all relevant and appropriate steps to seek a resolution to the issues raised as quickly and professionally as possible, based on the staff members' professional judgement and per the Maria International process and policies and always in line with the best interests of the Maria International students. Any Maria International staff who are made aware of complaints and concerns should:

- Respond with professional courtesy and respect
- Respond promptly, within the next school day
- Arrange an appointment with the person who has the complaint and concern as soon as reasonably possible
- Attempt to resolve the complaint and concern using reasonable methods that are in line with procedures outlined in this policy
- Keep the personnel involved in the complaint and concern informed of any progress towards the resolution of the complaint and concern
- Make impartial decisions regarding students' best interests and own professional judgement, experience and expertise.
- Maintain records throughout the complaints and concerns process using the complaint record form
- Follow the measures found in this policy to prevent threats and violence should the situation become abusive

Concerns that can not be resolved by individual members of staff should be passed on to the next relevant head of section, and the staff member involved in the complaint and concern should cooperate and participate fully in the investigations and steps necessary to resolve the situation.

Any complaints and concerns should be treated with the utmost confidentiality and not be discussed in public or with those not involved in the complaints and concerns procedure. There should be no gossip or sharing of one-sided views as these can create misconceptions and hamper the transparency and efficiency of the complaints and concerns procedure, or have unforeseen consequences for the individuals who are involved in the complaints and concerns procedure and decision making. Breaches of confidentiality by Maria International staff may be treated as a disciplinary offence.

Any member of the Maria International staff who are facing allegations, complaints and concerns will be treated fairly and impartially and can expect a full and fair investigation. After the completion of all the stages involved in the complaints and concerns procedure the staff member(s) involved disagree with the outcome and resolution of the procedure, he/she may submit a written appeal to the Maria International Headteacher.

Head of Section

The relevant Head of Section may be contacted and informed of any complaints and concerns raised. The Head of Section should then take steps to resolve these issues based on his/her professional judgement, expertise and experience and in accordance with the Maria International processes, policies and guidelines, and keeping the students' best interests in mind.

The Head of Section should:

- Respond with professional courtesy and respect
- Respond promptly, within the next school day
- Arrange an appointment with the person who has the complaint and concern as soon as reasonably possible
- Attempt to resolve the complaint and concern using reasonable methods that are in line with procedures outlined in this policy
- Keep the personnel involved in the complaint and concern informed of any progress towards the resolution of the complaint and concern
- Make impartial decisions regarding students' best interests and own professional judgement, experience and expertise.
- Maintain records throughout the complaints and concerns process using the complaint record form
- Follow the measures found in this policy to prevent threats and violence should the situation become abusive

Any complaints and concerns that can not be dealt with by the Head of Section should be passed up to the Maria International Headteacher. The Head of Section should cooperate and participate fully in the investigations and steps necessary to resolve the situation

Headteacher

The Maria International Headteacher may be informed of any complaints and concerns raised by a member of the Maria International staff, Head of Section, or in writing from a parent/guardian or student. The Headteacher should seek to resolve complaints and concerns based on their professional judgement, experience and expertise, in line with Maria International procedures, policies and guidelines and in keeping with the best interests of the Maria International students.
The Maria International Headteacher should:

- Resolve any complaint and concern in line with the formal processes expected with efficiency, impartiality and fairness
- Not prejudge any aspect of the complaint and concern in order to act impartially throughout the complaint and concern process. This is so that the Headteacher is able to make their judgement based solely on the Maria International guidelines, policies and procedures and their own professional judgement.
- Maintain records of complaints and concerns using the complaint record form
- Enable review by the Maria International board of governors should any party wish to appeal the result(s) of the complaint and concern.

Students and Parents/Guardians

Students or Parents/Guardians who have any complaints and concerns are responsible for raising the complaint and concern to the relevant Maria International Staff, Head of Section or the Headteacher. Any complaints raised to the Headteacher should be done so formally, in writing.
Whilst it can be understood that the raising of a complaint and concern could raise tensions, Maria International still reasonably expects students and parents/guardians to:

- Treat all Maria International staff with mutual respect and courtesy
- Respect the needs of the Maria International staff and students
- Trust in the professionalism and experience of all Maria International staff and leadership
- Understand that Maria International teaching staff are unable to meet during their scheduled teaching times or other professional duty commitments
- Recognise the time constraints faced by the Maria International staff and allow a reasonable time for Maria International staff to respond to complaints and concerns raised
- Avoid any aggressive actions, verbal abuse or any use (or threatened use) of violence towards any in the Maria International community or their property

- Not engage in gossip, public speculation or lobbying in regard to the complaint or concern raised
- Accept and follow the procedures laid out in this and other related policies
- Understand that Terms & Conditions demand the procedures laid out in this Complaints and Concern policy are followed when seeking a financial refund for withdrawal without notice.

Informal Process

It is the belief of Maria International that the majority of complaints and concerns can be resolved informally with minimum delay if students and parents/guardians discuss the matter directly with the relevant member of staff, or if necessary, the relevant Head of Section.

Step 1: The Maria International member of staff

- Student and/or parents/guardians raise the concern with the relevant member of staff, classroom teacher or homeroom teacher
- The parents/guardians arrange a meeting, as soon as possible, to discuss the complaint or concern in an appropriate and informed manner without the worry of interruption. It's important to remember, however, that schools are busy and that for the teaching staff, their commitment to delivering their lessons are the priority, therefore it may not be possible for a member of the teaching staff to meet with parents/guardians immediately
- The purpose of the meeting is to establish the nature of the complaint and concern and to plan a reasonable and realistic resolution to the concern and complaint raised.
- If the complaint and concern being raised is not appropriate for any member of staff other than the headteacher to be involved with, the involved member of staff will refer the parents/guardians directly to the Maria International headteacher.
- The member of staff will make a brief written account of the complaint and concern being raised and any actions that were agreed for resolution of the complaint and concern on a complaint record form

Step 2: Head of Section

If the complaint and concern have not been successfully resolved or is beyond the member of staff involved to resolve or if the parents/guardians are not satisfied with the outcome of the discussions with the member of staff, they should seek to arrange a meeting with the next relevant head of section.

- The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the ongoing nature of the complaint and concern raised, what has been discussed already, any resulting actions from the meeting(s) with the member of staff previously.
- The Head of Section may then need to investigate what has happened since the meeting before they can assess how to address the complaint and concern. If this is the

case, it will be agreed beforehand in terms of the time it will take to investigate and will contact the parents/guardians to inform them of the outcome and expected next steps to be taken

- If the complaint and concern being raised is not appropriate for any member of staff other than the headteacher to be involved with, the Head of Section will refer the parents/guardians directly to the Maria International headteacher.
- The Head of Section will make a brief written account of the complaint and concern being raised and any actions that were agreed
- The Head of Section will obtain the initial complaint record form from the member of staff and complete the further sections from the notes gathered in their investigations or they will complete a separate complaint record form from their notes if parents/guardians went to them directly
- The Head of Section will email parents/guardians with a summary of the complaint and concern being raised, what has been agreed for the next steps and when they should anticipate a response
- The Head of Section will investigate and either resolve or plan the next steps for the resolution of the complaint and concern. This may involve other members of staff and the parents/guardians for consultation
- The Head of Section will then notify the parents/guardians by email and in person/phone call of the outcome and subsequent resolution of the complaint and concern, according to the deadlines communicated with the parents/guardians previously.

Step 3: Further Actions

It is Maria International's sincere hope that the majority of complaints and concerns can be resolved using the previous two steps of the informal process. However, if this is not the case or it is inappropriate for the members of staff in the previous two steps to be involved in then the matter will be referred to the Maria International Headteacher and resolved through the formal process outlined in the next section.

Formal Process

If a complaint and concern can not be resolved through the informal process for whatever reason, then the formal process must be followed.
Raising a matter to this process is a serious step and should be considered carefully. In consideration of the home-school partnership that Maria International seeks, it is important that everyone involved works cooperatively, respectfully and professionally to seek a resolution to the complaint and concern raised to this process.

Step 4: The Headteacher

Initiating the Formal Process

In order to start the formal process for complaints and concerns, the party must put their complaints and concerns, in writing, to the Maria International Headteacher. This written notice can be given in the form of a letter or email, addressed to the Headteacher with the subject 'For the attention of the Headteacher'. The letter should clearly state:

- The complaint and concern
- Justification for not using the informal process, or why the issue is still considered unresolved after using the informal process
- An indication as to the desired outcome for resolution of the complaint and concern

Investigation

The Headteacher should immediately acknowledge the receipt of the complaint but is not required to respond to it immediately. Before responding to the receipt the Headteacher should make sure that they fully understand the circumstances surrounding the matter being brought forth. To do this the Headteacher will:

- Establish what has happened so far, who has been and is involved in the situation
- Obtain the initial parent complaint record
- Clarify the nature of the complaint
- Identify the areas that are unsolved or need further elaboration

If the complaint involves the criticism of a member of the Maria International staff, no action will be taken until a written statement has been obtained by the member of staff concerned.
In addition to this written statement, the Headteacher will arrange a meeting with the member of staff mentioned in the complaint and the parent who has raised the concern, in order for mediation and clarification of the issues being raised.
Further meetings may be arranged in order to call witnesses and it may be helpful, with the agreement of all parties involved to arrange a joint meeting, with all parties being given the opportunity to answer questions, clarify their positions and reasonings.
At the meetings mentioned, the Headteacher may also request the presence of the Head of Section and/or Maria International's legal representative(s).

During these meetings the Headteacher will:

- Act as an impartial mediator
- Ask questions to gather further information about the concerns, actions taken and any proposed actions to be taken
- Clarify what each party would consider as an appropriate resolution and steps needed to reach the appropriate resolution
- Explore potential resolutions
- Persist in questioning to appropriate levels

- Remain open and impartial
- Not express judgements unless agreed upon by all parties involved
- Make detailed notes of the meeting

Decision Making

After meeting with all parties involved, the Headteacher will:

- From their notes, add additional comments to the original complaint record form
- Complete a new original complaint record form
- Consider the evidence that has been gathered
- Consider the desired outcomes raised by the parties involved
- Consider the various means through which the complaint could be resolved, and formulate a final resolution to the concern or complaint

Feedback

The Headteacher is responsible for informing all involved parties of the outcome that has been decided, in writing within three working days. The Headteacher may also arrange a final meeting to discuss the decision and reasoning to the parties as well as advise on the right of appeal.
The Headteacher will also acknowledge if the complaint or concern is valid, either as a whole or in its parts, or if the complaint has not been substantiated and therefore considered to be unfounded. The Headteacher may also offer any one or more of the following:

- An official apology
- An explanation
- An official admission that the situation that caused the complaint or concern could have been handled differently or better, however, this is not an admission of negligence
- An assurance that the event will not be repeated and the steps Maria International will take to improve and avoid situations occurring again, to the best of its abilities.
- Review policies in light of the complaint/concern

Specific Concerns

Concerns about, or allegations of, abuse

Any concerns or allegations of abuse made against a member of the Maria International staff should be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the Headteacher **immediately**. Any allegations or concerns made against the Headteacher should be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and to the Maria International owners and board of governors **immediately**.

Full details of how concerns about, or allegations of abuse are managed are laid out in the Maria International Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy as well as the Maria International Staff Behaviour and Code of Conduct Policy which is available upon request and also available on the Maria International school website.

Concerns or complaints against the Headteacher

Should a parent or member of staff have a concern or complaint about the Headteacher, it should be addressed in writing, in the form of an email, to the Maria International owners and Board of Governors, who will then follow the informal, and if necessary the formal, process.

However, if a parent or member of staff is unhappy with the decision made by the Headteacher in regards to a complaint or concern, or that the complaint or concern has not been resolved, this should not be a complaint against the Headteacher but instead should be dealt with through the appeals process.

Right of Appeal

If a parent or member of the Maria International staff is not satisfied by the outcome of the complaints procedure, they have a right to appeal to the Maria International Board of Governors.

Appeals must be submitted in writing, in the form of an email, to the Maria International Board of Governors within five working days of the initial decision. This appeal will be considered by the Board of Governors.

The Maria International Board of Governors will choose to either uphold the original resolution made by the Headteacher or instruct the Headteacher to revise the decision. If it is the case that the decision should be revised the Maria International Board of Governors will work collaboratively with the Headteacher to formulate a new outcome.
The decision made by the Maria International Board of Governors is considered final and will be communicated to the parties involved in writing, in the form of an email, within five working days.

All concerns should be successfully resolved following the informal and formal processes outlined. However, there may be rare instances where all stages of the procedures and appeal have been carried out but the parent or member of staff remains unsatisfied. If this occurs, without any new and significant information, and the matter is brought up again the Headteacher and Maria International Board of Governors will send a joint written declaration, in the form of an email, that informs the party that all stages of the Maria International Complaints and Concerns policy have been followed and exhausted and therefore the matter is considered closed.

Unreasonable or Persistent Complaints

Unfortunately, it may be the case that a party involved in a complaint or concern believes that they can force a specific outcome if they behave in an unreasonable manner when raising or pursuing their issue. It is to be clearly stated that this type of behaviour or actions will not alter the decision-making process, is upsetting to those involved in the complaint or concern and for these reasons, these behaviours and actions will not be tolerated.
The party will, therefore, be asked to once again review the expectations outlined in this policy and be informed that they may only be able to interact through the relevant Head of Section and/or the Headteacher, which can cause a significant reduction in the time taken to resolve the issue.

A persistent complaint is one where the party complains, formally or informally, about issues, or about issues they wrongly believe to be within the remit of Maria International with excessive frequency. Such behaviour is considered unreasonable and can be characterised by:

- Actions that are repetitive, obsessive or harassing
- Excessive correspondence, through email, phone, regarding a concern
- Insistence about pursuing complaints in a manner that is deemed to be unreasonable
- Insistence about pursuing issues that are unsubstantiated, and/or issues that have an unrealistic or unreasonable outcome
- Lobbying others in the Maria International community
- Participating in public speculation with others in the Maria International community
- Repeated pursuing of a complaint or concern that has been through the Maria International Complaints and Concerns procedure including appeal and joint written declaration from the Headteacher and the Maria International Board of Governors.
- Repeated pursuing of a complaint or concern that is outside the remit of Maria International

As with unreasonable complaints, parties who persistently complain, as demonstrated through the actions above, will be asked to once again review the expectations outlined in this policy and that their actions take up significant time that has a detrimental impact on the teaching and learning in Maria International, and impacts Maria International student's learning experience and opportunities. The party may also be requested to only communicate to the Headteacher or relevant Head of Section if the behaviour continues which can slow down the complaint and concerns procedure of legitimate concerns and complaints.

Contacting the Maria International Board of Governors

To contact the Maria International Owners and Board of Governors please address in writing, in the form of an email if possible, to Mr. Michael Fares through the following email address misboffice@gmail.com.

Any written correspondence that is wished to be mailed to the school should be made out as followed:

Maria International Owners and Board of Governors
Strada Piața Amzei Nr.6, Sector 1
Bucuresti, Romania

Or by Phone:
+4.0730.432.092

Review and Evaluation

This policy is to be renewed, evaluated and appropriately updated annually by the Maria International leadership team and Head Teacher.

Date of next review: 15/08/2025

Prepared/Updated by: Yara Barsoum **Date**: 10/11/2024

Approved by: Nicholette Vicol **Date:** 11/11/2024

This policy is to be reviewed **annually** and updated as and when relevant changes occur.

Measures to Prevent Threats and Violence

Violence, or the threat of violence, towards any member of the Maria International Staff or Maria International Community Members, is Unacceptable

In the event of violence or the threat of violence or bullying, the following steps should be taken:

1. **STOP**: In the event of violence, threats of violence or bullying, whether real or perceived, by a third party, ask the aggressor to stop the unacceptable behaviour
2. **Notify Leadership**: If the aggressor continues with their unacceptable behaviour, immediately notify the Maria International Leadership team or ask another member of staff to be present until Maria International Leadership can arrive
3. **Call For Help**: If serious violence is threatened, or is likely, leave the area immediately and call for support (from a nearby colleague, the Maria International Leadership Team, or Police (dial 112))
4. **Defend**: In the event of a physical attack or assault, fight back to defend yourself and protect the nearby students in their care, using abilities and knowledge of self-defence as best as possible

All Maria International staff are aware of and familiar with the steps outlined above and are able to implement the steps when necessary.

This is confirmed by staff signing the declaration of awareness and understanding the risk assessment and safety statement.

Complaint Record Form

This form is to be completed by any member of the Maria International staff who receives a complaint,
For Informal Complaints, this should then be passed down to the relevant Head of Section,
For Formal Complaints, this should then be passed on to or completed by the Headteacher.

Name of Complainant:	Date of Complaint Issue:
Name of Student: Relationship to Student:	Year Group:
Summary of Complaint:	
Informal Procedures Followed:	
Evidence:	
Outcome and Justification: (Summary, copy of the notification to parents/staff should be attached)	
Decision Made By:	Date of Decision:

Date of Appeal Submission:	Date of Appeal Panel:	Appeal Panel Members:
Outcome and Justification: (Summary, copy of the notification to parents/staff should be attached)		