

## **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

### **Introduction**

The School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this procedure.

The aim of the procedure is to achieve a fair, effective and prompt as possible resolution of parental concerns about the education and/or welfare of individual children in the care of St Helen and St Katharine.

The expression 'parents' is used for all those having parental responsibility for the child. These procedures apply to all parents of pupils of the school. A copy of this procedure can be found on the school website and can also be obtained, on request, from the school office.

### **Time Scales for Dealing with Complaints**

All complaints will be handled in a serious and sensitive manner. They will be acknowledged within five working days if received during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the School's aim is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 28 working days if the complaint is lodged during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

Stage 3, the Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further 28 working days if the appeal is lodged during term time, and as soon as is practicable during holiday periods.

A complaint should be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. The School will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

### **Withdrawal of a Complaint**

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

### **Resolving complaints**

At each stage in the procedure, St Helen and St Katharine wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in its entirety or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure that the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that the issue will

not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made

- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

### **Stage 1 – Informal Resolution**

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally with the Form Tutor, who should be contacted in the first instance on matters of a general nature.
- If not resolved in this way, it should be referred to the appropriate Head of Section. If she cannot resolve the matter alone, she will consult the Head of Department, Deputy Head or the Headmistress.
- Complaints made directly to a Head of Department will usually be referred to the relevant Section Head, unless the Head of Department deems it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
- The Section Head or Head of Department will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved, or in the event that the Section Head or Head of Department and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.
- Parents who make a complaint against the Headmistress will be advised to proceed directly to Stage 2(i) of this procedure.

Anonymous allegations will not be investigated unless they raise a safeguarding issue, in which case they will be referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. Governors have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.

### **Stage 2 – Formal Resolution**

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaints in writing to the Headmistress. The Headmistress will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Headmistress will speak to the parents concerned, normally within five working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Headmistress to carry out further investigations / appoint an appropriate senior member of staff to conduct an investigation
- The Headmistress will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Headmistress is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Headmistress will also give reasons for her decision.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure within 10 working days of having received the written decision from the Headmistress.
- If parents feel a Stage 2 complaint is ongoing and not resolved they should put their complaint in writing to the Chair of the Governing Body.

- Stage 2 Formal Resolution complaints are listed below as complaints received over the academic year.

### **Stage 2(i)**

- Complaints that involve or are about the Headmistress should be addressed to Mr Kevan Leggett (the Chair of Governors), via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential
- The Chairman of Governors will nominate a Governor to investigate and they will call for a full report from the Headmistress and for all the relevant documents. The nominated Governor 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. Once the nominated Governor 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 nominated Governor will give reasons for his/her decision.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure within 10 working days of having received the written decision from the nominated Governor.

### **Stage 3 – Panel Hearing**

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3, following a failure to reach an earlier resolution, they will be referred to the Clerk to the Governors, who has been appointed by the Governors to call Hearings of the Complaints Panel.
- The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Board of Governors. The Clerk to the Governors, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a Hearing to take place as soon as practicable, and normally within fifteen working days.
- If the complaint is:
  - jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
  - the entire governing body or
  - the majority of the governing body

Stage 3 will be heard by a committee of independent, co-opted governors.

- The Clerk will make every effort to accommodate parental availability by offering three dates and will consider comments concerning Panel composition.
- If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.
- Note that, once triggered by Stage 3 of this procedure, the Hearing will proceed, even if the parent subsequently decides not to attend. The panel will consider the matter in the parent's absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint in order to bring the matter to a conclusion.

- If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the Hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than five working days prior to the Hearing.
- The parents may be accompanied at the Hearing by another person. This may be a relative or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.
- Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately, without the need for further investigation.
- Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out, and may require an adjournment. After consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within five working days of the conclusion of the Hearing.
- The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it.
- The Panel's findings and recommendations, if any, will be sent in writing to the parents, the Headmistress, the Governors and others involved in the Hearing as the Panel deems appropriate (including the person complained about, where appropriate)

This completes the School's Complaints Procedure

## Record Keeping

A written record will be kept of all complaints and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing and a record of action taken as a consequence of any complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld). This will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Chair of Governors and Chair of the Risk and Compliance Committee and by the Headmistress.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

## Governor Scrutiny and Implementation:

This takes place through briefing meetings between Head and Chair, and by the Chair of Risk and Compliance checking the Complaints log and raising any queries/concerns with the Head

Policy last reviewed .....	Lent 2021
Next Review date .....	Lent 2022
Person Responsible .....	Headmistress
Audience .....	Staff and Parents

Complaints that have proceeded to Stage 2 since March 2020:	1
Complaints that have proceeded to Stage 3 since March 2021:	1