



Concerns & Complaints Policy

1: Introduction:

This policy involves all members of staff, as well as parents and pupils and is available to all students and parents on the school website.

The policy, approved by the Principal and the Board of Governors, provides guidelines for handling concerns and complaints.

The procedures set out below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the circumstances of each case.

Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue or if the Principal permanently excludes or asks a pupil to leave and the parents seek a Governors' Review of that decision.

Parents include a current or confirmed prospective parent or legal guardian or education guardian.

Three stages: this policy describes a three-stage procedure:

Stage 1: informal raising of a concern or difficulty notified orally or in writing to a member of staff

Stage 2: a formal complaint in writing to the Principal or relevant member of SLT

Stage 3: a renewed complaint in writing to the Chairman of the Board of Governors, involving provision for a panel hearing

A concern about the safety of your child should be notified immediately to the person you believe is best placed to take urgent action and should be confirmed in writing to the Principal.

2: Policy Aim and Statement

2.1 **Aim:** The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice; it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote parents' and pupils' confidence in our ability to safeguard and promote welfare. We will try to resolve every concern or complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, reviewing our systems and procedures in light of the circumstances.

2.2 **Policy statement:** The School needs to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. We recognise that a difficulty that is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, which would be damaging to relationships and also to our school culture. Parents and pupils should never feel - or be made to feel - that a complaint will be ignored or will adversely affect a pupil or his/her opportunities at this school. The policy, however, distinguishes between a concern or difficulty which can be resolved informally and a formal complaint which will require investigation.

3: Timescales:

The School aims to resolve all concerns and complaints in a timely manner. Where timescales are given in 'working days', this is defined as Monday - Friday during term time (the dates of which are available on our website).

Complaints received during holiday periods will be dealt with as soon as is practicable but are likely to take longer to resolve due to the unavailability of relevant staff. Under such circumstances the complainant will be notified of any extension to the



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time scales when the complaint is acknowledged.

In complex cases, more time may be needed to conduct a full and fair investigation or convene a panel. In this instance, extended timescales will be confirmed to the complainant at the earliest possible opportunity with an explanation given for any delay/extension.

We will not investigate complaints that have been made more than three months after the events that gave rise to the complaint took place unless there are exceptional circumstances, for example where new evidence has come to light. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs but these should be read as subject to the provisions of this paragraph.

4: Management of Complaints

4.1 No member of staff should manage a complaint on their own and must refer it to their line manager for advice and consideration. If there is doubt as to which 'category' a complaint belongs, the line manager should consult the relevant member of SLT.

4.2 The Principal has appointed the Heads of Primary and Senior Schools to be responsible for the co-ordination and administration of the Complaints Procedure. If one or other is unavailable or is the subject of the complaint, his/her duties will be carried out by the Principal or another senior member of staff. Their main responsibilities in this context are to:

- be the first point of contact while the matter remains unresolved and to keep records;
- coordinate the complaints procedures in school;
- maintain an on-going training for all school employees in relation to complaints;
- monitor the keeping, confidentiality and storage of records in relation to complaints;
- report regularly to the Principal with respect to complaints.

4.3 Complaints: Every formal complaint (a serious complaint made in writing rather than a 'concern') notified to a member of staff will be noted, together with the action taken, on the relevant file.

5: Stage I (Informal Stage): Concerns and Difficulties

5.1 **Concerns:** We expect that most concerns, where a parent or pupil seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken, can be resolved informally. Examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, or about allocation of privileges or responsibilities, or about a timetable clash or some other aspect of the School's systems or equipment, or a billing error.

5.1.1 Notification: raise the concern initially as follows:

5.1.1.1 **Education issues** - If the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, speak or write to the Tutor or Class Teacher or Head of Department as appropriate.

5.1.1.2 **Pastoral care** - For concerns relating to matters outside the classroom, speak or write to the Tutor, Class Teacher, Head of Key Stage or the relevant SLT member.



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5.11.3 Disciplinary matters - A problem over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised first with the member of staff who imposed it, and, if not resolved, with the Tutor, Head of Key Stage or the relevant SLT member.

5.11.4 Financial matters/GDPR - A query relating to fees or extras or GDPR should be stated in writing to the CFO.

5.12 Acknowledgement: We will acknowledge a written notification by telephone, e-mail or letter within two working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable in the holidays and look to resolve all such informal concerns within 7 working days.

5.13 Unresolved concerns: A concern which has not been resolved by informal means should be notified in writing as a formal complaint which will be dealt with in accordance with Stage 2 below.

6 : Stage 2: Formal Complaint

6.1 Notification: An unresolved concern under Stage 1, or a complaint which needs investigation, or dissatisfaction with some aspect of the School's policies, procedures, management or administration should be set out in writing with full details and sent with all relevant documents and your contact details to the Principal or to the relevant SLT member. Any complaint will be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within two working days during term time, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale. We would look to resolve all such formal complaints within 10 working days.

6.2 Investigation: The Principal may ask a senior member of staff to act as "investigator" and/or may involve one or more members of the Board of Governors. The investigator/s may request additional information from the complainant and will probably wish to speak personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. The investigator/s should not be known to the complainant personally. The complainant may request a meeting with the Principal once the investigation has been conducted. The outcome of the investigation will be reported to the Principal. Either the Principal or Head of Primary School or Head of the Senior School, as appropriate, will then notify the complainant in writing of his decision and the reasons for it. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

7 : Stage 3: Reference to the Chair of the Board of Governors

7.1 Notification: If dissatisfied with the Principal's decision under Stage 2, the complaint may be renewed in writing to the Chair of the Board of Governors. The letter to the Chair should give full details of your complaint, including the reasons you believe the matter is unresolved and the outcome you are seeking. All relevant documents and your contact details must be enclosed alongside the letter. The letter will normally be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within four working days during term time, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale. We would look to resolve all formal Stage 3 complaints within 20 working days.

7.2 Action by the Chair of the Board of Governors: The Chair will arrange for the complaint to be investigated, making provision for a hearing before a panel. This will usually involve a small sub-committee of at least three people who were not directly involved in the original complaint including one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school – following procedures equivalent to those described in Stage 2 (above).



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7.3 Notice of hearing: Every effort will be made to enable the Panel hearing to take place within 20 working days of receipt of the request. As soon as reasonably practical and in any event, at least 5 working days before the hearing, the Clerk will send you written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the Panel members who will be present. The relevant parent will have the right to attend the hearing if they wish and also have the right to be accompanied. This would not ordinarily be legal representation but will be to enable them to address concerns and answer questions to the best of their ability.

7.4 Decision: When the Chair is satisfied that s/he has established all the material facts and relevant policies, so far as is practicable, s/he will notify the complainant in of her/his decision and the reasons for it. The Panel's decision, findings, reasons for the decision and any recommendations shall be confirmed in writing. This decision is final. The complainant – and where relevant, the person complained about – will be provided with a written copy of the findings. The decisions, findings and any recommendations will be made available for inspection on the School premises by the Governing Body and the Principal.

8: Confidentiality:

A written record will be kept of all Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints, which indicates the nature of the complaint, the action taken, and whether resolved. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept separately and confidentially. Details of individual complaints will be retained or destroyed subject to GDPR

9: Complaints about staff

9.1 Members of staff who are the subject of a formal complaint may be kept informed of the progress of the complaint as appropriate.

9.2 Complaints that may result in staff capability or disciplinary proceedings: Where, at any stage, it is necessary to undertake staff disciplinary or capability proceedings as a result of the concern or complaint, the details of this will remain confidential to the member of staff and School leadership. The complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed in line with policies and procedures, however, is not entitled to be informed about, or participate in, the relevant proceedings.

10: Managing complaints

10.1 Managing anonymous complaints:

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Principal or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants this, and if so can be investigated.

10.2 Managing unreasonable complaints:

We are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening. The School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's



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contact with the School and that which causes undue stress to involved parties.

Whenever possible, the Principal or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns about the complainant's behaviour and conduct with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

10.3 Managing serial Complaints

Where a complainant raises an issue that has already been dealt with via the Concerns and Complaints Policy, the issue will not be reinvestigated except in exceptional circumstances, such as where new and relevant evidence has been provided. If a complainant persists in raising the same, or substantially similar, issue the Board Secretary will confirm in writing that the complaint has been dealt with fully and in line with this policy. This will be the end of the matter.

10.4 Managing 'Frivolous' and 'Vexatious' Complaints

In cases where the School has taken every reasonable step to address a complainant's concerns and given a clear statement of the position and/or options, the decision may be taken that no further response will be made to the complainant. The Principal will make a recommendation to the Chair of Governors providing their full reasoning.

The Chair of Governors will either confirm the Principal's recommendation and inform the complainant via the Board Secretary or direct that the complaint be addressed using this policy.

The characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint are:

- complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific and/or repetitious;
- complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance;
- complaints which are offensively personal in an attack

11 Reporting of Complaints

The Principal keeps a record of complaints and will report to the Governing body at least annually to consider lessons learned and to identify any patterns in complaints.

Any parent or student wishing to know the number of Stage 2 concerns communicated in the last year is able to ask for this information by writing directly to the Principal.

Associated policy Code of Conduct (Staff)