



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Reviewed and updated autumn 2025 | Next review autumn 2026

Introduction

This policy applies to current and prospective parents (who have paid the deposit), including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This policy does not apply in relation to matters concerning child protection or where a pupil has been expelled or removed or not offered a place.

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.

This policy can be made available to parents on request or can be downloaded from the School's website. It can also be made available in larger print or other accessible format if required i.e., because of a disability. If assistance is required with making a complaint because of a disability or special needs, the Head's PA should be contacted so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

When this policy refers to working days, this means Monday to Friday when the school is open during term times.

Legal Framework

The policy has been approved by the Governing Body of the School and it takes account of the Education (Independent School Standards (England) Regulations 2024, part 7). Separate procedures apply in the event of a safeguarding or child protection issue (see Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy) or if the Headmistress excludes a pupil or asks her to leave and the parents seek a Governors' Review of that decision (see Discipline, Exclusions and Required Removals Policy).

A copy of the Complaints Procedure is available on the website or upon request from the School. The Complaints procedure should be read in conjunction with:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Discipline, Exclusions and Required Removal Policy

Definition

A complaint is a matter in which a parent or guardian of a pupil is unhappy about a real or perceived problem and seeks action by the School. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff. Any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School falls within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School

has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done, or has acted unfairly. Parents or guardians can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The 'days' specified in this policy refer to those days that the School is in session, i.e. 'term time'. Complaints will be acknowledged within five working days if received during term time and as soon as is practicable during holiday periods. The target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 28 days, if the complaint is lodged during term-time, and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

Process

This policy describes a three-stage procedure:

- Stage 1 Informal Resolution
- Stage 2 Formal Resolution
- Stage 3 Panel Hearing

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint, they should normally contact their pupil's Form Tutor. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means, to the parents' satisfaction. If the Form Tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult a Head of Department, the Director of Pastoral Care, the Director of Teaching and Learning or the Head.
- Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, Director of Pastoral Care, Director of Teaching and Learning or the Head will usually be referred to the relevant Form Tutor unless the Head deems it appropriate for the matter to be dealt with by the Head of Department, the Director of Pastoral Care, the Director of Teaching and Learning or the Head personally.
- The Form Tutor will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within 14 working days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays, or in the event that the Form Tutor 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.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head. The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head will either meet with or speak to the parents concerned, normally within 14 working days of receiving the complaint or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- A senior member of staff delegated by the Head will assist in investigating all written complaints.
- The Head will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made. The parents will be informed of this decision in writing together with reasons for the decision within 28 working days of having received the complaint or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays.

- If the parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure within 14 working days of receipt of the written decision.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they should write to the Chair of Governors setting out in full the details of their complaint within 14 working days of receiving the Head's decision. A request for a hearing will normally only be considered if parents have invoked stages 1 and 2.
- The Chair of Governors will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 14 working days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays. The Chair will arrange for a Complaints Panel to be convened to consider the matter at the hearing.
- The Panel will usually 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 Chair of Governors (or a deputy).
- 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 5 working days prior to the hearing.
- The parents may be accompanied to the hearing if they wish. This may be by a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be necessary.
- 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.
- After due consideration of all facts the Panel considers relevant, the Panel will reach a decision on the balance of probabilities as to whether or not the complaint is substantiated. If the complaint is not substantiated, the Panel will dismiss the complaint. If the complaint is substantiated, the Panel will uphold the complaint and may make recommendations. The Panel cannot award financial compensation or order reinstatement of a pupil.
- The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it within 7 working days. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise confirmed in writing to the parents, the Head, the Governors and, where relevant, the person about whom the complaint is made. The Panel's decisions, findings and any recommendations will also be made available for inspection on the school premises.

A written record (which will be kept for at least three years) will be kept of all complaints and whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a Panel hearing. The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year will be published in the Annual Information Booklet issued to prospective and current parents.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except in so far as is required of the school by the Independent Schools Inspectorate Regulations, June 2018 where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection, or where any other legal obligation prevails.

Early Years Foundation Stage

In respect of children within the Early Years Foundation Stage:

- records of complaints will be kept for at least three years; and
- parents may make a complaint to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), CAP House, 9-12 Long House, London EC1A 9HA or by calling 0207 600 0100

The School will provide the ISI/DfE, upon request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period and the action taken and conclusion reached.

Repeat or Vexatious Complaints

Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, the School will not investigate beyond the first instance.

Duty of Care

As an employer, the School has a duty of care towards its employees and will, therefore, seek to ensure that any employee who is the subject of a complaint will be treated fairly and with respect, and given appropriate opportunity to explain their viewpoint.

Number of Complaints

Information regarding the number of formal complaints received in the previous academic year is available by contacting the Headmistress's PA, via the contact details on the School website.

Referring a complaint to ISI

The School is inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), an independent organization which reports to the Government on schools. Parents or others who wish to complain about an independent school should contact the Department for Education using the form available on the ISI website. ISI will usually expect parents to have followed the School's formal complaints procedure, as outlined in this policy, before contacting them.

Policy Review

The Headmistress will report to the Governing Body annually on the number and type of complaints received, and their outcomes.

This policy is reviewed annually by the Headmistress and Governors. The next review is due in September 2026.