



Parental Complaints Procedure

March 2022

Also to be followed in the case of appeals against the expulsion or required withdrawal of a pupil

This Policy and these procedures also cover boarding and the EYFS setting.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 **The open climate of the School:** The School encourages parents, along with children and staff, to voice their concerns. Usually discussion of the matter will allay or remove the worry without the need for formal procedures.
- 1.2 If parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this Procedure. St Christopher School will make the complaints procedure available to all parents of pupils and of prospective pupils on the school's website and in the school office during the school day, and the School will ensure that parents of pupils and of prospective pupils who request it are made aware that this document is published or available and the form in which it is published or available.
- 1.5 **Timescales:** We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. They will be acknowledged within five working days if received during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. When we refer to "working days" we mean Monday to Friday when school is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website.

It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the School's target is to complete the first two stages of the procedures within 20 working days. Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further 20 working days. In the case of the EYFS, complaints will be resolved within 28 days.

If, at any stage of the complaints procedure, parents/guardians fail to respond to the School within 20 working days, we will close the complaint.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is presumed that there may need to be some additional, reasonable flexibility as a consequence of disruption or staff absence.

- 1.6 **Respecting confidentiality:** All in the School should be committed to the principle that if parents raise a complaint it should in no way rebound upon their children. You can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you (or your child) raises in good faith.



- 1.7 Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. It is School policy to let staff know about complaints that are made about them (without always disclosing the identity of the complainant) and to encourage them to respond to this knowledge in as constructive a way as possible. The School is not required to divulge to parents any confidential information or the identities of pupils or others who have given information which the Head has investigated or which has led to disciplinary action including the required removal of a pupil. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where this is overridden by a legal obligation such as when the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 163 of the 2002 Education Act requests access to them.
- 1.8 Any anonymous complaints will be recorded and it will be at the Head's discretion as to what action is taken, if any. It is obviously not possible to provide a response to an anonymous complaint.
- 1.9 In accordance with paragraph 31(1)(b) of schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, St Christopher School will make available to parents of pupils and of prospective pupils and provide, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or the ISI for the purposes of section details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.
- 1.10 The School is required to publish the number of complaints received annually. In the school year 2020/21 there were two complaints registered under the formal procedure.

2. What is a complaint?

- 2.1 A complaint can be made about the School impersonally as an organisation, about an individual member of staff, about a pupil or about another parent. A complaint may be made if a parent thinks that the School or an individual, for example:
 - 2.1.1 has done something wrong
 - 2.1.2 has failed to do something that should have been done
 - 2.1.3 has acted unfairly or without due courtesy
- 2.2 A complaint can also be an expression of dissatisfaction with any aspect of the service provided by the School.

Separate guidelines cover how to deal with suspicions or accusations of child abuse. Such concerns may be voiced to the Head or to the Head of the Senior School who is the nominated social services contact person ("Designated Safeguarding Lead") for such issues.



3. What to do if you have a complaint.

The three-stage complaints procedure

3.1 Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- 3.1.1 It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- 3.1.2 Parents are encouraged to address their concern to the member of staff with the appropriate responsibility. This person is most likely to be able either to explain matters or to effect a solution. In *Communication with the School* published annually for parents there is an up-to-date list of such staff.
- 3.1.3 If parents have a complaint they should normally contact the appropriate member of staff as set out in *Communication with the School*. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the member of staff cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult The Head of Year or Head of the Junior School, as appropriate.
- 3.1.4 Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, the Head of the Senior School or the Head will usually be referred to the relevant the appropriate member of staff as set out in *Communication with the School* unless the Head of Department, the Head of the Senior School or the Head deems it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
- 3.1.5 The member of staff approached will endeavour to settle the complaint immediately if it is straightforward or normally within five working days if further investigation or consultation is necessary. Unless the matter is easily settled the staff member must make a written and dated record of the complaint, when it was raised and how it has been dealt with.
- 3.1.6 Every effort will be made to settle the complaint informally.
- 3.1.7 Satisfaction for the complainant may come from any of the following:
 - 3.1.7.1 knowing that the complaint was unjustified or that no further action is necessary
 - 3.1.7.2 knowing that changes have been made and matters will be different in future
 - 3.1.7.3 knowing that the School is now alert to a possible problem
 - 3.1.7.4 feeling that their concern has been considered seriously
 - 3.1.7.5 perceiving the outcome to be well-considered, even if different from what they originally sought
 - 3.1.7.6 receiving a considered letter of apology.
- 3.1.8 In some cases where a parent may wish to drop a complaint the School may still decide to pursue the matter if it considers it right to do so, for example to deal with an issue or to ensure satisfaction for a person complained against.



- 3.1.8 Should the matter not be resolved or in the event that the appropriate member of staff 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.
- 3.1.10 If however the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors.

3.2 Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- 3.2.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head stating that they wish for the matter to be dealt with formally. Their letter should set out the particulars of the complaint.
- 3.2.2 The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- 3.2.3 In most cases the Head (or possibly the Head of the Senior School or the Head of the Junior School or such other member of staff as he decides) will discuss the matter face-to-face or by telephone with the parents concerned, normally within 10 working days of receiving the complaint. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- 3.2.4 It may be necessary for the Head to carry out further investigations. The Head will keep written, dated records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- 3.2.5 Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head will also give reasons for his/her decision.
- 3.2.6 If the complaint is against the Head, the Chair of Governors (c/o St Christopher School) will call for a full report from the Head and for all the relevant documents. The Chair 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 Chair 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 Chair will give reasons for his/her decision.
- 3.2.7 If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

3.3 Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- 3.3.1 If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the Chair of Governors (c/o St Christopher School), who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel.



- 3.3.2 The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of 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. The Chair of 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 10 working days.
- 3.3.3 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 normally not later than 5 working days prior to the hearing.
- 3.3.4 The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not be allowed except by the convenor in special circumstances.
- 3.3.5 If a parent does not exercise the right to attend a panel hearing, this does not necessarily remove the School's right or obligation to hold the hearing in conformity with the policy. The School's arrangements for the hearing will be reasonable in order to facilitate the parents exercising the right of attendance. In rare cases if parents do not attend an agreed panel hearing or a subsequent one the complaint will be deemed to have been resolved/closed.
- 3.3.6 If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.
- 3.3.7 After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings and may make recommendations.
- 3.3.8 The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, normally within five working days of the hearing (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following the hearing). The decision of the Panel will be final. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents, and, where relevant, the person complained about, as well as the Chair of Governors and the Head.
- 3.3.9 A written record will be kept of all formal complaints and of whether they are resolved at formal stage or proceed to a Panel hearing.

4. WRITTEN COMPLAINTS RELATING TO THE REQUIREMENTS UNDER THE STATUTORY FRAMEWORK FOR THE EYFS

- 4.1 For the Nursery and the Reception Class (K Group), collectively designated as the Early Years Foundation Stage ("EYFS"), the complaints procedure follows the same process. Parents may also complain directly to ISI or Ofsted if they wish.
- 4.2 **St Christopher School will provide ISI/Ofsted, on request, with a written record of all formal complaints made during any specified period, and the action which**



was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaints will be kept for at least three years.

- 4.3 **Parents may complain directly to ISI or to Ofsted if they believe the provider is not meeting the EYFS requirements.** They can be contacted as detailed below:

Independent Schools Inspectorate CAP House 9-12 Long Lane London EC1A 9HA T: 0207 600 0100 concerns@isi.net www.isi.net	Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M21 2WD T: 0300 123 1231 enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk www.ofsted.gov.uk
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- 4.4 These arrangements also apply to the Junior School.

5. OTHER ASPECTS:

- 5.1 **Records:** The School will keep a record of all formal complaints including a note of those involved, a brief statement of the issue, actions and of the outcome and a note of the staff involved in responding, regardless of whether it was upheld. Where necessary reference may be made to where more detailed records may be found. Records of formal complaints will be reviewed periodically to see if there are any patterns or opportunities for the School to make improvements.
- 5.2 Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all complaints and whether they are resolved at the formal stage or proceed to a panel hearing. At the School's discretion, additional records may be kept which may contain the following information:
- 5.1.1 Date when the issue was raised
 - 5.1.2 Name of parent
 - 5.1.3 Name of pupil
 - 5.1.4 Description of the issue
 - 5.1.5 Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
 - 5.1.6 Witness statements (if appropriate)
 - 5.1.7 Name of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
 - 5.1.8 Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- 5.3 Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Sections 108 and 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.
- 5.4 **Liability:** Parents will understand that staff cannot admit that the School has any liability and that a case where this is suggested will have to be referred to the School's insurers and legal advisers.



- 5.5 **Complaints by parents about the child of other parents:** Apart from reviewing the facts of an incident in which their own child is also involved, parents cannot expect the School to discuss with them a child who is not their own. The School's role in such cases is to listen and later to respond to the issues raised in the complaint, if appropriate, having considered all the factors involved.
- 5.6 **Complaints about parents by other parents:** If the complaint is about words or actions that have taken place on the premises or otherwise under school auspices, such as on an expedition, the School may try to effect a reconciliation. In rare cases the School may have to impose conditions regarding a parent's presence or conduct in the School. It is not always easy to draw the boundary between what is private and what becomes the business of the School.
- 5.7 **Complaints to statutory bodies:** The parents of boarders may contact The Independent Schools Inspectorate about any complaint they have regarding a boarder's welfare. The parents of children in the EYFS may contact the Independent Schools Inspectorate or OFSTED about any complaint they have regarding their child. (See above)
- 5.8 Alternatively the Department for Education may be contacted:
Independent Education and Boarding Team
Department for Education
Mowden Hall
Staindrop Road
Darlington DL3 9BG
- 5.9 **Disciplinary proceedings:** In some cases the same set of circumstances will give rise to both a complaint and disciplinary investigations and action by the School against either a pupil or a member of staff. Such disciplinary proceedings are covered by separate guidelines and should be kept distinct from the handling of associated complaints, though this may not always be possible. The adjournment of proceedings may be necessary in such cases.
- 5.10 **Mediation:** Where all else has failed then the School encourages parents to attempt to settle any dispute by mediation in accordance with the model mediation procedure published from time to time by the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR).

NB. There are separate complaints procedures for pupils and staff of the school.

Emma-Kate Henry
Head

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