

Parental Complaints Policy



St. Stephen's International School

“Where East meets West”

Approved by:

SMT

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1. Aims

Our school aims to meet its obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

2. Definitions and scope

The following guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint.

A **concern** is defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought".

The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.

A **complaint** is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action".

The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

3. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

We also intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits will be set for each action within each stage.

Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set, and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline with an explanation for the delay.

The school expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and no later than 3 months afterwards. We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

4. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the principal or the director or members of the school board)

Stage 1: informal

The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the headteacher as appropriate, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school office.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 3 working days, and investigate and provide a response within a further 2 working days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the subject of the complaint and/or the relevant Assistant Head, as appropriate.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

Stage 2: formal

Inform the principal in writing

This letter should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The principal (or designated member of the senior leadership team) will call a meeting to clarify concerns, and seek a resolution. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting, and should inform the school of the identity of their companion in advance.

In certain circumstances, the school may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case, the school will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment.

The principal (or other person appointed by the principal for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 10 working days.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the principal in writing within 5 working days.

Inform the principal in writing

This letter should set out the details of the complaint including evidence as set out above. The complainant should also specify what they feel would resolve the complaint, and how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently.

The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 5 working days.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the principal in writing within 5 working days.

Stage 3: submit the complaint to the review panel

The review panel consists of 3 members – the school director, another member of the board, plus one independent (of the management and running of the school) reviewer. These individuals will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 8).

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel; however, the review panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied by a suitable companion if they wish.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representatives have completed presenting their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel must then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide a copy of the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the subject of the complaint, and make a copy of the findings and recommendations available for inspection by the school director and principal.

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 working days.

5. Complaints against the principal or school director or member of the board

Complaints made against the principal should be directed to the school director. The complainant should inform the school director in writing, setting out the details of the complaint, any evidence and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 5 working days.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint, they should inform the director in writing within 5 working days. An appeals panel will then convene to consider the matter and a written conclusion of this appeals panel will be sent to the complainant within 10 working days.

Where a complaint is against the director or any member of the board, it should be made in writing to the principal in the first instance. The complainant should inform the principal in writing, setting out the details of the complaint, any evidence and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 5 working days.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint, they should inform the principal in writing within 5 working days. An appeals panel will then convene to consider the matter and a written conclusion of this appeals panel will be sent to the complainant within 10 working days.

6. Persistent complaints

Where a complainant tries to re-open the issue with the school after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the school director (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the director) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any), *and*
- The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The school will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, and/or
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, and/or
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint.

Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The school will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the school acts reasonably.

7. Record-keeping

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

Records of complaints will be kept for 10 years.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole school board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the school board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the school board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

8. Learning lessons

The senior management team and the school board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the principal and SMT, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

9. Monitoring arrangements

The SMT will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The SMT will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 8.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the PA to the principal.

This policy will be reviewed by the Head of Secondary every 2 years.

At each review, the policy will be approved by SMT.

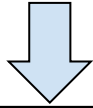
10. Summary of procedure

Stage 1 - Informal

Complaint discussed informally with relevant member of staff e.g. class teacher, form teacher or key stage manager.

Complainant advised of any action to be taken where appropriate.

Complainant not satisfied.
Proceed to stage 2

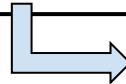
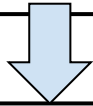


Complainant satisfied, no
further action

Stage 2 - Formal

Inform the principal in writing. Investigation conducted and findings fully reported to complainant.

Complainant not satisfied.
Proceed to stage 3



Complainant satisfied, no
further action

Stage 3 - Formal

Inform the principal in writing that no resolution has been reached. The principal will forward to the school director. Information/evidence will be reviewed by a review panel (which includes an independent reviewer).

The decision will be communicated in writing.