

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

We welcome suggestions and comments from parents, and take seriously any complaints you raise. If you wish to make a complaint you can expect it to be treated by the College in accordance with the procedure below.

All formal complaints are digitally stored as a confidential record in the Principal's office which also records whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing and the action taken as a result of the complaint. The written record of complaints identifies those complaints relating to boarding provision. The nature of the complaint (though not the names of the complainant or any pupil or employee involved), the stage reached and the action taken are reported to the next meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee of Council whether or not it is upheld. The number of complaints during the academic year 2022-23 registered under the formal procedure (ie Stage Two) was three, with nil at Stage Three.

Contact details of the Independent Schools Inspectorate: 020 76000100 or email: info@isi.net .

In this policy, "parent(s)" / "you" means a current parent or legal guardian.

References to **working days** mean Monday to Friday, when College is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on College's website and do not include travelling days or exeats when many staff may not be available. In the event that the application of this definition is likely to introduce excessive delays, due to intervening College holidays, College's approach is to take sensible and reasonable steps so as to minimise any hardship or unfairness arising from such delays.

STAGE 1 – INFORMAL RESOLUTION

We hope that any problems will normally be resolved quickly and informally through discussion with the appropriate member of staff. The Parents' Handbook gives information about who to contact with particular areas of concern. If the member of staff contacted cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him / her to consult a more senior member of staff. In many cases, a complaint will be resolved by this means to the parents' satisfaction.

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In all cases at Stage 1, College will acknowledge your complaint within three working days and every effort will be made to address the issues in a prompt and timely manner, and to provide you with a response and achieve a resolution as soon as possible. In the majority of cases, a resolution (and certainly action taken as a step towards seeking a resolution) can be expected within fifteen working days (excluding weekends) so as to have an adequate chance of being able to access and communicate with colleagues and / or pupils and / or other parents as needed, depending on the circumstances.

Should the resolution of a matter necessarily extend to beyond a fifteen working day period, we will be in touch with you to clearly explain the reasons for this, and to give an indication of when we aim to be able to conclude matters.

The member of staff to whom the complaint has been directed will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received.

Should the matter not be resolved satisfactorily then parents are advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

STAGE 2 – FORMAL RESOLUTION

If you are not satisfied with the response you receive, you may wish to make a formal complaint.

You should write to the Principal stating that you wish to make a formal complaint and giving clear details of the situation that concerns you.

THE RESPONSE YOU WILL RECEIVE

The Principal (or in her absence and depending on the area of complaint, the Vice Principal or Vice Principal Academic), will use all reasonable endeavours to send an initial response to your complaint within three working days, acknowledging receipt of your formal correspondence, and explaining how we will proceed. We will also provide an indication of the date by which we will contact you again, a date which will ordinarily fall within fifteen working days (excluding weekends).

Any extension to this timeframe will be by exception, and will reflect the complexity of the specific case and circumstances and / or the time at which the request is made (for example there may be some variation in our ability to review or expedite further action between term and non-term time dates, because these bring differences in the availability of colleagues, pupils, parents and staff to participate in any further investigation or discussions that may be required).

Once again, in all cases every effort will be made to address the issue in a prompt and timely manner, and to provide you with a response and a resolution as soon as possible.

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The Principal may appoint a senior member of staff to investigate the complaint, who may request additional information from you and will probably wish to speak to you personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. A report on the investigation will be prepared and considered by the Principal.

Once the Principal is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, she will respond in the form of a letter or report telling you of the outcome of your complaint. It will explain her conclusion, the reasons for it and any action taken or proposed.

The Principal will aim to notify you of her decision within 15 working days of receipt of the complaint. Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in delay, you will be notified of this and informed of the new timescales as soon as possible.

The Principal will keep electronic records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

If a Stage 2 complaint relates to the Principal, the Chair of Council (or the Vice Chair) will decide who will investigate and respond to the complaint.

In these circumstances, it is not appropriate for complainants to contact the Principal (or any other member of staff involved) to discuss any issue relating to the complaint until after the outcome is known.

Any such communications will be directed to the Clerk to Council and then relayed to the correct person as appropriate.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your complaint will be treated confidentially as far as possible. Knowledge of it will be limited to the Principal (Vice Principal, Vice Principal Academic or Head of Pastoral Care) and those directly involved and any others that need to know, including the Chair of Council (or in his / her absence, the Vice Chair).

It is College's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children.

In some circumstances, it may be necessary to make third parties outside the school aware of the complaint and possibly also the identity of those involved. This would be likely to happen where, for example, a child's safety was at risk or if it became necessary to refer matters to the police or the Charity Commission.

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Matters relating to specific complaints will be kept confidentially on file in accordance with College's Data Protection procedures. Anonymous complaints may not be pursued, although they will also be kept confidentially on file.

Any action that needs to be taken under staff disciplinary procedures will be handled confidentially within the College.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State for Education or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

STAGE 3 – PANEL HEARING

If a parent(s) is dissatisfied with the Principal's decision, the parent(s) can request that the complaint be referred to a Complaints Panel.

A Complaints Panel meeting is a review of the decisions taken by the Principal.

The role of the Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:

- (i) the documents provided by both parties; and
- (ii) any representations made by the parents and the Principal, and to reach a decision on the balance of probabilities as to whether to uphold or dismiss each complaint.

The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure.

A request for a meeting with the Complaints Panel must be put in writing to the Clerk to Council within five working days of the Principal's decision, providing details of all the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired. The Clerk to Council will acknowledge the request in writing within three working days of receipt and every reasonable effort will be made to enable the meeting to take place within twenty working days of receipt of the request.

The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom will be independent of the management and running of the school. Each of the Panel members will be appointed by the Chair of Council. The Panel members will elect one of them to be the Chair of the Panel throughout the proceedings. A clerk appointed by the Panel will take handwritten minutes of the proceedings.

You should identify and supply copies of any relevant papers in your possession or control to the Clerk to Council no later than five working days prior to the meeting. Copies of such papers will then be supplied to all parties. A late submission of papers may lead to an adjournment. Should

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any party make a late submission it will be made clear that the Panel and any other parties are not automatically obliged to consider it, nor indeed respond to it.

You may be accompanied to the meeting itself by one other person of your choice. This may be a relative, member of staff or friend. The meeting is not legal proceedings and so legal representation will not be necessary. If you do wish to be accompanied by someone who is legally qualified, please notify the Clerk to the Council of this at least five working days prior to the meeting and note that the Panel will wish to speak with the parents directly and this person will not be permitted to act as an advocate.

All those attending the meeting are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the meeting may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his / her comment will be minuted.

For compliance purposes the Panel hearing should go ahead unless the parent later indicates that he or she is now satisfied and does not want to proceed further. A Panel hearing should, therefore, proceed notwithstanding that a parent may subsequently decide not to attend. If necessary, the panel should consider the parent's complaint in absentia and issue findings on the substance of the complaint thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion. The requirement for the panel to proceed does not prevent the school from accommodating parental availability for dates or considering comments concerning panel composition.

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 it considers relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it will endeavour to complete within five working days of the meeting. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel is final.

The Panel's findings and recommendations, if any, will be sent in writing to the parents, the Principal, Council and, where and to the extent relevant, the person complained of within five days of the date of the hearing. A copy of the Panel's finding will be kept on a confidential record in the Clerk to Council's office for inspection by the Principal and the Chair.

This represents the conclusion of College's parents' Complaints Procedure.

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