



# Complaints Procedure

September 2024

# Complaints Procedure

<b>Policy to be reviewed annually</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Completed</b>
Reviewed	Head	August 2024	✓
Approved	Board of Governors	November 2024	✓

Date of next review: September 2025

<b>To be published on</b>	
School network	✓
School website	✓

## **Accessibility notice**

To enable easier reading, this Policy is available in a larger font upon request.

**This procedure applies equally to the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 as taught at St Christopher's School. It is available for parents of pupils on request and on the school's website.**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and learning, the pastoral care provided to its pupils, and its close relationships with parents and carers. If parents wish to make representations or make a formal complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this procedure. Courtesy, restraint and good manners are expected from everyone in all communications and interactions.
- 1.2. Separate procedures apply if a child protection issue has arisen (see the Child Protection and Safeguarding policy) or if a pupil has been excluded or asked to leave (see the Exclusion policy).
- 1.3. All time scales in this document refer to term time and working days, i.e. school days during term time.

## **2. What constitutes a complaint?**

- 2.1. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction concerning a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, or failed to do something that it should have done, or acted unfairly.
- 2.2. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The School is here for their daughter, and they can be assured that their daughter will not be penalised for a complaint that they or their daughter raises in good faith. The School will always seek to deal with any concerns or representations as quickly as possible to reach an amicable resolution. Where formal complaints arise, the School will respond within the time scales set out in this policy unless further time is needed to conduct a thorough investigation. In these circumstances parents will be advised of any modified time scale to investigate the complaint.
- 2.3. Anonymous complaints will not be investigated under this procedure.
- 2.4. If the school receives a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject, the school will treat these complaints as being part of a campaign and send the same response to all complainants.
- 2.5. Group complaints (i.e. several signatories) or petitions will not be investigated under this procedure.

## **3. Stages**

- Stage 1: informal resolution
- Stage 2: formal resolution

- Stage 3: Panel Hearing

#### **4. Usual Timeframe for dealing with complaints**

- 4.1. All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. They will be acknowledged within five working days (Monday to Friday) if received during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods (parents will be advised of revised timings). 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 procedure within 28 days if the complaint is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.
- 4.2. Stage 3, the Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further 28 days if the appeal is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods (parents will be advised of revised timings).

#### **5. Complaints relating to the EYFS**

- 5.1. Any complaints regarding the EYFS will be investigated and complainants will be notified of the outcome within 28 days. Details of Ofsted and ISI are available at the end of this document and parents can contact those authorities if they believe the School is not meeting EYFS requirements.

#### **6. Recording complaints**

- 6.1. Staff who receive a complaint should log it on our internal system, CPOMS – tagging it as a complaint, or the form found in appendix one.
- 6.2. All complaints - whether formal or as early representations - will be logged to include the date of the concern/issue, how it was investigated and the outcome (with dates). The aim is to ensure that school leaders and governors can maintain an overview of all representations and complaints and any significant patterns of concern which may be arising. This is seen as being particularly important in the context of child protection. The School will keep a written record of all complaints and whether they are resolved following a formal procedure or proceed to a Panel hearing. The School will also keep a written record of the action taken by the School as a result those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). Records will also include:
  - Witness statements (if appropriate)
  - Name of member(s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
  - Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversation)
- 6.3. Correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Education and Skills Act requests access to them.

#### **7. Stage 1 - Informal Resolution**

- 7.1. It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.

- 7.2. If parents have a complaint, whether it relates to education issues, pastoral care or a disciplinary matter, they should normally contact their daughter's form teacher/subject teacher. The member of staff contacted will acknowledge a written notification by telephone, email, or letter within five working days of receipt during term time, addressing the substance of the complaint to the degree possible at this stage. In the holidays, the acknowledgement will be made as soon as is practicable and not later than five working days beyond the start of the next term or half term.
- 7.3. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the form teacher or subject teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, they will consult the Head who will then agree the next course of action to respond to the complainant.
- 7.4. A query/complaint relating to financial matters such as fees or extras should be raised in the first instance with the Bursar.
- 7.5. Complaints made directly to a Subject Lead or to the Head will usually be referred to the relevant form teacher or subject teacher unless the Subject Lead/the Head deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.
- 7.6. The form teacher or subject teacher will enter a written record on CPOMS of all concerns and complaints, the date on which they were received, any action taken in response and any further communications arising. Should the matter not be resolved within 14 days, or if the form teacher or subject teacher 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.
- 7.7. If the complaint is against the Head, parents must make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors who will agree the process for investigation in accordance with this policy and the timescales therein.

## **8. Stage 2 - Formal Resolution**

- 8.1. If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head stating explicitly their wish to invoke the formal complaints procedure. The written complaint should set out all the grounds of the complaint and the desired outcome and should also include full contact details. The Head will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within three working days and will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- 8.2. In most cases, the Head will meet or speak to the parents concerned, normally within 10 days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- 8.3. It may be necessary for the Head, or a (usually senior) member of staff designated by the Head, to carry out further investigations. The School will treat complaints in as confidential a manner as possible. Discussions of the case will be limited to the Head, and those that the Head needs to consider. The Head may involve one or more Governors.

- 8.4. The Head will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- 8.5. The Head will review the outcome of the investigation. Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made, and parents will be informed of this decision in writing within 25 working days from the receipt of the complaint. The Head will also give reasons for her decision.
- 8.6. Any complaint submitted within a month of the end of term or half term is likely to take longer to resolve due to the school holidays and unavailability of staff. In these circumstances, the resolution will be communicated to parents within 25 working days of the start of the new term or half term.
- 8.7. If the complaint is against the Head, the Chair of Governors will agree the process for investigation and 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 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.
- 8.8. If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

## **9. Stage 3 - Panel Hearing**

- 9.1. If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they should write to the Head within 14 days of the Head's stage 2 decision letter (in exceptional circumstances this timescale may be extended). The request must state the outcome they desire and all the grounds of the complaint and enclose copies of any relevant documents and full contact details. Panel Requests will usually only be considered if the procedures for an informal (stage 1) and a then formal complaint (stage 2) have been completed.
- 9.2. The matter will then be referred to the Clerk to the Governors, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearing of the Complaints Panel. The Panel will consist of at least three individuals not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. There are likely to include two Governors and an additional person who is independent of the management and running of the School. Each of the Panel members should be appointed by the Clerk.
- 9.3. The Clerk will acknowledge this request within five working days. Requests received during half terms or school holidays will be responded to as soon as practicable and in any case within five working days of the start of the new term or half term. If assistance is required, for example, because of a disability, the Clerk will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.
- 9.4. The Clerk will refer the matter to the Panel Complaints Panel, for consideration and will, on behalf of the Panel, then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 20 working days.

- 9.5. 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 seven working days prior to the hearing.
- 9.6. As soon as reasonably practical and in any event, at least seven working days before the hearing, the Clerk will send the parents a notification of the date, time, and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the Panel members who will be present.
- 9.7. The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative or a friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- 9.8. If the parents decide not to attend the hearing, the Panel hearing will still go ahead to consider the parents' complaint in absentia and issue findings on the substance of the complaint (unless the parents indicate that they are now satisfied and do not wish to proceed further).
- 9.9. 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 and parents advised of the process and time scale.
- 9.10. After due consideration of all facts, they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete and communicate, normally within 20 days of the hearing.
- 9.11. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it normally within 20 days of the hearing. **The decision of the Panel will be final.** The Panel's findings and recommendations, if any, will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head, the Governors and, where relevant, the person against whom the complaint was made. The findings and recommendations will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Chair of Governors and the Head.

## **10. Confidentiality and records**

- 10.1. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements, and records will be kept confidential except as required of the School by paragraph 33 (k) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, namely where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them, or where any other legal obligation prevails.
- 10.2. A written record will be kept of all formal complaints (Stage 2 of this procedure) and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage (Stage 2) or proceed to a Panel hearing (Stage 3). The record will include details of any action taken by the School as a result of these complaints, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld. Records will be kept for a minimum of seven years.

**Any complaint concerning a child in the Early Years Foundation Stage (our Reception class) will be investigated within 28 days and kept as a record for at least 3 years and it may also be referred, if the parent wishes, to:**

**Independent Schools Inspectorate**

**First Floor, CAP House,**

**9-12 Long Lane,**

**London EC1A 9HA,**

**020 7600 0100**

**info@isi.net**

**or OFSTED on 0300 123 466 OR 0300 123 1231**

**OFSTED,**

**National Business Centre,**

**Piccadilly Gate,**

**Store Street Manchester, M1 2WD**

Availability of this policy

A copy of this policy may be downloaded from our website <https://www.stchristophers.london/policies> or is available on request from the school office, St Christopher's School, 32 Belsize Lane, NW3 5AE (020 7435 1521). This policy can be made available in large print or another accessible format if required.

There have been no formal complaints made to the school in 2022-2024



**Appendix 1**

**Parental Complaint Form / CPOMS record**

**Member of staff receiving the complaint:**

**From (name of parent):**

**Name of pupil and class:**

**Date/Time of complaint:**

**Complaint:**

**Action taken:**

**Outcome:**

**Issue passed to:**

**Date/Time:**

**Seen:**

**Senior member of staff (Name):**

**Date/Time:**

**Head:**