1 Complaints by parents

1.1 Introduction
1.2 Compliance
1.3 Definitions
   Concern
   Complaint
1.4 Handling
1.5 Recording
1.6 Procedure
   Stage 1: informal resolution
   Stage 2: formal resolution
   Stage 3: panel hearing

2 Complaints by pupils

2.1 First stage
2.2 Second stage
2.3 Third stage
2.4 Coursework appeals
COMPLAINTS

1 Complaints by parents

1.1 Introduction

The School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents of existing or prospective pupils at the School do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this procedure.

St George’s will make the complaints procedure available to all parents of existing and prospective pupils on the School’s website and in the School Office during the School day, and will ensure that parents of existing and 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.

1.2 Compliance

In accordance with Part 7 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010 (and 2012 amendments) St George’s will make available, on request, to parents of existing and prospective pupils, to the Chief Inspector, to the Secretary of State (or the ISI for the purposes of Section 162 of the Education Act 2002), details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

The School will also ensure that it complies with Standards 17 and 18 of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding 2015 by ensuring that it has reference to The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010 (and 2012 amendments) and Section 29 of the Education Act 2002.

- The policy is available to staff, parents and boarders.
- Boarders and parents know that they can contact OFSTED on 08456 404040, the Local Authority Designated Officer (01628 683150) and ISI (020 7600 0100) with any complaint concerning boarding welfare.
- A written record is kept of serious complaints and their outcome for regular review by the Head.
- Complaints are resolved either to the complainant’s satisfaction, or with an otherwise appropriate outcome which balances the rights and duties of pupils without reasonable delay.
- Pupils are not penalised for a complaint made in good faith.
- Details of how parents may appeal against a decision made by the School about their complaint are provided.
At all stages, if appropriate, parents may use their daughter’s guardian to help with communications.

1.3 Definitions

**Concern.** A concern is an issue raised as a source of dissatisfaction, whether informally in conversation, on the telephone, by email or by letter to any member of School staff.

**Complaint.** A complaint is a formal, specific, focused, written expression of dissatisfaction by a parent with a real or perceived problem. It is addressed to the Head. It will follow attempts to resolve the grievance at the levels below that of Head, as outlined in Stage 1 below.

A complaint may be made if a parent thinks that the school has, for example:

- done something wrong;
- failed to do something it should have done;
- acted unfairly or impolitely.

A complaint may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department within the School or about an individual member of staff. It is not helpful to differentiate between ‘informal’ and ‘formal’ complaints. Informal complaints can easily escalate into a formal complaint if not addressed quickly and with sensitivity. Serious issues may be raised in an informal and friendly way and apparently trivial issues in an adversarial manner. Complaints against staff need particularly sensitive handling. Matters relating to the Head will be referred directly to a Governor. Correspondence should be addressed to The Clerk to the Governors at St George’s School.

1.4 Handling

All concerns and complaints need to be handled equally seriously, sensitively and as quickly as possible. They will be acknowledged immediately, and fully dealt with within 10 days if raised in term time. Holiday time and other factors can exceptionally affect the timescales, but in these circumstances they will be acknowledged on the next working day, and dealt with as soon as is practicable, and certainly within four weeks. A gentle expression of concern or a simple query may grow into a painful matter if the complainant feels that he / she has been brushed aside. Equally, issues with the potential to become acutely difficult may dwindle and fade if they are handled well at the initial stage. An unresolved problem may become a festering dispute or a confrontation. Procedures need to be flexible to handle both formal complaints and the informal raising of issues and concerns.

1.5 Recording

All complaints must be recorded in the central log. The information recorded is as follows:
Policy 9: Complaints

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of pupil
- Brief statement of issue
- Staff member handling the issue
- Brief statement of outcome and actions taken as a result
- At what stage the complaint was resolved

Notes on all complaints are maintained and kept together in the School Office and are regularly reviewed by the Head. The files contain simple but clear notes of all conversations with parents about any source of dissatisfaction. This applies to friendly chats and to telephone conversations, as misunderstandings easily arise. There will be a clear statement of what is concerning the complainants. The notes can be agreed with parents. The written records indicate whether the complaints are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing. They include details of any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint; regardless of whether they are upheld or not. All notes and correspondence, statements and records are to be kept confidential except 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.

1.6 Procedure

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 daughter’s form tutor, Head of Year, the relevant Head of Department or Housemistress, or, in the case of prospective pupils, the Marketing and Admissions Manager. This may be expressed orally (face to face or on the telephone) or in writing (by a letter or by email). In many cases, the matter will be resolved straight away by this means to the parents’ satisfaction. If the form tutor, Head of Year, Head of Department or Housemistress cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult the next level of management up, which may be a member of SMT. Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, Assistant or Deputy Heads will usually be referred to the relevant Head of Year or Housemistress unless they deem it appropriate for them to deal with the matter personally. The member of staff 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 10 working days in term time, or four weeks in holiday periods, or in the event that the member of staff handling the complaint and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2.

Stage 2: formal resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the complainants 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 meet with
Policy 9: Complaints

or speak to the parents / guardian concerned, within 10 working days of receiving the complaint in term time, and within a short a time as is practicable during the holidays, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. It may be necessary for the Head to carry out further investigations or delegate to someone else to make further investigations on her behalf. 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 and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head will also give reasons for her decision. In the event of a complaint being made about the Headmistress, a modified Stage 2 procedure will be enacted. A single Governor will hear the complaint. If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3.

Stage 3: panel hearing

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the Bursar, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel. The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will 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 or on behalf of the Governing board. The Bursar, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 20 working days. 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 will be supplied to all parties not later than five days prior to the hearing. The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. 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 of the facts it considers relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations. 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. The decision of the Panel will be final. A copy of the Panel’s findings and recommendations will (if any) be sent by email or otherwise given to the parents, and, where relevant, the person complained about, as well as the Governors and the Head. A note taker will be present, to make a formal record of the meeting. This would normally be the Clerk to the Governors.

2 Complaints by pupils

2.1 First stage

If a pupil wishes to raise concerns about conditions or personal treatment in school there is a procedure that she should follow. Initially she should talk to her form tutor if it is a matter affecting the working day or to her Housemistress if it is a boarding matter, or to any other appropriate adult. The adult will report the matter to his or her line manager.
for record-keeping purposes, then ascertain what can be done to remedy the situation.

2.2 Second stage

If the matter remains unresolved and is of general interest, the pupil should consult a prefect or voice her concern to the form representative who attends Food Council and School Council as relevant. If she still has concerns she should express this in writing and give it to the form tutor or Housemistress as relevant, who will then copy this for the Deputy Head (Academic), Head of Year or Deputy Head (Pastoral) depending on the circumstances. A record of this complaint should be recorded in the Pupil Complaint Log by the recipient and a note of the action taken.

2.3 Third stage

If the pupil thinks that the situation has still not been dealt with satisfactorily she has the option of making a formal complaint. She should write a letter to the Head, outlining the nature of the complaint. The Head may then call a meeting of the people involved and attempt to resolve the situation. The Head’s decision is final.

2.4 Coursework appeals

If a pupil wishes to appeal against a teacher’s mark of a piece of public examination coursework (sometimes called controlled assessment) in any subject, she should ask her parent(s) to put the appeal in writing and address this to the Data Manager who will copy this to the relevant Head of Department, the Deputy Head (Academic) and the Head. The Data Manager will check that the coursework marking criteria have been followed and that all the work has been marked and the marks added up correctly. The parent(s) should be informed of the result of this enquiry and should be given the opportunity to take the appeal further if they wish. In that case the Data Manager should chair an Appeals Board of no less than two other members of staff. This Board should meet as soon as possible to review the implementation of the coursework marking procedure. If the procedure has not been correctly followed, then the pupil’s coursework must be re-marked by another member of the relevant department and the Board notified. If the procedure has been correctly followed, then the appeal will be dismissed. In both cases, the pupil’s parents should be notified of the Appeal Board’s findings as soon as possible.