

PARENTS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

1.1 Introduction

Parents at St George's are very much part of our community, and we warmly welcome their support. It is vital that we work together to help all the pupils in the school gain as much as possible from their experiences and we are very proud of the way that parents and the School come together to resolve any concern, difficulty or complaint.

The School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching, co-curricular provision 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. This procedure does not apply in respect of past pupils unless the complaint was initially raised whilst the pupil was still on the School roll.

St George's will make this complaints procedure available to all parents of existing and prospective pupils on the School's website, and a copy is available from the School Office on request, and we 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 Independent Schools Standards Regulations (2020), St George's will make this Complaints Procedure available to parents of pupils and will inform parents of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

- The policy is available to staff, parents and boarders.
- The School is inspected by ISI. Parents have the right to contact the ISI if they have a complaint regarding the College's general education, pastoral or boarding provision. ISI will usually expect parents to have followed the College's formal complaints procedure before contacting them. ISI can be contacted on 020 7600 0100 or at concerns@isi.net or you can write to the ISI at CAP House, 9 – 12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA.
- A written record is kept of serious complaints and their outcome for regular review by the Head.
- In accordance with National Minimum Standard 18 of the Boarding Schools: National Minimum Standards 2015 the School's written record of complaints identifies those complaints relating to boarding provision, and action taken by the School as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld)
- 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.

Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this can be regarded as vexatious and outside the scope of this procedure.

The School will not normally investigate any anonymous complaints. However, the Head, or Clerk to the Governors, as appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Parents should not approach individual Governors to raise concerns or complaints. Governors have no power to act on an individual basis and it may prevent them from considering complaints if escalated to Stage 3 of the procedure.

1.4 Recording

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

- 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 109 of the 2008 Education and Skills Act, requests access to them, and in accordance with the School Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notices.

1.5 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 tutor, Head of Year, the relevant Head of Department or Housemistress, or, in the case of prospective pupils, the Director of Admissions and Marketing. This may be expressed orally (face to face or on the telephone) or in writing (by letter or email). In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the 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 the Senior Leadership Team. Complaints made directly to a Head of Department 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 or speak to the parents / guardian concerned within 10 working days of receiving the complaint in term time, and within as 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 (if any) will 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.