



Complaints Policy (To include EYFS and Boarding)

Reviewed July 2024

Introduction

St John's School has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents (*of current students*) do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this procedure. This policy satisfies the NMS standard 14 for Boarding.

All complaints must be submitted within 30 calendar days from the date of the incident.

The number of formal complaints investigated by the school in any given year will be made available to parents on request.

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 child's Tutor. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult the respective School Leads/Head.
- Complaints made directly to the Head will usually be referred to the respective School Leads, unless the Head deems it more appropriate to deal with the matter personally.
- The person hearing the complaint will make a written record of all concerns and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within fourteen calendar days or in the event that the teacher and the parent fail to reach satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.
- Written complaints in the EYFS must be investigated and the outcome advised within 28 calendar days. Records of complaints will be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request. ISI and Ofsted can be contacted via www.isi.net or www.ofsted.gov.uk.



Stage 2 Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents 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 (depending on whether it is term time or school holidays), the Head will arrange to meet the parents, normally within five working days of receiving the complaint, 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.
- 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 informed of this decision in writing within 7 calendar days of meeting the parents. The Head will also give reasons for his decision.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure, and must provide new grounds of appeal (in writing, and no more than 2 pages long)
- Parents have a period of 7 calendar days to raise their complaint to Stage 3.
- Parents will not be allowed to escalate a complaint to Stage 3 solely on the basis of threatening legal action.



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 Chair of Directors, who will call a hearing of the Complaints Panel.
- This 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 (see note below). The Chair of Directors shall appoint each of the Panel members. The Chair of Directors will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 21 calendar 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 shall be supplied to all parties not later than two working days prior to the Hearing.
- The parents may be accompanied to the Hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Parents will not be permitted to bring a lawyer with them as their companion or representative.
- 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 the facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within fourteen calendar days of the Hearing. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head, the Directors and, where relevant, the person complained of.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them. Records of the actions taken will be kept and made available to ISI – whether upheld or not.



Parents will be given reasonable scope and the School will facilitate the parent's exercise to attend the panel hearing. However, should the parent not attend, this does not deny the school's opportunity to hold the hearing without the parent, always in conformity with the complaints policy.

Retention – The period for retaining records of complaints is not prescribed in the standard. New for September 2020, the DfE as regulator, has advised that complaints which do not have safeguarding implications should be retained for a minimum of 7 years (always in line with our Privacy Policy). Where there is a safeguarding angle: 'Records concerning allegations of abuse must be preserved for the term of the Independent inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation if it is longer.' Correspondence and records concerning complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an Inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Note:

The following guidance comes from a letter sent by the DfE to the ISC General Secretary in 2002. Although dated, the advice is extant.

Whilst we do not intend to be prescriptive, our general view is that suitable people would be those who have held positions of responsibility and who are used to analysing evidence and putting forward arguments/points. It would add credibility if independent panel members had some standing in the local community. In this connection serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background – perhaps retired members of the Police Force – might be considered suitable by schools. Schools will have their own views and may well have other suitable suggestions to make.

On the subject of whether it would be acceptable to appoint former Directors or staff of the school as the independent panel member, the regulations do not preclude this since the stipulation is that the person must be independent of the management and running of the school. Clearly former Directors or staff would not have any such involvement. However, schools should bear in mind that they may be subject to criticism that such people would remain too close to the school and would not be truly independent.

Number of formal complaints in the last twelve months (July 2023 – July 2024) is 1.