



# **Parent Complaint Procedure Spring Term 2024**

## **Aims and Principles**

***St Paul's Cathedral School is a Christian, co-educational community which holds to the values of love, justice, tolerance, respect, honesty, service and trust in its life and practice, to promote positive relationships throughout the school community and where the safety, welfare and emotional well-being of each child is of the utmost importance.***

*The school aims to instil a love of learning through a broad curriculum. It aims to give each pupil the opportunity to develop intellectually, socially, personally, physically, culturally and spiritually. All pupils are encouraged to work to the best of their ability and to achieve standards of excellence in all of their endeavours.*

*Through the corporate life of the school, and through good pastoral care, the school encourages the independence of the individual as well as mutual responsibility. It aims to make its pupils aware of the wider community, espouses the democratic process and encourages a close working relationship with parents and guardians.*

## **1 Introduction and Aims**

1.1 St Paul's Cathedral School highly values its partnership with parents and seeks to resolve any concerns or complaints, responding quickly, thoroughly and effectively when these are raised. We seek to improve the School's practice in the light of constructive criticism and to learn lessons from formal and informal complaints.

1.2 It is the intention of this document, which is available to parents and prospective parents on the school's website and in hard copy on request, to explain the procedure by which such complaints can be addressed.

1.3 All parents should be aware that regardless of the nature of a complaint and whether or not it is upheld, parents are not entitled to details of any related sanctions imposed on staff, pupils or parents for reasons of data protection and confidentiality.

## **2 Definitions and Time Frame**

2.1 For the purposes of this procedure a parent is defined as a parent of the child or any person with parental responsibility for the child.

2.2 A parental concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'. A parental complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

2.3 Working days for the purposes of this procedure mean a day other than a Saturday, Sunday or UK public holiday. Term dates can be found on the school website. Any complaints raised during school holidays will be acknowledged and this procedure will commence when the school re-opens. In calculating the number of days, the day of receipt of the complaint and the day of despatch of the response will not be counted.

2.4 There may be occasions when it is necessary to deviate from this complaints procedure if this is reasonable and justified. Complainants will be notified of the changes.

## **3 Scope and Application**

3.1 This procedure applies to parents of pupils in all sections of the School, including Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Boarders.

3.2 Separate procedures apply to complaints brought directly by pupils. These are set out in the Boarders Complaints Procedure and Day Pupils Complaints Procedure, which can be found in the policy section of our website.

3.3 Parents are requested to bring any complaints or concerns to the attention of the school promptly and without delay. Early attention to concerns can prevent situations from escalating and aid in investigation. This procedure applies to incidents which have taken place within the past three months. Under exceptional circumstances, earlier incidents may be dealt with under this policy, at the discretion of the Head.

3.4 This procedure is only available to parents of pupils, meaning current registered pupils. This procedure will only apply to past pupils if the initial complaint was raised by parents and acknowledged by the School in writing when the pupil was still registered as a current pupil.

3.5 This procedure does not apply to prospective parents or pupils including those who have accepted a place at the school in respect of their child but where that child has not yet started at the school.

3.6 This procedure does not apply to complaints about temporary or permanent exclusion, which are covered under Governor Review; details of this process are available from the Clerk of Governors.

3.7 The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints.

3.8 This procedure does not cover complaints raised in relation to the non-payment of any sum owing to the School. If a parent has a complaint regarding any action taken (or proposed to be taken) by the School as a result of failure to pay any sum owing to the School, the parent may write to the Clerk to the Governors of St Paul's Cathedral School (Steve Vickery, Bursar), who will refer the matter to the Chair of Governors.

3.9 Complaints about child protection matters will be handled:

- under the school's child protection and safeguarding policy
- in accordance with relevant statutory guidance
- with reference to external agencies which may include the local authority designated officer (LADO) or the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH).

3.10 If appropriate, the school will acknowledge that a complaint is upheld, wholly or in part. In addition it may offer:

- an explanation;
- an admission that it could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the school will try to ensure that the event complained of will not happen again and an explanation of the steps taken in this respect;
- an undertaking to review policies and / or procedures; an apology.

3.11 Requests for financial awards, such as claims for compensation, damages or fee refunds, are beyond the scope of the school's complaints procedures.

3.12 The school may propose the use of mediation to resolve a complaint and will consider any request for mediation from a complainant. Where mediation is used, the Chair of Governors will review the complaint to ensure that appropriate investigation of the complaint has taken place and any necessary learning has been noted or actions taken.

## **4 Stage I – Informal Resolution**

4.1 It is generally in the interest of all concerned that complaints be resolved in as efficient and amicable a way as possible. This can usually be done in an informal fashion.

4.2 Where parents have a complaint, verbal or email contact in the first place is usually with Form Tutors, who will acknowledge receipt within two working days. This can often lead to the matter being rapidly resolved. Parents are reminded that teachers do not access their emails immediately while they are working with pupils. For urgent matters, a call to the Office during office hours will ensure that the parent's concern receives immediate attention.

4.3 Where appropriate the Form Tutor will arrange a meeting to discuss the parent's concern rather than discussing sensitive or complex matters by email.

4.4 The Senior Leadership Team at St Paul's Cathedral School can be contacted via the Office by any parent who wishes to arrange an appointment to discuss a concern or complaint.

4.5 Informal complaints will be recorded by staff on iSAMS (the school's information management system) and reviewed by the Deputy Head, even where a complaint is promptly and fully resolved.

4.6 The school aims to deal with complaints promptly and sets five working days as the target timescale within which Stage I complaints should be satisfactorily resolved.

4.7 Although all formal complaints will be made in writing, this does not mean that the formal stage is automatically triggered whenever a concern is expressed in writing, for example, by email. Complaints will usually only progress to the formal stage after first being considered at the preliminary stage and only then if the complainant expresses an intention to escalate a matter to the formal stage.

4.8 Where complaints are not successfully resolved by the informal process at Stage 1, a more formal procedure is available, as set out below.

## **5 Stage 2 Complaints**

5.1 Parents who are not satisfied with a Stage 1 resolution are now asked to put their complaint in writing to the Head (or to the Chair of Governors if the complaint is about the Head). This must be sent within seven working days of the Stage 1 resolution meeting or correspondence.

5.2 The school requests that Stage 2 Complaints are accompanied by a Complaint Form (see Appendix 1).

Stage 2 Complaints must include:

- The complainant's name and full contact details
- details of the complaint and who it has previously been raised with
- a copy of any relevant documents; and
- the outcome desired.

5.3 Complaints are to be made by the parent or parents directly to the school. Where several parents believe they share the same grounds for complaint, individual complaints must be made. This approach recognises the likelihood that no two situations will be identical and the value the school places on its partnership with the parents of each individual child and supports the school's capacity to meet its obligations under this procedure.

5.4 The Head will seek to acknowledge such complaints within three working days of receipt. This communication will acknowledge receipt and summarise what the School understands to be the nature and key points of the complaint.

5.5 The Head will usually invite parents to attend a meeting to discuss the issue and if necessary will meet with others with relevant knowledge of the circumstances to define the scope of the complaint and / or assist in the investigation.

5.6 The Head will carry out any appropriate investigations and keep a written record of all meetings and interviews pertaining to the complaint.

5.7 The Head will produce a Stage 2 decision in writing within fifteen working days of the Stage 2 parent meeting.

5.8 If the complaint is about the Head, the Chair of Governors will call for a full report from the Head and for 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 of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the Stage 2 decision in writing, within fifteen working days of the Stage 2 parent meeting.

5.9 If parents remain dissatisfied by the Stage 2 resolution, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure by writing to the Chair of Governors, within ten working days of receiving the Stage 2 response. In the absence of any communication within these timescales, the School will deem the complaint resolved.

## **6 Stage 3 – Formal Complaints and the Panel Hearing Procedure**

6.1 Parents who are not satisfied by the Stage 2 response are directed to submit their complaint in writing to the Chair of Governors within ten working days.

6.2 The Chair of Governors will acknowledge written complaints within three working days of receipt and will convene the Complaints Panel, selecting a Panel Chair, who will be a current Governor.

6.3 The Panel will comprise three individuals who were not involved in any aspect of the complaint. Two members of the Panel will be current Governors and one member will be an individual independent of the management and running of the School, nominated by the Chair of Governors, who has held a position of responsibility and is used to scrutinizing evidence and putting forward balanced arguments.

6.4 A hearing will take place within twenty working days of the complaint being acknowledged by the Chair of Governors. At least five days prior to the Panel Hearing, relevant documentation should be sent to members of the Panel by the Clerk to the Governors.

6.5 Parents may be accompanied to a hearing by one other person, perhaps a relative or friend. The Panel Chair will not permit persons under the age of 18 or pupils of the school to attend. Legal representation at a hearing is not considered to be appropriate.

6.6 New matters of complaint will not be reviewed at this stage and any evidence unrelated to the initial complaint will not be considered but will be acknowledged and the parents informed of the person to whom they have been referred under Stage 1.

6.7 The Panel will either reach a decision at the end of the Hearing or adjourn to carry out any further investigation which is deemed appropriate and will then reach a decision within ten working days of the Panel Hearing, other than in exceptional circumstances.

6.8 Within ten working days after the Hearing, the Clerk will send the parents and the Head a copy of the Panel's draft report. If the parents or Head believe that the Panel has not accurately summarised their complaint in the report, they will inform the Clerk in writing within five working days thereafter, giving details of the alleged inaccuracies. The Panel will then finalise its report.

6.9 The Panel's report will be sent to the parents, the Head, the Chair of Governors and, where relevant, the person complained about.

6.10 The Panel's report will state its decision in respect of the parent's complaint. The decision of the Panel in respect of the parent's complaint will be final and binding.

6.11 The Panel's findings and any recommendations including any actions taken to implement them will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the Chair of Governors and the Head; the Panel's report will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

## **7 Records of Complaints**

7.1 A written record of all complaints, whether or not they go beyond Stage 1, will be maintained, indicating whether they are resolved at Stage 1, Stage 2 or proceed to a Panel Hearing. Complaints directly relating to Boarding will be so identified, including the action taken by the School as a result of these complaints, regardless of whether they are upheld. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and in confidence.

7.2 Although the school is not required to keep a record of informal complaints, we do so via weekly year group meeting notes, reviewed weekly by the Deputy Head in order to ensure that any patterns may be identified or useful lessons learned. Summary information is presented to the Head on a half-termly basis.

7.3 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 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

## **8 Complaints about the fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements**

8.1 Additional requirements apply to the School's EYFS arrangements, beyond those which apply to the main school. Written complaints about the fulfilment of EYFS requirements at the School will be investigated (by the Head of Pre-prep or another senior leader nominated by the Head) and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days and a record of complaints will be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.

8.2 In addition, parents can contact Ofsted and ISI (the Independent Schools Inspectorate) as below: Ofsted – Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD - Tel: 0300 123 4666 ISI – Cap House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA – Tel: 0207 600 0100.

## **9 Expected Behaviours and the Handling of Unreasonable Complaints**

9.1 The school is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to responding promptly and appropriately to those who complain. It will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, the school does not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening. Parents are reminded of their contractual obligation to treat school staff in a reasonable manner.

9.2 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 the policy.

9.3 The school may determine that a complaint is unreasonable and provide an explanation to the complainant that it will not respond, for example, complaints which

- are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious in nature
- insist upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason
- insist upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner
- are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- contain demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value

9.4 In determining whether a complaint is unreasonable, the school will consider all the circumstances of the case and the nature of the complaint itself, including:

- whether a complaint has reasonable foundation;
- the history and context of the complaint (and any evidence where relevant);
- whether the time and cost of investigating the complaint is proportionate to the issue under discussion;
- whether an investigation of the complaint is likely to cause a disproportionate or unjustified level of disruption, irritation or distress;
- unexplained delay in raising a complaint or issue;
- if the purpose of the complaint is to obtain an outcome which is unavailable via the complaints procedure, such as a claim for compensation, damages or a refund of fees;
- any evidence of a complaint being brought for an improper purpose.

9.5 Whenever possible, the Head and / or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before dismissing a complaint as unreasonable.

9.6 A complainant may request that a Stage 3 Panel be convened to determine the single issue of whether the school's dismissal of the complainant's original complaint was justified.

#### **10 Record of Formal Complaints 2023-24**

10.1 In the 2023/24 academic year, no Stage 3 complaints were raised.

Two Stage 2 complaints were investigated, both of which were partially upheld. A further Stage 2 complaint was raised and withdrawn by the submitting parent.



## Appendix I

### Parental Complaints Form

Parental Complaints Form		
<b>Name of complainant:</b>		
<b>Address:</b>	<b>Telephone:</b>	<b>Email:</b>
<b>Name and role of staff member with whom the complaint has been raised with at the informal stage:</b> (Please include any relevant dates)		
<b>Reason for complaint:</b> (Please include as much information as possible about what specifically you are unhappy about and why)		
<b>Desired outcome:</b>		
<b>List of relevant documents enclosed with the complaint form:</b>		
<b>Declaration:</b>  The information included in this Complaint Form is accurate to the best of my knowledge. I agree to cooperate fully with the complaints procedures and acknowledge my ongoing obligation to treat St Paul's Cathedral School and its staff in a reasonable manner at all times.  Signed:		

SLT Review: Head, August 2024

Full Governing Body Review: Summer Term 2024