

COMPLAINTS POLICY: INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

This policy makes use of the procedures set out in the Independent Schools Council (ISC) guidance 'ISC Model Complaints Procedure', and the DfE guidance on Complaints Procedures for maintained schools, but adds further elements to turn them into a model policy for independent schools. This policy applies to the Pre Prep, Prep and High School Departments.

COMPLAINTS POLICY

School: St. Dominic's Grammar School, Brewood

General:

The school is required under the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 to adopt, make available, and apply a complaints procedure. In order to comply with the Standards against which OFSTED/ISI inspections will be carried out.

'Complaints' are not defined in the Independent School Standards Regulations, but the guidance for maintained schools suggests that there is a difference between 'concerns' which should be dealt with informally and 'complaints', which should be subject to a formal procedure i.e. it cannot be easily resolved by the intervention of a Senior Manager.

This policy concerns complaints from **parents, pupils and others**.

At St. Dominic's Grammar School, the Head of Upper or Lower School/ a member of SLT including the Bursar will appointed as the Complaints Co-ordinator.

The policy does not cover complaints from members of staff as these are covered by the school's grievance procedures.

Types of Concerns and Complaints

The majority of concerns/complaints received by the school fall into the following categories:

- **Financial and administrative** (and breach of contract in independent schools);
- **Academic** (course programme, unsatisfactory teaching, too much/too little homework, progress in a particular subject etc);
- **Pastoral care** (discipline/indiscipline, inappropriate sanctions, bullying, overall progress of the child, unhappiness of the child, accommodation etc); or
- **Child protection** (allegations against staff, handling of sensitive issues).

Responsibilities:

Governing Body: for

- Adopting the policy, procedures and guidelines;
- Appointing where necessary an independent panel to hear complaints; when complainants are not satisfied with the school's response;
- Receiving reports and findings from the panel; or

- Receiving reports from the Head of School; advising the Head of School.

The Governing Body will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes regularly. The Governing Body will also monitor the school's response to complaints and any panel recommendations.

Chair of the Governing Body:

Sir Michael Griffiths – sir.michael.griffiths@btinternet.com

makes provision for a hearing before a panel appointed by or on behalf of the Governors and consisting of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school, to hear complaints from complainants not satisfied with the school's response.

Chair of the Independent Panel:

Mrs T Wood – friends@stdominicsgrammarschool.co.uk

To ensure that:

- The parties understand the procedure;
- The issues are addressed;
- Key findings of fact are established;
- Complainants are put at ease;
- The hearing is conducted as informally as possible;
- The panel is open-minded and acts independently;
- No member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome, or has been involved in the issues previously;
- All parties have the chance to be heard;
- Any written material is seen by all parties; and
- Findings are communicated to the parent and school within three days of the hearing.

Clerk to the Governing Body –

Miss Emma Pugh – spugh@stdominicsgrammarschool.co.uk

The Clerk must act as the reference point for the complainant when the complainant has not been satisfied with the school's response.

The Clerk must:

- Set convenient dates and times and venues for hearings;
- Collate any written material and forward it to the parties;
- Meet and welcome the parties;
- Record the proceedings; and

- Notify the parties of the decision.
 - Ensure that the record of complaints is kept for at least 7 years. 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
- Persistent correspondence – 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

Headmaster

Mr Peter McNabb – pmcnabb@stdominicsgrammarschool.co.uk

- For the overall internal management of the procedures;
- For ensuring that there is both an informal and formal procedure;
- For ensuring that the written policy and procedures are available to parents, pupils and members of the public on request;
- For hearing complaints at the second stage (see below); and
- For ensuring that the procedures are monitored and reviewed and regular reports made to the Governing Body.

Head of Senior School or Lower School/SLT or Bursar (Complaints Co-ordinator):

Mr Paul Tudor – ptudor@stdominicsgrammarschool.co.uk

for

- The efficient operation and management of the policy and procedures;
- Training staff on how to deal appropriately with complaints;
- Keeping parents, pupils and others informed of the procedure;
- Compiling reports for the Headmaster as required; and
- Liaising with Head of Upper or Lower School where complaints are curriculum based.
- Making a courtesy call to ascertain an appropriate timescale after proceedings.

Bursar: for

- administrative, environmental and financial queries and complaints.

Heads of Faculty/Heads of Department/Subject: for

- dealing with and where possible resolving concerns/complaints about academic matters/programmes of study/teaching methods at stage 1 of the procedures.

Form tutors: for

- dealing with and where possible resolving complaints concerning overall pupil progress, discipline issues, pastoral care.

Nominated Person: for

- receiving any child protection issues.

All staff: for

- hearing any concerns brought to them by parents and pupils and reassuring them that they will be dealt with as soon as possible by the appropriate member of staff,
- informing the relevant staff of the concerns.
- passing any complaints received from other people who are not parents to the Head of Upper or Lower School/Bursar (Complaints Co-ordinator).

PROCEDURES

General

There are three possible stages.

Stage 1 Informal Resolution

Concerns expressed by parents or pupils to any member of staff should be dealt with by that member of staff if he/she is able to do so. If the member of staff considers the issue to be beyond his/her competence the concern should be passed to the Form Teacher/Head of Faculty.

Concerns/complaints which come to a member of staff from other sources should be passed immediately to the Head of Upper or Lower School (Complaints Co-ordinator), who will inform the complainant of the action he/she proposes to take.

Stage 2 Formal Procedure

Complaint heard by Headmaster/Head of Upper or Lower School/Bursar

Stage 3 Independent Panel Hearing

Complaint heard by the independent panel appointed by the Governing Body; the panel will consist of 3 people not directly involved in the matter.

Detailed Guidance

All staff and Governors should be conversant with the procedures.

Stage 1

All staff should listen carefully and patiently to parents' and pupils' complaints, recognising that however ill-founded the complaint might be, it is a matter of great concern to the parent or pupil. If unsure, please complete the relevant pro-forma and discuss it with a member of SLT. All concerns will be followed up by a courtesy call by the Complaints Co-Ordinator within 3 days, whenever possible and the outcome recorded.

Two Working Day Service

If the matter is within the competence of the member of staff to resolve quickly, this should be done. Otherwise the complainant should be reassured that the complaint will be passed to the relevant member of staff, and the relevant person should be informed by the member of staff as soon as possible. The complainant should be told that it is the school's policy to respond to the verbal complaint within 2 working days, even if the issue cannot be entirely resolved in 2 working days.

If a trivial/simple verbal concern/complaint is made it might be possible to resolve it immediately. In more serious cases, or where a member of staff is uncertain, parents should always be asked to put their complaint in writing and move to Stage 2 Formal Procedure. This is to ensure that there is no conflict in determining what the complaint consists of and the action taken by the members of the school staff.

Serious complaint by a pupil

If a serious complaint is made by a pupil, the member of staff should immediately inform the Headmaster/Complaints Co-ordinator who will discuss the issue with the relevant members of staff in order to determine what the course of action should be.

Members of staff receiving a concern/complaint must use the school's Complaints Form to inform the relevant senior member of staff/Complaints Co-ordinator. But this does not prevent the member of staff also speaking to the relevant senior colleague about the matter at the earliest opportunity.

If the senior member of staff considers the issue to be serious, he/she should inform the Head of School/Complaints Co-ordinator via the school's Complaints Form, and inform the complainant of the action taken. If the complainant is not satisfied with the informal response, he/she should be informed that they must make a formal complaint in writing to the Head of School/Complaints Co-ordinator.

In any cases of doubt members of staff should seek the advice of the Complaints Co-ordinator or Head of Upper or Lower School who have the responsibility for mentoring colleagues. Informal resolution should normally take no more than **three** working days. If a longer period is necessary to complete investigations, the complainant should be informed within three working days of the reasons and the new date for resolution.

If not satisfied at this stage, move onto stage 2.

Stage 2 Formal Procedure

When a written formal complaint is received, the Headmaster in consultation with the Complaints Co-ordinator will decide on the appropriate action and deploy a relevant member of senior staff to consult the relevant staff, make appropriate investigations, and attempt to resolve the issue within **three** working days. If a resolution cannot be found the Headmaster/Complaints Co-ordinator should inform the complainant of his/her right of appeal to an independent panel.

If the complaint concerns a child protection issue or involves an allegation of abuse by a member of the school staff the named person responsible for child protection complaints should be informed by the Complaints Co-ordinator.

No complaint should normally be left unresolved at this stage after THREE days of receipt of the complaint. Where more time is necessary to complete the investigations, the complainant will be informed and another date set.

Stage 3 Hearings by an Independent Panel

Complainants who are not satisfied by the school's decision regarding the complaint can request a hearing by a panel of three members, one of whom will be independent of the school management.

The complainant must be advised by the Headmaster/Complaints Co-ordinator to write to the Chair of the Governing Body via the Clerk giving details of the complaint. The Chair will nominate the panel.

The hearing must be within 10 working days of the Chair receiving notice of the complaint.

The complainant must be told of his/her right to be accompanied by a friend, and where relevant, translations/interpreters must be arranged by the Clerk in consultation with the parties. Legal representation is not normally permitted,

The nominated Governor/panel will make its own procedures, and will agree these with the Chair, who will report them to the next meeting of the Governing Body.

The Governor/panel will ensure that the complainant is heard in private, is welcomed, and as far as possible, is put at ease.

Careful consideration must be taken when the complainant is a pupil.

The panel will hear the appeal(s), consider all the views expressed and decide the outcome.

The panel can make such findings and recommendations to the Governing Body as it wishes. It must send its report to the Governing Body, the Headmaster and the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, within three working days of the hearing. This timescale also ensures all complaints dealt with are within the EYFS time-frame of 28 days. Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements must be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days.

Note: for the purposes of the complaints procedure, 'working days' means term time days. If a complaint is received at the end of a term, a resolution will be reached within a maximum of 10 weeks from the date of the complaint being lodged.

Governing Body Action

The Governing Body, after consultation with the Headmaster, will consider the panel's findings and recommendations and make such decisions as it feels are necessary in the circumstances.

In general, the Governing Body will take one of the following courses of action:

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- Decide on appropriate action to resolve the complaint; or • Recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures.

The Governing Body's decision is binding.

Reporting and Recording

In all cases it is important for staff to use the school's Complaints Form so that records of the complaint and the action taken can be recorded and traced. Supporting documents should be attached to the form.

The Clerk to the Governing Body will ensure that all correspondence, statements and records pertaining to the complaint are kept confidential and secure 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. A written record of all complaints will be kept for at least 3 years and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing. Records will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher. A record will be kept of any action taken by the school as a result of any complaints regardless of whether they are upheld or not.

The Headmaster and Complaints Co-ordinator will consider the handling of complaints from time to time, and will discuss issues with staff where appropriate.

The Headmaster will report to staff from time to time and to the Governing Body each term on the number and type of complaints received and their outcomes.

You can contact OFSTED on 03001231231 or you can write to the Secretary of State (see addresses below) if you think you can show that the school has broken the law, or acted unreasonably. Unreasonableness in the strict legal sense means acting in a way in which no reasonable authority could act. You should include copies of any refusal letters you have received, a copy of the appeal panel's decision, copies of any further correspondence with the school and any relevant supporting evidence. Parents may make a complaint to:

- (1) Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) by e-mail enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or telephoning 0300 123 4666 (8am-6pm); and
- (2) ISI (Independent Schools Inspectorate) at www.isi.net or telephoning 020 7600 0100.
- (3) The Secretary of State for Education. The final stage of appeal is to the Secretary of State for Education. Complainants should be advised to write to The School Complaints Unit (SCU) at: Department for Education, 2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate, Manchester M1 2WD

Parents may ask to know the number of formal complaints received by the school in the last academic year, please ask at Reception.

Signed:

Michael Griffiths

Chair of the Governing Body Date of

September 2024 next review

September 2025

PARENTAL COMPLAINT FORM

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 of Upper or Lower School:

Headmaster:

PUPIL COMPLAINT FORM

Member of Staff receiving the complaint:

From (Name of Pupil):

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 of Upper or Lower School:

Headmaster:

Internal handling concerns and identifying complaints – summary

It is essential that concerns/complaints are dealt with speedily and that communications are kept open between the complainant and the school. Most concerns/complaints can be dealt with quickly in the following way if the channels of communication are kept open at all times.

**Parental concern raised
(by phone, unscheduled meeting or note)**



Refer matter to relevant Head of Senior or Lower School

(Written *pro forma* to be filled in and given to them within **24 hours**)



Member of staff to contact
parents within **24 hours** to
resolve matter and record action
on
pro forma



**Head of Senior or Lower
School** to contact parents within **48 hours** after
the
resolution to confirm
satisfaction.



SATISFIED

If satisfied, ensure personal contact sheet has been filed with relevant DH and record of date of resolution made.

Completed concern forms to be retained in Headmaster's

Office and in the pupils file. These must be passed on with 24 hours of final Head of Upper or Lower School contact.



UNSATISFIED

The concern now becomes a complaint and the matter is now referred to the Headmaster to try and resolve the matter within 5 working days.

Copy of complaints procedure sent to parents now if still unsatisfied.

See Handbook for next steps in complaints procedure.