



ST MARGARET'S

SCHOOL

Complaints Procedure

Next review: September 2021

St Margaret's School Complaints Procedure

This procedure is for all parents of pupils in the School; including children in the EYFS.

As a school we encourage dialogue between parents, pupils and teachers. Whilst this formal procedure is required, it is not intended to cover the normal process of dialogue with parents and pupils, including the expression of negative comments about aspects of the school, and we hope that parents will normally use informal approaches to the school.

In accordance with paragraph 32(1)(b) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the School will make available to parents of pupils and of prospective pupils and provide, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate, details of the complaints procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

If at any time parents have cause for concern or occasion for complaint, they should raise the matter with the school as soon as possible. All concerns or complaints will be taken seriously and confidentially, and the school will respond promptly. The school is here for your child and you can be assured that your daughter will not be penalised for a complaint that you raise in good faith.

Parents should feel free to telephone, or to write, with details of the issue that concerns them.

What Constitutes a Complaint ?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the school is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the school has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have

done or has acted unfairly. The school will not deal with anonymous complaints (except for those concerning child protection matters) and therefore these procedures do not provide for a resolution of anonymous complaints

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The School is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you [or your child] raises in good faith.

The three-stage Complaint Procedure

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and **informally**.
- In the first instance it may be best to address a concern to the member of staff most closely involved with the matter at issue (e.g. the Form Teacher, Housemistress or Head of Department). In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Form Teacher, Housemistress or Head of Department cannot resolve the matter alone it may be necessary for him/her to consult the Vice Principal or the Head.
- Complaints made directly to Vice Principal or the Head will usually be referred to the relevant Form Teacher, Housemistress or Head of Department unless Vice Principal or the Head deems it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
- The Form Teacher, Housemistress or Head of Department 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 five working days or in the event that the Form Teacher, Housemistress or Head of Department and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with stage 2 of this procedure.
- If, however, the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors whose contact details are available from the School Office on request.

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. S/he will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head will speak to the parents concerned, normally within 5 working days of receiving the complaint (28 calendar days in the case of an EYFS related 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 will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head will also give reasons for her decision.
- If the complaint is against the Head, the complaint should be made to the Chairman of Governors. The Chairman of Governors or their nominee will call for a full report from the Head and for all the relevant documents. The Chairman of Governors or their nominee 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 Chairman of Governors or their nominee is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing. The Chairman of Governors or their nominee will give reasons for his/her decision.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

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 Clerk 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 three trustees not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and one other person who shall be independent of the management and running of the

school. The Clerk, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 15 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 shall be supplied to all parties normally not later than 5 working days prior to the hearing.
- The parents may attend the hearing and 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 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 facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings and may make recommendations.
- The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, normally within 5 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 electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents, and, where relevant, the person complained. The panel's findings and

recommendations if any will be available for inspection by the Head, and the Chair of Governors at the School.

Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. They will be acknowledged within five working days if received during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the school's target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 28 days if the complaint is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further 28 days, if the appeal is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

Recording Complaints

Following resolution of a complaint, the school will keep a written record of all complaints and whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing. A record will be kept of any action taken whether or not a complaint is upheld. Records will indicate those complaints relating to boarding. The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice. When dealing with complaints the School (including any panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of pupil
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name of member(s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes of the hearing
- The Panel's written decision

This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the School's Privacy Notice, but potentially including sensitive data such as information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint.

The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Notice and Retention of Records policy but in most cases for a period of at least six years after the pupil leaves the School.

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 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

The School will provide ISI/Ofsted, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaints will be kept for at least three years.

Parents may complain directly to Ofsted or to ISI if they believe the School is not meeting the EYFS requirements.

Ofsted may be contacted on 0300 123 1231 or by email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

ISI may be contacted on 020 7600 0100 or by email: concerns@isi.net

Welfare of Boarders

A separate procedure exists, in accordance with Standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools, for boarders and their parents to raise complaints, and which is made available to boarders, their parents and staff for their information.