



Complaints Procedure

This policy also applies to the Early Years' Foundation Stage and Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014

We hope that your daughter is happy at St Margaret's. On occasion, however, a problem may arise. This procedure sets out both the process which the School expects parents to use to register any complaint and, similarly, the process which parents can expect the School to adopt in responding to any complaint.

1.0 Purpose of the Complaints Procedure

This procedure aims to assure parents that any complaint against the school will be dealt with in a fair, consistent and responsive way, with the aim of achieving a speedy and satisfactory response.

2.0 Scope of this Procedure

A complaint is defined as a clear statement of dissatisfaction about any specified aspect of the school's work which has an effect on an individual pupil for whom the complainant has parental responsibility.

This procedure deals with specified day to day complaints against the management and/or operation of the school, but excludes exclusion appeals, child protection matters, or grievances by school staff.

Complainants may be parents, guardians or any other person who, with the School's written consent, has assumed parental responsibility for a pupil. The term "parent" is used throughout this document as a generic term for a person with such responsibility.

3.0 General

Records of all conversations and meetings with parents to resolve complaints will be kept. All correspondence, statements and records will remain confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Anonymous allegations will not be investigated. The School is happy to offer advice on the application of this procedure in practice at each stage.

4.0 Stage 1: Informal Stage

On the vast majority of occasions, a parent will raise a concern directly with a member of the school staff without any formality. The School very much encourages parents to discuss concerns affecting their daughter with her Form or subject teacher at the earliest opportunity. At this stage, it may be unclear whether the parent is making a complaint, seeking information, or has misunderstood a situation. In any event, the School aims to resolve the concern at this point in a speedy and effective manner. Sometimes the Form or subject Teacher will be able to provide information, reassurance, or suggest a course of action leading to an immediate solution. At other times, they may need to discuss the matter with colleagues, and/or with the Principal or his Deputy.

In the latter case, the parent will be kept informed of the progress of their complaint, the outcome of any investigation and the action, if any, which the school proposes to take.



On some occasions, a parent may wish to raise a complaint with the Principal in the first instance. In such circumstances, they can expect the Principal to consult with the Form Teacher and/or other members of staff or interested parties before a solution is offered.

If this informal process has been exhausted and no satisfactory solution found, the Principal will invite the parent to put the complaint in writing to the Chairman of Governors, using the form attached as Appendix 1. This form should be sent to the Chairman of Governors within ten school days. If the parent decides at this point not to pursue the complaint, but at a later date changes their mind, they should nevertheless arrange a further meeting with the Principal before invoking Stage 2.

In the event of a complaint relating specifically to the conduct of the Principal, parents should proceed directly to Stage 2 of this procedure.

5.0 Stage 2: Referral to the Chairman of Governors

The Chairman of Governors (or another Governor to whom the Chairman has specifically delegated this responsibility) will acknowledge the written complaint within five school days of receipt and provide an opportunity to meet the parent to discuss the complaint.

The Chairman will ensure that the complaint is fully investigated. This process may involve, amongst other things: reviewing all written records relating to the complaint, an interview with the Principal and requesting the Principal to make further investigations. If the complaint refers specifically to the conduct of the Principal, the Chairman will undertake any relevant investigations personally.

The Chairman's written response to the complaint will normally be made within ten school days of receipt of the complaint. If this is not possible, a letter will be sent explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised target date.

The written response will include full reasons for the conclusions reached by the Chairman and what action, if any, the School proposes to take to resolve the matter.

If the parent remains dissatisfied, they may request that their complaint be considered by a Governors' Complaints Panel under Stage 3 of this procedure. This request must be made in writing to the Clerk to the Governing Body within ten school days (unless there are reasonable extenuating circumstances delaying this) of receipt of the response from the Chairman of Governors under Stage 2, and enclose a copy of the original complaint form.

6.0 Stage 3: Review by the Governors' Complaints Panel

Complaints only rarely reach this level. However, when the need arises, the Governors' Complaints Panel will consider complaints at this stage. The Panel will consist of three members, at least one of whom will be a Governor and at least one of whom will be independent of the School. One member will be nominated to act as the Panel's Chair. None of the panel can have been involved in the complaint.

The Clerk to the Governors will acknowledge receipt of the request for a Stage 3 hearing **within five school days**. This letter of acknowledgment will inform the parent that the complaint will be heard by the Governors' Complaints Panel (GCP) within **twenty school days** of receipt of the complaint. It will also inform the parent of the right to submit any further documents and that these must be



available to the Clerk to the Governors within **five school days** of receipt of the acknowledgment letter.

The right to call witnesses to the meeting, subject to the approval of the Chair of the CGP, and the right of the parent to be accompanied by a companion, will also be explained in the letter. If the parent wishes to be accompanied by a legal representative, this is at the discretion of the school, and not an automatic entitlement.

The school will consider parental availability for dates and comments concerning panel composition. The Clerk to the Governors will send a copy of the letter of acknowledgment of the complaint to the Chairman of Governors and the Principal (or the Chairman alone, in cases relating directly to the conduct of the Principal) and request a written report in response to the complaint to be sent to the GCP within **five school days** of receipt of the letter. The right to call witnesses, subject to the approval of the Chair of the GCP, will also be explained.

If the parent does not attend the hearing the panel should still consider the substance of the complaint and issue findings based on this. It should not merely be a review of procedures.

The hearing may be cancelled if the parent indicates in the intervening time that they do not wish to proceed with the complaint.

A parent's right to the panel hearing is not forfeited by virtue of the parent taking (or threatening to take) out legal proceedings against the school.

The Clerk to the Governors will then convene a GCP meeting, having consulted with all parties on convenient times. The date, time and venue for the meeting will then be confirmed at least **five school days in advance**. At this point, the names of all parties and witnesses (if any) to attend the meeting and all relevant documents to be referred to at the meeting will be provided to all parties and each panel member.

The panel hearing will be held according to the procedures detailed in Appendix 2.

Within 10 school days of the hearing the school will provide the panel's findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and make them available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Principal. Their decision is final.

The school will keep a record of all formal complaints and whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and the action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

7.0 Early Years Foundation Stage

In the case of complaints concerning the Early Years Foundation Stage (Reception), the whole process described above will be completed within 28 working days. Parents may also exercise their right to make a complaint to Ofsted and/or to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) if they wish. The contact details are as follows: Ofsted, Royal Exchange Building, St. Ann's Square, Manchester M2 7LA, Tel: 08456 014772. ISI, Cap House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA, Telephone: 020 7600 0100.



Appendix 1

Notification of Formal Complaint

Name of the pupil to whom the complaint relates:

Name of the parent/guardian making the complaint:

Details of Complaint *(Please be as specific as possible)*

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(Please attach a continuation sheet if required)

What would you like to see done to resolve your complaint and bring the matter to an acceptable close?

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Signed Date

Please return the completed form to the Chairman of Governors at the school address.



Appendix 2

Procedures for Hearings of the Governors' Complaints Panel

The aim of the meeting is to resolve the complaint and achieve a reconciliation between the School and the Complainant. The Chair of the GCP will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted. The introduction of new information or witnesses, not previously notified to all parties, would be reason to adjourn the meeting.

Order of the Hearing

1. The Chair will welcome the complainant (and companion, if present) and introduce the Panel.
2. The Chair will explain the purpose of the meeting, the procedure, and that all written evidence has been made available to all parties.
3. The Complainant is invited to explain their complaint, calling in witnesses if appropriate.
4. The GCP may question the Complainant and witnesses.
5. The Complainant and companion retire from the meeting.
6. The Chair welcomes the Chairman of Governors and Principal (where appropriate).
7. The Chair explains the purpose of the meeting, the procedure, and that all written evidence has been made available to all parties.
8. The Chairman of Governors and Principal (where appropriate) present a response to the complaint, including action taken to address the complaint at stages 1 and 2 of the procedure, calling witnesses, if appropriate.
9. The GCP may question the Chairman of Governors/Principal.
10. The Chairman of Governors and Principal retire from the meeting.
11. The GCP may, if necessary, recall the Complainant, Chairman of Governors, Principal or witnesses for further questions.
12. Should the GCP require further information, it may adjourn the hearing to a mutually convenient date in order that this may be provided.
13. If the GCP is satisfied that it has all the necessary information, it will consider the complaint and reach a unanimous or majority decision.