



SENIOR SCHOOL COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURES PARENTAL COMPLAINTS

This policy is applicable to Senior School Pupils only

This Policy is available on the School Website or upon request from the School Administration Office

COVID-19

The College will endeavour to comply with the timescales and procedures set out within this Complaints Policy, but it may be necessary to revise them on a case-by-case basis, to ensure compliance with measures in place and constraints associated with the requirement to maintain COVID-secure practices at all times, as well as to accommodate delays that may result from disruption and staff absence.

Aim:

The aim of this policy is to ensure that any complaint is handled sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is:

- a. Good for relationships;
- b. Good education practice, and
- c. Good business practice.

Applicability:

This document applies to current pupils and to past pupils in cases where the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still registered.

Policy Statement:

We need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. Parents should never feel - or be made to feel - that a complaint, made in a reasonable and appropriate way, will be taken amiss or will reflect adversely on the pupil or his/her opportunities at this College. We will investigate and try to resolve every complaint in a positive manner and will treat every complaint as an opportunity:

- a. To put right any matter which may have gone wrong;
- b. To review our systems and procedures in the light of the relevant circumstances.

We recognise that a complaint which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, damaging to relationships and also to our internal culture.

Child Protection:

If a complaint involves a Child Protection issue, the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (Deputy Head, Pastoral) should be informed immediately.

Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, a complaint is defined as any matter about which a parent or guardian of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the College. Complaints may be categorised as follows:

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- i. Education Matters If the complaint relates to the classroom, the curriculum or additional educational needs, please speak to your child's Tutor, Housemaster or Housemistress or the relevant Head of Department;
- ii. Pastoral Care If the complaint relates to matters outside the classroom, or in the House, please speak to your child's Housemaster or Housemistress, and
- iii. Disciplinary Matters If you have a complaint about a disciplinary sanction then you should speak to your child's Housemaster or Housemistress.

Every parent (specifically, a current parent or legal guardian of a pupil of the College) has the right to have any complaint confidentially and carefully investigated by an adult within the community or, where appropriate, outside it.

THREE-STAGE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

The College operates a three-stage complaints procedure as follows:

- a. **Stage One** The first stage of the complaints procedure aims to resolve matters informally with staff directly involved (Housemasters / Housemistresses / teaching staff where appropriate). Stage one procedures are acknowledged within one working day and completed within 5 working days (defined as Monday-Friday excluding Bank Holidays) of the matter being brought to the attention of a member of staff. The College will aim to provide a response to the complainant within this timescale;
- b. **Stage Two** The second stage of the complaints procedure aims to resolve formal complaints made in writing to the Head of the College (as defined above) or referred to the Head by a member of staff. Stage Two procedures are acknowledged within one working day and completed within 10 working days, but in more complex cases this may be extended by mutual agreement. The College will aim to provide a written response to the complainant within this timescale;
- c. **Stage three** The third stage of the Complaints procedure is available to complainants who remain dissatisfied with the Head's handling of the matter at Stage Two, or where the complaint directly concerns the Head. Stage Three procedures are acknowledged within two working days and completed within 10 working days, but in more complex cases this may be extended by mutual agreement. The College will aim to convene a panel Hearing – as appropriate – within this timescale and will produce its findings within 10 working days of the conclusion of the Panel Hearing.

Under certain circumstances, extended timescales may need to be mutually agreed, particularly if the complaint arises immediately prior to or during a school holiday period.

STAGE 1 - INFORMAL RESOLUTION OF COMPLAINTS

It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved as early and as informally as possible. If parents have a complaint they should normally first contact their child's Housemaster or Housemistress.

The Housemaster/Housemistress may be able to resolve the complaint. He/she may need to consult a subject teacher or Head of Department if it is an academic complaint.

The Housemaster/Housemistress will make a written record of all complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within 5 working days, or in the event that the Housemaster / Housemistress and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory solution, then parents will be advised to refer the matter to the Head for Formal Complaint Resolution.

The Housemaster/Housemistress 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 a few days. In the event that the Housemaster/Housemistress and the parents **fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to** speak directly a member of the SLT or to the Head whereupon it is hoped that the concern or complaint may be resolved quickly, usually within one week, and **informally**.

STAGE 2 - FORMAL RESOLUTION OF COMPLAINTS

The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. This may involve an investigation of the matter, usually by the Deputy Head, Pastoral, who will be asked to carry out the investigation and make a written report for the Head.

In most cases, the Head will communicate with the parents, within 10 working days of receiving the complaint. If possible, an agreement or solution will be reached by this stage.

Whilst the Head will strive to achieve a solution as quickly as possible, it may be necessary to carry out further investigations, for example where there are other parties involved. Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept by all members of staff concerned.

Once the Head is satisfied that 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 his decision. If parents are still not satisfied, they should proceed to Stage Three (Independent Resolution) as detailed below.

The College will maintain a written record of all complaints made (regardless of whether they are upheld) and dealt with at the formal stage of the procedure, indicating whether the complaint was resolved at the formal stage or whether it proceeded to Independent Resolution. The record will also capture any actions taken by the College as a result of the complaint.

STAGE 3 - INDEPENDENT RESOLUTION OF COMPLAINTS

This stage of the Complaints Procedure will only be necessary should the matter not have been resolved at the former two stages. If this stage has been reached, parents should write to:

The Clerk to the Governors
St Lawrence College
Ramsgate
Kent CT11 7AE

Parents must write to the Chairman of Governors within 5 days of the date of the Head's decision. The Clerk to the Governors will acknowledge the receipt of the letter of complaint within 2 working days and schedule a meeting to take place as soon as practicable and within 10 working days.

A Panel of at least three people will be appointed by or on behalf of the Chair of Governors. The Governors and all other members of the Panel will not have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.

One person will be appointed to the Panel who will be independent of the management and running of the College. The DfE has advised that individuals who have held a position of responsibility and are used to analysing evidence and putting forward balanced arguments would be suited to the independent panel member role. Examples of persons likely to be suitable are: serving or retired business people; civil servants; heads or senior members of staff at other schools; people with a legal background; and retired members of the Police Force.

The parents making the complaint are required to provide the Clerk to the Governors with any documentation they wish the Panel to consider. This, together with the College's documentation, will be bundled and circulated to the parents, the Head and the Panel members ahead of the hearing.

The Panel will be convened to hear the complaint and the complainant will be invited to attend and be accompanied if they wish. The parents may be accompanied at the hearing by a legally-qualified person, but as the hearing does not constitute legal proceedings, a legally-qualified person will not be permitted to act as an advocate for the parents. The Panel will speak to the parents directly and the legally-qualified person will only be allowed to clarify points of law should they arise. Parents are required to notify the College in advance of the hearing if they are going to be accompanied by a legally-qualified person.

The role of the panel is to consider the facts and decide whether the complaint is made out. If so, the complaint will be upheld and if not it will be dismissed. If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint.

Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how to carry out the investigation. After due consideration of all the relevant facts, the Panel will make findings and recommendations. The hearing may be adjourned if the Panel decides that further investigation is necessary. The Panel will aim to conclude any further investigations within 10 working days of adjournment of the hearing.

Upon conclusion of the hearing and any subsequent investigations, the Panel will write to the complainant within 5 working days and, where relevant, the person complained about, informing them of its findings and recommendations and the reasons for them. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel may then make recommendations for the College to consider going forward on any of the issues raised, or the School's procedures generally. The Panel has no power to impose sanctions.

A copy of the findings and recommendations will remain available, on the school premises, for inspection by the Chair of Governors and the Head. The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the School's complaints procedure.

Parents can be assured that all complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. 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 2008 Education and Skills Act requests access to them.

The Clerk to the Governors will keep a record of complaints considered under this stage of the procedure and of their outcomes. The Governing Body will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes regularly, and actions taken by the school as a result of these complaints. The record will also detail the stage at which the complaint has been resolved. The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year will also be made available upon request.

In the event of concerns about child welfare, parents and guardians should contact either Independent Schools Inspectorate at:

ISI
Ground Floor
Cap House
9-12 Long lane
London
EC1A 9HA
Tel: 0207 600 0100
Web: www.isi.net

or, for issues concerning allegations against staff, contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Team, (Tel: 03000 410888).

The number of formal complaints registered during the past year can be obtained upon request from the College Administration office.

This policy will be reviewed in accordance with the Policy Review Schedule

Revision History

Version No.	Revision Date	Summary of change	Approved by	Updated by
1.1	12/03/2018	Timescales and panel composition	Bursar	Bursar
1.1	10/09/20	Update to no of complaints	Bursar	Bursar
1.2	9/10/20	COVID update	Bursar	Bursar
1.3	9/11/21	Access arrangements for complaints records amended.	Bursar	Bursar
1.4	6/1/22	Minor updates	Bursar	Bursar