

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

St Teresa's has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this Procedure.

The school recognises the difference between 'concerns' which will generally be dealt with informally and 'complaints', which will be subject to a formal procedure.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and **informally**.
- If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their daughter's Form Teacher or Boarding Mistress. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Form Teacher or Boarding Mistress cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary to consult the Head of Year, the Head of Boarding, the Deputy Headmistress or Headmistress.
- Complaints made directly to the Head of Year, the Head of Boarding, the Deputy Headmistress or Headmistress will usually be referred to the relevant Form Teacher or Boarding Mistress unless the Head of Year, the Head of Boarding, the Deputy Headmistress or Headmistress deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.
- Complaints which come to a member of staff from other sources should be passed immediately to the Deputy Head who will inform the complainant of the action she proposes to take.
- The Form teacher or Boarding Mistress 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 seven working days or in the event that the Form teacher or Boarding Mistress 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.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution.

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents/complainant should **put their complaint in writing** to the Headmistress. The Headmistress will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Headmistress will contact the parents/complainant

concerned, **within five working days** of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

- It may be necessary for the Headmistress to carry out further investigations.
- The Headmistress will **keep written records** of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Headmistress is satisfied that, as 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 Headmistress will also give reasons for 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 Mr Large (Clerk to the Governors and Bursar), who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Conciliation Committee.
- **The matter will then be referred to the Conciliation Committee for consideration.** The Conciliation Committee will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, **one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school.** Mr Large, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable **within ten days.**
- If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint and any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than four working days prior to the hearing.
- **The parents/complainants may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person.** This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately 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 reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete **within 5 working days of the Hearing.** **The Conciliation Committee will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it.** The decision of the Conciliation Committee will be final.

The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Headmistress, the Governors and, where relevant, the person complained of.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except in so far as is required of the school by paragraph 6(2) (j) of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2003; where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

The Headmistress and Deputy Head will consider the handling of complaints from time to time, and will discuss issues with staff as necessary.

The Head 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.

Responsibilities

Governing Body

Responsible 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 Headmistress; advising the Headmistress

Chair of the Independent Panel

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

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.

Headmistress

Responsible for:

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

Deputy Head

Responsible 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; and
- compiling reports for the Head as required.

Bursar: for environmental and financial queries and complaints

Heads of Department: 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/Boarding Staff/Heads of Year: for dealing with and where possible resolving complaints concerning overall pupil progress, discipline issues, pastoral care.

Deputy Head/Head of Boarding/Headmistress: 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; and for informing the relevant staff of the concerns; and for passing any complaints received from other people who are not parents or pupils to the Deputy Head

