



ST BENEDICT'S SCHOOL
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St Bernard's Preparatory School

Group Complaints Policy

Authorised by: The Board of Governors of St Benedict's School

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Circulation: Governors/all staff/volunteers automatically

Parents on request/School Website

Status:

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1. Introduction

This is a regulatory policy. Responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of the policy, compliance with it, and its implementation lies with the Governors. This includes monitoring the operation of the policy, reviewing its effectiveness, tracking any patterns in complaints, evaluating the nature of complaints received, and modifying practice where appropriate.

2. Circulation

2.1 This policy applies across the schools within the St Benedict's family of schools:

St Benedict's Senior School

St Benedict's Junior School

St Bernard's Preparatory School

It is addressed to all staff and parents and is published on each school's website.

2.2 This policy can be made available in large print or another accessible format if required. If assistance is needed in making a complaint, for example because of a disability, parents should contact the relevant school office, which will make appropriate arrangements.

3. Policy status

3.1 The policy has been approved by the Headmaster and the Governing Body of St Benedict's School ("the School"). It provides guidelines for handling complaints. It takes account of Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014: Manner in which complaints are handled; the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework (March 2014; updated September 2025) and Department for Education guidance (Best Practice Guidance for School Complaints Procedures 2020, updated January 2021).

3.2 The procedures set out below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the Policy aims and circumstances of each case. Certain procedures can only be carried out during term time, for example when teaching staff are required to be present for the purposes of an investigation or hearing.

4. Application

4.1 This Policy applies only to complaints made by parents. In this Policy "parent" means one or both parents and includes any person who is not a parent of the pupil in question, but who has parental responsibility, or who has care for the child. It may, at our discretion, include a parent or guardian whose child has recently left the School, as long as notification of the complaint was received whilst the pupil was still registered at the

School.

4.2 Child Protection

Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue – please refer to the School’s Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

4.3 Decisions made by the Head to Exclude or Require the Removal of a Pupil

The Complaints Policy does not apply in relation to a decision to remove or exclude a pupil from the School. Parents seeking a review of such a decision made by the Head may request a Governors' Review of that decision.

4.4 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

Parents can make a complaint to Ofsted and/or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), although it is expected that complaints will go through the School’s complaints procedure first. Details of how to contact Ofsted and ISI will be given on request and are given at the end of this procedure.

4.5 Admissions Policy

The Complaints Policy only applies to parents of current pupils, and therefore complaints from parents of prospective pupils relating to the implementation of the School’s Admissions Policy and entrance procedures are not within the scope of this Policy.

4.6 Data Protection and Subject Access Requests

Anyone may raise a formal complaint under this policy in relation to Data Protection or Subject Access Requests. You should address any complaint to bursar@stbenedicts.org.uk. The school will consider your complaint promptly, impartially, and in accordance with applicable data protection law. The School will respond within 30 days. If you remain dissatisfied following the school's internal review, you will be advised of your right to escalate the matter to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

5. Timescales

5.1 With regard to the Department for Education’s Best Practice Guidance for School Complaints Procedures 2020, we expect complaints to be raised within three months of the incident complained of, or where a series of associated incidents has occurred within three months of the last of these incidents. We may, however, consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

5.2 We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. We aim, wherever reasonably practicable, to conclude all complaints within a school term.

5.3 The School may deviate from any of the stated timescales should it be considered reasonable in the circumstances. If this happens, amended timelines will be communicated to parents. Should parents provide notification of a complaint outside of the stated timeframes for any Stage they should include details of the circumstances that prevented the notification being given sooner for consideration along with the notification.

5.4 When we refer to working days, we mean Monday to Friday, when the School is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website. Complaints received within the last week of term or during school holidays may take longer than the published timescales as it is not always possible to complete a full investigation due to school holidays.

5.5 A complaint about the safety of your child should be notified immediately to the person you believe is best placed to take urgent action and should be confirmed in writing to the relevant Head.

6. Stages

This policy describes a three-stage procedure:

Stage 1: informal raising of a concern or difficulty, orally or in writing, with an appropriate member of staff.

Stage 2: a formal complaint in writing to the Head of the relevant school.

Stage 3: a referral to the Complaints Panel.

7. Stage 1: Informal - Concerns and Difficulties

Most concerns can and should be resolved informally. Parents are encouraged to raise concerns promptly with the member of staff best placed to deal with them. Examples might include dissatisfaction about teaching, pastoral care, allocation of responsibilities, timetabling, systems, equipment, or billing.

Concerns should normally be raised initially as follows:

- **Educational matters:** with the relevant teacher or, where appropriate, a senior leader.
- **Pastoral matters:** with the relevant pastoral lead or senior leader.
- **Disciplinary matters:** first with the member of staff concerned and, if unresolved, with a senior leader.
- **Financial matters:** in writing to the Bursar or equivalent.

The school will normally acknowledge a concern within two working days during term time, or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays. A concern raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing.

If a concern is not resolved informally within 15 working days, or if the matter is of sufficient seriousness to require formal investigation, it should be raised under Stage 2.

8. Stage 2: Formal Complaint

A formal complaint should be set out in writing, with full details and any relevant documents, and sent to the Head of the relevant school. If the complaint is about the Head, it should be sent to the Chair of Governors of St Benedict's School via the school office. The complainant should clearly state the outcome they desire from the complaints process.

The complaint will be acknowledged within two working days during term time, indicating the action being taken and the likely timescale.

If the complaint is against the Head, the complaint should be made to the Chair of Governors of St Benedict's School. The Chair of Governors will nominate someone to investigate the complaint. The investigator may request further information, meet with the complainant, and speak to others who have relevant knowledge of the circumstances. A written outcome, with reasons, will normally be provided within 10 working days during term time. If the investigation concludes during school holidays, the school will respond as soon as reasonably practicable, and normally no later than five working days after the start of the next term. Written records will be kept of meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

Regardless of outcome, the school will consider whether any review of systems, practice or procedure is appropriate.

9. Stage 3: Reference to the Complaints Panel

9.1 If the parent is not satisfied with the school's response to their complaint at Stage 2, they may continue to this stage. A Panel hearing is a review of the Stage 2 process and decision. Its purpose is to consider whether the Stage 2 investigation and outcome were reasonable in all circumstances and to determine what, if any, further action should follow.

9.2 The Panel hearing will be a full merits hearing of the complaint, not merely a check that process was followed, however Stage 3 is not an opportunity to present new facts, evidence, or areas of complaint. The Panel will not consider any new matter which was not raised as part of Stages 1 and 2.

9.3 Notification

To request a hearing before the Complaints Panel please write to the Chair of Governors of St Benedict's School within five working days of the Head's decision at Stage 2. Your request will only be considered if you have completed the procedures at Stages 1-2. Please ensure that a copy of all relevant documents and your full contact details accompany your letter to the Chair. Please state in your letter all the grounds of your complaint and any outcome that you desire. Please also send the Chair a list of the documents which you believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to see. The Chair will acknowledge your request in writing within four working days during term time.

9.4 Composition

A Complaints Panel ("Panel") will be constituted on behalf of the Chair of Governors, comprising members of the Board of St Benedict's School and one person independent of the management and running of the School.

9.5 Convening the Panel

The Chair of Governors will convene the Complaints Panel as soon as reasonably practicable, but the Panel will not normally sit during school holidays. The Chair – or Clerk to the Governors acting on her or his behalf – will tell you who has been appointed to sit on the Panel.

9.6 Notice of hearing

The Panel will be convened within 15 term time working days of the complaint being asked for review. The panel will not normally meet during school holidays. The Chair will send you written notification of the date, time, and place of the hearing together with brief details of the Panel members who will hear it and a copy of relevant documents in the possession of the School as soon as possible.

9.6 Attendance

You may attend the hearing if you wish and may be accompanied by another person such as a relative or

friend. It is not necessary for that person to be legally qualified; indeed, as panel hearings are not legal proceedings, if parents are accompanied by a legally qualified person, that person will be attending in a supportive capacity only and will not be permitted to advocate on the parents' behalf.

9.7 Chair of the Panel

The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Panel (chosen by them) and will be conducted in an informal manner.

9.8 Evidence

The Chair of the Panel will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a re-hearing of the previous stages nor legal proceedings and the Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.

9.9 Conduct

All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint, and good manners or, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair of the Panel. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and her/his comment will be minuted.

1.10 Adjournment

The Chair of the Panel may at his/her discretion adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue. This may include an adjournment to take legal advice.

9.11 Private proceeding

A hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.

9.12 Decision

After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel shall reach a decision. The Panel will decide whether to:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part; and/or
- make recommendations to the Head and/or the Governors.

The Panel's decision will be communicated in writing to you within five working days. Reasons for the decision will be given. The Decision will be made available on the school premises. A copy will be sent to you, to the Chair of the Board of Governors, to the Head and, where relevant, to any person about whom the complaint has been made.

9.13 Withdrawal / discontinuance by a complainant

If you withdraw a complaint or indicate that you are now satisfied and do not wish to proceed, the school may nevertheless, at its discretion, refer the matter to a Panel or continue with an already convened Panel where it considers it appropriate to do so. This may be in order to bring the matter to a clear conclusion, to make findings or recommendations which may inform school practice, or to address any safeguarding, welfare,

regulatory or wider community issues arising. In such circumstances, the Panel may consider the complaint in absentia and issue findings and, where appropriate, recommendations.

10. Vexatious or serial/persistent complaints

10.1 Please note that while all complaints are investigated, the School reserves the right not to progress complaints which it considers vexatious or serial/persistent, in line with Department for Education guidance (Best Practice Guidance for School Complaints Procedures 2020, updated January 2021).

10.2 The Office of the Independent Adjudicator defines the characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint as:

- Complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious
- Insistence on pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason
- Insistence on pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner
- Complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- Demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value

10.3 If a complainant has completed the procedure attempts to re-open the same issue, the correspondence may then be judged as being 'serial' or 'persistent.' However, the application of a 'serial' or 'persistent' marking should be against the complaint or its subject matter rather than the complainant.

10.4 Any decision not to progress a vexatious, serial, or persistent complaint will not be taken lightly, and the school will consider all surrounding circumstances and best practice guidance before taking such action. Normally the Head and/or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before dismissing a complaint as vexatious, serial, or persistent. Should any such decision be taken this will be communicated to the complainant.

11. Confidentiality and records

11.1 Correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where disclosure is required by law, by the Secretary of State, or in the course of inspection. A written record will be kept of all complaints and their resolution. Complaint records will be retained and destroyed in accordance with the school's data retention arrangements and data protection obligations.

11.2 EYFS complaints

Where a school has EYFS provision, written complaints relating to the fulfilment of EYFS requirements will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome within 28 days. The record of such complaints will be made available to ISI and/or Ofsted on request.

11.3 Details for Ofsted and ISI

If parents believe that the school is not meeting EYFS requirements, they may contact ISI and, where applicable, Ofsted.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House

9–12 Long Lane

London

EC1A 9HA

Telephone: 0207 600 0100

Email: info@isi.net ([Independent Schools Inspectorate](#))

Ofsted

Telephone: 0300 123 4666

Email: CIE@ofsted.gov.uk (complain.ofsted.gov.uk)