



Whole School Complaints Procedure (including Early Years) for Parents of Pupils at St Edmund's School Canterbury

Introduction

This Complaints Policy is written to ensure full compliance with Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, which sets out the statutory requirements for handling complaints in independent schools. It also reflects the expectations of the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and, where applicable, the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (2022). The policy applies to complaints from current and prospective parents relating to the school's provision of education, facilities, and services, and ensures that all complaints are handled fairly, promptly, and in a manner consistent with the principles of natural justice. It meets the legal requirement to: provide a clear three-stage process (informal, formal, and panel hearing); include an independent panel member; allow complainants to be accompanied; maintain written records of all complaints and their outcomes; and ensure that correspondence, statements, and records are treated confidentially except where disclosure is required by law, including safeguarding obligations. The policy is available to parents on request and is published on the school's website in accordance with the Independent School Standards.

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

The Complaints Procedure will be held on the school's website for easy access by parents. It does apply to former pupils, but only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still registered at the school. This procedure does not cover exclusions.

Record Keeping

The central record of formal complaints across the whole 2-18 school is retained by the Head of School. This record is limited to those complaints made in writing under the formal part of our complaints procedure and the school adheres to the requirement that it records whether the complaint is resolved at the formal stage or if the complaint proceeds to a panel hearing. The record of formal complaints specifically identifies those relating to boarding.

The individual Heads also keep records of informal complaints made in their own school (Senior, Junior and Pre-Prep), which are treated with due confidentiality and kept securely in password encrypted files. Records are kept, even of these informal complaints, to enable patterns of concern to be monitored and addressed if necessary.

The record of any complaint made will be kept for a minimum of three years within the EYFS and for five years elsewhere in the school, unless the issue is contentious, in accordance with DfE advice. The school will keep a record of action taken as a result of a complaint, regardless of whether it is upheld – action will always be noted.

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.

Where appropriate, complaints should initially be raised as follows:

Educational issues: if the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum, co-curricular activities or Special Educational Needs, please speak or write initially to:

- Senior School: the Tutor, Head of Department or Deputy Head (Educational Development)
- Junior School: the Form Teacher or Assistant Head (Academic).
- Nursery/Pre-Prep: the Class Teacher

Pastoral care: for complaints relating to matters outside the classroom, please speak or write to:

- Senior School: the Tutor, Housemaster or Deputy Head (Pastoral)
- Junior School: the Form Teacher or Head of Pastoral Care
- Nursery/Pre-Prep: the Class Teacher

Staff issues: for complaints relating to members of staff, please speak or write to:

- Senior School: the Head of Department or Deputy Head
- Junior School: the Deputy Head
- Nursery/Pre-Prep: the Head

Disciplinary matters: a problem over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised first of all with:

- Senior School: the Deputy Head
- Junior School: the Deputy Head
- Nursery/Pre-Prep: the Class Teacher

Financial matters: a query relating to fees should be raised with the Bursar (all three schools)

An informal complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within two working days of receipt, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely timescales.

Such action may include an investigation and/or a meeting with the parent. The parent will receive a response to the complaint within two working weeks. If the parent is dissatisfied with the response to the informal complaint or in the event that the complaint cannot be resolved by informal means, the parent may make a formal complaint

Should the matter not be resolved within (under normal circumstances) 2 weeks (3 weeks in the summer holidays) or in the event that they 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 should put their complaint in writing to the Head of Pre-Prep, the Head of the Junior School or the Head. Any such correspondence will normally be acknowledged within 24-48 hours of receipt. The Head of Pre-Prep, the Head of the Junior School or the Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head of Pre-Prep, the Head of the Junior School or the Head will meet/speak to the parents concerned, normally within 7 days (no more than 21 days in the summer holidays) of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. Alternatively, a written response may be given. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Head of Pre-Prep, the Head of the Junior School or the Head to carry out further investigations.
- The Head of Pre-Prep, the Head of the Junior School or the Head will keep records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. The complaint will be logged in the relevant Head's Complaints file.
- Once the Head of Pre-Prep, the Head of the Junior School or 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.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.
- The Head of Pre-Prep, the Head of the Junior School or the Head will record whether the matter has been resolved at the Formal stage or if the complaint proceeds to a Panel Hearing.

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 Chairman of Governors 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 at least three people (usually two school Governors) not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chairman of Governors. The Chairman of Governors, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and, under normal circumstances, within 21 days (within 28 days in the summer holidays).
- 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 no later than 7 days prior to the hearing.
- The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, 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 7 days of the Hearing. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head of Pre-Prep, the Head of the Junior School or the Head, the Governors and, where relevant, the person who is the subject of the complaint. A copy of findings and

recommendations will be made available on the School premises for inspection by the Chairman of Governors and the Head of Pre-Prep, the Head of the Junior School or the Head – correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential in a Complaints file in the relevant Head's office.

- If the parents decide not to attend the Panel Hearing, the Panel Hearing should proceed nonetheless. In this circumstance, the Panel will consider the complaint in their absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion. The school will reasonably aim to accommodate parental availability for dates and/or consider comments concerning Panel composition.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and 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 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them or where other legal obligations prevail. Where a complaint relates to boarding matters, parents can contact ISI directly concerning child welfare – 0207 710 9900 or concerns@isi.net. **It should be noted that although parents are entitled to communicate concerns about any aspect of a school with ISI, ISI do not investigate individual complaints or become involved in how they are resolved.**

Appendix 1: Complaints Procedure - Independent Member of the Panel

The DfES (now DfE) supplied the following guidance in a letter to the ISC General Secretary:

Whilst we do not intend to be prescriptive our general view is that suitable people would be those who have held positions of responsibility and who are used to analysing evidence and putting forward balanced arguments/points. It would add credibility if independent panel members had some standing in the local community. In this connection serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background - perhaps retired members of the Police Force - might be considered suitable by schools. Schools will have their own views and may well have other suitable suggestions to make.

You asked if it would be acceptable to appoint former governors or staff of the school as the independent panel member. The regulations do not preclude this since the stipulation is that the person must be independent of the management and running of the school. Clearly former governors or staff would not have any such involvement. However, schools should bear in mind that they may be subject to criticism that such people would remain too close to the school and would not be truly independent.

Appendix 2: Complaints Procedure – Provisions for complaints made by parents whose child is in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

1. The record of any complaint made will be kept for a minimum of three years.
2. If parents believe that the school is not meeting the EYFS requirements, parents may make a complaint to Ofsted and/or ISI (the Independent Schools Inspectorate) if they so wish.
3. Written complaints concerning the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days. The record of complaints will be made available to Ofsted and/or ISI on request.
4. The school will notify parents about an inspection once the school has been notified. When the final inspection report has been provided, the school will provide parents of children who attend the setting with the document.

Independent Schools Inspectorate, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA. Telephone 020 7600 0100. Fax 020 7776 8849. Email : info@isi.net

WBHL (Whistleblower hotline), Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD
Telephone 0300 123 3155. Email : whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk

The school received two formal complaints in the academic year 2024-25.

EOC September 2025

Signed: _____
Chairman of Governors

Date: _____

Review Date: September 2026

Version Number	Date of Amendment	Signature
1	September 2013	LJMH
2	April 2014	LJMH
3	October 2014	LJMH
4	September 2015	LJMH
5	September 2016	LJMH
6	September 2017	LJMH
7	March 2018	LJMH
8	September 2018	EOC
9	September 2019	EOC
10	September 2020	EOC
11	September 2021	EOC
12	September 2022	EOC
13	September 2023	EOC
14	September 2024	EOC
15	September 2025	EOC