

CITY OF LONDON SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

Introduction

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the school has done something wrong, or failed to do something that it should have done or acted unfairly.

City of London School for Girls 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 with care and in accordance with this procedure. City of London School for Girls makes its complaints procedure available to all parents of pupils and of prospective pupils on the school's website and in the school office during the school day, and the school will ensure that parents of pupils and of prospective pupils who request it are made aware that this document is published or available and the form in which it is published or available.

In accordance with paragraph 32(3)(f) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, City of London School for Girls will make available to parents of pupils and of prospective pupils and provide, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or the Independent Inspectorate approved by the Secretary of State under S106 Education and Skills Act 2008 ('the 2008 Act'), details of the complaints procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The school is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you [or your child] raises in good faith.

For the avoidance of doubt, the term “**Confidentially**” in this policy applies as between the complainant and the School, which includes individual staff and governors, where appropriate, on a need to know basis. The school will not accept and cannot investigate anonymous complaints. Where a teacher is at the centre of any complaint(s), he/she will need to be consulted as part of the investigation.

Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. They will be acknowledged within five working days if received during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible. Details of response times for each stage of the procedure, including

response times for complaints received during the school holidays or shortly before the commencement of a school holiday are set out below.

The school's target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 30 working days if the complaint is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further 30 days, if the appeal is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

Policy

This policy and procedure is for the benefit of pupils, and parents of pupils, at the City of London School for Girls ('the School'). This policy and procedure will be relied upon in respect of all complaints by parents and pupils made against the School except in respect of:

- a) child protection allegations where a separate policy and procedure applies; and
- b) expulsions where a separate policy and procedure applies.;
- c) appeals relating to internal assessment decisions for external qualifications where a separate appeals procedure applies.

Complaints made by members of the public about the School will be dealt with under the City of London Corporation Complaints Procedure.

The School expects that most concerns can be resolved informally and will use their best endeavours to resolve any complaints that are made informally, or any concerns that are raised, on that basis. If informal procedures fail to resolve the issue, a formal complaint about any matter not involving child protection allegations, internal assessment decisions or a decision to expel or remove a pupil, must be stated courteously in writing to the Headmistress and will be dealt with under this City of London School for Girls Complaints Policy and Procedure.

Every complaint shall receive fair and proper consideration and a timely response. This policy and procedure is available on request to, pupils, the parents of pupils and prospective pupils of the School. While pupils may, themselves, raise concerns and complaints under this policy and procedure, the School will involve parents should this occur.

This policy and procedure in no way overrides the right of the School to act in accordance with the School's Terms and Conditions agreed by parents upon enrolment of their child as a pupil in the School, although parents are not prevented from raising concerns or complaints pursuant to this policy and procedure where they are of the reasonable view that the School has not acted in accordance with the School's Terms and Conditions.

Please Note: Parents can be assured that all complaints and expressions of concern, whether raised informally or formally, will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will remain

confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended) requests access to them or where any other legal obligation prevails.

Stage One - Informal Resolution

1. It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
2. If parents have a concern they should normally contact their daughter's Form Tutor. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Form Tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult a Head of Department/Assistant Head of Section/Head of Section, the Deputy Heads or the Headmistress, depending on the nature of the matter. Matters of an academic nature may require involvement from the Deputy Head Academic of the Head of department, whereas matters of a pastoral nature may require involvement from the Deputy Head pastoral of the Heads of section/ Assistant Head of Section.
3. Complaints made directly to a Head of Department/Assistant Head of Section/Head of Section, the Director of Studies, the Deputy Head, or the Headmistress will usually be referred to the relevant Form Tutor unless a Head of Department/Assistant Head of Section/Head of Section, the Director of Studies, the Deputy Head, or the Headmistress deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.
4. The Form Tutor will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. These records will be kept for one (1) year after the pupil leaves the school.
5. The School will use its reasonable endeavours to resolve any informal complaints within ten (10) working days of them being raised, except where they are raised either during or immediately before (within two (2) working days) the commencement of school holidays, where the School will use its reasonable endeavours to resolve them as soon as possible after commencement of the new school term (usually within ten (10) working days).
6. Should the matter not be resolved as referred to in paragraph 5 above, or in the event that the Form Tutor and the parents fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised of their right to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage Two of this Procedure.
7. If, however, the complaint is against the Headmistress, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chairman of Governors

Stage Two - Formal Resolution

8. If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis (as set out in paragraphs 1 to 5 above), then parents should put their complaint in writing to

the Headmistress, which complaint should be expressed clearly and courteously. Parents should also identify how they wish their complaint to be resolved.

9. The Headmistress will delegate responsibility for undertaking investigation of the complaint to a member of the SMT or a Head of department as appropriate.
10. The Headmistress will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
11. In most cases, the Headmistress will meet or speak with the parents concerned to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
12. The Headmistress will use reasonable endeavours to speak to or meet parents within ten (10) working days of the formal complaint being received, except where the complaint is received in school holidays or within two (2) working days of their commencement where the Headmistress will use all reasonable endeavours to speak or meet with parents as soon as possible after the commencement of the new school term (usually within ten (10) working days).
13. It may be necessary for the Deputy Head, Director of Studies, or Head of Department or Head of Section to investigate the matter further
14. The Headmistress will keep a written record of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
15. Once the Headmistress is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made. Parents will be informed of this decision in writing, giving reasons for the decision. The written decision should be provided no later than ten (10) working days after speaking or meeting with parents to discuss the matter (pursuant to paragraph 10 above). The Headmistress may also arrange to meet with parents to explain the decision.
16. The School will keep a written record of all formal complaints, including records of meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint, and the School's decision, which record will be kept for one (1) year after the pupil leaves the School.
17. Where parents are dissatisfied with the outcome of the School's response to their formal complaint, the parents have the opportunity to have their complaint considered by an independent Complaints Panel.

Stage Three – Panel Hearing

18. If parents seek to invoke Stage Three following failure to reach an earlier resolution and where dissatisfied with the Headmistress's decision in respect

of their formal complaint, the parents may, in writing addressed to the School, request that their complaint be further considered by an independent Complaints Panel set up for this purpose.

19. This request for further assessment of the complaint will, for the purposes of this Procedure, be known as an 'appeal'.
20. Parents must lodge their appeal in writing and within ten (10) working days of the date of the School's decision made in accordance with the Stage Two Procedure. The parents should provide a list of their complaint(s) made against the School and which they believe to have been resolved unsatisfactorily by the Stage Two Procedure, along with the remedies sought in respect of each. The Complaints Panel is only obliged to consider the complaint(s) lodged in this 'initial submission' although they may use their discretion to consider other relevant and related matters that may subsequently arise.
21. Where an appeal is received by the School, the School will, within five (5) working days, refer the matter to the Town Clerk (Clerk to the Board of Governors), who will act as Clerk to the Complaints Panel. Where the appeal is received by the School during school holidays, or within two (2) working days of their commencement, the School has five (5) working days upon commencement of the school term to refer the matter to the Town Clerk
22. The Clerk provides an independent source of advice on procedure for all parties.
23. Once an appeal has been received by the Clerk, he/she will acknowledge the appeal in writing within five (5) working days, and inform the parents of the steps involved in this Complaints Procedure.
24. The Clerk will then endeavour to convene an independent Complaints Panel hearing as soon as possible to consider the matter, normally no later than twenty (20) school days after receipt by the School of parents written notice that they wish to invoke the Stage Three Procedure, dependent upon the availability of the Panel members.
25. The independent Complaints Panel will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, including two Governors on the Board and one person independent of the management and running of the school. The process used for selecting an independent person will conform to relevant guidance issued by the Department for Education (DFE).
26. The following are entitled to attend a hearing, submit written representations and address the Panel:
 - a) the parent/s (or, if aged over 18, the pupil);
 - b) the Headmistress of the School and/or one representative; and

- c) any other interested person whom the Complaints Panel considers to have a reasonable and just interest in the appeal and whose contribution would assist the Panel in their decision-making.

Parents have the right to be accompanied by a third party for support. Legal representation will not normally be permitted and we reserve the right to refuse admission of a legal representative other than in exceptional circumstances with the prior agreement of the Chair of the Panel.

27. Where the Complaints Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. In such cases all parties will be given the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Panel in support of their position, including:
- a) documents relevant to the complaint(s),
 - b) chronology and key dates relating to complaint(s), and
 - c) written submission setting out the complaint(s) in more detail.

This evidence will be considered by the Panel, along with the initial submission that was lodged by the parents.

28. Evidence will be initially sent to the Clerk, who will then circulate the documentation to all parties, including the Panel members, along with an order of proceedings. All written evidence must be received by the Clerk no later than ten (10) working days in advance of the hearing. The Clerk will distribute the written evidence to the relevant parties no later than five (5) working days in advance of the Panel hearing.
29. It is for the Panel to decide how to conduct the proceedings of the appeal, which should be reasonably informal so that all parties can present their case effectively. 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.
30. After due consideration of all the facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision, and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within ten (10) working days of the hearing. The decision reached by the Complaints Panel is final. Any decision reached that may have financial implications for the School will need the appropriate approval from the relevant authorities e.g. the Board of Governors, although any such approval must be compatible with the decision of the Complaints Panel.
31. The Panel's findings will be sent by the Clerk in writing to the parents, the Headmistress, the Governors and, where relevant, the person complained of within ten working days. The letter will state any reasons for the decision reached and recommendations made by the Complaints Panel.
32. The School will keep a record of all appeals, decisions and recommendations of the Complaints Panel, which record will be kept for one (1) year after the pupil leaves the School and will be available for inspection on the school

premises by the governors and the head teacher, whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and action taken by the school as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). 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.

Recording Complaints

Following resolution of a complaint, the school will keep a written record of all complaints and whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing. At the school's discretion, additional records may be kept which may contain the following information:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of pupil
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)

REFERENCES

- Parental Terms and Conditions
- Senior School and Prep Parents' Handbooks
- Child Protection Policy
- Internal Assessments Appeals Policy and Procedure
- Pastoral Care, Discipline and Exclusions Policy

Revised: September 2015, June 2016, April 2017

Approved by Board of Governors: June 2016

To be reviewed by: June 2019