



CASTLE COURT
SCHOOL

Complaints Procedure

Reviewed January 2026
Due for Review January 2027
Katie Johnson (Head)

INTRODUCTION

The school's vision is for each pupil to receive an outstanding, all-round and innovative education in an inspiring and naturally beautiful learning environment. We want to cultivate a love of learning and enable each child to grow and flourish in all areas of life within a loving, nurturing community. Castle Court has the Christian faith at the centre of its foundation and as such family values are at the core of school life. We are committed to working with pupils and their families to achieve this vision. However, we understand that during a child's time at the school, there may be issues or concerns which parents would like to raise. If parents do have a complaint or concern, this policy exists to provide a mechanism for parents to express their concerns to a member of staff. Parents can expect their complaint to be treated with care and in accordance with this policy.

An effective complaints procedure can defuse problems and can provide the school with helpful information. Complaints and concerns treated constructively can be used to improve standards and may prevent further cause for complaint.

Castle Court 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 will ensure that parents of pupils and of prospective pupils who request it are made aware that this document is published or available and of the form in which it is published or available, and of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding School year. In accordance with paragraph 32(1) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Castle Court will also make available, on request, to Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE) or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), details of this Complaints Procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

Although this Procedure is made available to parents of prospective pupils, it is not available for use by them; it may only be used by parents of current pupils.

Complaints by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil to which the complaint relates was still registered as a pupil at the School.

The School will be mindful of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in the application of this policy.

Although the School endeavours to manage complaints in an open and transparent manner, parents should be aware that there may be circumstances which mean the School is unable to share complete details about how a complaint has been handled by the School, the evidence collated, steps taken in response or other related matters. This could be the case even when a complaint is upheld. For example, this may be because such information constitutes sensitive third-party data (for example belonging to a staff member, pupil or other parent), legal or regulatory requirements prohibit disclosure, or withholding information is in accordance with specific instructions from a statutory agency. This list is not exhaustive.

"Parent(s)" means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for a pupil about whom the complaint relates.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A COMPLAINT?

We understand a complaint to be an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. A complaint may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific department in the school or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the

School is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done, or has acted unfairly and has been unable to resolve the matter informally.

We welcome suggestions, ideas and comments from parents, which may be made directly to staff, or in writing through email or letters. These informal exchanges would not constitute a complaint for the purposes of this policy. We consider them to be a healthy dialogue between staff and parents as we seek to work together in the interests of each child. When seeking to engage with staff in this way please be aware that the beginning of the day may not be the best time to engage with comments or ideas and please be mindful that teaching staff may not have time during the school day to respond to emails.

We also welcome parents sharing concerns which they may have about any aspect of their child's education at the school. It is normally best to address concerns to the member of staff most immediately involved; but if it has not been possible to resolve the concern informally, parents may take the matter to a more senior member of staff, for example a member of the Leadership Team or the Head.

Any complaint which involves a child who may be at risk of harm, abuse or neglect must be treated as a safeguarding concern and actions must be taken in line with the School's safeguarding policy. This may postpone or supersede any investigation via the complaints procedure.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them. There may also be other circumstances in which the School is required to share information relating to a concern or a complaint in order to comply with its legal or regulatory obligations.

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) raise(s) in good faith.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

In the event that a conflict of interest exists in relation to a complaint, then the member of staff or Governor who has the potential conflict of interest (the 'conflicted party') cannot be involved in the complaints procedure and their place in the complaints process (if any) will be taken by another member of staff or governing body, nominated by the Head. If the conflicted party is the Head, the complaint will generally be dealt with by another member of the Leadership Team in conjunction with a Governor nominated by the Chair of Governors.

A conflict of interest can arise in a number of ways, including the following by way of example:

- the individual making the complaint is also a member of staff or Governor;
- the individual making the complaint is related to or has a close personal relationship with a member of staff or Governor; or
- the subject of the complaint is related to or has a close personal relationship with a member of staff or Governor.

THE THREE-STAGE COMPLAINTS 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 child's form teacher. If the form teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for the form teacher to consult a Section Leader, Head of Department, member of the Leadership Team or the Head.

Complaints made directly to a Section Leader, Head of Department, member of the Leadership Team or the Head will usually be referred to the relevant form teacher unless the Section Leader, Head of Department, member of the Leadership Team or Head deems it appropriate for him or her to deal with the matter personally.

The form teacher 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 10 working days or in the event that the form teacher 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 Complaints Procedure.

If the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors whose contact details are available from the School on request.

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. The Head may require further information from the parents to help clarify the scope and nature of their concerns. The Head may in some circumstances deem it appropriate to nominate a staff member to hear the complaint and manage the Stage 2 complaint process. The Head (or their nominee) will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

In most cases, the Head (or their nominee) will speak to the parents concerned, within five working days and within a maximum of 10 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 further investigations to be carried out. The Head (or their nominee) will determine who should carry out any investigation and this may be someone external to the School.

Written records will be kept of all formal meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

Once the Head (or their nominee) 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. The Head (or their nominee) will also give reasons for their decision. This will normally be within 20 working days and a maximum of 60 working days of receiving the Stage 2 formal complaint.

If the complaint is about the Head, parents should make their complaint, in writing, directly to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors will nominate someone to investigate the complaint. The Stage 2 process described above will then be followed with the individual nominated by the Chair of Governors investigating the complaint against the Head.

Where parents are not satisfied by the school's response, 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 should do so in writing to the Clerk to the Governors (Head's PA) within 5 working days of receiving the decision at Stage 2, setting out their grounds of appeal. Any supporting evidence which the parents wish to rely on should also be provided with their grounds of appeal. If the parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated due to extenuating circumstances which have impeded the parents from taking action, the parents should request an extension in writing. Such a request should be made to the Clerk to the Governors in advance of the original deadline, setting out the further time period requested and the reason for this. This will be considered. In the event parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated (including any extensions if agreed) the School reserves the right to conclude the complaint process and not progress the matter to Stage 3.

The Clerk to the Governors, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel, will then refer the appeal to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of 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. The Clerk to the Governors will appoint one Panel member to act as Chair of the Panel OR The Complaints Panel will appoint one of the Panel members to act as the Chair of the Panel. The Clerk to the Governors, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days and schedule a hearing to take place within 20 working days.

If the Panel, or Clerk to the Governors, deems it necessary, they may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing or further investigation be carried out. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than five working days prior to the hearing.

The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. The Stage 2 decision-taker shall also be entitled to be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not be appropriate and the companion should not be a lawyer. The identity of the companions should be confirmed to the Clerk to the Governors as soon as possible and by no later than 2 working days before the hearing. The Panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend.

A note-taker will attend the hearing to take notes. This will not be verbatim notes but an accurate reflection of what was discussed. Notes of the hearing will be shared with attendees as soon as practicable after the hearing. To the extent there is any disagreement about the content of those notes or further comments from the parties, these will be considered by and, where possible, resolved by the Chair. A copy of any comments on the notes will be appended to the notes.

The remit of the Panel shall be at the discretion of the Chair of Governors and the manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint 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 the merits of the complaint and all facts they consider relevant, **the Panel will make findings as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and decide whether to:**

- dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and

- make recommendations for the School to consider. Stage 3 Panels cannot require that any financial compensation is paid to parents or otherwise obligate the School to take particular steps.

The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, within 5 working days of the hearing (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following the hearing). The decision of the Panel will be final. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents, and, where relevant, the person complained about as well as the Chair of Governors and the Stage 2 decision-taker. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair of Governors and the Head.

TIMEFRAME FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

All complaints will be handled seriously, sensitively and within clear and reasonable timescales.

It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the School's target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure **within 30 working days**. Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, will be completed **within a further 20 working days**.

Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, **working days** refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays and half term. This means that during School holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although the School will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay. It may also take longer to resolve a complaint during periods of significant disruption to School life or as a consequence of unavoidable staff absence, however deviation from the normal timescale for resolving a complaint during term time will only occur on an exceptional basis, and the School will take all reasonable steps to limit any such delay. The School expects parents to engage in the process in a reasonable, constructive and responsive manner to help ensure matters can be dealt with in a timely way and in line with the targets set out in this Procedure.

PERSISTENT CORRESPONDENCE

Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this will be regarded by the School as vexatious and outside the scope of this procedure.

RECORDING COMPLAINTS AND THE USE OF PERSONAL DATA

Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all formal complaints, whether they are resolved at the Stage 1 (informal stage), the formal stage (Stage 2) or proceed to a Panel hearing (Stage 3) and any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld).

The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice. When dealing with complaints the School (including any Panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- 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 and contact details 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)
- Notes/minutes of the hearing, and
- The Panel's written decision

This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the School's *Privacy Notice* , but potentially including, for instance, information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy.

The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its *Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy*. All records relating to complaints shall be treated as confidential. In addition to where requested by the Secretary of State or an inspector (see above), there may be other circumstances where disclosure of the substance of a complaint or particular confidential records relating to it is required, for example, where there is a legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligation (eg, in response to a subject access request) which prevails over the requirement to maintain the records as confidential.

The number of complaints at Stage 2 in the Academic Year 2023-2024 was 0 (zero).

The number of complaints at Stage 3 in the Academic Year 2023-2024 was 0 (zero).

The number of complaints at Stage 2 in the Academic Year 2024-2025 was 2.

The number of complaints at Stage 3 in the Academic Year 2024-2025 was 0 (zero).

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN IN THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

Parents of EYFS children should follow the three stages of this Complaints Procedure. If parents remain dissatisfied and their complaint is about the school's fulfilment of the EYFS requirements, then parents may take their complaint to the ISI or Ofsted. Parents will be notified by ISI or Ofsted of the outcome of the investigation into their complaint within 28 days of the complaint being received.

Castle Court will provide ISI/Ofsted, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaints will be kept in accordance with its Privacy Notice.

Parents may complain directly to Ofsted or to ISI if they believe the provider is not meeting the EYFS requirements. Schools must make available details of how to contact Ofsted and/ or the ISI:

Ofsted can be contacted on 0300 123 1231 or by email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD

ISI can be contacted on 020 7600 0100 or by email: info@isi.net

ISI, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA

