



Complaints Procedure Policy

School Division: Whole School

Policy Division: General

Policy Owner: Principal

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1. Introduction

Claremont School is committed to providing the best teaching, boarding and pastoral care it can for its students. It is hoped that any worries or complaints can be dealt with informally and directly through the Reception teams, the Boarding and Welfare teams, Form Teachers and the Operations, and Finance teams. If not, the school has a formal complaints procedure. A complaint is any matter which students, parents or other stakeholders are unhappy about and seek action by the school. Formal complaints are extremely rare, reflecting the good relationships between these parties that enable most matters to be resolved informally.

The details below are not provided to limit the availability of the statutory complaints process to parents, and if parents deviate from the process by mistake, for example by omitting to state that something is a 'Formal Complaint', then the procedure will be maintained in line with the policy.

This policy does not cover the items below and the separate policy listed should be referred to:

- If a student has been permanently excluded or has been asked to leave (Student Behaviour Policy, and Exclusion Policy)
- If a child protection issue has arisen (Safeguarding Policy)
- If a student or parent believes that there has been a material error or irregularity in the assessment or examinations process and they want to appeal (Examination Policy)
- Complaints relating to admissions (Admissions policy)

This policy includes complaints about advice given to applicants, students and parents regarding visa applications, CASs and UK immigration rules. Any such complaints should be made to the school using the stages detailed below.

Any concern about the safety of a student should be communicated immediately via the emergency Safeguarding email address DSL@claremontschool.co.uk.

Where the term “working days” is used, this shall mean any day that is not a Saturday or Sunday or a bank holiday and which falls within term time as published on the website. However, wherever possible we will try to resolve any issues or complaints during holiday periods as quickly as possible, but delays may occur due to staff holidays or other matters outside of our control.

Students and/or parents will not be discriminated against or suffer any recrimination as a consequence of making a complaint. This complaints policy is part of the school process of quality review and any complaint or concern is therefore valued as useful feedback rather than criticism.

2. Stage 1- Informal Resolutions

For all matters in which you consider there is cause for a complaint, it is usually best to address it to the person most able to resolve it, be it a Form Teacher, Pastoral Lead, House Parent, or member of the Finance team. If you are unsure who to address your complaint to please address it initially to the Reception Teams:

For Claremont Prep School: Office@claremontschool.co.uk Tel +441424751555

For Claremont Senior School: Office@claremontseniorschool.co.uk Tel +441580830396

The school will acknowledge your complaint within 2 working days and highlight the steps that will be taken in order to achieve a positive resolution. This will include reference to the personnel involved. The school will seek to provide you with a resolution within 10 working days of the complaint being received. This process allows the complaint to be considered initially on an informal basis. If you are not satisfied with the response in Stage 1, you may escalate the complaint to Stage 2. Stage 1 concerns can be raised, and referred to stage 2 up to three months after the date of the incident causing concern.

3. Stage 2- Formal Resolutions

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint in Stage 1 and wish to take the matter further, you should contact the Principal. Please be aware of the following points when taking your complaint to Stage 2:

- Under 18 students must get their parents to submit a formal complaint (Stage 2 and Stage 3) on their behalf, unless there are exceptional circumstances preventing this;
- You must be dissatisfied with the response you have received in Stage 1;
- You must make your complaint in writing and stipulate that it is a 'Formal Complaint' escalating from Stage 1 to Stage 2;
- You may ask a friend, relative or agent to help you with your communication or make it on your behalf;
- Where a complaint is found to be justified, remedial action will be taken.

For both the Nursery, Prep and Senior school:

Ed Dickie, The Principal, c/o Claremont School
Ebdens Hill, St Leonards-on-Sea, TN37 7WP
Office@claremontschool.co.uk

The Principal will acknowledge your complaint within 5 working days. The Principal will then provide you with a final response within 15 working days of the complaint being received. The response will explain the decision, the reasons for the decision and action taken or proposed. This process allows the complaint to be considered formally by the Principal. If you are not satisfied with the response in Stage 2, you may escalate the complaint to Stage 3.

The Principal may delegate the responsibility to investigate the complaint to an appropriately qualified member of staff.

4. Complaints raised about the Principal

Formal complaints about the Principal can be sent to the Regional Managing Director of the International Schools Partnership.

By emailing MrLouis@ispschools.co.uk , FAO Regional Managing Director

The Regional Managing Director may deal with the Stage 2 complaint in the same manner as described for other complaints, or may recuse themselves at this stage and pass the complaint to another member of the regional team to be addressed in the first instance, so that they are then free to sit on the Panel in Stage 3 if required.

5. Stage 3 Appeals Procedure and Panel Hearing

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint in Stage 2 and wish to take the matter further, you should contact the Regional Managing Director, overseeing the school's Governance. Please be aware of the following points when taking your complaint to Stage 3:

- The appeal request should be received within 10 working days of receipt of the Stage 2 response;
- You must be dissatisfied with the response you have received in Stage 2 and be able to explain the reasons for your dissatisfaction with the Principal's decision;
- You must make your complaint in writing and stipulate that it is an 'Appeal against the Principal's decision' escalating from Stage 2 to Stage 3;

- You may ask a friend, relative or agent to help you with your communication or make it on your behalf.

Contact for the Regional Managing Director :
Regional Managing Director, c/o Claremont School
Ebdens Hill, St Leonard-on-Sea, TN37 7PW

mlouis@ispschools.com , FAO Regional Managing Director

The letter will be initially acknowledged by the Regional Managing Director within two working days of receiving the complaint, indicating the action that will be taken and the likely timescale.

The Regional Managing Director will then convene a panel and schedule a hearing date which will be as soon as possible and within 20 days from receipt of the complaint, though this may not be possible if the complaint is received outside term time.

- The panel shall be made up of at least three persons each of whom is not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. One member of the panel shall be independent of the management and running of the school. Members of the ISP Leadership and Management Executive Team and staff or those involved in governance working in any school within the ISP group, are not considered to be independent.
- The complainant must be informed of the date of the panel hearing a minimum of 5 working days prior to the panel happening and reasonable efforts must be made to find a convenient time for the complainant as well as the Panel.
- The Panel may decide to require additional material or further particulars of the complaint, or any related matter, in advance of the hearing. Any such additional material or further particulars shall be supplied to all parties at least 2 working days before any hearing to consider the complaint and, if necessary, the hearing date shall be deferred.
- The complainant(s) may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, friend or agent. Legal representation is prohibited during the internal appeals stage.
- The parents' right to request and attend a panel however is not forfeit because they have threatened or initiated legal proceedings.
- Where a parent has requested a panel hearing, the panel hearing will take place unless the parent later indicates that they are now satisfied and do not wish to proceed further.

6. The Panel Hearing

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

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. If the hearing is terminated for this reason, the original decision will stand. Any complainant who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and their comment will be documented.

The Panel is not empowered to make any financial award nor impose sanctions on staff, students or parents. At the hearing the Panel will attempt to achieve a resolution. Where a resolution has not been reached and where the Panel is satisfied that it has established all the relevant facts (if necessary having carried out further investigations) and has duly considered all that the complainant and the school has said, the Panel shall make its findings and recommendations (if any). If the Panel considers that the complaint has been proven, it will uphold the complaint. If the Panel does not consider that the complaint has been proven, it will dismiss the complaint. These decisions will be made on the balance of probabilities. The decision of the Panel will be final.

The Panel's findings and any recommendations and its reasons for them, shall be recorded in writing and sent (not later than 10 working days from the date of the final hearing) to the complainant(s), the Principal and, where relevant, the person(s) complained about. The decision, findings and any recommendations will be made available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Principal.

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

7. Unresolved Complaints

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of a complaint following this procedure, and the complaint is in relation to the school not meeting a standard set out by the DfE, you can refer your complaint to the DfE. For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

8. Confidentiality and Records

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints are treated seriously and confidentially.

Correspondence, statements and records are kept confidential except in so far as is required of the school by paragraph 33 of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014, where disclosure is required by the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

The record of complaints must state whether the complaint has been resolved following a formal procedure or whether it has proceeded to a panel hearing. It must also give details of the action taken by the school as a result of these complaints, regardless of whether the complaint has been upheld.

In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will be kept for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in the circumstances. For reference, DfE have confirmed that it is necessary to retain complaints which do not have safeguarding implications for a minimum of 7 years (a period determined by the 6-year inspection cycle with allowance for unforeseen circumstances). Where there is a safeguarding angle, it will be necessary to retain it for much longer.

9. What is a vexatious complaint?

Claremont School's commitment to resolving complaints is outlined above. However, there are occasions where a complaint becomes vexatious, either because the complainant behaves in an unreasonable manner when raising and/or pursuing concerns or is unreasonably persistent. Examples of complainant behaviour that may lead to a complaint being classified as vexatious include when a complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on;
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email or by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;
- uses threats to intimidate;
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence;
- knowingly provides falsified information;
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums;
- states that their intention is to persist until that outcome is achieved;
- insist on dealing with, or refusing to deal with specific members of staff;
- unfairly makes a complaint targeted towards an individual member of staff;
- causes the irreparable breakdown of student, staff relationships, whereby the member of staff is unable to effectively carry out their role;
- causes ongoing distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community and/or are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health; and
- use Subject Access Requests excessively and unreasonably, beyond what is fair and lawful.

Any such behaviour as listed above, whilst not necessarily associated with an active complaint, will be dealt with in accordance with our parental engagement policy and the school's parent contract.

10. Process for dealing with vexatious complaints.

Whenever possible, the Principal will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking. The Principal will verbally communicate to the complainant that we consider the nature of their complaint to be vexatious, and/or the manner in which they interact with the school is unreasonable. A record of this will be kept, and shared with the complainant. If the action continues, then the Principal shall communicate to the complainant in writing, outlining why we consider their complaint to be unreasonable/vexatious. The Principal will make this decision after consultation with the Regional Management Team of International Schools Partnership. The Principal will usually communicate to the complainant actions to be taken to protect the school from unreasonable actions in the form of a communication agreement. This may include:

- notifying the complainant that the school will no longer be responding to correspondence, or accepting phone calls;
- restricting the complainant from school property;
- restricting communication to designated members of staff; or
- directing communication between alternative appropriate adults representing the child.

In circumstances where the school needs to communicate with the complainant for matters beyond day to day educational reporting, it will be done so in writing.

Any such communication agreement will usually be in place for six months, where it will be reviewed by the Principal.

In circumstances of non-compliance to a communication agreement, the school may deem this a breach of the parent contract, and may withdraw or ask parents to withdraw the student from the school in accordance with the terms of the parent contract.

11. Complaints Log 2023-2024

During the academic year 2023-24 the following formal complaints were received, investigated and resolved:

Stage 2: 3

Stage 3: 1

This policy is made available to parents on request and via the school's website.

12. Links with other Policies

- Parental Engagement Policy