

## **St Margaret's School Complaints Procedure**

As a school we encourage dialogue between parents, pupils and teachers. Whilst this formal procedure is required, it is not intended to cover the normal process of dialogue with parents and pupils, including the expression of negative comments about aspects of the school, and we hope that parents will normally use informal approaches to the school.

If at any time parents have cause for concern or occasion for complaint, they should raise the matter with the school as soon as possible. All concerns or complaints will be taken seriously and treated with respect, and the school will respond promptly. Parents should feel free to telephone, or to write, with details of the issue that concerns them. In the first instance it may be best to address a concern to the member of staff most closely involved with the matter at issue (e.g. the form teacher, Head of Department etc), but there may be some concerns which parents prefer to bring directly to the Head of Year, the Pastoral Deputy or the Headteacher.

Boarders and their parents who wish to raise a concern about standards of care should do so with the school in the first instance to help us provide the highest possible standard of care for the girls. Concerns can also be raised with Ofsted at Building C, Cumberland Place, Park Row, Nottingham, NG1 6HJ, or with the Local Authority Designated Officer on 07920 283106 or 07993 288271.

Stage 1 of the process below refers to informal complaints. However, complaints of a serious nature about the conduct of a member of staff should be made formally (Stage 2), and complaints about the Head should go straight to the Governors (Stage 3).

Copies of formal complaints, and any written response, will be kept in a file, held by the Clerk to the Governors. The nature and number of complaints, but not any confidential details, will form part of the Head's termly report to the Governors.

### **Informal Complaints**

1. Any complaints received will be forwarded to the appropriate member of staff and the person expressing the complaint will be advised who is dealing with the matter.
2. The relevant member of staff will, wherever possible, telephone or write to the person making the complaint by the end of the next working day, either to discuss the matter or to assure them that the matter is in hand. The staff member will also make and keep dated, written record of the complaint.
3. The school will respect the views of a complainant who indicates that s/he would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. In such cases, the complaint will be referred to another staff member.

4. Should a member of staff be unable to deal with a complaint, it will be referred to the relevant senior member of staff.
5. If the complaint progresses to the appropriate member of the Senior Management Team and still cannot be resolved informally, the complainant will be invited to make a formal complaint, as described below.
6. All complaints will be dealt with as quickly as possible: many can be resolved within 24 hours and none should take longer than 5 working days.

### **Formal Complaints**

1. Upon receipt of a formal complaint, which should be made in writing to the Head, the Head may ask another senior member of staff to investigate the matter and provide her/him with all relevant information.
2. The Head (or her representative) will inform the complainant that the complaint has been received and indicate the nature and timescale of any investigation and conclusion, which will normally be within 15 working days. The Head will also provide copies of the complaint to the Clerk to the Governors and the Chairman of Governors.
3. After considering all the available information, the Head (or her representative) will inform the complainant of the outcome of the complaint.
4. If the complainant is still dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further, s/he will be advised of the right to refer the complaint to the Governors.

### **Complaint Heard by Governors' Complaints Panel**

1. The complainant should make a formal complaint in writing to the Chair of Governors. The Chair, or a nominated governor, will convene a Governing Body complaints panel, consisting of three governors and a person who is independent of the management and running of the school, normally within 15 working days of receiving the complaint.
2. The governors' appeal hearing is the last school-based stage of the complaints process, and is not convened to merely rubber-stamp previous decisions.
3. Individual complaints would not be heard by the whole Governing Body at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

4. The panel can
  - dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
  - uphold the complaint in whole or in part
  - decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
  - recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.
  
5. No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
  
6. The aim of the hearing, which will be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. The complainant(s) may, if they wish, be accompanied by one other person to the hearing. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations that will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.
  
7. The Clerk to the Governors will be the contact point for the complainant and will:
  - set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
  - collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing
  - meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing
  - record the proceedings
  - notify all parties of the panel's decision
  - keep a formal record of all complaints and whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing
  - ensure that all correspondence and records relating to the complaint are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or an inspecting body requests access to them
  
8. The Chair of the Panel will ensure that:
  - the Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it
  - the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption
  - the issues are addressed.

The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head, the Governors and, where relevant, the person complained of.

MF/KY  
September 2009