

# Complaints Policy

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Name and appointment of owner / author	Stuart Bachelor, Deputy Head
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Next Governor review due	as required pending changes to legislation or major changes to procedures
Where available	Freemen's Staff SharePoint site, School web-site (unrestricted area), Parent Portal, Governor Portal, hard copies in Receptions and Gatehouse

## COMPLAINTS POLICY

### Policy Statement

This policy applies to parents of pupils at the City of London Freemen's School ('the School'). For a complaint to be dealt with under this policy, the parent(s) must have a child on the School's roll at the time at which the complaint is lodged. If the complaint is specific to a child of theirs, that child - rather than a sibling - must be on the School's roll when it is lodged. An exception is made for complaints by prospective parents concerning their child in respect of the School's admissions process.

This policy and procedure will be relied upon in respect of all complaints by parents made against the School except in respect of:

- (a) safeguarding allegations where a separate policy and procedure applies;
- (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;

If a pupil has a concern or complaint about the School, he/she should report it to an appropriate member of staff (such as his/her Head of Year or the Deputy Head) with the assurance that all complaints made by pupils in good faith will be taken seriously.

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 complaints can be resolved informally and will use their best endeavours to resolve any complaints that are made informally on that basis. If informal procedures fail to resolve the issue, a formal complaint about any matter not involving safeguarding allegations, internal assessment decisions or a decision to expel or remove a pupil, must be stated courteously in writing (i.e. by letter) to the Headmaster and will be dealt with under this City of London Freemen's School Complaints Policy and Procedure. Every complaint shall receive fair and proper consideration and a timely response.

This policy and procedure is made available to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils of the School on an unrestricted area of the School's website.

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 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, whether raised informally or formally, will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

## **School Complaints Procedure**

### **Stage One - Informal Resolution**

1. It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally.
2. If parents have a complaint they should normally contact a Form Teacher or Tutor for pastoral concerns, Subject Teacher for academic matters or the Head of Boarding for Boarding concerns. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Form Teacher/Form Tutor, Subject Teacher, or Head of Boarding cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult a Head of Department, Head of Junior School/Senior School/Sixth Form, a Deputy Head, or the Headmaster.
3. Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, Head of Junior School/Upper School/Sixth Form, a Deputy Head or the Headmaster will usually be referred to the relevant Form Teacher/Form Tutor, Subject Teacher or Head of Boarding, as appropriate unless the Head of Department, Head of Junior School/Senior School/Sixth Form, a Deputy Head or the Headmaster deems it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
4. The Form Teacher/Form Tutor, Subject Teacher or Head of Boarding, as appropriate, will make a written record of all 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 in school holidays or within two (2) working days of their commencement. In the latter two cases, the School will use its reasonable endeavours to resolve informal complaints 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 Teacher/Form Tutor, Subject Teacher or Head of Boarding, as appropriate, and the parents fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage Two of this Procedure.

7. Complaints about any aspect of boarding welfare can also be referred to the Children's Commissioner on <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/> or by phoning 0800 5280731.

## Stage Two - Formal Resolution

1. If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis (as set out in Paragraph 5 and 6 above), then parents should put their complaint in writing (i.e. by letter) to the Headmaster, which complaint should be expressed clearly and courteously. Parents should also identify their desired outcome. It is important that this communication amounts to a full and exhaustive account of the complaint. Once submitted, additions thereto will not be accepted unless new information comes to light after that date.
2. If the Headmaster requires further information or clarification in order to deal with the complaint, he will speak to or seek to meet with the parents concerned to discuss the matter. In any case, within ten (10) working days of the complaint being received, the Headmaster will confirm in writing to the parents the course of action that he has decided to take, including the name of the Investigating Officer.
3. The Headmaster will delegate responsibility for undertaking investigation of the complaint to a Deputy Head or Head of Department/Head of Boarding/Junior School/Senior School/Sixth Form, as appropriate. The purpose of such an investigation is solely to establish, from a standpoint of neutrality, the facts of the matter raised by the parents in their complaint.
4. The Headmaster will use reasonable endeavours to speak to or meet with parents within thirty (30) working days of the formal complaint being received to discuss the findings of the investigation and the course of action that he proposes to take as a result. Where this is not possible- either because the complaint is lodged during or shortly before school holidays, because the complaint is likely to require an unusually protracted investigation, or because of urgent demands on the time of the appointed Investigating Officer- the reasons for any delay will be explained in detail to the parents.
5. The Headmaster will then confirm his decision to the parents in writing within ten (10) working days of informing them of the investigation's findings.
6. The Headmaster will keep a written record of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
7. 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.

These records will be retained until or shortly after the child's 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, with the exception of complaints that allege abuse by a member of staff.

8. 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**

1. If parents seek to invoke Stage Three following failure to reach an earlier resolution or where dissatisfied with the Headmaster's decision in respect of their formal complaint, the parents may, in writing (i.e. by letter) addressed to the School, request that their complaint be further considered by an independent Complaints Panel set up for this purpose.
2. This request for further assessment of the complaint will, for the purposes of this Procedure, be known as an 'appeal'.
3. Parents must lodge their appeal in writing and within ten (10) working days of the date of the School's decision, as conveyed in writing by the Head, 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.
4. 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.
5. The Clerk provides an independent source of advice on procedure for all parties.
6. 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.
7. 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.

8. The independent Complaints Panel will consist of two Governors on the Board who have not previously been involved in the complaint, 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).
9. The following are entitled to attend a hearing, submit written representations and address the Panel:
  - a. The parent(s) and/or one representative;
  - b. The Headmaster 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.

Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.

10. 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 in support of 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.

11. 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.
12. 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.
13. 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.

14. The Panel's findings will be sent by the Clerk in writing to the parents, the Headmaster, the Governors and, where relevant, the person complained of. The letter will state any reasons for the decision reached and recommendations made by the Complaints Panel.
15. The School will keep a record of all complaints, appeals, decisions and recommendations of the Complaints Panel, including the stage at which any complaints are resolved and whether or not they refer to boarding. In addition, this record details the action taken by the School as a result of the complaints. These records will be retained until or shortly after the child's 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, with the exception of complaints that allege abuse by a member of staff.

The number of formal complaints received in the academic year 2024-25 is one (1).