

CCSS Concerns and Complaints Policy

CCSS receives very few complaints, but wants to deal with any complaints from students, parents and other bodies or individuals in an efficient, open and honest way, in line with best practice and the values of the College.

This policy makes use of the procedures set out by the Independent Schools' Council and in DfES guidance. We are required under the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2003 to adopt, make available, and apply a complaints procedure.

'Complaints' are not defined in the Independent Schools Standards Regulations, but the guidance for maintained schools suggests that there is a difference between 'concerns' which should be dealt with informally and 'complaints', which should be subject to a more formal procedure.

The Regulations only refer to complaints from parents, though we would like to specifically include complaints from students and members of the public.

For guidance: types of concerns and complaints:

CCSS receives very few complaints, though we recognise that the majority of concerns/complaints received by any school or usually college fall into the following categories:

- **financial and administrative** (for example, breach of contract in independent schools);
- **academic** (course programme, quality of teaching, too much/too little homework, etc.);
- **pastoral care** (discipline/indiscipline, inappropriate sanctions, bullying, unhappiness of child, accommodation, etc.); or
- **child protection** (allegations against staff, handling of sensitive issues).

The above categories are presented for guidance so that parents and students can be specific about their concerns and for these to be handled appropriately.

Responsibilities

For the efficient working of the policy, the following responsibilities have been identified.

The Trustees of CCSS:

are responsible for

- agreeing the policy, procedures, and guidelines;
- appointing where necessary an independent panel to hear complaints, when complainants are not satisfied with the college's response;
- receiving reports and findings from the panel; or
- receiving reports from the Principal.

The Trustees will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes regularly. The Trustees will also monitor the college's response to complaints and any panel recommendations.

Chair of Trustees:

for appointing a panel of at least three people independent of the management of the college, to hear complaints from complainants not satisfied with the college's response.

Chair of the independent Panel:

to ensure that:

- the parties understand the procedure;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are established;
- complainants are put at ease;
- the hearing is conducted as informally as possible;
- the panel is open-minded and acts independently;
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome, or has been involved in the issues previously;
- all parties have the chance to be heard;
- any written material is seen by all parties; and
- findings are communicated to the parent and Principal within five days of the hearing.

Clerk to the Trustees:

The Clerk must act as the reference point for the complainant when the complainant has not been satisfied with the college's response. The Clerk to the Trustees at CCSS is also the Bursar and the Principal will ensure that independent procedures are established when a complaint may involve financial or related issues.

The Clerk must:

- set convenient dates and times and venues for hearings;
- collate any written material and forward it to the parties;
- meet and welcome the parties;
- record the proceedings; and
- notify the parties of the decision.

Principal:

- for the overall internal management of the procedures;
- for ensuring that there is both an informal and formal procedure;
- for maintaining a central record of complaints (maintained securely but to be made available to official inspection bodies such as Ofsted or ISI);
- for ensuring that the written policy and procedures are available to parents, students and members of the public on request;
- for hearing complaints at the second stage (or appointing a Complaints Co-ordinator to hear them);
- for ensuring that the procedures are monitored and reviewed and regular reports made to the Trustees; and

- training staff on how to deal appropriately with complaints.

The Principal may devolve any of the above procedures to other senior colleagues.

Bursar:

for administrative, environmental and financial queries and complaints.

Heads of Department:

for dealing with and where possible resolving concerns/complaints about academic matters/programmes of study/teaching methods at stage 1 of the procedures.

Senior House Manager:

for dealing with and where possible resolving complaints concerning boarding issues.

Child Protection Officer:

for receiving any child protection issues.

All staff:

for hearing any concerns brought to them by parents and students and reassuring them that they will be dealt with as soon as possible by the appropriate member of staff; and for informing the relevant staff of the concerns; for following appropriate procedures including the use of the “complaints form”, and for passing any complaints received from other people who are not parents or students to the Principal.

General Procedures

There are three possible stages:

Stage 1 Informal Resolution

Concerns expressed by parents or students to any member of staff should be dealt with by that member of staff if he/she is able to do so. If the member of staff considers the issue to be beyond his/her competence the concern should be passed to the Principal.

Concerns/complaints which come to a member of staff from other sources should be passed immediately to the Principal who will inform the complainant of the action he/she proposes to take.

Stage 2 Formal Procedure

Complaint heard by Principal

Stage 3 Independent Panel Hearing

Complaint heard by the independent panel appointed by the Trustees.

Detailed Guidance

All staff and Trustees should be conversant with the procedures.

Stage 1

Informal resolution

All staff should listen carefully and patiently to parents' and students' complaints, recognising that however ill-founded the complaint might be it is a matter of great concern to the parent or student.

If the matter is within the competence of the member of staff to resolve quickly this should be done. Otherwise the complainant should be reassured that the complaint will be passed to the relevant member of staff, and the relevant person should be informed by the member of staff as soon as possible. The complainant should be told that it is the college's policy to respond to the verbal complaint **within 48 hours**, even if the issue cannot be entirely resolved in 48 hours.

If a trivial/simple verbal concern/complaint is made it might be possible to resolve it immediately. In more serious cases, or where a member of staff is uncertain, parents, students or others should always be asked to put their complaint in writing (and moving to Stage 2 Formal Procedure). This is to ensure that there is no conflict in determining what the complaint consists of and the action taken by the members of the college staff.

If a complaint is made by a student, the member of staff should immediately inform the Principal who will discuss the issue with the relevant members of staff in order to determine what the course of action should be.

Members of staff receiving a concern/complaint must use the college's 'Complaints Form' to inform the Principal (available from the staff eHandbook or any College Office). But this does not prevent the member of staff also speaking to the relevant senior colleague about the matter at the earliest opportunity. A complaint relating to Child Protection should be handled under the appropriate Child Protection arrangements.

The Principal will inform the complainant of the action taken. If the complainant is not satisfied with the informal response, he/she should be informed that they must make a formal complaint in writing to the Chair of Trustees.

In any cases of doubt, members of staff should seek the advice of the Principal. Informal resolution should normally take no more than **five** working days. If a longer period is necessary to complete investigations the complainant should be informed, within five days, of the reasons, and the new date for resolution.

Stage 2

Formal Written Complaint

When a written formal complaint is received, the Principal must consult the relevant staff, make appropriate investigations, and attempt to resolve the issue within **five** working days. If a resolution cannot be found the Principal should inform the complainant of his/her right of appeal to the Chair of Trustees and the Independent Panel.

If the complaint concerns a child protection issue or involves an allegation of abuse by a member of the college staff, the Child Protection Officer should be informed.

No complaint should normally be left unresolved at this stage after FIVE days of receipt of the complaint. Where more time is necessary to complete the investigations the complainant will be informed and another date set.

Stage 3

The Chair of Trustees and Hearings by an Independent Panel

The complainant must be advised by the Principal to write to the Chair of the Trustees via the Clerk giving details of the complaint. The Chair of Trustees may attempt to resolve the issue to the satisfaction of the complainant.

However, complainants who are not satisfied by the college's decision re the complaint can request a hearing by a panel of three members independent of the college's day-to-day management. The panel may comprise members of the Trustees or other suitable persons. The Chair will nominate the panel.

With the agreement of the complainant, the panel may meet without the complainant present. If this is not acceptable, the complainant may attend and must be told of his/her right to be accompanied by a friend.

The hearing must be within 14 days of the Chair receiving notice of the panel request.

The nominated panel will make its own procedures, and will agree these with the Chair, who will report them to the next full Trustees' meeting.

The panel will ensure that the complainant is heard in private, is welcomed, and as far as possible is put at ease.

Careful consideration must be taken when the complainant is a student.

The panel will hear the appeal(s), consider all the views expressed and decide the outcome.

The panel must send its report to the Chair of Trustees, the Principal and (where relevant) the complainant within ten working days of the hearing.

Chair of Trustees Action

The Chair of Trustees, in consultation with the Principal, will consider the panel's findings and recommendations and make such decisions as necessary in the circumstances.

In general the Chair of Trustees will take one of the following courses of action:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or part;
- decide on appropriate action to resolve the complaint; or
- recommend changes to the college's systems or procedures.

The Chair of Trustees' decision is binding and their decision will normally be communicated to the parties within TEN days of receiving the panel's report.

Reporting and Recording

In all cases it is important for staff to use the college's 'Complaints Form' so that records of the complaint and the action taken can be recorded and traced. Supporting documents should be attached to the form.

The Principal will ensure that all correspondence, statements and records pertaining to the complaint are kept confidential and secure except where the Secretary of State or inspecting body requests access to them.

The Principal will consider the handling of complaints from time to time, and will discuss issues with staff as necessary.

The Principal will report to staff from time to time, and to the Trustees each term on the number and type of complaints received and their outcomes.

Reviewed October 2007 (Chair of Trustees)
Minor revisions December 2007

Next review October 2008