

Introduction

CCSS will always take seriously any complaint that might be raised. If parents or students do have a complaint, they can expect to be treated by the college in accordance with this policy. CCSS considers a formal complaint to be one which is dealt with through the formal complaints procedure.

A number of points in this document have been explicitly clarified in relation to the Independent Schools Standards Regulations (ISSRs). These points are in green type.

It is a regulatory requirement that schools record whether any formal complaints are resolved informally or proceed to the stage of a panel hearing. In 2016–17 and 2017-18 there were no formal complaints and therefore none proceeded to a panel hearing and none were relating to boarding.

Throughout this document, any reference to action taken by the Principal also refers to any action taken by another senior member of staff deputising for the Principal. Any reference to action taken by the Chair of Trustees also refers to action taken by a nominated designate Trustee.

The regulations refer only to complaints from parents of pupils.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

Please note that the procedures in this document are not intended to limit the availability of the statutory complaints process. Our experience is that in almost every circumstance parents far prefer an informal and non-bureaucratic approach, and it is in this spirit that our procedures operate.

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved very quickly and informally.

Any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the school is defined by the regulations as a complaint.

If parents have a complaint, they should normally, in the first instance, contact the relevant tutor. In many cases, the matter should be resolved quickly by this means to the satisfaction of all concerned. If the tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult colleagues and/or members of the Senior Leadership Team.

Complaints made directly to senior staff will usually be referred to the relevant tutor unless they deem it appropriate to deal with the matter personally. The tutor will keep a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within five working days, or in the event that one of the above members of staff and the parent/student fail to reach a satisfactory solution then parent should proceed with their complaint in accordance with this Procedure. If the complaint is directly about the Principal, a complainant may approach the College Independent Listener or go to stage 2 of this procedure and contact the Chair of Trustees for a formal resolution, prior to Stage 3 should it be required.

Stage 1a – Referral to the College’s Independent Listener

The Independent Listener (Margaret Goddin) is, as the name suggests, independent of the College and is empowered to make direct contact with any member of the College staff or Trustee body to help resolve a problem on behalf of a parent or student. They act solely for the complainant as a knowledgeable advocate, familiar with the College structure and staff, but completely independent of them. Parents or students can contact Margaret Goddin at any time by email (goddin.m@btinternet.com) – please enter CCSS in the subject line of your email.

This additional optional stage exists entirely in the spirit of helpful conflict resolution. It is entirely any complainant’s decision whether to use the Independent Listener or not and it is not a required stage.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parent should put their complaint in writing to the Principal. The Principal will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

In most cases, the Principal will speak or write to the complainant concerned, normally within 5 working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. **In order to be clear in relation to the ISSRs, the Principal will check with the complainant whether their communication is because they wish the Principal to be aware or to seek his view, or if they wish to initiate the formal stage of the complaints process.**

If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. It may be necessary for the Principal to carry out further investigations. Under the formal processes, the Principal will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. In any case a response will be made within 20 working days.

Once the Principal is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made following consultation with the Trustees through the Chair of Trustees and the complainant will be informed of this decision in writing. The Principal will also give reasons for the decision. This will be within 20 term-time working days of the initial response.

If the complainant is still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed in accordance with this Procedure.

Stage 2a – Referral to the College’s Independent Listener

As at stage 1a, **and with the same reassurances about the spirit of the process**, parents are invited to contact Margaret Goddin at any time by email (goddin.m@btinternet.com) if dissatisfied with the response to their complaint – please enter CCSS in the subject line of your email.

Stage 3 – Recourse to Trustees

If parents seek to invoke stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the Chair of Trustees, or a nominated designate Trustee, who will seek to find an informal solution in the first instance. In most cases, the Chair of Trustees will speak or write to the complainant concerned, normally within 5 working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. In any case a response will be made within 20 working days.

If this is unsuccessful it may be necessary to put the matter to the College Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management of the College and its Trustees. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chair of Trustees, after consultation with the Board of Trustees. One of the members of the Panel will be designated as Convenor who will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and within 30 term-time working days of the complainant making recourse to Trustees. The Convenor will act as Chair of the Panel during the hearing.

If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance to the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties at least 4 working days prior to the hearing. The parent may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. If possible, the Panel will resolve the complaint immediately 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 all of the facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within 5 working days of the Hearing. The Panel will write to the complainant informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel’s findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the complainant, the Principal, the Chair of Trustees and, where relevant, the person complained about.

A copy of findings and recommendations is kept on the school premises for inspection by the Chair of Trustees and the Principal. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them. A written record is kept of all formal complaints regardless of whether they are upheld (which identifies if they relate to boarding), whether they are resolved following a formal procedure or proceed to a panel hearing, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

Beyond the College

CCSS hopes that it will never be necessary, but parents and students are able to contact the regulatory authorities regarding welfare complaints. For independent schools such as CCSS the regulatory body is The Independent Schools Inspectorate, who cover all aspects of independent schools. The web addresses for ISI is: www.isi.net . It is also possible to contact local authority welfare services by email: LADO@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

We hope that our policy and procedures, Stages 1-3, provide all the necessary means for resolving any complaints and that they are swiftly and openly approached with the goodwill that characterises all relationships within the College.

January 2018

Next review due December 2018