

## COMPLAINTS POLICY

### Parents and outside agencies

#### **Stage 1 (Informal concern)**

Any problem or concern that relates to the actions of staff and/or the application of St Catherine's policies and/or procedures should be raised promptly with the member of staff responsible for the area or action which is a matter of concern. St Catherine's will make every effort to resolve the problem promptly through informal discussion with the relevant member(s) of staff.

If the concern is not resolved at this stage, an informal discussion should be arranged with the Principal. If the concern is about the Principal, an informal discussion should be arranged with the Chair of the Board.

St Catherine's will seek to use any complaint as an opportunity to improve its services.

- Any concern should be brought to the attention of St Catherine's as soon as possible.
- Unless there are exceptional circumstances, any matters raised more than three months after the issue of concern has taken place will not be considered; nor will concerns or complaints raised anonymously.

#### **Stage 2 (Principal)**

If the response of the member of staff and/or the Principal at the informal stage is unsatisfactory, the concern should be put in writing to the Principal or the Chair of the Board (if the concern is about the Principal), using the form attached to this policy at Appendix 1. The Principal or the Chair of the Board will investigate the complaint and provide a written response. This will normally be within 10 working days of receipt, but the complainant will be informed if, for example, more time is needed to complete the investigation.

The complainant will be told that consideration of their complaint by the Principal is now concluded.

#### **Stage 3 (Chair of the Board)**

If:

- the Principal's response to the complaint is unsatisfactory; and/or
- the concern is about an action by the Principal and it has already been discussed informally with the Chair of the Board; and/or
- there is concern that the process has not been followed,

the complaint should be put in writing to the Chair of the Board, using the form attached to this policy at Appendix 1. This should be received within 15 working days of the Principal's response, as applicable.

The Chair of the Board will investigate the complaint and provide a written response, normally within 15 working days.

At the Chair of the Board's discretion, an independent investigator from an appropriate external agency may be appointed at Stage 3 to support the Chair of the Board's

investigation of the complaint. The complainant may be invited to speak to the independent investigator. In these circumstances, Stage 4 of the complaints' procedure will not be invoked and the decision of the Chair of the Board will be final.

#### **Stage 4 (Investigative Panel)**

If:

- the Chair of the Board's response to the complaint is unsatisfactory; and/or
- the concern is about an action by the Chair of the Board; and/or
- there is concern that the process has not been followed,

the complaint should be put in writing to the Board's Investigative Panel, using the form attached to this policy at Appendix 1. This should be received within 15 working days of the Chair of the Board's response, as applicable.

The Investigative Panel will investigate the complaint and provide a written response, normally within 15 working days. The complainant may be invited to speak to the panel and be accompanied by a friend or appropriate representative.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the decision of the Investigative Panel will be final.

#### **Stage 5 (Independent mediation)**

In exceptional circumstances, the complaint can be referred to a civil mediation provider accredited by the Civil Mediation Council.

#### **Unreasonable complaints/complainants**

St Catherine's is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and aims to provide a high quality service to those who complain. Ordinarily, complainants' contact with the organisation will not be limited. However, staff will not be expected to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and action will be taken to protect staff from any unacceptable, vexatious, abusive, offensive or threatening behaviour.

A complainant will be deemed unreasonable when, because of the frequency and/or nature of their contact(s) with St Catherine's, staff are hindered from considering their and/or other people's complaints.

A complaint will be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- 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 co-operate with the complaints' investigation process whilst still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints policy;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints policy and procedures or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented upon – and/or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insists they are fully answered, perhaps immediately and/or to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and/or suggests staff should be replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;

- makes the same complaint repeatedly (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that either the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation(s) into the complaint(s) where St Catherine's complaint policy has been fully and properly implemented and completed;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome; and/or
- makes excessive demands on staff time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact regarding the complaint in person, in writing or by email.

A complaint/complainant may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint (either face-to-face, by telephone, in writing and/or electronically) does so:

- maliciously;
- vexatiously;
- aggressively;
- using threats, intimidation or violence;
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- knowing it to be false;
- using falsified information; and/or
- publishing unacceptable information in whatever form, including on social media platforms.

Complainants should limit the number of communications they have with St Catherine's whilst a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful for repeated correspondence to be sent, in whatever format, as this could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Principal and/or the Chair of the Board will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' categorisation.

If the behaviour is deemed to be unreasonable, the Principal and/or the Chair of the Board will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who contact St Catherine's excessively and/or cause significant levels of disruption, certain methods of communication will be specified as will the acceptable number of contacts in a given period. Ordinarily, such measures will be reviewed after a period of six months.

In exceptional circumstances, if the unreasonable behaviour persists and the complainant is the parent, carer or guardian of a student, a contract may be drawn up which the complainant will be required to sign in order for the student to continue their education at St Catherine's. In such circumstances, St Catherine's reserves the right to levy an administrative charge upon the complainant in relation to the costs associated with drawing up such a contract.

In very exceptional circumstances, an injunction may be sought against the complainant to prevent the complainant from continuing to make unreasonable complaints.

Should any serious incident(s) of aggression or violence occur, the concerns and actions taken (including banning an individual from St Catherine's site) will be put in writing immediately and the police will be informed.

## **Students**

Posters displayed around the school explain to students how to fill in a complaint form (Appendix 2).

The Principal, Head of Care and/or another senior member of staff will respond to the complaint within 2 school days wherever possible.

Each complaint will be filed in the complaints book with a record of any actions taken. The student making the complaint will be spoken to before and after any actions taken to make sure he/she is satisfied.

## **Monitoring**

A member of the Board of Trustees carries out half-termly monitoring visits. Complaints will be included as part of this monitoring. A termly report will be submitted to the Board of Trustees. For reasons of confidentiality it will be in terms of number and nature of complaints without specific details of each one.

Monitored by Governors Feb 2013/March 2018

Reviewed Mar 2013 / Oct 2015/Sept 2016/March 2018

## APPENDIX 1

ST CATHERINE'S SCHOOL AND SIXTH FORM CENTRE

### COMPLAINTS FORM FOR PARENTS AND OUTSIDE AGENCIES

If Stage 1 of the Complaints Policy has not resolved the concern, please complete and return this form to the Principal (Stage 2), the Chair of the Board (Stage 3) or the Investigative Panel (Stage 4), St Catherine's, Grove Road, Ventnor, Isle of Wight, PO38 1TT.

Name:
Contact details:
Date:
Nature of complaint: (Please include specific details including dates, times, names etc., as appropriate)

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Any supporting evidence:  
(Please list any documents and attach these to the form)

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Signed:

Date:

To be completed by the Principal/Chair of the Board/Investigative Panel

Date complaint form received:

Signed:

Person dealing with the complaint:

Date this person received the form:

Response form completed: