



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

INTRODUCTION

The Branch Christian School takes all complaints seriously. The purpose of the Complaints Procedure is to reassure parents and others with an interest in the school that:

- Any complaint against the school will be dealt with in a fair, open and responsive way, with the aim of achieving a speedy and satisfactory resolution
- The school recognises that a willingness to listen to questions and criticism and to respond positively, can lead to improvements in school practices and provision for pupils.

This procedure has been drawn up using the *The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations, 2019*, to ensure that the school deals with the handling of complaints from parents of pupils effectively.

Part 7: Manner in which complaints are handled

8.1 This Part of the standards sets out requirements about a complaints procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils which, amongst other things, needs to provide for three stages: informal, formal and a hearing before a panel which is to include an independent member. A school can have a complaints process which has a wider scope or more facilities for complaint than the standards require, but to meet Part 7 a proprietor must ensure that a procedure is drawn up and effectively implemented and which is:

- (a) is in writing;*
- (b) is made available to parents of pupils;*
- (c) sets out clear time scales for the management of a complaint;*
- (d) allows for a complaint to be made and considered initially on an informal basis;*
- (e) where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with subparagraph (d), establishes a formal procedure for the complaint to be made in writing;*
- (f) where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with subparagraph (e), makes provision for a hearing before a panel appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint;*
- (g) ensures that, where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school;*
- (h) allows for a parent to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish;*
- (i) provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulates that a copy of those findings and recommendations is—*
 - (i) provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and*
 - (ii) available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher;*
- (j) provides for a written record to be kept of all complaints that are made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e) and—*
 - (i) whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and*
 - (ii) action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld); and*
- (k) provides that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be 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.*

8.2 It may be useful to note the following points:

- a. the complaints procedure need not apply to prospective pupils, and therefore, it does not have to cover failure to admit such pupils;*
- b. the procedure only needs to apply to relation to complaints from parents of pupils, i.e. persons for whom education is being provided at the school. Therefore, the process does not need to cover complaints from parents of pupils who have left voluntarily or as a result of being excluded (except in cases where the complaints process was started when the pupil was still being educated at the school);*
- c. there is no provision in the standard for complaints by pupils, even those who are adults, although a school may choose to have such a process;*
- d. the requirement for a panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school means that the independent member should not only be outside the school's workforce, and not a member of governing body/proprietary body, but also should not be otherwise involved with the management of the school - for example, this might well be the case with a solicitor who regularly acts for a school;*
- e. the provision requiring a complaints procedure to allow a parent to be accompanied at a panel hearing does not confer a right on a parent to have a legal representative to make representations on their behalf at the hearing, although the school can allow this if it wishes;*
- f. if a parent does not exercise the right to attend a panel hearing, this does not remove the school's obligation to hold the hearing in conformity with its complaints policy. The school's arrangements for the panel hearing should be reasonable in order to facilitate the parent(s) exercising the right of attendance*

8.3 It should also be noted that if it is found that this standard has not been met because of the way a particular complaint has been handled, the Secretary of State has no power to compel the school to alter its decision on that complaint, only to take regulatory action designed to address the failure to meet the complaints standard, so that future complaints are dealt with properly.

This policy is available to all parents of pupils on our website or from the office.

SCOPE OF THE PROCEDURE

A complaint is defined as a clear statement of dissatisfaction about any specified aspect of the school's work. This procedure deals with specified day-to-day complaints against the management and/or operation of the school which fall outside the scope of the following procedures:

- Complaints which have an alternative statutory avenue of appeal or complaint, i.e. admissions, exclusions, SEN assessments, Section 409 Curriculum Complaints and those covered by the Education (School Records) Regulations 1989.
- Serious complaints which must be dealt with by specific employment procedures e.g. allegations of professional abuse, criminal offences or those that are potentially staff disciplinary issues.

Complainants may be anyone e.g. parents, guardians, grandparents, neighbours of the school or anyone with an interest in the work of the school. However, it is expected that it will be mainly parents or guardians who will make use of this procedure. The term 'parent' is therefore used throughout the procedure as a generic term, but the procedure also applies in relation to any other type of complainant. Informal complaints may be made by telephone, e-mail, in person or be written. Formal complaints should be made in writing, either by e-mail or letter.

Records of all conversations and meetings with parents to resolve formal complaints will be kept. If necessary, the Trustees will meet to discuss the complaints, minutes will be taken. To help prevent recurring complaints, copies of correspondence and notes will be kept on file in the school's records, separately from individual pupil records.

If at any stage in the procedure it becomes apparent that the complaint falls outside of this general Complaints procedure, parents will be informed.

There may be rare occasions when, despite all the stages of the procedure having been followed, a parent remains dissatisfied. If the parent seeks to re-open the same issue, the school reserves

the right to inform him/her in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is closed.

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be 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.

STAGE 1: INFORMAL STAGE

Wherever possible, we hope that complaints can be resolved effectively through an informal process.

If you have a child at the school and your concern is about the school or the education provided, the complaint should be discussed with your child's supervisor or the school administrator in the first instance.

If you do not have a child at the school, please discuss the matter with the school Administrator or the Headteacher.

On occasions, a parent may raise a concern directly with school staff without any formality. At this stage, it may be unclear whether the parent is making a complaint, seeking information or has misunderstood a situation. In any event, the school aims to resolve the concern at this point in a speedy and effective way. Records will still be kept of these concerns. (See Appendix 1)

However, if the concern is not resolved immediately and a complaint is confirmed by the parent, the opportunity to discuss the matter with an appropriate member of staff will be given e.g., Head Teacher, Administrator and Supervisors. In the case of complaint against the Head Teacher or Administrator, this stage will always be heard directly by the Head Teacher or Administrator her/himself.

The member of staff will discuss the issue with the parent and those involved in school, with the aim of resolving the complaint as soon as possible. The parent will be informed of the outcome of the investigation and what action, if any, the school proposes to take. The matter should be dealt with within **5 school days** of the verbal complaint.

If the informal process has been exhausted and no satisfactory solution has been found, the parent will be asked by the member of staff dealing with the complaint whether he/she wishes the complaint to be considered formally at stage two of this procedure.

If wishing to proceed with the complaint, the parent will be invited to put the complaint in writing to the Head Teacher. The letter should be sent to the Head Teacher within **3 school days**.

STAGE 2: REFERRAL TO THE TRUSTEES OR HEAD TEACHER FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

Where the complaint has been addressed by the Head Teacher at stage one, this stage will be heard by the Trustees. Where another staff member has addressed the complaint at stage one, this stage will be heard by the Head Teacher. (See Appendix 2)

The Trustees, Head Teacher or Administrator will acknowledge the written complaint within **5 school days** of receipt and provide an opportunity to meet the parent to discuss the complaint.

The Trustees or Head Teacher will investigate the complaint and a written response will normally be made within **10 school days** of receipt of the complaint. If this is not possible, a letter will be sent explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised target date.

The written response will include full reasons for the conclusions reached by the Trustees or Head Teacher and what action, if any, the school proposes to take to resolve the matter.

If the parent still remains dissatisfied, he/she will be advised that, in order to progress the complaint further at Stage 3, he/she must notify the Trustees in writing **within 10 school days**, copying the original complaint form.

The Trustees will then ensure that the parent is offered the opportunity of taking the complaint to a Complaints Panel at Stage 3 of this Procedure.

STAGE 3: REVIEW BY THE TRUSTEES COMPLAINTS PANEL

Complaints only rarely reach this level. However, when the need arises, the Complaints Panel (established according to the suggested composition detailed in Appendix 3 attached) will consider complaints at this stage. If the complaint is still not successfully resolved after step one and step two a panel will be set up by the Trustees of at least three persons, one of whom is independent of the management and running of the school, to discuss the complaint.

A written acknowledgement of the complaint and the request for it to be heard at Stage 3 of the Procedure will be sent to the parent by the Complaints Panel within **5 school days**. The letter will inform the parent that the complaint will be heard by the Complaints Panel within **15 school days** of receiving the complaint. It will also inform the parent of the right to submit any further documents other than the complaint form and that these must be made available to the Complaints Panel within **5 school days** of receipt of the acknowledgement letter. The right to call witnesses to the meeting, subject to the approval of the Complaints Panel and the right of the parent to be accompanied by a companion of her/his choice will also be explained in the letter. The parent has the right to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish.

The Complaints Panel will send a copy of the letter of acknowledgement of the complaint to all the members of the Complaints Panel, the Head Teacher and the Administrator and request a written report in response to the complaint to the Complaints Panel within **5 school days** of receipt of the letter. The right to call witnesses, subject to the approval of the Chair, will also be explained.

The Complaints Panel is free to make its own findings and recommendations prior to the meeting.

The Complaints Panel will then convene a meeting, having consulted with all parties on convenient times. The date, time and venue for the meeting will then be confirmed at least **5 school days** in advance.

The names of all parties and witnesses (if any) to attend the meeting and all relevant documents to be referred to at the meeting will also be provided by the Complaints Panel to: the parent; the Chair of the Trustees and/or Head Teacher; and each panel member. This will be provided as soon as possible and, in any event, at least **5 school days** prior to the meeting.

The meeting will be held following the procedures for hearing a complaint detailed in Appendix 4.

A written decision will be sent to the parent and the Complaints Panel and/or Head Teacher within **5 school days** of the hearing. The letter will explain that the decision of the Complaints Panel is final but that complaints can be taken to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills under the Education Act 1996, on the grounds that:

- A Governing Body is acting or proposing to act unreasonably; or

- The Governing Body has failed to discharge its duties under the Act.

All outcomes and copies of those findings and recommendations are confirmed in writing to both parties in accordance with the Complaints Procedure. This may be via electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and made available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Head Teacher.

Records will be kept on file from the date of the resolution of the complaint plus 6 years, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing in the 'Complaints' folder at the school. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be 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.

Policy Review Information:

Review date	Changes made	By whom	Date of next review
September 2020	Adopted CEE Policy.	Mrs J Holt	September 2023
September 2020	None	Mr S Hodgson	September 2023
September 2023	None – it is in line with MOD	Mrs JE Holt Mrs L Cox	September 2026
September 2026	None	Mrs J E Holt	September 2029

APPENDIX 1

Information regarding Informal School Complaint (Stage 1)

To be filled in by school staff member who received the informal complaint

Name of person completing form _____

Child's Name (to whom issue relates) _____

Class Supervisor _____

Parent/Guardian _____

Contact details (including mobile) _____

Telephone no. if appropriate) _____

Details of Complaint:

(Please be as specific as possible e.g. giving dates, who was involved and where etc.)

Please attach continuation sheet/additional information if you wish

Please attach any emails, text messages, etc. that you have received

What was done to resolve the complaint and bring the matter to an acceptable closure for the parents and the school?

Signed ----- Date -----
(Staff member)

Please file in the 'Complaints' folder at the school.

APPENDIX 2

Form to notify Formal School Complaint (Stage 2 and/or Stage 3)

Child's Name (to whom issue relates) _____

Class Supervisor _____

Parent/Guardian _____

Contact details (including mobile) _____

Telephone no. if appropriate) _____

Details of Complaint:

(Please be as specific as possible e.g. giving dates, who was involved and where etc.)
Please attach continuation sheet/additional information if you wish

What would you like to see done to resolve your complaint and bring the matter to an acceptable closure for yourself and the school?

Signed _____ Date _____
(Parent/Guardian)

Please return the completed form marking it 'private and confidential' to the Head Teacher or Administrator, at the school. Records will be kept on file in the 'Complaints' folder at the school.

APPENDIX 3

Composition of the Trustees Complaints Panel

The Trustees Complaints Panel should consist of two members of the Trustees and one other member who is independent of the management and running of the school, to discuss the complaint. A Chair of the Complaints Panel should also be appointed.

The Trustees may decide to appoint the three members annually, together with three reserves, designated in the order in which they would be called upon to stand in order to ensure that three members will be available to meet within the timescales. The Trustees may wish to consider the advantages of having a parent as a member of the panel.

No member of the Complaints Panel should have had prior involvement with the complaint. As the Chair of the Trustees may be involved at an earlier stage in the procedure (particularly where the complaint is about the Head Teacher) it may be wise not to include the Chair as a member of the Complaints Panel to avoid any possible reference to the Chair being “tainted”. It is not considered appropriate for the Head Teacher or Administrator to be a member of the Complaints Panel. The role of the Head Teacher or Administrator would be to attend the panel hearing to give evidence and s/he may choose to invite staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant (subject to the approval of the Chair of the Complaints Panel).

APPENDIX 4

Trustees Complaints Panel Procedures for Hearing the Complaint

Introduction

The aim of the meeting is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the parent. The Chair of the Complaints Panel will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted.

Although the meeting will follow the structured order below, given potential sensitivities and anxieties, the Chair will endeavour to ensure that the proceedings are as informal as possible and that all parties are put at their ease. The introduction of new information or witnesses, previously not notified to all parties, would be reason to adjourn the meeting so that everyone has time to consider and respond to the new information.

Order of Meeting

1. The Chair welcomes the parent and his/her companion and introduces the Complaints Panel.
2. The Chair explains the purpose of the meeting, the procedure, and that all written evidence has been made available to all parties.
3. The parent/companion explains the complaint, calling in witnesses if appropriate.
4. The Complaints Panel may question the parent/companion and witnesses.
5. The parent and companion retire from the meeting.
6. The Chair welcomes the Head Teacher, Administrator or other staff members (where the complaint has been addressed by the any of these persons at stage 2).
7. The Chair explains the purpose of the meeting, the procedure, and that all written evidence has been made available to all parties.
8. The Head Teacher, Administrator or other staff members presents a response to the complaint, including action taken to address the complaint at stage 1 and 2 of the procedure and calling witnesses, if appropriate.
9. The Complaints Panel may question the Head Teacher, Administrator or other staff members.
10. The Head Teacher, Administrator or other staff members retire from the meeting.
11. The parent, together with his/her companion, is invited back into the room to make a final statement, and then retires.
12. The Head Teacher, Administrator or other staff members where applicable, are invited back into the room to make a final statement, and then retire.
13. The Complaints Panel considers the complaint, using its own findings and recommendations if appropriate, and reaches a unanimous or majority decision. The Complaints Panel also decides what action (if any) to take to resolve the complaint and, if appropriate, recommends changes to ensure similar complaints are not made in future.
14. When a decision has been made, the Chair recalls the parent, Head Teacher, Administrator or other staff members and each is informed of the outcome and any action to be taken.
15. All outcomes and copies of those findings and recommendations are confirmed in writing to both parties in accordance with the Complaints Procedure. This may be via electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and made available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Head Teacher.
16. Records will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing in the 'Complaints' folder at the school.
17. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be 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.

APPENDIX 5

SUMMARY OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

- 1. Informal** All informal complaints should be made by telephone, e-mail, in person or written to either your child's supervisor, the Head Teacher or Administrator via the office. The matter should be dealt with within **5 school days** of the verbal complaint.
- 2. Formal** If the complaint is not successfully resolved after step one, the complaint should be written or e-mailed to the Head Teacher, again via the office. The written complaint will be acknowledged within **5 school days**. The matter should be dealt with within **10 school days** of the Head Teacher receiving the written complaint.
- 3. Panel** If the complaint is still not successfully resolved after step one and step two, the Trustees must be contacted in writing **within 10 school days**, copying the original complaint form.
A panel will be set up by the Chair of Trustees of at least two persons, one of whom is not a school manager, to discuss the complaint.
The complaint will be heard by the Complaints Panel within **15 school days** of receiving the complaint.
Parents will be allowed to attend the panel. A friend may accompany them.
The matter should be dealt with within **5 school days** of the panel meeting.
The panel will put its findings and recommendations in writing.
All parties will get a copy.
Records will be kept on file and the final level needed to sort the matter, from the date of the resolution of the complaint plus 6 years

Confidentiality will be provided for all the above.