



SIMON LANGTON
Grammar School for Boys

Complaints Policy

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Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys is committed to providing the very best education for our young people and we want our students to be healthy, happy, safe and successful. We recognise the importance of establishing and maintaining good relationships with parents, carers and the wider community. We are aware that there may be occasions where people have concerns or complaints and the following procedure sets out the steps that should be followed in order to resolve these as promptly, fairly and informally as possible.

School governing bodies are required under Section 29 of the Education Act 2002 to have in place a procedure for dealing with complaints relating to the school. Sometimes when concerns are more specific, there are alternative and more appropriate policies for dealing with them. The following lists specific topics and the correct policy to refer to should you have a concern or complaint. You can access these policies on the school website or ask for a copy from the school office.

- Pupil Admissions: please see the school's 'Admissions' policy
- Pupil Exclusions; please see the school's 'Behaviour and Discipline' policy or 'Exclusion' policy
- Special Educational Needs: you can use this policy to complain unless your child has an Education, Health and Care Plan and you wish to appeal against a decision that the local authority has taken. If this is the case, you need to contact the local authority.
- Staff grievance, capability or disciplinary; these are covered by separate school policies and procedures
- Anonymous complaints: Please refer to the school's 'Whistleblowing' policy
- Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information Requests: please see the school's 'Data protection' and 'Freedom of Information' Policies

Aims and principles of the policy

This policy aims to:

- Encourage the resolution of concerns and complaints by informal means wherever possible
- Ensure that concerns are dealt with quickly, fully and fairly within defined time limits wherever possible
- Provide effective and appropriate responses to concerns and complaints
- Maintain good relationships between the school and all those involved

Where concerns are raised, the school intends for these to be dealt with fairly, openly and promptly. The governing body has approved the following procedure which explains what you should do if you have any concerns about the school.

Where appropriate, the school may offer mediation to resolve a concern or complaint at any stage of the process. The school may also use someone independent from the school to investigate a complex issue and to report back to the Head of School, Executive Headteacher, Chair of Governors or Governor Complaints Panel (depending on which the stage of the process the complaint is being dealt with).

Raising Concerns

The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the complaints procedure. Where you have a concern or query about any aspect of the school or your child's education or wellbeing, raise this with your child's Form Tutor or Head of Year in the first instance. Ideally they will be able to address your concerns immediately or can arrange a meeting with you to discuss the issue.

All concerns will be dealt with confidentially, although it may be necessary to take notes if the matter may need to be taken further or may arise again in the future.

Safeguarding

Wherever a complaint indicates that a child's wellbeing or safety is at risk, the school is under a duty to report this immediately to the local authority. Any action taken will be in accordance with the school's 'Safeguarding' policy.

Social Media

In order for complaints to be resolved as quickly and fairly as possible, we ask that complainants do not raise concerns or discuss them publicly via social media. Complaints will be dealt with confidentially by the school and we expect complainants to observe confidentiality also.

Complaints that result in staff capability or disciplinary

If at any formal stage of a complaint it is determined that staff disciplinary or capability proceedings are necessary, the details of any action will remain confidential to the Head of School and/or the individual's line manager. The complainant is not entitled to participate in the process or receive any detail about the proceedings or outcome.

Complaints about the Head of School, Executive Headteacher or the Governors

Where a complaint concerns the Head of School, the complainant should first approach the Head of School in an attempt to resolve the issue informally. If the complainant is not satisfied with this outcome they should write to the Executive Headteacher outlining that they wish to take a complaint forward. The Stage 3 process will then commence and the Executive Headteacher will take the process forward.

Likewise, if a complaint concerns the Executive Headteacher, attempts should be made to address the issue informally with the Executive Headteacher. If this does not resolve the issue then complainant should write to the Clerk of Governors requesting that their complaint be dealt with by the Chair of Governors. The stage 4 stage will then commence.

Where a complaint concerns a governor, the same process applies as for the Executive Headteacher. Where a complaint concerns the Chair of Governors the procedure at Stage 4 will apply but the Vice Chair or an independent investigator will take the process forward.

The Stages of the Complaints Process

Stage 1 – Informal Complaint

Please start by telling your child's Form Tutor or Head of Year about your concern. This is usually the best and quickest way of resolving issues. In some cases, they may feel it more appropriate to refer you to a more senior or experienced member of staff who will try to resolve the concern informally.

- It is recommended that you make an appointment to speak to the Form Tutor or Head of Year as soon as possible as this will give both parties the opportunity to talk about the issue without being interrupted
- It is important to recognise that schools are busy organisations and may not be able to offer an appointment straight away
- The purpose of this meeting should be to establish the nature of the concern and to seek a resolution to the problem
- It is good practice for the Form Tutor or Head of Year to make a brief written record of the concerns raised and any actions agreed
- They may need to carry out an investigation or talk to others before they can respond to you. You should be given a timescale for a response. We aim for this timescale to be 10 working days, however depending on the complexities of the complaint, this may be longer.

Stage 2 – Formal Written Complaint (non- parental complaints are likely to go straight to this stage)

If you feel dissatisfied with the outcome of discussions with the Form Tutor or Head of Year, you should then contact the Head of School either by arranging an appointment to see them, or by putting your complaint in writing.

Your letter should set out clearly the concern and why you feel the issue has not been resolved through informal channels. It is also helpful if you can set out what resolution you are seeking.

- The Head of School will consider the complaint and in doing so will:
 - Establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
 - Meet or contact you if they need further information;
 - Clarify what you feel would put things right if this has not been set out in your letter;
 - Interview those involved in the matter and those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
 - Conduct any interviews with an open mind;
 - Keep notes of any interview for the record

The final three points may be delegated to an investigating officer by the Head of School if appropriate.

- The Head of School will keep in mind ways in which the complaint can be resolved. It may be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:
 - an apology
 - an explanation
 - an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better (please note this is not an admission of negligence)
 - an assurance that the event complained of will not recur
 - an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
 - an undertaking to review policies and practice in light of the complaint

It may also be the case that the complaint may not have any substance and is therefore considered to be unfounded or unsubstantiated.

The Head of School will discuss the outcome with you and should send a detailed response within a maximum of 20 school days. Where this proves to be unrealistic, you will be informed in writing and given an estimate of how long it will take to provide a detailed response.

Where you are unhappy about the decision the Head of School has made about your complaint, this does not become a complaint about the Head of School or staff member concerned. However, you will be advised of your entitlement to take your original complaint to the next stage by writing to the Executive Headteacher as soon as possible after receiving

the decision, briefly outlining the content of the complaint and requesting that a governor complaints panel is convened.

Stage 3 – Executive Headteacher

If you are not satisfied with the response of the Head of School, or you have a concern or complaint that is specifically about the Head of School, which has not been resolved informally, then you must write to the Executive Headteacher as soon as possible after receiving the decision, briefly outlining the content of the complaint and requesting that the complaint is reviewed. The steps outlined in Stage 2 will then be repeated by the Executive Headteacher and a response will be made within a maximum of 20 school days. Where this proves to be unrealistic, you will be informed in writing and given an estimate of how long it will take to provide a detailed response.

Stage 4 – Governor Panel

If you are not satisfied with the response of the Executive Headteacher, or you have a concern or complaint that is specifically about the Executive Headteacher which has not been resolved informally, then you must write to the clerk to the governing body as soon as possible after receiving the decision, briefly outlining the content of the complaint and requesting that a governor complaints panel is convened and marking any envelope or email “urgent, private and confidential” for the attention of the Clerk to Governors.

- The Clerk to the Governing Body will acknowledge receipt of the letter within 5 school days. The acknowledgement will inform the complainant that three members of the school’s governing body will hear the complaint within 20 working days of receiving the complaint. The letter will invite the complainant to attend also explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further documentation relevant to the complaint.
- For complaints specifically about the Executive Headteacher, the Chair of Governors will arrange for the complaint to be investigated, either by him/herself or by an appropriate independent investigator.
- A meeting of the Governors Complaints Panel will be convened. No governors with prior involvement in the issues complained about will be included on the panel and no staff governors will be used. An experienced governor will chair the panel meeting. The chair/clerk of the complaints panel will contact the complainant with the arrangements.

- Once the panel has been held, the complainant and the school will be informed of their decision within five school working days. If it is not possible to meet these timescales then the chair of the panel will contact both parties to discuss a mutually convenient date.

Stage 5 – Escalation to Secretary of State for Education

If the complainant remains unsatisfied by the outcome of the governors' panel, they are advised to contact the Secretary of State for Education. The Secretary of State has a duty to consider all complaints raised but will only intervene where the governing body has acted unlawfully or unreasonably.

The School Complaints Unit considers complaints relating to local authority maintained schools in England on behalf of the Secretary of State. They will look at whether the school's complaints policy and other relevant statutory policies were adhered to. They will also check whether the school's policy adheres to education legislation. However the unit will not re-investigate the substance of the complaint. This remains the responsibility of the school. If the Schools Complaints Unit finds that the school has not handled a complaint in accordance with its procedure, the unit may request that the complaint is looked at again.

The School Complaints Unit can be contacted by calling the national helpline on 0370 000 2288 or by going online at: www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus or by writing to:

Department for Education

School Complaints Unit

2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester M1 2WD

Policy for unreasonable complainants

Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

The school defines unreasonable complainants as *'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'*.

Examples: A complaint may 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 while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

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

- maliciously;
- aggressively;

- using threats, intimidation or violence;
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- knowing it to be false;
- using falsified information;
- Publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Head of School, Executive Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an ‘unreasonable’ marking.

If the behaviour continues the Head of School or Chair of Governors will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include barring an individual from school premises.

Barring from the School Premises

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. We will therefore act to ensure our school remains a safe place for students, staff and other members of their community.

If a parent’s behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask him/her to leave school premises. In serious cases, the Head of School, Executive Headteacher or the local authority can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make. We will give the parent the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing. The decision to bar should then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent should be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the Head of School, Executive Headteacher or Chair of Governors. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the Department for Education. Once the school's own complaints procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.