



St. Michael's School

Parental Complaints Policy

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy is in place to meet the regulatory requirement under the “*Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003*” for the school to have a procedure for the handling of complaints. This policy is available on our website or printed copy from the office upon request. The policy and procedure can be used by parents/guardians of existing pupils only (i.e. those currently enrolled at the school and under a current admissions’ contract). As a boarding school, this policy is also written with reference to Standard 5 of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools in Wales.
- 1.2 St. Michael’s School aims to ensure that any complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently, quickly and at the appropriate level and resolved as soon as possible. We will try to resolve every complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, we will review our systems and procedures in light of the circumstances of the complaint.
- 1.3 We recognise that a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment and so we need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. Parents and pupils should never feel that making a complaint will adversely affect a pupil or his/her opportunities at the school.
- 1.4 This policy only applies to complaints from parents of current pupils and to parents of former pupils if the complaint was raised when the pupil was still enrolled at the school. We are also unable to consider complaints which relate to suspension or termination of places due to non-payment or late payment of fees or actions taken in respect of recovering fees due.
- 1.5 In this policy, unless otherwise stated, reference to “the Headmaster” means the Headmaster of St Michael’s School.
- 1.6 We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. When we refer to **working days**, we mean Monday to Friday, when school is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the school’s website. During holiday periods, the availability of staff to deal with a complaint could have a substantial effect on the timescales presented here and therefore they become advisory only during holiday periods, where any proceedings may be adjourned until they can be dealt with satisfactorily and accurately.

2 Management of complaints

- 2.1 The school’s complaints procedure has three stages:
- 2.1.1 **Stage 1:** informal raising of a complaint with a member of staff orally or in writing – further details of this procedure are set out in Appendix 1.

- 2.1.1 **Stage 2:** a formal complaint in writing to the Headmaster – further details of this procedure are set out in Appendix 2.
- 2.1.3 **Stage 3:** reference to the Complaints Panel – further details of this procedure are set out in Appendix 3.
- 2.2 Complaints may be entered directly into stage two of the process, where stage one has already been followed by some other means.
- 2.3 Separate procedures apply in the event of a safeguarding or child protection issue, in which case the Safeguarding and Child Protection policy should be consulted; or if the Headmaster permanently excludes a pupil from the school and the parents seek a review of that decision, in which case the Pupil Exclusions and Discipline for Learning policies should be consulted.
- 2.4 There is also in operation separately for the receiving and hearing of pupil complaints, known as the Pupil Complaints & Concerns Policy. This is available on request to all pupils and boarders, although summary details are found within the ‘Welcome Guide’ which is given to all pupils each September at the start of the academic year in the Senior School.

3 Record keeping and confidentiality

- 3.1 A written record will be kept of complaints, and of whether they were resolved at the stage 2 or proceeded to a stage 3 Complaints Panel Hearing, including the action taken by the school as a result of the complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). The number of formal complaints registered during the preceding school year will be supplied to parents on request.
- 3.2 Records of complains will be reviewed regularly by the Headmaster to monitor any concentration or trends in the complaints received and appropriate action taken.
- 3.3 Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access is requested by Welsh Government or where disclosure is required in the course of an inspection or under other legal authority.

4 Complaints to Care Inspectorate Wales

- 4.1 Parents of boarders have the right to contact Care Inspectorate Wales if they have a complaint concerning the welfare of their child.
- 4.2 Care Inspectorate Wales can be contacted at <https://careinspectorate.wales/> on 0300 7900 126 or at the following address:

Care Inspectorate Wales
Government Buildings
Picton Terrace
Carmarthen SA31 3BT

- 4.3 It is expected that complaints made under this policy will go through the school's parental complaints procedure as detailed here, before Care Inspectorate Wales is contacted.

Date reviewed: September 2023

Date for next review: September 2024

Person responsible for this policy: Headmaster

Appendix 1 Stage 1 – dealing with concerns and difficulties informally

1 Informal resolution of a complaint

1.1 We expect that most complaints can be resolved informally. For example, dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care or a billing error should be able to be resolved by the relevant member of staff. Complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation are taken very seriously and may need to be dealt with at Stage 2 without action at Stage 1.

2 Who to contact

2.1 Where appropriate, complaints should initially be raised with the relevant class teacher, Pastoral Leader or Houseparent, as appropriate.

2.2 Parents may wish to raise any higher level concerns directly with the Deputy Head, Head of Prep or Headmaster.

2.3 A complaint against the Headmaster should be put in writing to the Chair of Governors (contact details available upon request) who will follow the procedure set out in Stage 2.

2.4 An informal complaint provided in writing will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within two working days of receipt during term time as soon as practicable during the holidays. It is however customary for us to respond generally within 24 hours to the majority of informally raised complaints. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing but a record of the matter will usually be made on the school's database or through internal email.

2.5 A complaint which has not been resolved by informal means to the parent or guardian's satisfaction, within 15 working days, should be raised in writing to the school as a formal Stage 2 complaint using the procedure set out in Appendix 2. The complaint does not need to state the words 'formal' if it is clear or evident that the complaint is intended in this way, however in these circumstances the Headmaster or his representative will ask the complainant if they wish for it to be treated as such and dealt with under this policy.

2.6 Remember also that the school has an 'independent listener' and their details may be obtained from the school office.

Appendix 2 Stage 2 – formal complaint

1 How to make a formal complaint

- 1.1 If a parent is dissatisfied with the response to the complaint under Stage 1, or the complaint requires investigation or involves dissatisfaction with some aspect of the school's policies or management, the complaint should be made under Stage 2.
- 1.2 The full details of the complaint should be set out in writing and sent with all relevant documents and full contact details to the Headmaster.
- 1.3 The complaint will be acknowledged by the telephone, email or letter within three working days during term time, and as soon as practicable during the holidays, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale.

2 Investigation

- 2.1 The Headmaster will ask a senior member of staff to act as Investigator and may seek advice or counsel from both internal (leadership/board members) and external parties (consultant/legal expert/the authorities, etc.). The Investigator may request additional information from you and may wish to speak to you personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- 2.2 The Investigator will prepare a report on the investigation which will be considered by the Headmaster.
- 2.3 Where appropriate, the Headmaster may act as the Investigator or share this responsibility with someone else jointly.

3 Decision

- 3.1 The Headmaster will then notify the complainant by email or letter of his/her Stage 2 decision and the reasons for it within 10 working days from the receipt of the formal complaint. Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay, the parents will be notified of this and informed of the new timescales as soon as possible.
- 3.2 Please note that any complaint received within one month of the end of a term or half term is likely to take longer to resolve owing to the presence of school holidays and the unavailability of personnel required for the investigation to be undertaken properly.
- 3.3 If a parent is dissatisfied with the Headmaster's decision, the parent can request that the complaint be referred to the Complaints Panel under Stage 3 using the procedure set out in Appendix 3.

Appendix 3 Stage 3 – Complaints Panel

1 What is a complaints Panel Hearing?

1.1 A Complaints Panel Hearing (Hearing) is a review of the decisions taken at Stage 2 by the Headmaster (or in circumstances where the formal complaint concerns the Headmaster, the Chair of Governors appointed to act in his place). The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of stage 2 of the complaints procedure. There is therefore no need to re-address the complaint or re-write it for the benefit for the Panel, since the original complaint is being referred to Panel.

1.2 The role of the Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:

1.2.1 the documents provided by both parties and

1.2.2 any representations made by the Parents/Guardians and the Headmaster

and to reach a decision, on the balance of probabilities, as to whether each complaint is made out in whole or in part.

1.3 It is not within the powers of the Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils or parents. The Complaints Panel may make recommendations to the school on these matters or any other issues as appropriate.

2 How to request a hearing

2.1 A request for a hearing must be put in writing to the Chair of Governors within five working days of the decision complained of. The request will usually only be considered if the procedures at Stages 1 and 2 have been completed.

2.2 The written request should include:

2.2.1 a copy of all relevant documents and full contact details;

2.2.2 details of all grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired;

2.2.3 a list of the documents which the parents believe to be in the school's possession and wish the Complaints Panel to see; and

2.2.4 whether you propose to be accompanied to the hearing by someone who is legally qualified (see paragraph 3.3 below).

2.3 If assistance with the request is required, for example because of a disability, please inform the Chair of Governors of this who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

2.4 The Chair of Governors will acknowledge the request for a hearing in writing within two working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable during the holidays.

2.5 Every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within 20 working days of receipt of the request. However, parents should note that the Complaints Panel will not normally sit during half terms or school holidays, save for exceptional circumstances and at the sole discretion of the Chair of Governors.

3 Planning the hearing

3.1 As soon as reasonably practicable, and usually no less than ten working days before the hearing, the Chair of Governors will send written notification to each party of the date, time and place of the hearing.

- 3.2 Copies of any additional documents you wish the Complaints Panel to consider should be sent to the Chair of Governors to be received at least five working days prior to the hearing.
- 3.3 You may be accompanied to the hearing by another person, for example a relative or friend. The hearing is not legal proceedings and so legal representation is not necessary. If you do wish to be accompanied by someone who is legally qualified, you should have notified the Chair of Governors of this in your initial request for a hearing. If you did not do so and subsequently wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, you must inform the Chair of Governors of this at least five working days prior to the hearing and the parents should note that the Complaints Panel will wish to speak to the parents directly. This person will not be permitted to act as an advocate or to address the hearing unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Panel.
- 3.4 Clerk to the Directors/School Board will circulate a copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the Complaints Panel to all parties usually at least three working days prior to the hearing.
- 3.5 Whilst the hearing will take place either on school premises (or at an alternative local place with the Panel's permission or by their request), one or more members of the Panel may join the hearing by way of video or tele conferencing facilities, such that they are able to participate to an appropriate degree in the proceedings. This step is considered necessary to facilitate the timely consideration of any complaints referred to the Panel, given that members may be geographically remote from one another on occasion.

4 Composition of the Complaints Panel

- 4.1 The Complaints Panel will normally comprise three individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint, including one independent member who has no connection with the governance, management or running of the school.
- 4.2 The parents may ask the Chair of Governors to inform them who has been appointed to sit on the Complaints Panel ahead of the hearing, though this will always be explained at the time of the hearing.
- 4.3 The Complaints Panel members will appoint one of themselves to be the Chair of the Panel throughout the proceedings, as guided by the advice of the proprietor/Director.

5 The Hearing

- 5.1 The hearing will be conducted in an informal manner.
- 5.2 The parties shall have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Complaints Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and / or may take written statements into account.
- 5.3 All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. A clerk appointed by the Complaints Panel will take a handwritten minute of the proceedings.
- 5.4 All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is

dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his/her comment will be minuted.

- 5.5 The Chair may, at his/her discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue. This may include an adjournment to take legal advice.
- 5.6 A hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.
- 5.7 When the Chair of the Panel considers that all the issues have been sufficiently discussed, he/she will conclude the hearing.

6 **The decision**

- 6.1 The Complaints Panel will reach a decision on a balance of probabilities unless there is an agreed position.
- 6.2 The decision, findings and any recommendations will be confirmed in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, within ten working days of the hearing. The decisions, findings and any recommendations will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the Governing Body and the Headmaster.
- 6.3 The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the school's Parental Complaints Policy & Procedure.