

# **Complaints Policy**

## **Introduction**

The Covenant Christian School seeks at all times to operate as a partnership between home and school and seeks to work together with parents in educating children with shared aims and objectives.

We encourage clear, effective and open communication between Parents, Teachers, Trustees and any external parties who may have legitimate involvement as a significant other for a student.

It is recognised that the more involved a parent is in the life of the school, the greater the opportunity to communicate. We therefore make every effort to communicate with all equally through regular e-mail, whatsapp groups, the SAM and opportunities for face to face conversation at drop off and pick up.

**It is accepted that there may be times when Parents, Teachers or other parties may have issues which require further action than an informal conversation. This policy is intended to support all parties when there is a concern and a desire to resolve an issue. The Covenant Christian School takes all concerns and complaints seriously.**

If disputes occur, the school aims to deal with the issue promptly, and resolve them in line with the school ethos.

## **The purpose of this Complaints Procedure is to reassure parents and others that:**

Complaints will be dealt with in a fair, open and responsive way, with the aim of achieving a speedy and satisfactory resolution.

Every effort will be made to retain confidentiality where requested and possible.

The school recognises that a willingness to listen to questions and criticism can lead to improvements in school practices and provision for all pupils.

This procedure has been drawn up using:

- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations, 2014, to ensure that schools deal with the handling of complaints effectively.

This policy is available on our website or from the school reception.

The following Biblical principles guide our policy and practice:

◆ We make every effort to resolve complaints and disputes to the satisfaction of all sides.

“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble.” (Hebrews 12: 14-15)

◆ We try to resolve complaints and disputes within the school community.

“If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgement instead of before the Lord's people?” (1 Corinthians 6: 1)

◆ We will not consider that the School is always right and hope other parties will adopt the same attitude towards their own views.

“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourselves with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” (Romans 12: 3)

◆ We expect that forgiveness will be a part of the resolution of any complaint whatever the outcome for the parties involved. “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” (Colossians 3: 13)

◆ It is accepted that we all make mistakes. “Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect,…” (James 3: 1-2)

◆ If a matter concerns a breach of the Law, parties should contact the appropriate authorities. (See also Safeguarding Policy). “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which 1 God has established.” (Romans 13: 1)

◆ Established procedures should be followed so that disputes can be settled quickly and fairly. “Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.” (1 Corinthians 14: 40)

## **A concern or a complaint?**

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

**A concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”

CCS seeks to take any concerns seriously at the earliest stage in order to resolve matters and avoid the need for any party to take matters to Complaints level.

The majority of issues will be resolved informally through discussion with a class teacher or member of Management.

The requirement to have a Complaints Procedure need not in any way undermine efforts to resolve a concern informally. Concerns which are discussed informally and are addressed, or are being addressed are not recorded as part of our complaints procedure.

Parents are encouraged to develop a good relationship with their child's class teachers in order to discuss progress, and to help with addressing concerns at the earliest possible stage.

- The first point of contact for a parent regarding a concern about their child would usually be the class teachers, as part of ongoing relationships.
- However, either the teacher or parent may choose to involve SLT informally at any point to help address issues.

A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”.

A complaint may be ‘informal’ initially and be resolved, or progress to ‘formal’ using the procedure below.

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 which fall outside the scope of 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, teachers, guardians, grandparents, neighbours of the school or anyone with an interest in the work of the school. Informal complaints may be made by telephone, email, in person, or be written.
- Formal complaints should be made in writing, either by email or letter to the management team initially.

## **SUMMARY**

### **Concern Raised**



Approach the person involved and seek to resolve informally and privately if preferred. Parents should contact the class teacher in the first instance regarding concerns about their child

(Parents are encouraged to talk to class teachers regularly to develop a good relationship, so that any concerns may be addressed as soon as they arise).



Complainants may discuss concerns with the Management team at any time. At this point reassurances may be made, or if deemed appropriate, intervention can be put in place to resolve the issue

(If a concern has been raised as described as above, and not resolved, parents may speak with the head teacher or deputy head teacher informally). **Almost all issues are resolved by this stage.**



### **Stage 1**

If the matter is not resolved, make an ‘informal complaint’ face to face, verbally or via email, to the HeadTeacher who will discuss the matter with the Management Team and liaise with the complainant within 14 days.

### **Stage 2**

If the matter is not resolved, make a ‘formal complaint’ in writing to the Trustees. The Chair and another Governor will undertake an investigation, draw conclusions, make recommendations and ensure that they are implemented.

### **Stage 3**

If it is felt that the matter is not resolved, write to the Trustees Governors who will convene a panel of independent parties (Complaints appeal panel) to discuss the complaint and make recommendations.

### **Detailed Procedure - Resolution of Complaints and Disputes**

Any person who has a complaint or is in dispute should firstly determine the appropriate procedure to be followed. Normally the complainant should first approach the person they have a complaint around to attempt a resolution. The issue may be resolved there and then. Such conversations should be informal and private and used to discover the facts. “Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.” Proverbs 26:20 3 When problems first occur, our personality and temperament can be affected by anger. It would be appropriate to take time to “put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, ...” and “put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another ... (Colossians 3: 1-17) before this first meeting.

Please note, a parent should not directly approach a pupil about a complaint and complaints should not be made anonymously.

If the concern is serious, or has potentially serious implications, then this should be referred to senior staff. If the matter has not been resolved at the initial stage, below are the three detailed and defined stages to the official Complaints Procedure. At each stage it is helpful to clarify exactly who will be involved and what will happen.

### **Record keeping**

Records of all conversations and meetings to resolve formal complaints will be kept.

If necessary, the Trustees will meet to discuss the complaints, and 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, complainants will be informed.

There may be rare occasions when, despite all the stages of the procedure having been followed, a party remains dissatisfied. If the party 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 - Complaint investigated by SLT (Detailed process)**

The Complaints Standards state that a Complaints Procedure should “allow for a complaint to be made and considered initially on an informal basis.”

On the occasions where a person has raised a concern directly with school staff without any formality, it may be unclear whether the person is making a complaint, seeking information, or has misunderstood a situation. In any effect, the school aims to resolve the concern at this point in a speedy and effective way. Records will still be kept of these concerns using the usual communication records.

All parties volunteering in school are welcome to approach SLT to discuss a concern which may be addressed by reassurance or intervention.

Clarification may be sought at this time about whether this is sufficient to resolve the issue, or whether a complaint is being made under Stage 1 of the procedure.

If the concern is not resolved at this time and a complaint is confirmed, the opportunity to discuss the matter with Head Teacher/management will be given. If the complaint involves the Head teacher, the complainant may discuss the issue with the Chair of Trustees as an informal complaint. The complaint may be made verbally, face-to-face or via email.

Usually, the Head Teacher will discuss the issue with the complainant and those involved, with the aim of resolving the complaint as soon as possible.

The school will respect the views of a complainant who indicates that they would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. The Head Teacher may refer the complaint to management or the Chair of Trustees.

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. 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 responded to as soon as possible, and be addressed within 14 school days of the initial verbal or written complaint.

If this informal process has been exhausted and no satisfactory solution has been found, the complainant 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. Either party will be able to take the complaint to the next stage.

If wishing to proceed, the complainant will be invited to put the complaint in writing to the Chair of Trustees.

**A confidential record of complaints reaching this level and beyond will be kept by the Head Teacher.** The record will state whether the complaint was resolved at the preliminary stage or proceeded to the next stage.

## **STAGE 2: FORMAL - complaint referred to Trustees for further investigation**

If either party is unhappy with the decision in stage 1, they should write to the Trustees outlining their complaint within 14 school days of the response at the previous stage. They may use the form found in Appendix 4. The Trustees will inform the Governors that a complaint has been made, but not discuss the details. One or two Trustees will be nominated at this time to proceed with the complaint, alongside the Chair. The Chair, or another Trustee will acknowledge the written complaint within 3 school days of receipt and provide an opportunity to meet the parties to discuss the complaint within 14 school days. The Chair, and appointed trustees will investigate the complaint by meeting with both parties as a mediator or to establish the facts, making sure that both parties understand them. They will suggest a way forward, or make a decision as to what each party should do. If an investigation is required into the facts of the dispute, the Chair of Trustees will keep both parties informed as to progress during consideration of the complaint. A written response outlining the findings and outcome will normally be made within 14 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 and what action, if any, the school proposes to take to resolve the matter. The Trustees may reach one of several outcomes at this stage and will make the final decision on the matter. They may

- Reject the complaint
- Uphold the complaint,
- Investigate the claim further.

If the complainant still remains dissatisfied, they will be advised that, in order to progress the complaint further at Stage 3, they must notify the Trustees in writing within 14 school days.

The Chair will advise the full Trustee Board of the situation.

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

The School will publish the numbers of complaints brought to the Trustees under the formal procedure (Stage 2) during the preceding year on the website. (See Appendix 1) STAGE 3:

### **STAGE 3: Review by the Trustees Complaints Appeal Panel**

If the complaint is still not successfully resolved after Stage one and Stage two, a Complaints panel will be set up by the Trustees of at least three persons, to consider the complaint. A request for a hearing should be made, in writing, to the Chair of Trustees within 14 school days of being informed of the Trustees final decision at Stage 2. 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 complainant by the Panel within 3 school days. The letter will inform the complainant that the complaint will be heard by the Panel as soon as possible and usually within 14 school days of receiving the request. It will also inform the complainant 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 7 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 complainant to be accompanied by a companion of her/his choice will also be explained in the letter. All parties have the right to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish. The Chair of Trustees will nominate members of the complaints panel which may consist of three to five members and will be made up of a combination of the following:

- The Chair of Trustees as chair of the complaints appeal panel
- At least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, including one person independent of the running of the school, nominated by the Chair of Trustees
- A member of the school's Trustees board.

The Complaints Panel will send a copy of the letter of acknowledgement of the complaint to all the members of the Complaints Panel, and the Head Teacher. They will request a written report of the investigations up to this point from those involved at Stage 1 and 2 of the process, within 7 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 7 school days in advance. 6 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 complainant; the Chair of the Trustees, the Head Teacher, and each panel member. This will be provided as soon as possible and, in any event, at least 7 school days prior to the meeting. The meeting will be held following the procedures for hearing a complaint detailed in Appendix 3. A written decision will be sent to the complainant and the Complaints Panel and/or Head Teacher within 7 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 Trustee Body is acting or proposing to act unreasonably; or
- The Trustee 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 Chair of Trustees 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 approved by Management and Trustees

May 2026

## **Appendices**

### **APPENDIX 1**

**To be reported Annually via the Headteachers report to Trustees and SAM**

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| <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Numbers of complaints brought to the Trustees under the formal complaints procedure</u></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Academic Year ..... to .....</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Signed</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Date</u></b></p> |
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### **APPENDIX 2**

#### **The Composition of the Trustees Complaints Panel**

The complaints panel may consist of three to five members and will be made up of a combination of the following:

- The Chair of Trustees as chair of the complaints appeal panel
- At least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, including one person independent of the running of the school nominated by the Chair of Trustees
- A member of the school's governing body

The Governors 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 to be a member of the Complaints Panel. The role of the Head Teacher 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 3**

### **Introduction**

The aim of the meeting is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. The Chair of the Complaints Panel will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted. The meeting will follow the structured order below, but 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 a 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 complainant 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 complainant/companion explains the complaint, calling in witnesses if appropriate.
4. The Complaints Panel may question the complainant/companion and witnesses.
5. The complainant and companion retire from the meeting.
6. The Chair welcomes the Head Teacher, or other staff members (where the complaint has been addressed by 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, or other staff members present 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, or other staff members.
10. The Head Teacher, or other staff members retire from the meeting.
11. The complainant, together with his/her companion, is invited back into the room to make a final statement, and then retires.

12. The Head Teacher, 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 complainant, Head Teacher, 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 4**

Please use this form to notify school of a Formal Complaint  
(Stage 2 and/or Stage 3)

Child's Name (to whom issue relates)

Class Teachers

Complainant Name

Contact details

### Details of Complaint:

- Please be as specific as possible e.g., giving dates, who was involved and where etc.
- Please attach a 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 -----

Please return the completed form to the Chair of Trustees at the school. Records will be kept on file in the 'Complaints' folder at the school.

