



Complaints Policy

Lead Person : Deputy Headmaster

Governing Body Committee : Staff & Pay

Introduction

The Governing Body is required by the Education Act 2002 to have a policy for dealing with parents' complaints.

The Crypt School prides itself on the quality of teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However if parents or guardians do have a complaint about school issues they can expect it to be treated by the School efficiently and sensitively in accordance with this policy.

Aims of the Policy

Complaints can cover a wide variety of matters that concern parents. The school expects ALL parental complaints to be taken seriously and to be dealt with comprehensively and as far as possible in confidence. It is important that all stakeholders feel valued and involved with the school and are able to voice their concerns. This is helped where the culture of the school is open and where all complaints are received in a positive manner.

The policy aims to ensure that all complaints from parents, (and also pupils and others) are dealt with as quickly and sensitively as possible, and by the person best able to do so. As far as possible all concerns should be dealt with as informally as possible.

A parent, pupil or other complainant should be able to expect to have a response, even if not the final response, to their complaint within 24 hours of having made the complaint.

If parents, pupils or other complainants wish to register a formal complaint they should be asked to complete the school's Formal Complaint Form and return it to the Complaints Co-ordinator.

Types of Concerns and Complaints

The majority of complaints received by the school fall into the following categories:

- financial and administrative;

- academic (course programme, unsatisfactory teaching, too much/too little homework, progress in a particular subject etc);
- pastoral (discipline/indiscipline, inappropriate sanctions, bullying, overall progress of the child, unhappiness of child etc); and
- child protection (allegations against staff, handling of sensitive issues).

Responsibilities

Governing Body: for approving the policy, procedures, and guidelines, hearing and deciding on appeals, receiving reports, and advising the Head. The GB will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes annually or earlier if so determined by the Chair.

Chair of the GB: to receive complaints at Stage 3, to nominate a governor or panel to hear the appeal, and to check that the correct procedure is followed.

Nominated Governor or Chair of the Panel at Stage 3: to ensure that:

- the parties understand the procedure;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are established;
- complainants are put at ease;
- the hearing is conducted as informally as possible;
- the panel is open-minded and acts independently;
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome, or has been involved in the issues previously;
- all parties have the chance to be heard; and
- any written material is seen by all parties.

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk will act as the reference point for the complainant at Stage 3. The Clerk must:

- set convenient dates and times and venues for hearings;
- collate any written material and forward it to the parties;
- meet and welcome the parties;
- record the proceedings; and
- notify the parties of the decision.

Headmaster: for the overall internal management of the procedures, for hearing complaints at the second stage (see below), ensuring that the procedures are monitored and reviewed and reports made to the GB.

Business Manager: for administrative, environmental and financial queries and complaints.

Heads of Department and other middle managers: for dealing with and where possible resolving complaints about academic matters/programmes of study/teaching methods at stage 1 of the formal procedure.

Heads of Year: for dealing with and where possible resolving complaints concerning overall pupil progress, discipline issues, pastoral care at stage 1 of the formal procedure.

Mr A Courtenay, Assistant Head: for child protection issues. If the complaint concerns a child protection issue or involves an allegation of abuse by a member of the school staff, the 'named person' responsible for child protection complaint should be informed by the member of staff / Headmaster.

All staff: for hearing any concerns brought to them by parents and pupils and reassuring them that they will be dealt with as soon as possible by the appropriate member of staff, and for informing the relevant staff of the concerns. And for passing any complaints received from other people who are not parents or pupils to the Complaints Coordinator.

Procedure

Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally. If parents or guardians have a complaint they should contact the pupil's form tutor, or teacher, or the Deputy Headmaster.

The complaint should be acknowledged by the school within 24 hours. The school aims to resolve informal complaints within 5 working days. The member of staff in receipt of the complaint will make a written note of it and the date on which it was received. If a trivial/simple verbal complaint is made it might be possible in most cases to resolve it immediately and informally. In more serious cases, or where a member of staff is uncertain, parents should always be asked to put their complaint in writing. This is to ensure that there is no conflict in determining what the complaint consists of and the action taken by the members of the school staff.

Formal Procedure

Every attempt will be made to resolve complaints informally to the parents' or guardians' satisfaction, but if this fails then the formal procedure will be followed. The parent or guardian should put their complaint in writing to the Headmaster.

After considering the nature of the complaint the Headmaster will determine whether it should be heard at stage 1 or 2 of the formal procedure. The Headmaster will also determine which member of staff should hear the complaint at stage 1.

- Stage 1 complaint heard by staff member (who is not subject of the complaint);
- Stage 2 complaint heard by Headmaster
- Stage 3 complaint heard by GB's complaints appeals panel.

Guidelines: Stage 1

All staff should listen carefully and patiently to parents' and pupils' complaints, recognising that the complaint is a matter of great concern to the parent or pupil, whether or not the complaint is ill founded.

The member of staff will inform the complainant of the action taken. If a resolution cannot be found the member of staff should inform the complainant of their right of appeal to the Head master (Stage 2) and inform the Headmaster of the action taken.

At Stage 1 the school should aim to resolve the complaint within 5 working days of receiving it.

Guidelines: Stage 2

The Headmaster will decide the outcome at this stage, but may delegate the collating of information to another member of staff.

The Head must normally resolve the matter within five working days of receiving notification of the complaint.

If the Headmaster is unable to resolve the issue it is open to the complainant to make representations to the governing body. (Stage 3)

Guidelines: Stage 3

Appeals to the Governing Body

Complainants who are not satisfied by the Head's decision re the complaint can make representations to the governing body. The complainant must write to the Chairman of the Governing Body giving details of the complaint. The Chair will nominate a governor (or panel) to hear the appeal.

The hearing must be within 10 days of the Chair receiving notice of the complaint. The complainant must be told of their right to be accompanied by a friend.

The nominated governor/panel will make its own procedures, and will agree these with the Chair, who will report them to the next governing body meeting. The governor/panel will ensure that the complainant is heard in private, is welcomed, and as far as possible is put at ease. Careful consideration must be taken when the complainant is a pupil. The governor/panel will hear the appeal(s), consider all the views expressed and decide the outcome.

The governor/panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or part;
- decide on appropriate action to resolve the complaint; or
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures.

The governing body's decision is binding. The decision at this stage must be communicated to the parties within three days of the hearing.

Dealing with Complaints through Ofsted

The Education (Investigation of Parents' Complaints) (England) Regulations 2007 brought in a new procedure for dealing with parents' complaints through Ofsted. The regulations set out what complaints can be investigated by Ofsted as qualifying or non-qualifying complaints. Ofsted cannot investigate a parental complaint until the parent has exhausted all internal methods and appeals. However, the Chief Inspector has the discretion to waive this restriction.

Vexatious Complaints

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after all stages have been properly followed, the Chair is empowered to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

Investigating Complaints

The person investigating the complaint will make sure that they:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning; and
- keep notes of the interview.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure the person attempting to resolve the complaint will keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might 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;
- 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; and
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

Complainants will be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. The governors acknowledge that an admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

The Head and Chair will attempt to identify areas of agreement between the parties, and to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred in order to create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Monitoring and Review

The Head will report to staff from time to time, and to the GB annually or earlier if the Chair so determines, on the number and type of complaints received and their outcomes.

Reviewed : November 2010, September 2011

Approved : Full Governors : October 2011