

The St Michael Steiner School

Parents' Complaints Policy and Procedure

Policy

The St. Michael Steiner School aims to provide quality teaching and pastoral care to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, we aim to deal with it fairly, thoroughly and as promptly as possible.

It has been our experience that parents are often reluctant to follow a formal complaints procedure, but this does not always mean their concerns are not serious. In any case, any concerns require some kind of response and the school will be proactive in trying to resolve issues as soon as they become apparent. If parents do not initiate the procedure as laid out below, for example if a complaint is sent to a Class Teacher, rather than to the College, or is made verbally, at any stage, the College will assess the level of the complaint and follow the relevant procedure accordingly.

Complaints at all levels, the level at which they were resolved, related correspondence, findings and recommendations made and action taken by the school, are recorded in the Complaints Log. The fact that a complaint has been made is recorded in the College and department minutes.

Complaints concerning Safeguarding/Child Protection issues will be dealt with according to the procedures for dealing with disclosures, laid out in the school's Safeguarding Policy (see separate document). Other complaints will be treated by the school according to the following procedure:

Procedure

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

- We will endeavour to resolve concerns and complaints quickly and informally if possible.
- Complaints made in writing about the Early Years will receive a response within 28 days (This is a statutory requirement).
- If parents have a concern or complaint related to their own child, they should normally contact their son/daughter's Class Teacher, Kindergarten Teacher, Parent & Child Group Leader or High School Class Guardian. In most cases, the matter will be resolved straight away by this method.
- If the Class Teacher, Kindergarten Teacher, Parent & Child Group Leader or High School Class Guardian cannot resolve the matter alone, they may consult another colleague.
- If the complaint concerns a member of staff other than the Class Teacher, Kindergarten Teacher, Parent & Child Group Leader or Class Guardian, it is advisable to contact that person directly if at all possible.
- Complaints of any kind about the school may be made directly to the College at college@stmichaelsteiner.com. Should the complainant not wish to make a formal complaint to the College Chair for whatever reason, the complainant may make their complaint to the Chair of Trustees using the email address chair.trustees@stmichaelsteiner.com, and the Trustee Chair will in most cases follow a similar course to the College Chair as outlined below.
- Unless explicitly asked not to, or the Chair feels it is inappropriate, they will usually refer these initial complaints to the relevant teacher. In such cases, the Chair may agree to facilitate a meeting between the parties concerned if it is requested or seems appropriate.
- The Class Teacher, Kindergarten Teacher, Parent & Child Group Leader or High School Class Guardian (or the College/Trustee Chair if they are dealing with the complaint) will make a written record, or file the email exchange if complaints are received in that form, of all the concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. If this record takes the form of written

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minutes from a meeting and/or conversation, these will be shown to the complainant in order to agree that they are an accurate record of what has been reported.

- In the event that the parties concerned fail to reach a satisfactory resolution within a reasonable time, then the complainant will be advised to proceed in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.
- If the complainant is not a parent of a child in the school, the complaint should be directed to the College or Trustee Chair (email addresses above) who will deal with the matter as deemed appropriate, referring it to the appropriate person or acting as mediator at a meeting.
- In order that they remain impartial if their input becomes necessary should the matter be taken further, details of the complaint will not be reported to other College members or trustees until it has been resolved. However, College should be informed at the next meeting that there has been a complaint and it should be recorded in the College minutes.

Stage 2 - Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the complainant(s) should put the complaint in writing to the College or Trustee Chair (email addresses above). They will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Chair will have a meeting with the complainant(s), normally within 7 days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- In any case, the complainant will normally be informed within 7 days of the steps that will be taken to address the complaint.
- It may be necessary for the Chair to carry out further investigations. They will inform the complainant of this and give an indicative time frame within which these investigations would be completed.
- The Chair will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. Such records will be viewed by everyone who was present at the meeting/interview in order to confirm their accuracy.
- Once the Chair is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and the complainant will be informed of the decision in writing. They will also give reasons for the decision.
- The Chair will ask the complainant to confirm within 5 days that they accept the decision or, if they are still not satisfied, to confirm that they wish to proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.
- In the absence of a response from the complainant at this stage, the matter will be considered to have been resolved.

Stage 3 - Hearing Group

If the complainant seeks to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) the matter will then be referred to the Hearing Group for consideration.

- The Hearing Group will be appointed by the College and will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint or in stages 1 or 2: a delegated College member, a Trustee of the school and a person who is entirely independent of the school and not known to the complainant. The independent member is a trained mediator and retired legal professional who has agreed to act in this capacity should the need arise.

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- The delegated College member, on behalf of the Hearing Group, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as is practicable, and normally within 7 days.
- If the Hearing Group deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than 3 days prior to the hearing.
- The complainant may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- If possible, the Hearing Group will resolve the complaint immediately without need for further investigation.
- Where further investigation is required, the Hearing Group will decide how it should be carried out.
- After due consideration of all the facts they consider relevant, the Hearing Group will reach a decision (and may make recommendations) which it shall normally complete within 7 days of the hearing.
- The decision of the Hearing Group will be final.
- The Hearing Group's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the complainant, the College Chair, the Chair of Trustees and, where relevant, the person(s) against whom the complaint was directed. These will be filed with the Complaints Log.
- In accordance with the Staff Grievance Procedure, if a complaint against a member of staff is upheld, the Hearing Group will give a formal warning, with the right to appeal within 2 days, to the person against whom the complaint has been made.
- Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially.
- Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except in so far as is required of the school by Section 7 of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014, where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection, or where other legal obligation prevails.
- None of the above procedures affect the complainant(s) statutory rights.

Complaints to other bodies

- If the complainant believes that the school's policy and procedures outlined above have not been followed, or are not compliant with the Independent School Standards, they may make a complaint about this to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI): tel: 0207 6000 100 email: concerns@isi.net
- If the complaint is about the non-fulfilment of requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), it may be made to Ofsted: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school/private-schools>

COVID-19 Pandemic addendum

While we will endeavour to respond to complaints as swiftly as we can, it may not be possible to do so in the ways described above (e.g. in face-to-face meetings) or within the timeframes given here (e.g. it may be more difficult to gather all the paperwork) while the COVID-19 restrictions are in place.