



St Hilda's School

HARPENDEN

Caring, Curious & Confident

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Name of Policy	Complaints Policy
Reviewed by	Dan Sayers
Review Date	December 2025
Next Review Date	December 2026
To be Read in Conjunction with	Safeguarding (Child Protection) Policy
Legislation Referenced	

Unless otherwise stated, all Policies of St Hilda's School apply to the school in its entirety. This comprises all staff and pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), the Junior School (Key Stage 1) and the Senior School (Key Stage 2).

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1. INTRODUCTION

This policy has been checked in accordance with Part 7 of the Independent Schools Standards and should be read in conjunction with the "Safeguarding (Child Protection) Policy"

St Hilda's School is proud of its long tradition of pastoral care and high-quality teaching for all pupils. If, however, parents have a complaint, this will be treated by the school as detailed below.

2. COMPLAINT PROCESS GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS

This policy applies to parents (including guardians, carers and those with parental responsibility) of pupils currently on the School roll.

If parents wish to raise a concern or complaint, the school requires that it is informed as soon as possible.

2.1 Stage 1: Informal Resolution

- Wherever possible, the school will aim to resolve complaints and concerns quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint, they should normally contact their daughter's Form Teacher or other appropriate member of the staff. In most instances, the matter will be resolved immediately.
- If the Form Teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult the relevant Head of Department or Deputy Headteacher.
- The Form Teacher will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date upon which they were received.
- Should the matter not be resolved, usually within ten working days, or in the event that the Form Teacher and parent fail to reach a satisfactory informal resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure. Working days are considered to be the term dates specified on the School website.

2.2 Stage 2: Formal Resolution

- If a complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Headteacher who will decide upon an appropriate course of action.
- In the majority of cases, upon receiving the complaint, the Headteacher will speak to the parents in order to discuss the matter, usually within five working days during term time or if the complaint is received during School holidays, usually within 5 working days after the start of term. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may prove necessary for the Headteacher to carry out further investigations.
- The Headteacher will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- When the Headteacher is satisfied that all relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents informed of this decision in writing. The Headteacher will give reasons for the decision.
- Should the matter not be resolved, usually within 15 working days, or in the event of parents remaining dissatisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

2.3 Stage 3: Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following failure to reach an earlier resolution), they should contact the Chair of Governors who will call a hearing of the Complaints Panel. The Acting Chair of Governors, Katharine Solomons, may be contacted at ksolomons@sthildasharpenden.co.uk. Contact details for the Chair of Governors are also published on the School website.
- The matter will then be referred to a Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three people, including a member or members of the Governors. One panel member will be a person (independent of the management and working of the School) not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, whom the school has identified as a person of standing within the local community. A further two (or more) members of the panel will be the Proprietor and another member of the Board of Governors who will be unrelated to the complaint and will therefore not have pre-assumptions or bias.
- Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chairman of the Governors. The Panel will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as is practicable and normally within ten working days from when the Stage 3 complaint is received by the Chair of Governors.
- If the Panel 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 not later than three working days prior to the hearing.
- The parents 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 Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without need for further investigation.
- When further investigation is required, the Panel will decide upon how this should be carried out. After due consideration of all relevant facts, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations. It is the school's policy to reach a decision and make recommendations within ten working days of the Hearing. The Chair of the Panel will write to the parents informing them of their decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and recommendations, if any, will be sent in writing to the parents, the Headteacher, the Governors and, where relevant, the person about whom the complaint was made. Any necessary further action will be taken in accordance with due procedure.
- Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will remain confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requires access to them.
- On request, ISI (Independent Schools Inspectorate) and Ofsted will be provided with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and details of the action that was taken as a result of each complaint.
- It is the School's policy to notify complainants of the outcome of an investigation usually within 28 days of having received the complaint.

3. ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES FOR FORMAL COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE HEAD

- Formal complaints against the Head will follow the Formal Resolution (Stage 2) process, but complaints should be made in writing, initially, to the Proprietor. The Proprietor will appoint a suitable candidate to oversee Stage 2 of the complaint process.

4. TIMEFRAME FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

- All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively.
- It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible.
- Complaints will be acknowledged within five working days if received during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods, but usually no later than 5 working days after the start of term.
- Timescales are defined as a working day, Monday to Friday, during term time. Dates of terms are available on the School website.

5. RECORDS AND ISI

The School keeps a written record of all complaints, which are stored by the Compliance Officer. Complaints which do not have safeguarding implications should be retained for a minimum of 7 years. Where there is a safeguarding angle, records concerning allegations of abuse must be preserved for the term of the Independent inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation if it is longer. Complaints are an agenda item at Governors' Meetings in the Headteacher's Report.

A Complaints file will be available on the School premises for inspection by ISI, the Head, the Chair of Governors and the Proprietor.

6. PERSISTENT CORRESPONDENCE

Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this can be regarded as vexatious and outside the scope of this policy.

Similarly, another parent raising the same complaint, at the instigation of the first, will also be regarded as vexatious and outside the scope of the policy.

7. COMPLAINTS RELATING TO THE STATUTORY FRAMEWORK FOR EYFS

Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated by the school in accordance with this procedure and the complainant will be notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days. The School will provide ISI/Ofsted with a written record of all complaints made about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements during any specified period, and the action taken as a result of each complaint. The record of such complaints will be kept for at least three years. Parents may complain directly to Ofsted or to ISI if they believe the provider is not meeting the EYFS requirements:

8. OFSTED AND ISI CONTACT DETAILS

Should they so wish, parents can make a complaint to Ofsted or ISI (Independent Schools Inspectorate) at:

Ofsted Contact details:

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

ISI Contact details:

Telephone: 0207 600 0100

Email: complaints@isi.net

Numbers of formal complaints made in the previous academic year are available on written request from the Headteacher.

This policy will be reviewed annually, by the Senior Management Team, in line with the school's review schedule for policies.