



## **Complaints Policy**

## **Complaints Policy and Procedure (Whole School including Boarding & EYFS)**

### **Mission Statement**

***‘To educate young people to meet the challenges of life courageously, to use their talents to the full and to live the values of Christ’s Gospel’***

### **Introduction**

The quality of our teaching, pastoral care and community life enables us to fulfil our mission statement, ‘To educate young people to meet the challenges of life courageously, to use their talents to the full and to live the values of Christ’s Gospel’. Our school Mission Statement underpins everything we do and everything we are at Thornton. Our school is a community founded on Christ, and we therefore try to uphold the Gospel values of love, forgiveness and reconciliation. Our Complaints Procedure holds this aim to the fore. A speedy resolution of potentially difficult or conflict situations is desirable, and our procedures are carried out in a spirit of concern for all involved. Therefore, if parents have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the school with care and in accordance with this policy and procedure

Thornton College makes its Complaints Procedure available to all parents of pupils and of prospective pupils on the School’s website and the school will ensure that parents of pupils and of prospective pupils who request it are made aware that this document is published or available and of the form in which it is published or available, and of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

In accordance with paragraph 32(1) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the school will also make available, on request, to Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE) or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), details of this Complaints Procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

Although this Procedure is made available to parents of prospective pupils, it is not available for use by them; it may only be used by parents of current pupils.

The school will be mindful of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in the application of this policy. “Parent(s)” means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for (a) current student/s about whom the complaint relates.

### **What constitutes a complaint**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly.

## **Procedure**

### **Stage 1 – Informal Resolution**

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint, they should normally contact their child's Class Teacher, Form Tutor or Housemistress, outlining the nature of the complaint and the resolution they seek. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Class Teacher, Form Tutor or Housemistress cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for the member of staff to consult the Head of Year in the Senior School, or the Head of Prep for the Prep School, who will investigate the matter.
- Complaints made directly to the Deputy Head or the Headteacher (that are not formal) will usually be referred to the relevant child's Class Teacher, Form Tutor, Housemistress or Head of Year, unless the Deputy Head or the Headteacher deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.
- The child's Class Teacher, Form Tutor, Housemistress or Head of Year will record details of all complaints on Cpoms under 'Stage 1 – informal complaint' and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved, normally within ten days during term time or in the event that the child's Class Teacher, Form Tutor, Housemistress or Head of Year and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.

In the case of a complaint against the Headteacher, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors whose contact details are available from the school office on request and also on the website. on request.

### **Stage 2 – Formal Resolution**

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Headteacher, giving clear details of the situation, stating that they wish to make a formal complaint and the resolution they seek. The Headteacher may in some circumstances deem it appropriate to nominate a staff member to hear the complaint and manage the Stage 2 complaint process. The Head (or their nominee) will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Headteacher (or their nominee) will speak to the parents concerned, within 10 working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. It may be necessary for further investigations to be carried out. The Headteacher (or their nominee) will determine who should carry out any investigation and this may be the Deputy Head, a member of SLT or someone external to the School.
- The Deputy Headteacher / member of SLT will log details of all complaints and investigations on CPOMS
- Once the Deputy Headteacher / member of SLT is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made by the Head Teacher, and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Headteacher will also give reasons for their decision.
- Parents should expect to receive a conclusion to their complaint normally within 15 working days of the formal notification, although this may be extended if further investigations are required.
- If the complaint is against the Head, the complaint should be made to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors will nominate someone to determine the complaint. The Stage 2 process described above will then be followed as if the references to the Head (or their nominee) is to the individual nominated by the Chair of Governors to determine the complaint against the Head.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

### Stage 3 – Formal resolution - Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they should do so in writing to the Chair of Governors within 15 days of receiving the decision at Stage 2, setting out their grounds of appeal.
- Any supporting evidence which the parents wish to rely on should also be provided with their grounds of appeal. To the extent the parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated due to extenuating circumstances which have impeded the parents from taking action, the parents should request an extension in writing. Such a request should be made to the Chair of Governors (or Clerk to the Governors in their absence) in advance of the original deadline, setting out the further time period requested and the reason for this. This will be considered. In the event the parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated (including to the extent applicable any extensions if agreed) the School reserves the right to conclude the complaint process and not progress the matter to Stage 3.
- The Chair of Governors will then refer the appeal to the Complaints Panel for consideration.
- This stage involves a full- merits hearing of the complaint, not just a judicial review-style check that procedure was correctly followed.
- The Complaints Panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. This member should be outside the school's workforce, not a member of the governing body and not otherwise involved with the management of the school. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint normally within 10 working days and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 28 working days. 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 to all parties, usually not later than three school 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 be appropriate, and the companion should not be a lawyer. The panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend.
- The remit of the Panel shall be at the discretion of the Chair of Governors and the manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.

- After due consideration of all facts, they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and decide whether to:
  - Dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part;
  - Uphold the complaint (s) in whole or in part and
  - Make recommendations
- The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it normally within 10 working days of the hearing (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following the hearing).. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing and/ or by electronic mail to the parents, the Headteacher, the Governors and, where relevant, the person about whom the complaint was made. The findings and any recommendations will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Head Teacher.
- A panel hearing will proceed notwithstanding that a parent may subsequently decide not to attend. The school will ensure that arrangements for the Panel Hearing are reasonable to facilitate the parents exercising the right of attendance. The panel will consider the parent's complaint in absentia and issue

findings on the substance of the complaint, thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion. The requirement for the panel to proceed does not prevent the school from accommodating parental availability for dates or considering comments concerning panel composition.

### **Timeframe for dealing with complaints**

Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, **working days** refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays and half term. This means that during School holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although the School will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay. It may also take longer to resolve a complaint during periods of significant disruption to School life or as a consequence of unavoidable staff absence, however deviation from the normal timescale for resolving a complaint during term time will only occur on an exceptional basis, and the School will take all reasonable steps to limit any such delay.

### **Confidentiality**

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. 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 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act, requests access to them.

### **Exclusion**

Only the Head Teacher of Thornton College has the authority to exclude a student from school. In the absence of the Head Teacher, this authority will be delegated to the Deputy Head Teacher. For definitions and explanations of both fixed term and permanent exclusions, please see our Behaviour Policy.

### **Appeals:**

Parents are entitled to appeal to the governing body against any exclusion. A letter stating the intention to appeal should be sent to the Clerk to the Governing Body, Mrs Jane Sanders, at [jsanders@thorntoncollege.com](mailto:jsanders@thorntoncollege.com). A hearing will be set up as soon as possible; within term time, the school will try to hold a hearing within 10 working days save for where there are exceptional circumstances. Should a letter be received outside of term time, it may take longer to hold a hearing due to staff leave and other considerations, but every effort will be made to hold a meeting in a timely manner and the time frame will be confirmed in writing to the parent/s with an explanation for any delay.

The Governors' decision is final.

### **Contacting the Independent Schools Inspectorate, Ofsted, and/or the Department of Education**

The school is inspected by ISI. Parents and students have the right to contact an inspector if they have a complaint concerning a student's welfare. ISI will usually expect parents or students to have followed the school's formal complaints procedure before contacting them.

Parents can report their complaints or concerns to ISI by ringing them on:- 020 7600 0100 or writing to the ISI regional office at:-

Complaints  
Independent Schools Inspectorate  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Cap House

9-12, Long Lane,  
London  
EC 1A 9HA

**Email:** [concerns@isi.net](mailto:concerns@isi.net)

The Department for Education may be contacted on 0370 000 2288 or online.

The school will provide ISI, on request, with a written record of complaints, the action which was taken as a result of each complaint (regardless of whether they are upheld); and whether the complaint was resolved at the preliminary stage or whether it proceeded to a panel hearing. The school will provide parents with details on request ([trobinsont@thorntoncollege.com](mailto:trobinsont@thorntoncollege.com)) of the number of formal complaints in any one school year.

### **EYFS**

For complaints involving EYFS, parents of EYFS pupils should follow the three stages of this Complaints Policy and Procedure. If parents remain dissatisfied and their complaint is about the school's fulfilment of the EYFS requirements, then parents may take their complaint to the ISI or Ofsted.

Thornton College will provide ISI/Ofsted, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaints will be kept in accordance with its Privacy Notice

### **Ofsted:**

Telephone - 0300 123 4234

Email – [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

Parents can also contact Ofsted in writing:

Department for Education  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

The school is inspected by ISI. If parents believe that the EYFS requirements are not being met they are also invited to contact ISI:

Parents can register their complaints or concerns to ISI by ringing them on – 020 7600 0100 or writing to the ISI regional office at:-

Complaints  
Independent Schools Inspectorate  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Cap House  
9-12, Long Lane  
London  
EC1A 9HA

Email: [concerns@isi.net](mailto:concerns@isi.net)

## **Boarders**

Complaints which involve boarders will be identified as such when they are recorded.

## **Record Keeping**

At Stage 1, (Informal Resolution), parental contact is logged on CPOMS as 'Stage 1 – Informal Complaint'. When Stage 2 is reached and a letter of complaint is received by the Headteacher, it is then logged as a 'Stage 2 – Formal Complaint'.

In accordance with DfE guidelines, records of Complaints which do not have safeguarding implications should be retained for a minimum of seven years. Where there is a safeguarding issue involved, records concerning allegations of abuse, should be preserved for the term of the independent enquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and at least until the accused has reached normal pension age, or for ten years from the date of the allegation, if it is longer.

## **Persistent Correspondence**

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

For a complaints procedure to be fair, it must be fair to both the complainant and the College.

I) Fairness to the complainant consists in the provision of a structured complaints procedure which allows the complainant to gain a full hearing at the level they feel their complaint requires, be it informal or formal, and to inform of other recourses the complainant has a right to have.

II) Fairness to the College consists in the recognition by the complainant that the complaints procedure as outlined above offers every reasonable avenue for the pursuit of a full hearing, and thus that the College and its staff should be protected from ways of complaining which fall outside of this. A matter not taken through the appropriate channels is a matter closed.

## **Student Complaints**

Procedures for Student complaints are outlined in the Student School Planners as below.

Should you wish to make a complaint about something at school, this is what you should do:

### **Stage 1**

Talk to your Form Tutor about your complaint. The majority of complaints will be resolved at this stage because your Form Tutor will listen to what you have to say and will try their very best to support you and to offer solutions.

### **Stage 2**

Should you be unhappy with the response of your Form Tutor or you are not satisfied with the resolution proposed, talk to your Head of Year. They will discuss the action taken or suggestions made so far and investigate whether any further action is possible.

### **Stage 3**

The third stage is an official complaint and will be recorded as such. At this stage, you should write or email formally to Ms Wilks, Deputy Head and DSL, outlining your complaint. Ms Wilks, Deputy Head and DSL will record the complaint and speak to your Form Tutor and your Head of Year to discuss and record the support and proposals offered to date. Ms Wilks, Deputy Head and DSL will normally speak to you within two school days to confirm that an investigation is taking place.

- Usually within 10 school days you will be invited to talk the matter through with Ms Wilks, Deputy Head and DSL. You may take a member of staff or your parents/guardians to the meeting.
- Following the initial meeting, you will be invited back to speak to Ms Wilks, Deputy Head and DSL – again you may have a member of staff or your parents/guardians with you. You will be advised as to the outcome of the complaint and offered support and advice on the best course of action to take.

### **Stage 4**

Should you feel it is not resolved at the third stage, you should write or email formally to the Head Teacher, Dr Shaw, outlining your complaint. Dr Shaw will record the details and investigate the matter further. Dr Shaw will speak to you usually within two school days to confirm that an investigation is taking place.

- Normally within 10 school days you will be invited to talk the matter through with Dr Shaw. You may take a member of staff or your parents/Guardians to the meeting.
- Following the initial meeting, you will be invited back to speak to Dr Shaw – again you may have a member to staff with you or your parents/guardians with you. You will be advised as to the outcome of the complaint and offered support and advice on the best course of action to take.

Please contact the Head Teachers PA on [trobinson@thorntoncollege.com](mailto:trobinson@thorntoncollege.com) for details on the number of formal complaints logged in the academic year.