



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 students and of prospective students on the School’s website and the school will ensure that parents of students and of prospective students 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.

This procedure is published in accordance with regulatory requirements and is available to parents of current and prospective students. Formal complaints under this procedure may only be brought by parents of current students.

Reasonable adjustments will be made where necessary to ensure that parents are able to access and participate fully in the complaints process. “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.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them. There may also be other circumstances in which the school is required to share information relating to a concern or a complaint in order to comply with its legal or regulatory obligations. The school prioritises the welfare and wellbeing of its students and parents/carers can be assured that no child will be penalised for a complaint that parents/carers or the child, raises in good faith.

The Three Stage Complaints 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 Head Teacher (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.
- All details will be recorded on Cpoms under 'Stage 1 – informal complaint' and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved / staff and parents fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, normally within ten working days during term time, then parents should proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.
- If the complaint is against the Head Teacher, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors at chairofgovernors@thorntoncollege.com
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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 Head Teacher, giving clear details of the situation, stating that they wish to make a formal complaint and the resolution they seek – the template that should be completed is found in Appendix A of this policy. The Head Teacher 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 Teacher (or their nominee) will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head Teacher (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 Head Teacher (or their nominee) will determine who should carry out any investigation..
- All details about the complaint and any investigation carried out will be logged on CPOMS under Stage 2 – Formal Complaint.
- Once all the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made by the Head Teacher (or nominee), and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head Teacher (or their nominee) will also give reasons for their decision. In most cases, the Head Teacher (or their nominee) will make their decision and provide parents with reasons within 20 working days (term time) of the complaint being put in writing (or following the provision of any further clarificatory information about the complaint to the Head Teacher, if so requested). In instances where the Head Teacher has been involved at the informal stage or is related to the original incident in some way and it is decided they cannot review the matter, the Head Teacher will nominate someone to determine the complaint. The Stage 2 process described above will then be followed as if the references to the Head Teacher (or their nominee) is to the individual nominated by the Head Teacher to determine the complaint.

- If the complaint is against the Head Teacher, 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 Teacher (or their nominee) is to the individual nominated by the Chair of Governors to determine the complaint.
- Parents should expect to receive a conclusion to their complaint normally within 20 working days of the formal notification, although this may be extended if further investigations are required.
- 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 working days of receiving the decision at Stage 2, setting out their grounds of appeal. The template that should be completed is found in Appendix A of this policy.
- 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 member shall be independent of the management and running of the School and shall not be a current member of staff, governor or trustee. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chair of Governors, who will also appoint one Panel member to act as Chair of the Panel
- 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 5 working days prior to the hearing.
- The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. The Stage 2 decision-taker shall also be entitled to be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not be appropriate, and the companion should not be a lawyer. The identity of companions should be confirmed to the Chair of Governors as soon as possible and by no later than 2 working days before the hearing. 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, and, where relevant, the person complained about as well as the Chair of Governors and the Stage 2 decision-taker. A copy of the panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair of Governors 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

All complaints will be handled seriously, sensitively and within clear and reasonable timescales.

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. The School expects parents to engage in the process in a reasonable, constructive and responsive manner to help ensure matters can be dealt with in a timely way and in line with the targets set out in this procedure.

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:

Any complaint about a decision taken by the Head Teacher to exclude or require the removal of a student will be governed by this Stage 3 of the School's Complaint Procedure. There may be circumstances in which the School consider it necessary and appropriate to deviate from the Stage 3 procedure in the context of appeals for exclusion and required removal, and the School will inform the parents of this.

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
1st Floor
Cap House
9-12, Long Lane,
London
EC 1A 9HA

Email: 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 (trobenson@thorntoncollege.com) of the number of formal complaints in any one school year.

EYFS

For complaints involving EYFS, parents of EYFS students are encouraged to follow the three stages of this Complaints Policy and Procedure. Parents may contact Ofsted or ISI directly at any stage where they believe EYFS requirements are not being met.

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.

Parents may complain directly to Ofsted or to ISI if they believe the provider is not meeting the EYFS requirements.

Ofsted:

Telephone - 0300 123 1231

Email – 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
1st Floor
Cap House
9-12, Long Lane
London
EC1A 9HA

Email: concerns@isi.net / info@isi.net

Boarders

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

Recording complaints and use of personal data

Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all formal complaints, whether they are resolved at the formal stage (Stage 2) or proceed to Panel hearing (Stage 3) and any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld). 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 Head Teacher, 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.

The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice. When dealing with complaints the School (including any Panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of student
- Description of issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness Statements (if appropriate)
- Name and contact details of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue
- Notes / minutes of the hearing and
- The Panel's written decision

This may include 'special category personal data', potentially including, for instance, information relating to physical or mental health where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the School's Data Protection/GDPR Policy.

The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Notice. All records relating to complaints shall be treated as confidential. In addition to where requested by the Secretary of State or an inspector, there may be other circumstances where disclosure of the substance of a complaint or particular confidential records relating to it is required, for example, where there is legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligation which prevails over the requirement to maintain the records as confidential.

Persistent Correspondence

Where 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 below.

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

Stage 1 - Informal

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

Stage 2 - Formal

The second stage is a formal complaint and will be recorded as such. At this stage, you should write or email formally to Ms Wilks, Deputy Head and DSL, or another member of the Senior Leadership team, outlining your complaint. Ms Wilks, or a member of the Senior Leadership Team 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 or a member of the Senior Leadership Team 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 or a member of the Senior Leadership Team. 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 or a member of the Senior Leadership Team— 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 3

Should you feel it is not resolved at the second stage, or you are unhappy with the resolution, 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 and who will be overseeing the investigation.

- 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 for details on the number of formal complaints logged in the academic year.

Appendix A

Parent Complaint Form

This form is designed to assist parents/carers in raising a complaint formally, in line with the school's Complaints Policy. Please submit as part of your complaint.

Section 1: Your Details

Full Name:

Child's Name (if applicable):

Your relationship to the child:

Contact Address:

Telephone Number:

Email Address:

Please indicate the stage you wish the complaint to be heard at

- ☐ Stage 1 - Informal Stage
- ☐ Stage 2 - Formal Stage (submitted to Headteacher or Chair of Governors)
- ☐ Stage 3 - Panel Hearing (requested following dissatisfaction with formal stage outcome)

Please confirm which of the following have been completed:

- ☐ I have attempted to resolve the issue informally.
 - Who did you speak to?
 - When did you speak to them?
 - What was the outcome?
- ☐ I have submitted a formal written complaint and received a response.
- ☐ I am not satisfied with the outcome of the formal stage and wish to proceed to a panel hearing.

Section 2: Complaint Stage and History

Section 2: Details of the Complaint

1. Please describe your complaint clearly, including relevant dates, locations, and people involved:
(Please provide as much detail as possible – attach copies of relevant documents, if needed)

Section 3: Outcome Sought

What outcome are you hoping to achieve as a result of this complaint?

Section 4: Declaration

I confirm that the information given in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and that I am submitting this complaint in accordance with the school's Complaints Policy.

Signature

Date: