



## COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

|                                                               |                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Who is this policy for?                                       | Parents and carers of current pupils |
| Policy date:                                                  | September 2026                       |
| Review Date:                                                  | September 2027                       |
| Who is responsible for monitoring and evaluating this policy? | Headteacher                          |
| Signed off by:                                                | Governing Body                       |
| Signed off Date:                                              | September 2026                       |

### Formal complaints in the preceding school year

The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year was: 0

### Aim

The aim of this procedure is to provide a clear, fair and effective process for resolving concerns and complaints relating to the school.

This procedure is designed to meet the requirements of Part 7 of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Side by Side School seeks to resolve concerns and complaints fairly, promptly and, wherever possible, at the earliest stage.

### Scope

This procedure applies to concerns and complaints from parents relating to the provision of education or other services provided by the school for their child.

Some matters may be dealt with under separate procedures, including safeguarding concerns, admissions, exclusions and staff disciplinary or grievance matters. Where a concern falls within another procedure, the school will advise the complainant of the appropriate route to follow.

Where a complaint raises a safeguarding concern, the school's safeguarding procedures will take precedence and appropriate action will be taken in accordance with the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

### Data Protection Complaints



Where a complaint relates to the processing of personal data, the school will ensure that it is handled in accordance with its obligations under data protection legislation. Such complaints will be acknowledged within 30 days, investigated without undue delay and the outcome communicated to the complainant promptly.

Where a data protection complaint also falls within this Complaints Procedure, the school will ensure that the requirements of both procedures are met.

## **Introduction**

The majority of issues raised by parents, the community or pupils, are concerns rather than complaints. Side by Side is committed to taking concerns seriously, at the earliest stage, in the hope of keeping the number of formal complaints to a minimum and without needing formal procedures. However, depending on the nature of the complaint, you may wish or be asked to follow the school's formal complaints procedure.

We are committed to actively listening to the concerns of parents, and acting on them promptly. We welcome feedback and constructive criticism and view the sharing of concerns and complaints as a vital way for us to improve our practice. We acknowledge that when a parent feels the need to raise a concern or make a complaint they do this in the best interests of their child. We understand that parents often deliberate before approaching the school in this manner, and we will ensure that they are listened to carefully and their views respected. They will not be categorized as 'difficult' or 'unreasonable' and even if difficult issues are raised, we welcome the chance to work openly and honestly with parents in our shared aim of ensuring the best education for their child. We understand that often parents can use their knowledge of their child to help us look at issues in a new way and we welcome the chance to learn from parents through open dialogue.

The primary aim of Side by Side's complaints procedure is to resolve the complaint as fairly and speedily as possible. Formal complaints will be dealt with in a sensitive, impartial and confidential manner.

## **General Principles**

- An anonymous complaint will not be investigated under this procedure unless there are exceptional circumstances or the information provided raises a safeguarding or other serious concern.
- To allow for a proper investigation, complaints should be brought to the attention of the school as soon as possible. Any matters raised more than 3 months after the event being complained of will not be considered, save in exceptional circumstances.
- Investigation of any complaint or review request will begin within 5 school days of receipt of the same, save in exceptional circumstances. The investigation will be completed as soon as reasonably practicable.



The following details outline the stages that can be used to resolve complaints:

**The Side by Side Complaints Procedure has three main stages:**

- Stage One: a concern is raised informally with a staff member
- Stage Two: formal complaint is heard by the Headteacher
- Stage Three: complaint is heard by the Complaints Panel Hearing convened by the Proprietors

**Stage One: Raising A Concern**

Concerns can be raised with the school at any time and will often generate an immediate response, which will resolve the concern. The school requests that parents make their first contact with their child's class teacher, via a note in the link book or by talking to the teacher personally or on the phone at a mutually convenient time. Most concerns can be dealt with immediately by passing on or correcting information. On some occasions the concern raised may require investigation, or discussion with others, in which case **your concern will be acknowledged within 24 hours of us receiving the concern, and you will receive an informal but informed response within 48 hours.** If there is any delay to this time-frame of 48 hours because of staff absence or a similar reason, you will be informed of this delay immediately and a new timeframe set up. The vast majority of concerns will be satisfactorily dealt with this way.

At this stage, the school 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
- 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 questioning
- Keep notes of the interview

At this stage the particulars of the complaint will be recorded on a complaints form so that accurate records can be kept of all school actions in the event of the complaint being escalated. This paperwork will also be useful in allowing Side by Side to log the nature of complaints in general for the purposes of school improvement and evaluation.

If you are not satisfied with the result at Stage One, please write or call the school within ten school working days and state what you would like the school to do. We will then look at your complaint at the next stage.



## Stage Two – Complaint heard by the Headteacher

Formal complaints should be put in writing and addressed to the Headteacher. The complaint will be logged, including the date it was received. Side by Side will acknowledge receipt of the complaint **within 48 hours**. In many cases, this letter will also report on the action the school has taken to resolve the issue. A meeting will then be convened to address the matter further. This meeting will normally take place **within ten working days**. **If an investigation into the complaint takes longer, you will be informed of this and a new time frame put in place.**

However, if you are not satisfied with the result at Stage Two of the complaints procedure, please write or call the school **within ten working days of the written response or the meeting**. You will need to tell the school why you are not satisfied and what you would like the school to do.

The investigation will begin as soon as possible and when it has been concluded, the complainant, and the member of staff concerned, will be informed in writing of the outcome. This may be to the effect that:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full. Some details may then be given of action the school may be taking to review procedures etc. but details of the investigation or of any disciplinary procedures will not be released
- The matter has been fully investigated and that appropriate procedures are being following, which are strictly confidential (e.g. where staff disciplinary procedure are being followed).

Where a formal complaint concerns the Headteacher, the complaint should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees. The Chair, or another suitably appointed trustee who has had no prior involvement in the matter, will undertake the Stage Two process in place of the Headteacher.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied following the Stage Two response, they may request a Stage Three Complaints Panel Hearing in the usual way.

## Stage Three – Complaint is heard by an Appeals Panel convened by the Proprietors

If the matter has not been resolved at Stage Two, you need to write to the proprietors giving details of the complaint within two weeks of the completion of Stage Two. The Proprietors will convene a complaints panel. The panel will be made up from at least three people who have not previously been involved in the complaint. One person on the panel will be independent of the management and running of the school. The complainant is entitled to be accompanied by someone to support them. Where a complainant chooses not to attend the panel hearing, the hearing will nevertheless proceed in accordance with this procedure and the panel will consider the complaint on the basis of the information available to it. The meeting of the panel and the



hearing of the complaint will be kept completely confidential. The hearing **will normally take place within ten working days** of the receipt of the written request for a Stage Three investigation.

The aim of the Appeal Panel is to impartially resolve the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. All parties will be notified of the Panel's decision in writing within **three working days** after the date of the hearing. The Appeal Panel will follow the guidelines.

The hearing should be as informal as possible

- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence
- After introductions the complainant is invited to explain their complaint and be followed by their witnesses
- The Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses
- The panel may ask questions at any point
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint
- The Headteacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within three working days
- A copy of the findings and recommendations of the panel will be sent to the complainant and the person complained about. A copy of the findings and recommendations will also be made available to the Headteacher

All written records of complaints will be kept confidentially by the school for the purposes of monitoring and school improvement.

### **Records and Confidentiality**

The school will keep a written record of all complaints made under the formal stage of this procedure, including whether they were resolved following the formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing, and any action taken by the school as a result of the complaint, regardless of whether the complaint was upheld.

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 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them, or where disclosure is otherwise required by law.

Records will be retained securely in accordance with the school's records retention arrangements and data protection obligations.



The school will make available to parents the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.