



## **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE (PARENTS) POLICY**

### **1. Policy Aims**

- 1.1. Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation (DCSF) prides itself on the quality of the teaching, pastoral care and co-curricular programme provided to its pupils. If parents do have a complaint, however, they can expect it to be treated by the Foundation in accordance with this Policy.
- 1.2. The aim of this Policy is to ensure that a complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently, and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice, it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote parents' and pupils' confidence in our ability to safeguard and promote pupils' welfare. We will try to resolve every complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, reviewing our systems and procedures in light of the circumstances.
- 1.3. The Foundation will make this Policy available to all parents of pupils on the Foundation's website and in the School Offices. The Foundation will ensure that parents of pupils who request it are made aware that this document is published or available and the form in which it is published or available.
- 1.4. The Foundation commits in this policy to observing the principles of the Equality Act 2010 and does not discriminate on any grounds.

### **2. Relationship to Guidelines, Procedures, other Policies and Legal Requirements**

- 2.1. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. All correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential, except in so far as is required of the Foundation, as within the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, where disclosure is required in the course of the Foundation's inspections, or where any other legal obligation prevails.
- 2.2. This Policy takes account of paragraph 33 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Standard 14 of the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools (effective from 5 September 2022), and the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework for group and school-based providers (effective from 1 September 2025). The procedures set out

below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the Policy aims and circumstances of each case. Certain of the procedures can only be conducted during term time.

### **2.3. Written complaints relating to the requirements under the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework for group and school-based providers**

- 2.3.1. DCSF will provide 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 for at least three years.
- 2.3.2. Parents of children in the EYFS are entitled to make a complaint directly to Ofsted and/or to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). Parents can also raise concerns related to the quality of education or the welfare health or safety of pupils, by writing to the ISI directly, although it is expected that complaints will go through the Foundation's complaints procedure first. Details of how to contact Ofsted and the ISI will be provided on request and are given at the end of this Policy, at Appendix A.
- 2.3.3. All written complaints relating to the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated and complainants notified of the outcome within 28 days of having received the complaint.

### **3. Definitions**

- 3.1. A complaint is defined as 'an expression or statement of dissatisfaction by a parent however made, about actions taken or a lack of action, and which seeks action by the Foundation'.
- 3.2. A concern is defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.
- 3.3. In this Policy, 'parent' means one or both parents and has the meaning as in education law, i.e. it includes any person who has parental responsibility, or who has care of the child.
- 3.4. When we refer to working days, we mean Monday to Friday, when the Schools are open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the Foundation's website.

### **4. Policy Statements**

- 4.1. We need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. We recognise that a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, which would be damaging to relationships and also to our Foundation culture. Parents and pupils should never feel (or be made to feel) that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or their opportunities at their School. Many issues can be resolved informally without the need to follow formal procedures; nonetheless the Foundation will take informal concerns seriously and will

make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. However, there will be occasions when a parent will want to raise their concerns formally, and in such cases, they will be treated and investigated as complaints and this Policy will be followed.

- 4.2. This Policy applies only to complaints made by one or both parents of a pupil. This Policy may, at the Foundation's discretion, include an educational guardian or a parent whose child has recently left the Foundation, as long as notification of the complaint was received whilst the pupil was still registered at Chorister School or Durham School. Where the complaint relates to a former pupil of the Foundation, but where a sibling or siblings are current pupils of the Foundation, such complaints are not within the scope of the Policy.
- 4.3. With regard to the Department for Education's Best Practice Guidance for School Complaints Procedures 2020 (updated 15 January 2021), we expect complaints to be raised within three months of the incident complained of, or where a series of associated incidents has occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will, however, consider complaints made outside this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.
- 4.4. Complaints from parents of prospective pupils relating to the implementation of the Foundation's Admissions Policy and entrance procedures are not within the scope of this Policy.
- 4.5. The written record of complaints is limited to all those made in writing under the formal part of the procedure. Patterns of concerns will be detected by their reporting at a meeting of the Senior Management Team.
- 4.6. Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue – please refer to the Foundation's Safeguarding Policy.
- 4.7. A complaint about the safety of your child should be notified immediately to the person you believe is best placed to take urgent action and should be confirmed in writing to the Principal.

## 5. Procedures

- 5.1. This Policy describes a three-stage procedure:
  - **Stage 1:** Informal communication raising of a concern or complaint notified orally or in writing to a member of staff.
  - **Stage 2:** A formal complaint in writing to the Head.
  - **Stage 3:** A referral to the Complaints Panel.
- 5.2. We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs, although complaints received within the last week of term or during school holidays may take longer than the published timescales as it is not always possible to complete a full investigation due to school holidays. We aim,

wherever reasonably practicable, to conclude all complaints within a school term. The Foundation may deviate from any of the stated timescales should it be considered reasonable in the circumstances. If this happens, amended timelines will be communicated to parents. Should parents provide notification of a complaint outside of the stated timeframes for any Stage they should include details of the circumstances that prevented the notification being given sooner for consideration along with the notification.

### **5.3.Stage 1 – Informal Complaint**

We expect that most complaints, where a parent or pupil seeks intervention, reconsideration, or some other action to be taken, can be resolved informally. Examples might include a dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, or about allocation of privileges or responsibilities, or about a timetable clash or some other aspect of the Schools' systems or equipment, or a billing error.

If parents have a complaint about academic, pastoral or disciplinary matters, they should normally contact their child's Senior Housemaster/Housemistress or, at Chorister School, the Form Teacher or one of the Deputy Heads. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straight away by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Senior Housemaster/mistress or Form Teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult a Head of Department, Head of Section, Deputy Head, Head Teacher or Principal. If parents have a complaint about financial matters relating to fees or extras, this should be stated in writing to the Operations Manager.

Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, a Deputy Head, the Head Teacher or the Principal will usually be referred to the relevant member of staff unless the Head of Department, the Deputy Head, the Head Teacher or the Principal deems it appropriate for them to deal with the matter personally. Complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation are taken very seriously and may need to be dealt with at Stage 2.

Any member of staff receiving a complaint will acknowledge its receipt by telephone, email, or letter within two working days during term time and as soon as practicable in the holidays, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely timescale. They will make a written record of the complaint and the date on which it was received. Should the matter not be resolved within ten working days during term time (or within the alternative timescale notified), or in the event that the member of staff and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory conclusion, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Policy.

### **5.4.Stage 2 – Formal Complaint**

An unresolved complaint under Stage 1, or a complaint which needs investigation, or a dissatisfaction with some aspect of the Foundation's policies, procedures, management, or administration should be set out in writing with full details and sent with all relevant documents and your full contact details to the Principal. If the complaint is about the Principal, it should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, who will nominate a Governor

to lead the formal resolution of the complaint and therefore in the following sections, where reference is made to the Principal, the nominated Governor will be substituted.

We will acknowledge receipt of the complaint by telephone, email, or letter within two working days during term time and as soon as practicable in the holidays.

The Principal will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. They may ask a senior member of staff and/or one or more Governors to act as Investigator. Any investigator appointed will have no prior involvement with the complaint to ensure a fair, independent investigation. The Investigator may request additional information from you and will probably wish to speak to you personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to your complaint.

The outcome of the investigation will be reported to the Principal. Once the Principal is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made, normally within ten working days from the receipt of the Stage 2 complaint. However, any complaint received within one month of the end of term or half term is likely to take longer to resolve owing to the presence of school holidays and the unavailability of personnel. The Principal will then notify the complainant by telephone, email or letter of their decision and the reasons for it.

If the parent is not satisfied with the outcome, they should then proceed to Stage 3 of this Policy.

### **5.5.Stage 3 – Panel Hearing**

A Complaints Panel Hearing is a review of the outcome of a Stage 2 Formal Complaint. The Panel will not consider any areas of complaint not previously raised under Stage 2.

A parent wishing to seek a Stage 3 review by the Complaints Panel should request this in writing to the Clerk to the Governors or the Chair of Governors, within five working days of notification of the Stage 2 decision. In their application, the parent must state the grounds on which they are progressing the complaint and the outcome which they seek. They should ensure that a copy of all relevant documents and their full contact details accompany their letter to the Clerk or Chair, along with a list of any documents which they believe to be in the Foundation's possession and wish the Panel to see. Such a request will be acknowledged in writing within two working days. If a parent requires assistance with their request, for example, because of a disability, they should contact the Clerk who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least two Governors and one person who shall be independent of the governance, management and running of the Foundation. Panel members will not have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Governing Body.

The Panel Chair (normally chosen by the Chair of Governors), on behalf of the Panel, will schedule a hearing to take place as soon as reasonably practicable and usually within ten working days of receipt of the request, but the Panel will not normally sit during half terms or school holidays. As soon as reasonably practical and in any event, at least five working days before the hearing, the Clerk will send the complainant written notification of the date, time, and place of the Hearing, together with brief details of the Panel members who will be present. 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. Any copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties no later than three days prior to the Hearing.

The complainant will be invited to attend the Hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, teacher, or friend. It is not necessary for that person to be legally qualified; indeed, as Panel Hearings are not legal proceedings, if a parent is accompanied by a legally qualified person, that person will be attending in a supportive capacity only and will not be permitted to advocate on the parent's behalf. If appropriate, please notify the Foundation at least three working days before the Hearing the name of the person who will be accompanying you, and in what capacity. A pupil, aged 13 and above, may attend part or all of the Hearing at the discretion of the Chair.

Once a parent has indicated a wish to continue to Stage 3, for compliance purposes a Panel Hearing should take place unless the parent later indicates that they are now satisfied and do not wish to proceed further. In the event that the parent subsequently decides not to attend the Hearing, the Panel will consider the complaint in the complainant's absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint, thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion.

The Chair will conduct the Hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The Hearing is not a legal proceeding, and the Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account. All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Clerk will be asked to take a handwritten minute of the proceedings. A Hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press, other media, or any third party.

All those attending the Hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint, and good manners or, after due warning, the Hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. If terminated by the Chair due to the conduct of the complainants, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the Hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and their comment will be minuted.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. The Chair may, however, at their discretion, adjourn the Hearing

for further investigation of any relevant issue. This may include an adjournment to take legal advice. 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 (unless there is an agreed position) and may make recommendations, which it shall complete normally within ten working days of the Hearing. The Panel Chair will write to the parent informing them of the decision of the Panel and the reasons for it by email. If the complainant does not wish to receive the decision by email, a copy will be given or posted to them. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parent, the Principal, the Governors and where relevant, the person to whom the complaint relates. A copy of such decisions, findings and any recommendations will be retained for inspection on the Foundation premises by the Governing Body and the Principal.

## **6. Confidentiality and Record Keeping**

- 6.1. 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 access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of an inspection or under other legal authority or court order.
- 6.2. All records created in accordance with this Policy will be managed in accordance with the Foundation's Data Protection Policy, along with the Privacy Notice which are available on the Foundation's website.
- 6.3. Details of the complaints procedure are published on the Foundation website, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year will be reported to Governors annually and will be made available to parents and prospective parents on request.
- 6.4. Following the resolution of a formal complaint, the Foundation will keep a written record of all formal complaints (the Complaints Log), whether they are resolved at Stage 1, Stage 2 or proceed to a Stage 3 Panel Hearing and any action taken by the Foundation as a result of those complaints, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld. The Complaints Log will be monitored regularly by the Principal and the Senior Management Team.

## **7. Cross reference to other policies and documents**

This Policy is linked to the following policies and documents:

- DCSF Data Protection Policy
- DCSF Privacy Notice
- DCSF Complaints Procedure (Pupils) Policy
- DCSF EYFS Policy
- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014
- National Minimum Standards for boarding schools (effective from 5 September 2022)
- Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework for group and school-based providers (effective from 1 September 2025)
- Department for Education's Best Practice Guidance for School Complaints Procedures 2020 (updated 15 January 2021)

## **8. Oversight**

Oversight of this Policy is undertaken by the Audit Committee of the Governing Body, and the Policy will be reviewed at least once in every three-year period.

**Policy last reviewed by**

**Dr Michael Alderson, Principal, on 28 November 2025**

**S Middleton, Chief Operating Officer, on 8 June 2022**



## **Appendix A**

### **Contact information**

#### **Ofsted**

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

General Helpline: 0300 123 1231

[Complaints procedure – Ofsted – GOV.UK](#)

#### **Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI)**

CAP House  
9-12 Long Lane  
London  
EC1A 9HA

General Helpline: 020 7600 0100

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

## **Appendix B**

### **Procedures to be followed at a Hearing of the Complaints Panel**

#### **Introduction**

This is the procedure that will normally be followed by the Complaints Panel and is designed to ensure that all parties have the opportunity to present their views to the Panel.

#### **Meeting Format**

The Panel Members and Clerk to the Panel will be in attendance throughout the Hearing. Other persons attending (the parent(s) who have made the complaint, the person the parents have brought in as a supporter if relevant, the Principal and any other appropriate members of staff) will be brought into the Panel on an individual basis.

The Clerk to the Panel will take notes of the meeting. Any notes produced by the Clerk will not be verbatim and will belong to the Chair of the Panel. The Chair can authorise the release of the Clerk's notes on condition that they remain confidential.

#### **Suggested Agenda**

Welcome and introductions by the Chair.

Parents present their complaint. Where two parents are present, it is often more helpful if one parent undertakes the responsibility of presentation and answering of questions made by the Panel.

The Principal puts the Foundation's case, explaining the reasons for the decision and the calling of witnesses if necessary, and responds to any further questions as raised by the Panel following the presentation of the complaint made by the parents.

When the Panel is satisfied that it has established the facts sufficient for it to make its decision, the Chair may bring the Hearing to a close and inform the parties that they will be notified in writing of the decision, normally within ten working days.

#### **Legal Advice**

If, during the Hearing, parents introduce legal points on which the Panel feel they will need advice, they will consider one of two options:

- the Panel may decide to take a careful note of points made and to consider the advice of the Foundation's lawyers before making their final decision; or
- if the Panel feel that an immediate response is required, they may adjourn the hearing to take telephone advice from the Foundation's lawyers.

## Appendix C

### Persistent or Vexatious Complaints or Harassment in School Policy

#### 1. Policy Statements

- 1.1. The Principal and staff of DCSF deal with specific complaints as part of their day-to-day management of the schools in accordance with the Complaints Procedures (Parents) Policy or the Complaints Procedure (Pupils) Policy, as appropriate. The majority of complaints are handled in an informal manner and are resolved quickly, sensitively and to the satisfaction of the complainant. However, there are occasions when complainants behave in an unreasonable manner when raising and/or pursuing concerns. The consequences are that the actions of the complainants begin to impact negatively on the day-to-day running of the Foundation and, directly or indirectly, on the overall wellbeing of the pupils or staff. In these exceptional circumstances the Foundation may act in accordance with this Policy.
- 1.2. The Governing Body is responsible for preventing harassment and for acting to prevent actions which may have a detrimental effect on staff. An employee can make a complaint against the Foundation where they are harassed by someone who does not work for the Foundation, such as a parent. Reasonable and proportionate action should be taken by the Foundation to address the issue.
- 1.3. Parents who raise either concerns or complaints with the Foundation can expect the Foundation to:
  - Make available to complainants in writing:
    - how and when problems can be raised in the Foundation;
    - the existence of the Foundation's complaints policies, and
    - the existence of this Policy for dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complaints or Harassment in School.
  - Respond within a reasonable time;
  - Be available for consultation with reasonable time limits, bearing in mind the needs of the pupils within the Schools and the nature of the complaint;
  - Respond with courtesy and respect;
  - Attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the Foundation's complaints policies, other policies and practice and advice from appropriate advisers;
  - Keep complainants informed of progress towards a resolution of the issues raised.
- 1.4. The Foundation can expect parents who wish to raise concerns or complaints with the Foundation to:
  - Treat all Foundation staff and others associated with the Foundation with courtesy and respect;
  - Respect the needs and wellbeing of pupils and staff in the Schools;
  - Avoid the use, or threatened use, of violence to people or property;
  - Avoid aggression or verbal abuse;
  - Recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in the Foundation work and allow the Foundation a reasonable time period to respond;
  - Recognise that resolving a specific problem can sometimes take some time;

- Follow the Foundation's complaints policies in the case of a complaint.

## 2. Policy Aims

2.1. The aims of this Policy are to:

- Set the standards of courtesy and reasonableness that should characterise all communication between the Foundation and persons who wish to express a concern or pursue a complaint;
- Support the wellbeing of pupils, staff and everyone who has a legitimate interest in the work of the Foundation, including Governors and parents;
- Support DCSF in dealing fairly, honestly, openly and transparently with those who make persistent or vexatious complaints and those who harass members of staff in school while ensuring that other stakeholders suffer no detriment.

2.2. This Policy adheres to the philosophy underlying the Equalities Act 2010. The Foundation commits to observing its principles and does not discriminate on any grounds.

## 3. Definitions

3.1. For the purposes of this Policy a persistent complainant is a parent who complains about issues, either formally or informally, or frequently raises issues that the complainant believes to be within the remit of the Foundation, and whose behaviour is unreasonable.

Unreasonable behaviour may be characterised by:

- Actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, or repetitious;
- An insistence upon pursuing unsubstantial/unsubstantiated complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes;
- An insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- An insistence on only dealing with the Principal (or other senior member of staff) on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the Foundation to deal with such matters;
- An insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainants but cannot be changed, for example, if the desired outcome is beyond the remit of the Foundation because it is unlawful;
- Utilising approaches other than as laid down in the recognised complaints policies to complain about the Foundation or any individual connected with the Schools, including but not limited to passing information relating to the Foundation to the press or other media, particularly where such actions are interpreted by the Foundation as a breach of confidentiality.

3.2. For the purposes of this Policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions as in 3.1 above in such a way that they:

- Appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of Foundation staff;
- Cause ongoing distress to individual members of Foundation staff;

- Have a significant adverse effect on the whole or part(s) of the Foundation community; or
- Are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, wellbeing and health.

Harassment is not necessarily face-to-face. It may occur through written communications, visual images, email and phone.

#### **4. Procedure**

- 4.1. In the first instance the Foundation will inform the complainant that their behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this Policy. This will be confirmed in writing.
- 4.2. The Governing Body or the Principal may consider barring the parent from the Foundation premises following an incident of misconduct. The Principal may impose an immediate ban on a parent without recourse to the Governing Body. Where this is the case, the action will be followed up as set out in 4.4 below.
- 4.3. If the behaviour of the individual is not modified the Foundation may take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the Foundation community:
  - Inform the complainant in writing that their behaviour is now considered to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, falls under the terms of this Policy;
  - Inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interest of all parties;
  - Inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication from the complainant to the Foundation should be by letter only;
  - Consider banning the complainant from the Foundation premises, or proceed straight to a temporary ban. This action may in particular be appropriate in cases of physical or verbal aggression;
  - Consider taking advice from appropriate external parties/advisers about putting in place a specific procedure for dealing with complaints from this complainant;
  - In extreme circumstances the Foundation may use external agencies to assist in enforcing a decision.
- 4.4 The Foundation will review as appropriate any sanctions applied in the context of this Policy. Such sanctions will be reviewed on a termly basis as a minimum.

## **5. Responsibilities**

The Governing Body is responsible for preventing harassment and for acting to prevent actions which may have a detrimental effect on staff.