CANBURY SCHOOL

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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Policy Owner:	**P Rich**
Approved by:	**R Marks and L Clancy (Co-Chair of Governors)**
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1. Introduction & Aims

Canbury School prides itself on the quality of its education and pastoral care. However, if parents have a concern, they can expect it to be treated in accordance with this transparent procedure. We aim to resolve concerns through informal means wherever possible.

When responding to complaints, we ensure the process is:

- **Impartial and non-adversarial:** Handled fairly and objectively throughout.
- **Timely:** Adhering strictly to the deadlines set out below.
- **Confidential:** Treated with appropriate discretion, respecting the privacy of all parties
- **Safe:** Ensuring no student is ever penalised or treated differently because a parent has raised a concern

Regulatory Compliance: This document meets the requirements of Part 7 of the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, ensuring a written procedure is available to parents of current students. Canbury School also notes good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures from the department of Education.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

2. Scope & Eligibility

Who Can Complain?

- This policy applies primarily to parents or carers of current students on the school roll.
- It applies to parents of former students *only* if the complaint was originally raised while the student was still registered at Canbury School.
- Complaints from members of the wider public should be made directly in writing to the Headteacher.

What is Out of Scope?

This procedure does not cover complaints relating to the following, which are governed by separate school policies:

- Admissions and statutory assessments
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Staff grievances, capability, or discipline
- Claims for financial compensation or fee waivers (which are beyond the scope of this procedure)

3. Working Together: A Note on AI-Generated Complaints

We actively welcome direct feedback and would always rather hear about an issue than not. Our goal is to listen, understand, and reach the fastest resolution for your child.

We are aware that many parents now use generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT) to help draft school correspondence. We ask parents to consider the following before doing so:

- **AI bypasses informal resolution:** AI tools typically generate formal, legalistic text. Under this policy, receiving a highly formal letter may obligate the school to bypass Stage 1 and immediately trigger a formal Stage 2 investigation, slowing down what could have been resolved via a simple 5-minute phone call.
- **AI escalates language automatically:** AI models often inject intense regulatory vocabulary or legal terminology that changes the procedural nature of the issue, creating a more adversarial dynamic than intended.
- **Data Privacy:** Please do not enter the names of other students, families, or staff members into public AI tools, as uploading third-party personal data can result in breaches of UK GDPR.

4. Complaints Process

The school day calculations below exclude weekends, Bank Holidays, and school holidays. In calculating the number of school days in any scenario, the day of receipt and the day of reply shall not be counted.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Most concerns can be sorted out quickly by speaking directly with your child's Form Tutor or Subject Teacher. Complaints made directly to a member of senior leadership or the Head will usually be referred to the relevant member of staff, unless the member of senior leadership or the Head deems it appropriate for them to deal with the matter personally.

- **Timeline to Raise:** The concern must be raised within 3 months of the incident. We will consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated fairly for all involved.
- **Contact:** Email the teacher directly or contact the school office via reception@canburyschool.co.uk.
- **School Action:** The school will acknowledge the concern within 48 hours and aim to resolve the matter within 5 working days.
- **Formal Response:** A written summary of the informal outcome will be provided within 10 school days. If you remain dissatisfied, you will be advised to proceed to Stage 2.

Stage 2: Formal Investigation

If the matter is not resolved informally, you may submit a formal complaint in writing to the Head.

- **Submission:** Write an email or letter detailing relevant dates, times, witnesses, and your desired resolution.
- **Acknowledgement:** The Head (or an appointed investigator) will record the complaint and acknowledge receipt within 5 school days.
- **Investigation & Outcome:** The Head will conduct a full investigation and issue a detailed written conclusion with reasons within 15 school days

The investigating officer for any such complaints will have the authority and standing to investigate the matter and the ability to make recommendations for improvement should any arise. They will have access to all relevant information and personnel to conduct a thorough and fair investigation.

Stage 3: Governing Body Review Panel

If you are dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response, you have the right to request a formal Panel Hearing.

- **How to Escalate:** Write to the Clerk to the Governing Board (the Bursar) at bursar@canburyschool.co.uk within 14 school days of receiving the Stage 2 outcome.
- **The Panel Composition:**
    - The Clerk will convene a panel of at least three people who have no direct involvement in the matter.
    - At least one member will be entirely independent of the management and running of the school.
- **Dates**:
    - The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The clerk will aim to find a date within 25 (twenty-five) school days of the request, where possible.
    - If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.
- **Paperwork:**
    - The parent(s) should supply copies of their previous written complaints to the Head at Stage 2 and any other documentation they may wish to rely on to the Clerk for circulation to all parties not more than 7 (seven) days after the date of notification of the hearing. Documentation must be relevant to those matters set out in the complaint.
    - Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 10 (ten) school days before the date of the meeting.
    - To ensure a fair and orderly review, any supplementary documentation should be submitted within the established timelines. While late paperwork or entirely new complaints are strongly discouraged, the Panel Panel retains absolute operational discretion to admit late submissions or consider newly developed matters if it is deemed essential to satisfy the principles of natural justice and ensure a thoroughly fair, comprehensive hearing.
    - The board will ensure that the hearing is properly minuted. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.
- **The Hearing:**
    - A date will be set within 25 school days of your request. You have the right to attend and be accompanied by a companion (e.g., a friend or relative). Legal representation is generally not permitted unless exceptional circumstances apply.

    - At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.
    - At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.
    - The panel, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave, and evidence will then be considered.
- **The Outcome:**
    - The Panel will issue its definitive findings and recommendations in writing to the complainant, the Head, and the Governing Body within 10 school days of the hearing.
    - The Panel's role is to review the evidence before it and decide whether to uphold the parent's(s') grounds of appeal in full or in part. The panel can:
        - Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
        - Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part
    - If a complaint is upheld, the committee will:
        - Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
        - Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future
    - **The Panel's decision is final.**

Our 'normal' response times should be met as often as possible. Some flexibility may be required in instances of staff absence or outside of term time where it may be difficult to investigate concerns and complaints. Parents will always be informed where there may be reasonable delays.

5. Complaints Against the Head or Governors

- **Against the Head or an Individual Governor:** The complaint must be sent directly to the Clerk to the Governing Board (the Bursar). An impartial Governor will be appointed to handle the Stage 1 and Stage 2 procedures.
- **Against the Whole Governing Body:** The Clerk will appoint an independent investigator to conduct the Stage 2 process. They will issue a formal written conclusion within 10 school days.

6. Managing Unreasonable or Serial Complaints

While we treat all valid complaints with utmost seriousness, the school reserves the right to manage contact if correspondence becomes unreasonable, abusive, or intentionally disruptive.

If a parent repeatedly introduces duplicate complaints on a matter where our processes have already been fully exhausted, we may notify them in writing that the school has stopped responding to that specific issue. Any completely new or distinct concerns will still be treated normally.

7. Duplicate complaints from others

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the process is complete
- Direct them to the Department for Education (DfE) if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint, in line with the guidance published at www.gov.uk/complain-about-school.

If a duplicate complaint is raised which in the view of the school warrants further consideration, the procedure outlined in previous sections (as appropriate) will be repeated.

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

8. Record Keeping & Confidentiality

A secure, confidential log of all formal complaints is maintained by the Head. In accordance with Paragraph 33(j) of the Independent School Standards, this log records whether the complaints were resolved following the formal Stage 2 procedure, or proceeded to a Stage 3 panel hearing. The log will also document the specific actions taken by the school as a result of those complaints, regardless of whether the complaint was upheld or dismissed.

These records are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or an official inspection body (such as the Independent Schools Inspectorate - ISI) requests access. Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary, and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices, and our record retention schedule. Records of complaints will be kept securely for a period of seven years in line with data protection law, our privacy notices, and our record retention schedule.

Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint. Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, which will not unreasonably withhold consent.

It is vitally important that parents feel confident that their complaint will not penalise their child, and, equally, that staff trust that a complaint will be investigated with discretion. We, therefore, ask that complaints not be discussed with other parents or staff during the course of the investigation, unless evidence is required; this will be determined by the Head or the independent Panel. In addition, from the outset, all parties to a complaint must be aware that some information may need to be shared with others involved in the complaint procedure.

Where a parental complaint also involves a formal dispute governed by Section 164A of the Data Protection Act 2018 (concerning data subject rights and requests for erasure), the school will ensure that its investigation procedures under this policy are adapted to run concurrently without causing any operational conflict with our statutory data protection obligations.

9. Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure and the complaint is regarding the school not meeting standards set by the DfE in any of the following areas, the complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE:

- Education
- Pupil welfare, health and safety
- School premises
- Staff suitability
- Making information available to parents
- The spiritual, moral, social or cultural development of pupils

The DfE will consider reports of a major failure to meet the standards. Where appropriate, it can arrange an emergency inspection to look at student welfare and health and safety, and make sure that the school deals with serious failings.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

10. Anonymous Complaints

It is at the Headteacher's discretion what action, if any, should be taken in response to anonymous complaints. However, where an anonymous complaint raises a safeguarding concern, the school will always consider and, where appropriate, investigate the matter in accordance with its Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, regardless of the anonymity of the source.

10. Monitoring arrangements

The Co-Chairs of Governors will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Head, where appropriate and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether the school can make improvements to its procedures or practices to help prevent similar events in the future.

The governing board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The Co-chairs of Governors will track the number and nature of complaints and review underlying issues .

This policy will be reviewed by the Head every year. At each review, the policy will be approved by the Co-chairs of the Governors.

Complaints that reached stage 3 during the previous academic year (2025-2026): 1