



KING WILLIAM'S COLLEGE

King William's College & The Buchan School

Complaints Procedure

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Policy for the handling of concerns and complaints

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 King William's College and The Buchan School, operating as one organisation ("the School"), has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its students. However, no matter how hard an organisation tries, there will be occasions where it receives concerns or complaints about its service. If anyone does have a concern or complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this policy. This policy is applicable to all parents of students in the School, students, and members of the public and is available from the Principal's Office on request.

Concerns raised by parents are likely to be wide ranging and varied and could include complaints concerning:

- A child's lack of progress at school
- A disagreement over a particular school policy e.g. Homework/Prep or uniform
- Health and Safety issues
- Inappropriate discipline
- Parents being concerned about an individual teacher's attitude to themselves or their child
- Bullying: Lack of effective action being taken
- Concern over supervision at lunch and break times
- Unacceptable behaviour e.g. Racism
- Harassment: Unfair treatment of a pupil
- Billing error (Bursary)

In respect of this document, the definition of complaint means "a clear statement of dissatisfaction of a service provided or requested". A 'concern' may be defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought".

1.2 **Application:** This policy applies to all concerns and complaints other than those relating to Child Protection issues or to cases where parents wish to appeal against a decision by the Principal that a pupil be required to leave the School and if the parents seek a Governors' Review of that decision. Separate procedures apply to each of these exceptional cases.

1.3 **Timescales:** The aim is to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage of the procedure are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. For the purposes of this policy, a 'working day' is defined as a weekday during term time, when the College is open. The definition of 'working day' excludes weekends. For the avoidance of doubt, term dates are published on the College's website, and information about term dates is made available to parents and pupils.

2. POLICY AIM AND STATEMENT

2.1 **Aim:** The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently, 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 welfare. We will try to resolve every concern or 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 the light of circumstances.

2.2 **Policy Statement:** 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 could be damaging to relationships and also to our school culture. We intend that 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 his/her opportunities at school. The policy, however, distinguishes between a concern or difficulty which can be resolved informally and a formal complaint which will require investigation.

2.3 **Support for complaints against staff :** Staff who may be questioned as part of a complaint investigation, will be treated in a fair way and have an opportunity to put their case. They should be told about the procedures and be kept informed of progress. There is a critical balance to be maintained between supporting the individual so that his/her rights and reputation are protected and investigating a complaint thoroughly and impartially.

The complaints procedure is distinct from staffing procedures, which are treated confidentially. There may be occasions when, due to the nature of a complaint, it is more appropriately dealt with under a staffing procedure. If so, the complainant should be reassured that the matter is being taken seriously but under such circumstances they will not be advised of the outcome in relation to the member of staff.

2.4 **Confidentiality:** It is very important to treat conversations and correspondence with discretion. It is vitally important that complainants feel confident that their complaint will not penalise their child. However from the outset, all parties to a complaint will need to be made aware that some information may have to be shared with others involved in the operation of a complaints procedure. The Principal and members of the Senior Leadership Team may feel it appropriate to be accompanied by another member of staff when dealing with some complaints. Complainants should be made aware that a written record will be maintained of all meetings as part of the procedures.

2.5 **Anonymous Complaints:** It is usually proper to disregard anonymous complaints, unless somebody is prepared to substantiate them. The danger in this is that they may relate to something quite serious. It is at the Principal's discretion to decide whether the gravity of an anonymous complaint warrants an investigation. If the outcome of a complaint procedure shows the School is at fault, it is often sufficient to provide a redress in the form of an acknowledgement that the complaint is valid. Alternatively, it may be appropriate to offer an apology, an explanation, or a promise that the events complained about will not re-occur and an undertaking to review School policies and practises in light of the complaint. All anonymous complaints will be notified to the person who is the subject of the complaint.

2.6 **Malicious Complaints:** Where a complaint has been received, investigated, and in the opinion of the Investigating Officer the complaint is malicious or vexatious, the College will consider taking further action against the person who has submitted the complaint. Members of the public should be assured that the College will investigate fully any complaint. Should the College feel that the complaint is malicious then it may refer the matter to legal representation for a recommendation of what action should be taken against the person submitting the complaint.

2.7 **Complaints under the Whistleblowing Procedure:** The School will treat all such disclosures in a confidential and sensitive manner, respecting the confidentiality and anonymity of the individual raising the concern so long as this does not hinder or frustrate any investigation. Any attempt to victimise the individual raising the concern or to prevent concerns being raised will not be tolerated. It may be appropriate to preserve confidentiality that concerns are raised orally rather than in writing, although members of staff are encouraged to express their concern in writing wherever possible. If there is evidence of criminal activity then the Police will in all cases be informed.

3. Stage One – Informal Complaint/Concern and Resolution

3.1 It is hoped that most concerns and informal complaints will be resolved informally. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straight away by this means to the parents' satisfaction. Sometimes, consultation with other staff will be necessary, though conversations and correspondence will be treated with discretion.

3.2 **Notification:** Please raise the concern initially as follows:

In the case of The Buchan School, the first point of contact will be the Head.

In the case of King William's College, the first point of contact would normally be through the tutor, the Head of Year, or the Housemaster/Housemistress. Issues can also be raised with the Deputy Head Academic, Deputy Head Pastoral, or the Principal's Office.

Financial and Administrative Matters – a query relating to fees or extras or to other administrative matters should be raised either with the Bursar or Deputy Bursar.

- 3.3 **Record of Informal Complaints/Concerns:** All interested parties can be assured that all concerns and complaints are treated seriously and confidentially. A written record of all concerns and complaints will be kept, the date on which they were received, and the outcome. This will be kept confidential except to the extent required by legislation, or where disclosure is required in the course of the School's investigation or where any other legal obligation prevails. Should the matter not be resolved within 15 working days, or in the event that the relevant member of staff and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, complainants will be asked if they wish their concern to be considered further. At this point it becomes a formal complaint under Stage Two of this procedure. The School will make available, on request by the Department of Social Care / ISI a written report of all complaints made during a specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of the complaint.

4. Stage Two – Formal Resolution

- 4.1 **Notification:** If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the complainant should put their complaint in writing to the Principal within two months of it first being raised. The Principal will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- 4.2 The Principal will acknowledge the complaint in writing within 3 working days of receiving the complaint, confirming the exact nature of the complaint. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the School's complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. If this proves impossible, a letter will be sent explaining the reason for the delay and giving a revised target date for a response.
- 4.3 In most cases, the Principal will meet the parents concerned, within 5 working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. The complainant may be accompanied at this meeting by a friend, relative, or representative who can speak on their behalf.
- 4.4 It may be necessary for the Principal to carry out further investigations. This could involve interviewing witnesses and taking signed statements from those involved. If the complaint concerns a student, the student identified may be interviewed. The student should preferably be interviewed with another member of staff present and, in the case of a serious complaint, with their parents present.
- 4.5 A written response will include an explanation of the decision and the reason for it. Where appropriate, this will include what action the School will take to resolve the complaint. The complainant will be advised that if they wish to take the complaint further, they should notify the Clerk to the Governors within a maximum of 7 school days of receiving notification of the outcome of the complaint.
- 4.6 If the complaint involves the Principal, a member of the Governing body (or someone appointed by them) will carry out Stage Two of this procedure.
- 4.7 Formal complaints may be withdrawn at any stage by notice in writing.
- 4.8 **Record of Complaints:** All interested parties can be assured that all concerns and complaints are treated seriously and confidentially. A written record of all complaints under this stage of the procedure will be kept by the Principal's Office. This log will provide a brief written summary of the name of the complainant, the date the complaint was received, the matter complained of, and the date and manner of its resolution. Written records will also be kept of any meetings, interviews and telephone conversations held in relation to the complaint. This will be kept confidential except to the extent required by legislation, or where disclosure is required in the course of the School's investigation or where any other legal

obligation prevails. The School will make available, on request by the Department of Social Care / ISI a written report of all complaints made during a specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of the complaint.

5. Stage Three – Panel Hearing

- 5.1 **Notification:** If the complainant seeks to invoke Stage Three (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the Clerk to the Governors who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel. They must register their wish, in writing, to the Clerk to the Governors within seven days of receiving the decision of Stage Two.
- 5.2 The matter will then be referred to a Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom will be independent of the management and running of the School. Each of the Panel members will be appointed by the Chairman of Governors of King William's College. The person chairing the Panel will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable, normally within fifteen working days. As soon as reasonably practical and in any event at least five working days before the hearing, the Clerk will send written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the Panel members who will be present, and the identity of the Chairman of the Review Panel.
- 5.3 If a member of staff is the subject of a complaint then they will be advised of the complaint made against them and by whom, unless it is assessed that there is a risk to the safety and wellbeing of the complainant by sharing this information. The member of staff will also be advised as to whom has been appointed to investigate the complaint, the likely timescale and, in the event that, due to unforeseen circumstances, there should be any change to this timetable, this will also be communicated. In some cases, the nature of the allegation may be such that it is more appropriately dealt with under staffing procedures and in this case both the member of staff and the complainant will be advised accordingly. In such circumstances, the complainant will not be advised of the outcome, given that staffing matters are treated confidentially.
- 5.4 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 will be supplied to all parties not later than three working days prior to the hearing. The aim of the investigation will be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the School and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised that sometimes it may only be possible to establish facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously. If possible, the Panel will resolve the complaint without the need for further investigation.
- 5.5 The proceedings of the hearing will be as informal as possible. The Chairman of the Review Panel 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. The Chairman of the Review Panel may at his/her discretion adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue.
- 5.6 The complainant may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation would not normally be appropriate. For staff being interviewed as part of a complaint investigation, they have a right to be accompanied by a work colleague or trade union/staff association representative.
- 5.7 The Panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and will:
- (a) Reach a decision on the complaint
 - (b) Decide on an appropriate course of action to resolve the complaint
 - (c) Where appropriate, suggest recommended changes to the School's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

The Panel will write to the complainant informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent to the complainant, and, where relevant, the person complained about. A copy will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Principal and the Chairman of Governors.

5.8 Formal complaints may be withdrawn at any stage by notice in writing.

5.9 All interested parties can be assured that all concerns and complaints are treated seriously and confidentially. A written record of all complaints under this stage of the procedure will be kept by the Principal's Office. This log will provide a brief written summary of the name of the complainant, the date the complaint was received, the matter complained of, and the date and manner of its resolution. Written records will also be kept of any meetings, interviews, correspondence, statements and telephone conversations held in relation to the complaint. This will be kept confidential except to the extent required by legislation, or where disclosure is required in the course of the School's investigation or where any other legal obligation prevails.

6. EXTERNAL AGENCIES

6.1 Parents of boarding pupils with complaints which they feel have not been satisfactorily dealt with by the College can contact the Registrations and Inspections Officer, at the Department of Social Care on 01624 642422.

Registration and Inspection Unit,
Ground Floor
St George's Court
Hill Street
Douglas
IM1 1EF

6.2 Parents with complaints which they feel have not been satisfactorily dealt with by the College can contact the Department of Social Care and /or the Independent School Inspectorate if they wish to do so.

Registration and Inspection Unit,
Ground Floor
St George's Court
Hill Street
Douglas
IM1 1EF
01624 642422
RandI@gov.im

Independent School Inspectorate
CAP House
9 – 12 Long Lane
London
EC1A 9HA
020 7600 0100

6.3 It should be noted that a record of any complaint in respect of EYFS will be kept for at least three years.

6.4 The School will notify complainants of the outcome of an investigation within 28 days of having received the complaint.

6.5 The School will make available, on request by the Department of Social Care / ISI a written report of all complaints made during a specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of the complaint.

7. STUDENT COMPLAINTS

6.1 The student complaints procedure is displayed prominently in the boarding houses and the year group centres.

- 6.2 The procedure for students is as follows: “If you wish to make a complaint you are encouraged to see your Tutor, Head of Year or any member of the Boarding Staff. If you feel that your complaint has not been addressed, or if you feel that the matter cannot be resolved, you can see either of the Deputy Heads (Miss Broadbent or Mr Corrie) or the Principal (Mr Buchanan). Alternatively, you can contact the Independent Listener, Nicky Litton – 01624 861773 or 07624 202508.”
- 6.3 If a student needs advice or wants to talk over a problem, they have ready access to a number of adults. They may also talk in confidence to the College Medical Centre staff. In practice, students can go at almost any time to talk to any of the resident staff. These staff are also available for consultation by parents if they are concerned about the welfare of their child.
- 6.4 There is an independent listener, Nicky Litton, details are displayed in various locations around the School. In addition, the telephone numbers for Childline, Samaritans, etc are displayed.
- 6.5 Student representatives can raise complaints at boarding, 4th, 5th and 6th form councils and College Council but not about individual staff or subjects.
- 6.6 Complaints which appear trivial still need to be handled seriously. Young people may test the complaints procedure on relatively minor issues before finding the confidence to raise something painful, such as bullying.
- 6.7 A written record of any significant concern or complaint by a pupil will be kept and the relevant senior members of staff informed. Such senior staff are likely to be the Tutor, Head of Year, Head of Department, Deputy Heads or Principal as appropriate.

7. STAFF COMPLAINTS

- 7.1 If a member of staff has a complaint, they are advised to refer to the Staff Grievance Procedures.