



ST. JULIAN'S  
SCHOOL FOUNDED IN 1932

# Complaints Policy

Updated June 2023. Revised for the academic year 2025/26.

## 1. The purpose of this policy

St. Julian's School encourages friendly relations and mutual respect throughout the school community. Such an atmosphere is a positive example for the students and a necessary foundation for their successful personal, social and academic development.

This policy aims to:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible.
- Be simple to understand and use.
- Be impartial and non-adversarial.
- Allow a full and fair investigation.
- Where necessary, respect confidentiality.
- Allow swift handling with established time limits for action.
- Provide information to the Leadership Team to inform service improvements.

From time to time, disagreements or problems do arise. If that does not prove possible, the procedure outlined below should be followed.

## 2. Who can make a complaint?

This policy covers complaints made by parents or carers of children who are enrolled at St Julian's, parents or carers of children no longer at the school and members of the public about any provision of facilities that we provide.

## 3. The difference between a concern and a complaint

A **'concern'** may be treated as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

A **'complaint'** may be generally defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to invoke formal procedures. St. Julian's takes all informal concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

The School, however, is aware that there will be times when complainants may want

to raise their concerns formally. In these cases, the following complaints procedure should be followed.

Some complaints fall outside this complaints procedure and are dealt with by following the steps laid out in other policies, for example:

- Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation (complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy).
- Staff grievances (complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal Staff Grievances Policy).
- Staff conduct (complaints about staff will be dealt with under the School's internal Disciplinary Policy, if appropriate). Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a member of staff because of a complaint for privacy reasons, but will be notified that the matter is being addressed and resolved.
- Whistleblowing/Staff concerns (we have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors).
- An anonymous concern or complaint will not be investigated under this policy unless there are exceptional circumstances.

To ensure a proper investigation, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the school as soon as possible. Except in exceptional circumstances, any matter raised more than three months after the event being complained of will not be investigated.

## **4. Resolving complaints**

At each stage in the procedure, St. Julian's School will want to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- An explanation.
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better.
- We assure you that we will ensure the event complained of will not recur.
- An explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made.
- An undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.
- An apology.

## **5. Appeals related to behaviour incidents**

All matters related to the behaviour of students are dealt with according to the procedures outlined in the Behaviour Policy.

## **6. Withdrawal of a complaint**

If the complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

## 7. Informal resolution of the problem

In most cases, a problem can and should be resolved by contacting the class teacher, subject teacher or member of staff directly involved with the problem. The initial communication with the member of staff may be by email, telephone conversation or in person by appointment. If this person cannot resolve the matter alone, they may need to consult with their appropriate line manager. Informal concerns made directly to the relevant Principal<sup>1</sup> / Bursar / Head of School will usually be referred to the relevant person (as above) unless the Head of School / Principal / Bursar deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally. In all cases, there will be a written record of complaints and concerns, including the date received and the action taken. The School will attempt to resolve all informal concerns within five working days.

## 8. Statutory Complaints

St. Julian's School has a formal Complaints Book (Livro de Reclamações) which all establishments in Portugal must make available to customers by law. The School's Livro de Reclamações is available in the Guard's Hut at the Main Gate (Palácio Building) or online through this [link](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Where the term Principal is used this includes Head of the Pre-Prep, Head of the Prep School, Principal of the Secondary Section or Principal of the Bilingual Section. For the purposes of this policy it can also refer to the Bursar.

## Appendix 1: Formal complaints procedure

### Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the relevant Principal (unless they are about the Principal). This may be done in person, in writing (preferably using the Complaints Form) or in writing (either by letter or by email).

The Principal will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or by email) within five working days.

Within this response, the Principal will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the Complainant would like to see. The Principal can decide if a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Principal may delegate the investigation to another member of the section senior leadership team (who will be the Investigator), but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Principal (or Investigator) will:

- If necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.
- Keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Principal will provide a formal response within ten school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the Principal is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the Complainant with an update.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the School will take to resolve the complaint.

The Principal will advise the Complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the Principal, the Head of School will complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the Head of School or a member of the Board of Governors must be made in writing to the Secretary to the Board of Governors via the email address [boardsecretary@stjulians.com](mailto:boardsecretary@stjulians.com).

### Stage 2

If the Complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with the Head of School. A request to escalate the complaint to Stage 2 must be made via the Head of School's Secretary within five school days of the receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The Head of School will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or by email) within five school days.

The Head of School will aim to hold the meeting within seven school days of the receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Head of School's Secretary will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

### **Stage 3**

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a meeting with a committee of the Board of Governors, which will be comprised of the first three impartial governors available with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint.

A request to escalate the complaint to Stage 3 must be made in writing via the Secretary to the Board of Governors [boardsecretary@stjulians.com](mailto:boardsecretary@stjulians.com) within five school days of the receipt of the response to Stage 2 of the procedure. The Secretary to the Board of Governors will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or by email) within five school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Secretary will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Secretary will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Secretary will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The Complaint Committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee.

The Complaint Committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision, they will be sensitive to the Complainant's needs.

If the Complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or a friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by a Staff Association member and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this

complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any complaints regarding staff conduct will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

At least ten school days before the meeting, the Secretary will:

- Confirm and notify the Complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- Request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least three school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least three school days before the date of the meeting. The Complaint Committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The Complaint Committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with at Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a Complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The Complaint Committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The Complaint Committee can:

- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the Complaint Committee will:

- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Complaint Committee will provide the Complainant and the School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within three school days.

If the complaint concerns the Chair of the Board of Governors, the entire Governing Body, or the majority of the Governing Body, a Complaint Committee will be formed and heard by a committee of independent governors who will act with impartiality.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions St. Julian's will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the Complainant of how to escalate their complaint

should they remain dissatisfied.

## Appendix 2: Roles and Responsibilities in the Complaints Procedure

### Complainant

The Complainant should:

- Explain the complaint in full as early as possible.
- Co-operate with the School in seeking a solution to the complaint.
- Respond promptly to requests for information or meetings, or in agreeing on the details of the complaint.
- Ask for assistance as needed.
- Treat all those involved in the complaint with respect.
- Refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

### Investigator

The Investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by providing a comprehensive, open, transparent, and fair consideration of the complaint through:

- Sensitive and thorough interviewing of the Complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved.
- Interviewing staff and children and other people relevant to the complaint, considering records and other relevant information
- Analysing information.
- Liaising with the Complainant and Complaints Coordinator (see below) as appropriate to clarify what the Complainant feels would put things right.

The Investigator should:

- Conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.
- Keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note-taker to record minutes of the meeting.
- Ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal.
- Be mindful of the timescales to respond.
- Prepare a comprehensive report for the Head of School or Complaint Committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The Head of School or the Complaint Committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

**Complaints Co-ordinator** (this could be the Head of School / designated complaints governor, or another staff member providing administrative support)

The Complaints Co-ordinator should:

- Ensure that the Complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure.
- Liaise with staff members, Head of School, Chair of the Board of Governors and Secretary to the Board of Governors (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure

- Be aware of issues regarding:
  - sharing third-party information
  - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint, including interpretation support, or where the complainant is a child or young person.
- Keep records.

### **Secretary to the Governing Body**

The Secretary is the contact point for the Complainant and the Complaint Committee and should:

- Ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints and education law.
- Set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
- Collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example, stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale.
- Record the proceedings.
- Circulate the minutes of the meeting.
- Notify all parties of the Complaint Committee's decision.

### **Chair of the Complaint Committee**

The Chair of the Complaint Committee, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- Both parties are asked (via the Board Secretary) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting.
- The meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy.
- Complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the Complainant is a child/young person
- The remit of the Complaint Committee is explained to the Complainant.
- Written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under GDPR.
- If a new issue arises, it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting.
- Both the Complainant and the School are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself.
- The issues are addressed.
- Key findings of fact are made.
- The Complaint Committee is open-minded and acts independently.
- No member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure.
- The meeting is minuted.
- They liaise with the Secretary (and complaints co-ordinator).



**Committee Members**

Committee Members should be aware that:

- The meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so.
- No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the School and the Complainant
- We recognise that the Complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting is not found in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- Many Complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting
- Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- Extra care needs to be taken when the Complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting.
- Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.
- The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
- If the child/young person is the Complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the Complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.
- However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
- The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

## Appendix 3: Complaint Form

Your name:
Student's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Daytime telephone number: Evening telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature: Date:
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By whom:
Complaint referred to:

Date:

POLICY APPROVAL	
Reviewed	June 2023
Approved by the Policies & Compliance Subcommittee	22 June 2023
Approved by the Board of Governors	27 June 2023
Next review	September 2025