



STONYHURST
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
PENANG

2024/25 Complaints Policy

Name of Policy:	Complaints Policy
Date of Policy Revision:	September 2024
Revised by:	Deputy Principal
Approved by:	Principal
Date approved:	September 2024
Date of next revision:	August 2025
By whom:	
Location(s) where Policy can be found:	https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1KEZhuXAXDf9CioEce4jMvRYje2TxgGXW

Introduction

This document is a published policy which outlines the procedures that Stonyhurst International School will follow to deal with all complaints relating to the School and community facilities, services or activities that the School provides for which there are no separate procedures.

The School's adopted Complaints Policy and procedures are;

- > Simple and easy to understand
- > Are impartial
- > Are non-adversarial
- > Enables a full and fair investigation
- > Where necessary respects confidentiality
- > Addresses all the points at issue and provides an effective response and appropriate redress where necessary
- > Provides information to the School's Senior Leadership Team so that the School can be improved.

Complaints that fall outside of this policy are the School's own Expulsion, Removal and Review Policy; Equal Opportunities Policy; Staff Grievances and the SHP Employee Handbook 2024(Academic Employees Discipline and Cessation/Termination of Service).

We have produced this document to share and encourage best practice.

There is a difference between a legal requirement and good practice. In this policy we use 'can'; where the School has a legal power, not duty, to do something, and 'should'; which is for guidance on best practice.

This policy document will be published on the School's website and will be available to School staff on the internal drive.

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 reassurance is sought.

Our team supports to direct concerns to the correct members of staff. Academic concerns go through a process beginning with the Form Tutor, Head of Department or Playroom Leader, Assistant Heads of School and finally escalated to the Deputy Principal or Principal. More general matters are handled by our Director of Parent Liaison. Staff may choose to escalate a concern from a parent if no resolution is found or they are breaking the parent code of conduct.

We aim to deal with concerns in a timely manner and while following our policies.

A complaint may be generally recognised as an expression or statement of dissatisfaction about the actions taken or a lack of action.

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

There will be occasions however when complainants want to raise their concerns formally. In these circumstances, the School's Complaints Policy will be followed.

Who Can Make A Complaint?

Complaints are not limited to parents or caregivers of children who are enrolled at the School. Anyone can make a complaint about the provision of facilities or services that the School provides unless a separate policy and/or procedures apply.

This includes parents or caregivers of children no longer at the school and members of the public.

Complainants will be given the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full unless the School possesses clear evidence that the complaint meets the **serial complaint criteria**.

If the complainants contact the School again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as serial or persistent, and the School may choose not to respond.

The School will not mark a complaint as serial before the complainant has completed the procedure.

Complaints can be made anonymously and will be attended to and followed up in the exact same manner as an identified complainant.

The Complaints Procedure

1. The Complaint Stages

Level 1: The complainant must contact the School and let the relevant Director of Parent Relations, Head of Department or member of the Academic Leadership Team know of the complaint. This can be done electronically, by post, over the phone or in person (by making an appointment).

At this point, the aim is to resolve the complaint promptly and informally where possible. The School will reply either verbally or in writing within 7 School days.

Level 2: If the matter cannot be resolved informally, or the complaint is about a specific member of the Leadership Team, the next step is to write to the Deputy Principal or Principal, care of the School address to investigate the complaint. At the end of the investigation, the complainant is invited to a meeting for feedback or will receive either a verbal or written response within 15 School days.

Level 3: In the case of a complaint or grievance that is not resolved, the parent may contact the Chair of the Board of Governors. The chairman will decide whether the issue should be brought before the board for discussion or to leave the final decision with the Principal. This is the last of the School-based stages of the complaints process. The complainant will receive a reply within 20 School days.

1.1 Where further investigation is necessary and the published timeline cannot be met, the School reserves the right to set new time limits on a case. The complainant will receive an update on the new deadline and explain the delay.

1.2 The School considers three months to be an acceptable time frame to lodge a complaint to be raised after an incident arises. This cut-off time frame is for raising a complaint and escalating a complaint.

However, the School will take exceptional circumstances into account when deciding whether to progress a complaint.

Any decision made by the School will be in line with the principles of the law. This means that a decision is lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate.

It is the School's decision to determine what constitutes exceptional circumstances.

1.3 Written consent from the complainant will be required before disclosing information to a third party.

1.4 To prevent any later challenge or disagreement over what was said, brief notes of meetings and telephone calls should be taken. These should be kept securely, encrypted where appropriate and copies of any written communication/responses added to the complaint record.

1.5 After closing a complaint at the end of the complaints procedure, the School may receive a duplicate complaint from a spouse, a partner, a grandparent, or a child.

If the complaint is about the same subject, the new complainant will be informed that the School has already considered that complaint and the School process is complete. The new complainant will be advised to contact an external third party if they are dissatisfied with the School's handling of the original complaint.

The School will take care not to overlook any new aspects of the complaint that may not have been previously considered. If this is the case, the School will ensure these are investigated and dealt with to the full extent of the complaints procedure.

Complaint Campaigns

There is the possibility that the School may become the focus of a campaign and receive large volumes of complaints all based on the same subject and from complainants unconnected with the School.

The separate procedure for handling complaints of this nature includes;

- > Sending out a template response to all complainants
- > Publishing a single response on the School's website.

Complaints About Heads of School or Board of Governors

If the complaint concerns a Principal, a member of the Board of Governors, or the entire Board of Governors, it may be reasonable and necessary to deviate from the published complaints policy. This could include not following certain procedures that the policy states should, may, or must be followed.

Any deviation from the published procedure will be documented, including the explanation and justification of the deviation.

Complaints relating to a Governor of the Board, or multiple Board Governors should be made to the Clerk of the governing body who will arrange for the complaint to be heard by an impartial member (which may involve sourcing an independent mediator).

Parental Responsibility

Conflict between estranged parents over the application of parental responsibilities is a common cause of complaints made to schools. The School will follow its Child Protection and Safeguarding policies and procedures and the legal rights of each parent as the case presents itself to work through the complaint.

Legal Representation

The Principal and any member of the School staff will not participate in any meeting with a complainant who brings in legal representation to the School. No member of the School staff is obliged and required to attend a meeting where the other party has brought in legal representation.

In the event that a complaint progresses to a committee of members of the school governors, neither the complainant nor the School brings legal representation. These committees are not a form of legal proceedings. The aim of the Governors in the

complaints committee is reconciliation and to put right things that may have gone wrong.

The School recognises that there are occasions where legal representation may be appropriate.

If the complainant commences legal action against the School in relation to their complaint, the School will consider suspending the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Recording Complaints

1. The School acknowledges that the process of listening to and resolving complaints can contribute to school improvement. The Principal can use learning identified from across the spectrum of complaint investigations to inform improvements within the school and improve the effectiveness of the complaints procedure.

1.1 Recording Meetings

Where there are communication difficulties, either party may wish to use recording devices to ensure the complainant can access and review the discussions at a later point. All parties should agree in advance to being recorded.

As a School, it necessitates that we control all our data and the School has the discretion to decide whether to allow complainants to record meetings.

The decision to allow a recording of the meeting must be fair and reasonable, as there may be various levels of identifiable personal information recorded. Before making this decision, the School will consider;

- > How any decision to allow recordings may affect third parties called to act as witnesses
- > The impact and consequences on the individuals involved in the complaint in the event recordings are lost or leaked.

1.2 Audio or Video Evidence

Complainants should make sure they obtain informed consent from all parties present before recording conversations or meetings.

1.3 Recording Complaint Progress

The progress of the complaint and the final outcome will be recorded by the School. These records will be kept secure and encrypted if necessary. The complaint record will be held at the School for three years.

Handling Complaints Fairly

All complainants will be treated fairly and offered the chance to state their case either in person or in writing, at each stage of the procedure by the School.

If the School has made reasonable attempts to accommodate complainants with dates for complaint meetings and they refuse or are unable to attend the School can:

- > Convene meetings in their absence;
- > Conclude in the interests of drawing the complaint to a close.

Communicating the Outcome

The complainant will be informed by the School of:

- > The conclusion and reasons for any decisions in writing;
- > Any further rights of appeal.

Copies of the minutes will be issued to the complainant.

Matters Likely to Require A Child Protection Investigation

Complaints about child protection and safeguarding matters will be handled:

- > Under the School's Child Safeguarding and Protection Policy;
- > In accordance with relevant statutory guidance.

Managing Serial and Persistent Complaints

The School will do its best to be helpful to people who contact the School with a complaint, concern or request for information.

However, on occasions, despite all stages of the complaint procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the School will inform them that the procedure has been completed and the matter is now closed.

If the complainant contacts the School again on the same issue, the correspondence may be viewed as serial and persistent and the school may choose not to respond.

The School will consider complaints to be vexatious when:

- > Complaints are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific and repetitious;
- > There is insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- > There is insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
- > Complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance;
- > There are demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value.

The School will not refuse to accept further correspondence or complaints from an individual that it has had repeat or excessive contact with. The application of a serial or persistent complaint should be against the subject or specific complaint itself rather than the complainant.

If the complainant is causing a significant level of disruption the School may implement a tailored communication strategy. The School can restrict the individual to a single point of contact at the school (one individual via one email address only), and/or limit the number of times the complainant can make contact per term.

Decision To Stop Responding

The decision the School makes to cease responding to a complainant will never be taken lightly. The School needs to be able to say 'yes' to all of the following criteria when deciding to stop responding to a complaint:

1. The School has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns;
2. The complainant has been given a clear statement of the School's position and their options;
3. The complainant contacts you repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.

The case for the School to stop responding is stronger if there is agreement with one or more of these statements:

1. The letters, emails, or telephone calls from the complainant are often or always abusive or aggressive;
2. The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff;
3. The School has reason to believe that the complainant is contacting members of the School staff with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience.

The School will not stop responding just because an individual is difficult to deal with or asks complex questions. The School will always act reasonably and consider any new complaint.

Once the School has decided that it's appropriate to stop responding, the School will inform the complainant directly.

Review of the Policy

This policy will be reviewed at the end of the 2024/26 academic year to take into account any changes to the governing of the School or new guidance issued by the Malaysian government.

Related Documents

- Expulsion, Removal and Review Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Staff Grievances
- SHP Employee Handbook 2024(Academic Employees Discipline and Cessation/Termination of Service).

